

**APPARENTLY UNJUSTIFIED EVIL  
AND  
THE EXISTENCE OF GOD**

by  
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A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

**MASTER OF ARTS**

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**A Thesis/Practicum submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of The University  
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## **Abstract**

There are a variety of evidential arguments from evil against the existence of God. Common to all such arguments are observations of evil that appear to be unjustified, followed by an inductive inference to the conclusion that there is actually unjustified evil. Since unjustified evil is incompatible with the existence of God, it is concluded that God does not exist.

If certain assumptions, commonly granted in discussions of the problem of evil, are granted, however, those assumptions, together with the consequential complexity of history, make the essential inference in all evidential arguments from evil rationally unjustified. All evidential arguments from evil therefore fail. In this thesis I argue that the consequential complexity of history is such that we are not rationally justified in inferring that there is actually unjustified evil. Given the absence of rational justification for the inference that is essential to all evidential arguments from evil, I conclude that all such arguments fail.

## **Acknowledgements**

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.0 HAS PETER VAN INWAGEN MADE THIS THESIS REDUNDANT?</b>	<b>19</b>
1.1 A summary of van Inwagen's argument	19
1.2 A complex factor in justification	22
1.3 Still room for a defense	24
<b>2.0 WHAT MAKES SOME EVENTS APPARENTLY UNJUSTIFIED?</b>	<b>32</b>
2.1 Justification	32
2.2 Why do certain evils appear to be unjustified?	46
2.3 The two inductive inferences in evidential arguments from evil	48
<b>3.0 LIMITATIONS TO DIVINE INTERVENTION</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>4.0 THREE SORTS OF COMPLEXITY AND THE CHALLENGE THEY POSE TO OUR ABILITY TO JUDGE THE ULTIMATE VALUE OF EVENTS</b>	<b>77</b>
4.1 Structural complexity	78
4.2 Simultaneous complexity	91
4.3 The consequential complexity of history	94
<b>5.0 THE LACK OF RATIONAL JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STRONG INFERENCE</b>	<b>101</b>
5.1 The argument against the strong inference	101
5.2 Massive evils and the strong inference	111

<b>6.0 THE EXPECTATION OF APPARENTLY UNJUSTIFIED EVIL AND THE WEAK INFERENCE</b>	<b>120</b>
<b>6.1 The faulty assumption of the weak inference</b>	<b>121</b>
<b>6.2 God, deception and the weak inference</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>7.0 SOME CONCLUDING POINTS</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>7.1 A summary of what has been argued for</b>	<b>138</b>
<b>7.2 Loose ends</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>148</b>

## Introduction

Several years ago, people around the world were shocked and appalled at the killing of a little two-year old boy in Liverpool. The small boy was abducted by two ten-year old boys, who took him to a deserted railroad track and beat him to death with an iron bar and some bricks. According to the testimony of one of the offenders, the little fellow repeatedly tried to struggle to his feet only to be hit in the face again and again with the iron bar.

Few human beings would be so utterly depraved that they could merely stand by and watch such a horrific scene unfold before them, doing nothing to intervene. Yet if an omniscient and omnipresent God exists, He was there, saw it all, and did not stop it. Why? Contemplation of this particular instance of evil, and many others similar to it, raises one of the greatest philosophical problems yet unresolved to the satisfaction of many. The problem simply put is this; how do we reconcile our observations of apparently unjustified evil in this world with the proposition that there is a God who is omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For this thesis, I will use the term 'God' as defined by Nelson Pike in his paper, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1969, p. 208. Under this understanding, the term 'God' is a title and 'It is a logically necessary condition of bearing the title 'God', that an individual be perfectly good, omnipotent, omniscient, ...' (ibid., p. 208).



One solution is to deny the existence of such a God. There are many however, who believe that both God and evil exist.<sup>2</sup> The challenge for them is to rationally reconcile these two things. One of the objectives of this thesis is to show that if this world is such that God must let some instances of evil occur, then *our observations of evil are of no use in discussions pertaining to the existence of God.*

The problem of evil is a *philosophical* problem: can belief in an omniscient, omnipotent and perfectly good God be justified in light of the quantity and quality of evil we observe in this world? A *theist* (one who believes that there is a God who is active in this world)<sup>3</sup> who wishes to respond to this problem must somehow reconcile the evil that we have in this world with the traditional view of God. It would seem that God would create a world in which there was no evil, or at least that he would know about all instances of evil, that he would eliminate all evil so far as he was able, and that he has limitless power. How can both God and evil exist?

When faced with instances of evil coupled with the idea of God, some such as the discussants in the book of Job, assume either that God has reasons for the evil that we see (punishment for sin is a common

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<sup>2</sup> A precise definition of 'evil' is moot and not required for the argument that I will present in this thesis. I do note, however, that there are certain events and possible events that almost everyone would agree are evil (such as murder and rape) and other events and possible events that nearly everyone would agree are good (for example, tending to the needs of a person who is ill). The ground that we do have in common in our moral intuitions will be a sufficient basis from which to proceed with this discussion.

one) or that He does not need to supply us with any reasons. The existence of God is not brought into question. Rather our knowledge, or even our right to know or ask, is challenged.

Others have responded by questioning the existence of the traditional God. David Hume, in his mid-eighteenth century *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part 10,<sup>4</sup> has the character Philo summarize the problem as follows:

Is he (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?

Hume was challenging the existence of God as traditionally conceived.<sup>5</sup> God is either not omnipotent, or not perfectly good. If one insists that He *is* omnipotent and perfectly good, then one must explain why it is we have evil.

In 1955, J.L. Mackie further honed the argument from evil into a *deductive* argument against God. His argument was as follows:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Whenever 'theist' is used in this thesis, it will refer to a particular kind of theist; one who holds to the traditional view of God as already defined.

<sup>4</sup> Noted by Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams, see "Introduction," *The Problem of Evil*, Marilyn Adams and Robert Adams, eds. (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Note that because I am using the term 'God' as a title which entails omniscience, omnipotence and perfect goodness, a being which is lacking any one of those three attributes cannot be referred to with the title 'God'.

<sup>6</sup> J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *The Problem of Evil*, *ibid.*, p. 25. Mackie's paper was first published in *Mind* 64, (1955), pp. 200-212.

1. God is omnipotent
2. God is wholly good
3. evil exists

To show the contradiction in the above three propositions, Mackie supplied three additional premises:<sup>7</sup>

- a) A wholly good God would always eliminate evil as far as he can.
- b) There are no limits to what an omnipotent God can do.
- c) Therefore, God would eliminate evil completely

If Mackie's propositions are all true, then what he has done is show that the existence of God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. It should be emphasized here that proposition (c) does not allow the instantiation of any kind of evil *at all*. Even one instance of evil would be incompatible with the existence of God. We cannot have *both* evil existing *and* God existing. It is abundantly evident that evil exists, so it appears that God's existence is logically impossible. This is known as the *deductive* problem of evil: the non-existence of God is deductively inferred from the existence of evil.

A major (perhaps fatal) blow to the deductive problem of evil was dealt by Alvin Plantinga's famous Free Will Defense. Plantinga

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

argued that it is *possible* for God to have a morally sufficient reason for creating a world which contains evil. That logical possibility defeats the deductive problem of evil. According to Plantinga,

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 one contains) without creating one containing moral evil.<sup>8</sup>

Plantinga's defense suggests that there might be limits to what an omnipotent God can do. Thus Mackie's,

b) There are no limits to what an omnipotent God can do.

may be false. Plantinga explains what this limitation might be:

the creation of a world containing moral good is a cooperative venture; it requires the uncoerced concurrence of significantly free creatures.<sup>9</sup> But then the actualization of a world W containing moral good is not up to God alone; it also depends upon what the significantly free creatures of W would do if God created them and placed them in the situations W contains.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," *The Problem of Evil*, *ibid.*, p. 86. Plantinga's paper was originally part of his book *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 164-193.

<sup>9</sup> Plantinga defines a significantly free creature as one who is free to perform a morally right action and free to refrain; 'no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not.' (*ibid.*, p. 84). A more commonly held definition of a free agent is one whose decisions are not determined and who could have decided otherwise.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Although an evil-free world that contains moral good is logically possible, it may not be logically possible for God to actualize it; the free agents simply do not cooperate. This practical impossibility however, is due to a more fundamental logical impossibility. It is logically impossible for God to determine the moral choices of free agents. Thus, Plantinga's free will defense rests on this logical limitation.

Plantinga's defense fundamentally challenges Mackie's (b). If (b) is false, then (a) can still be true. God would always eliminate evil so far as He can, but it may be that 'God could not have created a universe containing moral good ... without creating one containing moral evil,' for reasons Plantinga has supplied above.<sup>11</sup>

Note that Plantinga does not argue that this actually *is* the case, only that it is a possibility. But that is all he needs in order to respond to Mackie's deductive argument from evil. He has shown that Mackie's conclusion,

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<sup>11</sup> Alvin Plantinga has reviewed this understanding of his free will defense and in a personal email message dated 18 March 1997, endorsed it as accurate. He adds that the distinction between strong and weak actualization is an important factor here. He states,

"I distinguish between weak and strong actualization: God strongly actualizes whatever he causes to be actual, and he can weakly actualize any state of affairs S which is such that there is some state of affairs S\* he can strongly actualize, and which is such that if God were to strongly actualize it, then S would be actual. Given this, and given the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, there will be many possible worlds God could not have weakly actualized, even though they are in fact possible and even though it is possible that he actualize them." (Used with permission.)

c) Therefore, God would eliminate evil completely

is possibly false. It appears to be the consensus of opinion now among philosophers that Plantinga's Free Will Defense has neutralized the deductive problem of evil<sup>12</sup> so far as the compatibility of God's existence with the occurrences of evil in this world is concerned.<sup>13</sup> The philosophical problem of evil is not solved, however. There still remains another significant aspect to the problem.

Plantinga's defense is based on the possibility that evil *may* be justified. If there is truly unjustified evil however, then theists still have a problem.<sup>14</sup> We do not *know* if there actually is unjustified evil in the world but the *amount* and *kinds* of evil we observe are often used as a basis from which to inductively infer there *is* actual unjustified evil (and therefore atheism is true). This rational basis for atheism can be argued inductively and forms what is known as the *evidential* problem of evil: the existence of evil in this world does not make the existence of God logically impossible, but the evidence

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<sup>12</sup> As an endorsement of this conclusion, see endnote (1) of William Rowe's "The Problem of Evil & Some Varieties of Atheism," *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed. (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> I should note that Plantinga's free will defense deals primarily with moral evil, which he describes as resulting from 'some human being's going wrong with respect to an action that is morally significant for him; any other evil is natural evil.' (Plantinga, *op. cit.* p. 85) Regarding natural evil, Plantinga suggests two theodicies. One allows that some natural evil is good for us and the other (which he gives more weight to) suggests that it is the result of the free decisions of non-human beings and that, on balance, this world is the best that God could obtain for the moral good that results.

of certain varieties and types of evil do supply the basis for the inductive inference to unjustified evil. Whether the inductive inference is actually rationally justified or not, we shall see.

All evidential arguments from evil have three common ingredients:

- a) *observations* of apparently unjustified evil
- b) an *inductive inference* from observations of apparently unjustified evil to the proposition that there actually is unjustified evil,
- c) the *assumption* that God would not allow unjustified evil.

To illustrate the role of these three components in evidential arguments from evil, we will now look at some examples.

The first example of an evidential argument from evil is provided by William Rowe and can be summarized as follows, where E1 is the case of a fawn trapped in a forest fire and undergoing several days of terrible agony before dying, and E2 is the case of the rape, beating, and murder by strangulation of a five-year-old girl.<sup>15</sup>

1. No good we know of justifies God in permitting E1 and E2.

therefore,

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<sup>14</sup> Exactly what is meant by unjustified evil will be discussed in chapter two.

<sup>15</sup> William Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, op. cit., p. 263.

2. No good at all justifies God in permitting E1 and E2.

therefore,

There is no God.

Here we have an inductive evidential argument from evil. The three ingredients common to all evidential arguments from evil are found in Rowe's argument. First, there is the observation of instances of apparently unjustified evil, in this case the hypothetical E1 and E2. Secondly, there is the inductive inference that these instances of apparently unjustified evil are *actually* unjustified. Finally, there is the assumption that actually unjustified evil is incompatible with the existence of God. Although this assumption is not stated, it is necessary to assume it in order to deductively infer the non-existence of God from (2).<sup>16</sup> This argument is one of the best recent examples of the evidential argument from evil that there is in the literature and Rowe lays it out well. For this reason frequent reference will be made to it over the course of this thesis, as a working example of an evidential argument from evil.

Two other illustrations of evidential arguments from evil are presented by Paul Draper and Quentin Smith. Draper has offered an argument from evil for the 'Hypothesis of Indifference' (the idea that

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<sup>16</sup> Rowe states that this inference is deductive. *op. cit.*, note 9, p. 263.



if there is a god, such a god is neither evil nor good)<sup>17</sup> as being more likely than theism.<sup>18</sup> Quentin Smith also presents an argument from evil that is of the same general variety. He argues that the horrors that we observe in this world make a malevolent creator more likely than theism.<sup>19</sup> In both these arguments we again have the common features of an evidential argument from evil. Both of them are built upon our observations of apparently unjustified evils in this world. Both infer that these evils are actually unjustified and both of them contain the notion that God would not allow unjustified evils. They argue against the existence of God as traditionally defined, but not against some other sort of god.

Realizing that our knowledge of the instrumental value<sup>20</sup> of instances of evil is limited, we might be willing to grant that a certain amount of apparently unjustified evil really has some ultimate positive value. Some, however, might feel that the quantity of apparently unjustified evil is greater than that 'certain amount'. Similarly, we might be willing to grant that instances of evil with relatively small

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<sup>17</sup> In Draper's words, 'neither the nature nor the condition of sentient beings on earth is the result of benevolent or malevolent actions performed by non-human persons.' Paul Draper, "Pain and Pleasure: An Evidential Problem for Theists," *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Op. cit., pp. 12-29.

<sup>19</sup> Quentin Smith, "The Anthropic Coincidences, Evil and the Disconfirmation of Theism," *Religious Studies* 28, pp. 347-350.

<sup>20</sup> The *instrumental value* of an event is the net value of all the consequences produced by an event.

intrinsic negative value<sup>21</sup> might quite plausibly have some outweighing instrumental value, but the quality of certain evils (their great intrinsic negative value) makes any justifying instrumental good very questionable.<sup>22</sup> Since all evidential arguments from evil are founded on the existence of apparently unjustified evils in this world, if one were to find a good explanation for the quantity and quality of apparently unjustified evils that was consistent with and even probable (in the epistemic sense) on the existence of God, all evidential arguments from evil might be neutralized.

In discussions of the evidential problem of evil, a *defense* is a response by the theist that merely tries to show that apparently unjustified evil does not *necessarily* preclude the existence of God. It tries to show that the existence of God is compatible with the occurrence of evil in this world. Peter Van Inwagen describes a defense as a 'story according to which both God and suffering exist,

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<sup>21</sup> The intrinsic value of an event is the value of the event by itself, without any consideration of its consequences.

<sup>22</sup> There is an implication here, and throughout my thesis, that some evils are greater than others and certain goods can outweigh an evil whereas other goods may be insufficient. I treat instances of evil and good as having values of various magnitudes in order to conform to our common moral intuitions. Most of us would see the slow torture of a baby over several days as being more evil than experiencing a mosquito bite. Similarly, almost everyone would likely agree that being spared the small evil of having one's afternoon nap interrupted by a crying child, is insufficient to justify the murder of that child. I do realize, however, that it would be impossible to come to any agreement as to exactly *what* value ought to be assigned to any given evil. This will not be a problem for my argument however, for I will suggest in chapter two that the instance of evil under consideration can be used as the standard unit of value and all the consequences of that event then assigned a value relative to that instance.

and which is possible "in the broadly logical sense" -- or which is such that there is no reason to believe that it is impossible in the broadly logical sense.<sup>23</sup> Van Inwagen points out that a defense will never be highly probable on theism.<sup>24</sup> A *theodicy*, on the other hand, is a story that accounts for why God allows evil to occur and is *highly probable* on theism. Van Inwagen distinguishes between a defense and a theodicy as follows.

In practice, of course, the probability of a defense will never be high on theism: if the defender of theism knew of a story that accounted for the sufferings of the actual world and which was highly probable on theism, he would employ it as a theodicy.<sup>25</sup>

Daniel Howard-Snyder has a similar idea in mind when he refers to a theodicy as a 'plausible justifying reason for God to permit the sorts

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<sup>23</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, "The Problems of Evil, Air and Silence," *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>24</sup> This sort of probability is what Alvin Plantinga refers to as epistemic conditional probability, the probability (epistemic) of one proposition on another (Alvin Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, op. cit., p. 84). Epistemic conditional probability is a particular aspect of the more general idea of epistemic probability that is not evaluated on the basis of calculations and numbers, but on the basis of warrant (Plantinga, op. cit., p. 84). Hubert Yockey classifies this sort of probability as the inductive logic interpretation in which 'we are interested in the logical support the evidence has for the selected hypothesis' (Hubert Yockey, "Basic Ideas in Probability Theory," *Information Theory and Molecular Biology* (Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 18). Unless otherwise specified or unless numbers are used, throughout this thesis the word 'probability' will be used in the epistemic sense. To clarify, when I say that M is highly probable what I mean is, the rational basis for believing that M is true is significantly stronger than the rational basis for believing that some other incompatible proposition is true. Another way of putting it is, the evidence provides much stronger support for M than for some other incompatible proposition.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., p. 156.

of evil we find in our world.<sup>26</sup> Alvin Plantinga also has the same idea in mind in his free will defense when he states that the key proposition in such a defense 'need not be true or known to be true; it need not be so much as plausible,' it only needs to be logically possible.<sup>27</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to present both a defense and a theodicy. What I will be arguing for amounts to a defense. Although my defense will be plausible, it will not include a story of why God allows evil to occur. Instead, I will merely draw upon an implication of all theodicies; there are sufficient limits as to how much God can intervene in this world. My defense will challenge the inferences that are normally made in evidential arguments from evil against the existence of God. I will argue that if there are sufficient limits to how much God can intervene in the affairs of this world, then it is quite plausible that,

1. the inference from apparently unjustified evils to the belief

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Howard-Snyder, "Introduction," *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, op. cit., p. xvii.

<sup>27</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," *The Problem of Evil*, op. cit., p. 86. It should be noted that Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams present a different notion of 'theodicy' and 'defense' in the Introduction to *The Problem of Evil*, (op. cit. p. 3). They use the term 'theodicy' to broadly 'cover any theistic response to questions about how theism can be true in view of the existence of evils. Theodicies whose main or exclusive aim is to rebut particular objections to theism may be called *defenses*.' I will not be using this understanding of 'theodicy' and 'defense'. Rather, I will be using these terms in the way that Van Inwagen, Howard-Snyder and Plantinga use them.

that there are instances of evil that are actually unjustified, is not rationally justified

2. our observations of instances of evil that appear to be unjustified are of no use in resolving the issue as to whether or not God exists.

In the first chapter, we shall look at an argument presented by Peter van Inwagen. Van Inwagen argues that certain cases of unjustified evil are unavoidable if God wants to refrain from obtaining a massively irregular world.<sup>28</sup> This would explain why we see some instances of apparently unjustified evil occurring; certain instances of evil are *actually* unjustified, at least when considered individually. We will see however, that even the sort of evil van Inwagen is writing about, still has some instrumental value in avoiding a massively irregular world. To clarify: some evils, when considered as individual instances, may have no justifying instrumental good but when considered as a part of a larger set may be justified in virtue of the instrumental good the entire set produces. The objective of this first chapter on van Inwagen's defense is to show that there still remains a need for a more general defense that addresses the quantity, as well as kinds, of evil that we observe.

In chapter two, I will look at three items that need to be addressed

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<sup>28</sup> For a good summary of his argument, see endnote (11) in his paper, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.

before responding to the evidential problem of evil. First, what makes an instance of evil justified? The objective here will be to discover some criteria for justification. Secondly, why do certain evils appear to be unjustified? In answering this question, we will look at the specific factors that make it appear as though an instance of evil is unjustified. Finally, I will look at the two kinds of inferences made in evidential arguments from evil against the existence of God, with a view to challenging them in later chapters.

There is a question that arises in response to the notion that God allows some evil to occur in order to bring about a greater good, or to prevent a greater evil. The question is why God cannot bring about the greater good without having to allow the evil or, in the case of preventing a greater evil, prevent both the antecedent evil *and* the greater evil. In chapter three, I will survey a number of defenses and theodicies, showing that all of them imply that there are some limits to what God can do in the way of intervening in the affairs of this world. The limitations all have one common idea: the possibility that there are certain outweighing goods that are logically impossible for God to bring about without allowing some evil. The purposes of this chapter will be to introduce the assumption that there are certain goods that are logically impossible to obtain without the allowance of instances of evil in this world, and to review some suggestions made by various theodicies as to what those 'certain goods' might be. I will then assume, for the purpose of the conditional argument that I will present in this thesis, that there are such goods, which entails that God must allow some instances of evil

to occur. A question that remains, and which I shall address, is why some instances of evil appear to be unjustified.

In chapter four, we will look at three types of complexity that this world may have. I will argue that these sorts of complexities pose a serious challenge to the notion that we are in a position to infer the ultimate value of any event.

Chapter five will expand upon the consequential complexity of causal chains mentioned in chapter four. I will argue, on the basis of this sort of complexity, that one of the inferences used in the evidential argument from evil, the strong inference, is not rationally justified. The *strong inference* is the inference that a particular instance of evil is actually unjustified. One complication of the strong inference is that the more precisely we focus on a particular event, isolating it from the vast network of causal chains that include the causes and consequences of the event, the greater is the uncertainty in the event's ultimate value. Looking for specific goods that justify specific evils, therefore, is a mistake. We are not rationally justified in inferring that specific instances of evil are actually unjustified (or justified). To make the strong inference, we must examine a sufficient portion of the entire actual network and compare the net value of that network with the best alternative to the event and the net value of its associated consequences. Our knowledge of the actual and best alternate network of causal chains and events is so minuscule that we do not have sufficient rational justification to infer that an event is *actually* justified or unjustified. We can only make

conclusions about how things *appear* to be, given the minute portion of the causal chains that we are aware of. I will go on to consider the special case of massive evils, which might be raised as an objection to what I have just argued. Finally, I shall examine the question of what our moral obligations are if we must be agnostic about the ultimate value of any event.

In chapter six, I shall argue that the weak inference is not rationally justified. The weak inference does not make any strong claims to the effect that a particular event is actually unjustified. Instead, it reasons that the general observations of apparently unjustified evil are exactly what we would expect if there is actually unjustified evil. I will respond by arguing that our general observations of apparently unjustified evil are exactly what we would expect if there is no actually unjustified evil and if we assume that there are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without the allowance of some evil. If this is the case, then our general observations of apparently unjustified evil are of no use in resolving the issue of whether or not there is actually unjustified evil. If this is the case, then our general observations of apparently unjustified evil are also of no use to discussions of the existence of God. If neither the weak nor the strong inference is rationally justified, then all evidential arguments from evil fall apart. In the second part of the chapter, I shall respond to an objection that focuses on God's moral obligation to not deceive. It would seem that God would be obligated to make things appear as they actually are. If God exists, then all evil is



justified and should appear to be justified. Since some evil appears to be unjustified, there must be actually unjustified evil.

The objective of the final chapter is to clearly distinguish between what has been argued for, and what has not been established or addressed. The assumed premises for my thesis will be discharged at this point. Unresolved issues will be briefly discussed.

The overall objective of this thesis is to argue that the inductive inference, that is essential to all evidential arguments from evil, is not rationally justified. The inference assumes a knowledge of the network of causal chains that compose history *and* the network of possible causal chains that compose alternate histories, that we simply do not have.<sup>29</sup> If this is so, then all evidential arguments from evil fail. Of course as I have already mentioned, whether or not theism is a *true* belief is not established in this thesis.

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<sup>29</sup> I will be using the word 'history' in the sense of 'a connected or related series of facts, events, etc., especially those concerning a specific group or subject.' (*Funk & Wagnalls Standard College Dictionary*, Canadian Edition, (Funk & Wagnalls, 1978), p. 636. In this case, it will refer to the set of all events and causal chains that compose a given world. In the specific case of our world, the set of all events and causal chains would include those in the past, present and future.

## 1.0 Has Peter van Inwagen Made this Thesis Redundant?

Peter van Inwagen has argued that God might have to allow a certain amount of unjustified evil in this world in order to avoid a massively irregular world. In this chapter I shall first summarize van Inwagen's argument. I shall then proceed to argue that such evil is not actually unjustified and that there are three reasons to believe that van Inwagen's defense still leaves room for the defense to be presented in this thesis.

### 1.1 A Summary of van Inwagen's Argument

Van Inwagen defines a *massively irregular world* as a world in which the laws of nature fail in some massive way.<sup>1</sup> He summarizes his argument for unjustified evil as follows.

... let us consider Rowe's famous case of a fawn that dies in prolonged agony of burns that it suffers in a forest fire caused by lightning. God, I concede, could have miraculously prevented the fire, or miraculously saved the fawn, or miraculously caused its agony to be cut short by death. And, I will concede for the sake of argument, if He had done so, this would have thwarted no significant good and permitted no significant evil. But what of the hundreds of millions (at least) of similar incidents that have, no doubt, occurred during the long history of life? Well, I concede, He could have prevented any one of them or any two of them or any three of them... without thwarting any significant good or

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<sup>1</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Problems of Evil, Air & Silence," *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed. (Indiana University Press, 1996), p. 158.

permitting any significant evil. But could he have prevented all of them? No -- not without causing the world to be massively irregular. And, of course, there is no sharp cut-off point between a world that is massively irregular and a world that is not ... There is, therefore no *minimum* number of cases of intense suffering that God could allow without forfeiting the good of a world that is not massively irregular ...<sup>2</sup>

In another paper, van Inwagen provides an excellent illustration of such a predicament that drives his point home.

Atlantis is sinking. Russell is in command of the last refugee ship. There are one thousand people left in Atlantis (all men, let us say). They are standing in a queue--position in the queue was determined by a fair lottery and is now unalterable--on the dock, clamoring for admission to his ship. Russell must admit the first  $n$  men in the queue; the value of  $n$  has been left entirely to his discretion. If he takes no refugees on board, he and his ship will *certainly* reach the mainland safely. Each refugee he admits will reduce the chances of a safe arrival of the ship at the mainland by 0.1 percent. ... He will have to close the hatch in the face of someone whose admission would not significantly decrease the ship's chances of reaching the mainland safely. ... God is in a precisely analogous moral situation. Although He may have miraculously saved all manner of fawns from forest fires, if He is to preserve the lawlike regularity of the world there must come a point at which He will refrain from saving a fawn (or whatever) even though performing this act of mercy would not significantly decrease the lawlike regularity of the world.<sup>3</sup>

Van Inwagen's argument is to the effect that God allows some

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<sup>2</sup> This summary is found in endnote (11) of van Inwagen's "The Problems of Evil, Air & Silence."

<sup>3</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "Reflections on the Chapters by Draper, Russell and Gale," *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, op. cit., p. 234.

number of evils in this world, not because they have some greater instrumental value, but because He must limit how much He interferes in this world. The more He interferes, the more the regularity of the world is threatened. At some point God must restrain Himself from intervening further. True, just one more intervention would not have a significant effect on the regularity of the world, but He must 'close the hatch' somewhere and there is no sharp cut-off point at which He must do it.

According to van Inwagen, a particular instance of evil that we observe might not have any positive instrumental value at all. That instance might be among those evils that God had to allow simply to avoid a massively irregular world. Simply put, the reason we observe some instances of apparently unjustified evil in this world might be, according to van Inwagen, because they really may be unjustified. Van Inwagen's point seems possible. There could well be a certain amount of evil in this world that when considered by individual cases, produces no greater good nor prevents no greater evil, but if prevented in its entirety would result in a massively irregular world. It may be logically impossible to both intervene in all instances of evil and avoid a massively irregular world.

Van Inwagen's argument can be used for particular instances of evil and is therefore suited to responding to evidential arguments from particular instances of evil, such as Rowe's argument from E1 and E2 outlined in the Introduction. It might be somewhat less adequate to account for the *quantity* of suffering as I shall shortly discuss. As

van Inwagen states however, this is only meant to be a defense and not a theodicy. In his case, he has given us a defense against a particular type of evidential argument, those that are based on specific instances of evil.

## 1.2 A Complex Factor in Justification

First of all, the idea that massive irregularity would result if God intervened too much in this world is plausible. Of course, it is conceivable that God could have created a completely deterministic, law-governed world in which no suffering ever occurred. But, as Alvin Plantinga has already suggested, it may be impossible to achieve certain goods without a world that contains free agents and certain amounts of evil.

Instances of evil of the sort van Inwagen is accounting for in his defense may not be justified when considered on an individual basis, but since they, as a group, do prevent a much greater evil, they are still justified, though in a different way. Keith Chrzan has made a similar point.

The definition of a best possible world implies that any change to that world would yield a less excellent world. ... if the best possible world contains an evil, that evil is not gratuitous.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Chrzan, "God and Gratuitous Evil: A Reply to Yandell," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 27, p. 100.

Chrzan's comment was made within the context of discussing the idea of a best possible world, but his idea is relevant here. If preventing certain evils that appear to be unjustified (gratuitous) actually resulted in a worse world, then those evils are not actually unjustified.

If we grant van Inwagen's proposal that too much intervention on the part of God would result in massive (hence, evil) irregularity, then an interesting twist to justified evils arises. Typically, the justification for an event is thought to be contingent on its consequences, perhaps causes and possible alternatives.<sup>5</sup> What van Inwagen's defense suggests, is that this approach to justification might be simplistic. When considering whether or not a particular evil should be allowed, we ought not to merely consider an event on its individual merits, but we should also consider whole combinations of events. Certain evils may have to be allowed that, when considered individually, would appear to be unjustified. The challenge would be to find the right combination of individually unjustified evils such that the net value of the entire combination of events in history was optimized. Individually unjustified evils that were part of the optimized combination would actually be justified in virtue of the role they play avoiding a very great evil (in this case, a massively irregular world). This sort of justification will be discussed further in the following chapter.

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed look at justification will take place in the following chapter.

If the basic idea of van Inwagen's defense can be granted (God must limit his intervention in order to avoid massive irregularity), then the complex factor it introduces into whether or not an evil is justified, makes it more difficult for us to know whether an evil is actually justified or not. A consequence of this difficulty will be discussed in chapter four.

### 1.3 Still Room for a Defense

Does van Inwagen's theory provide the final response to the evidential problem of evil? No, and I think van Inwagen is clear on this; he has only suggested this as a defense for a certain type of evidential argument, those based on particular instances of evil. As a defense, his story is logically possible and thus fulfills the basic criteria he has put forward for a defense (discussed in the Introduction). If, however, a defense can be presented that is even more plausible than van Inwagen's, then there is certainly room for such a story. In this thesis I will attempt to present a defense that, while consistent with van Inwagen's defense, is more plausible given the consequential complexity of this world.

There are two other areas in van Inwagen's defense that might allow further discussion. First, why is a massively irregular world so much worse than all the evils that it would forestall? Secondly, while van Inwagen's defense might be a possible answer to evidential

arguments based on specific instances of evil, it may not provide a satisfactory response to the quantity of evil we see.

First, Peter van Inwagen's suggestion that God must limit His intervention in order to avoid a massively irregular world might initially appear to be a good reason, if it is true, for limiting his involvement, but on second thought what is wrong with a massively irregular world? Van Inwagen's example of a massively irregular world is quite utopian, albeit an odd sort of world to live in.

God, by means of a continuous series of ubiquitous miracles, causes a planet inhabited by the same animal life as the actual earth to be a hedonic utopia. On this planet, fawns are (like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) saved by angels when they are in danger of being burnt alive. Harmful parasites and microorganisms suffer immediate supernatural dissolution if they enter a higher animal's body. Lambs are miraculously hidden from lions, and the lions are compensated for the resulting restriction on their diets by physically impossible falls of high-protein manna.<sup>6</sup>

What is so evil about such a world? Van Inwagen provides two reasons that do not seem to be very compelling and, to be fair, van Inwagen only suggests them as possibilities, having already stated that he does not really need to provide any since this is just a defense. The first reason he provides is that any defect in the world

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<sup>6</sup> Peter van Inwagen, "The Problems of Evil, Air & Silence," op. cit., pp. 158-159.



is bad<sup>7</sup> and any degree of irregularity in the world is a defect<sup>8</sup>; therefore any degree of irregularity is bad.

Are miracles bad things? Van Inwagen allows that a miracle is an irregularity, albeit small. It follows from this that a miracle is a defect and, by van Inwagen's reasoning, therefore bad. Most might allow that a miracle is an irregularity, but fewer might allow that a miracle is a bad thing. Even if some did grant that a miracle is a bad thing, is it worse than the evil it prevents? Most people suffering from cancer would likely prefer the evil of a miraculous healing over the evil of the cancer. I think most would be inclined to agree that it seems implausible that the preventative miracle is more evil than the evil that miracle prevents. Even a massive amount of miracles, such as would be necessary in van Inwagen's scenario quoted above, do not strike me as intrinsically more evil than the world in which we now live.

The other reason he supplies to believe that a massively irregular world is evil is that it is massively deceptive. It is hard to see how this necessarily follows. Surely in a world with the amount of intervention a massively irregular world has, God could keep everyone informed as to how much He is intervening. If being deceived is evil, then it is just one more evil that would be eliminated by God in a massively irregular world.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 161.

Even if the reasons van Inwagen supplies are not compelling, I do think he is right, however, about a massively irregular world being something God might want to avoid. Other thinkers have suggested additional reasons as to why God might not want to intervene to the point of eliminating all evil.

Joseph Butler (1692-1752) suggested at least four problems that would occur if there were too many 'interpositions' by God.<sup>9</sup>

1. The sort of foresight we need for planning would be jeopardized.
2. Idleness and negligence would be encouraged.
3. People would doubt that there are natural laws.
4. There would be long-term bad effects.

F.R. Tennant suggested some points similar to Butler's,

... the general suspension of painful events, requisite on the vast scale presupposed in the elimination of physical ills, would abolish order and convert a cosmos into an unintelligible chaos in which anything might succeed upon anything.<sup>10</sup>

This loss of regularity would result in,

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Butler, "Part I," *The Analogy of Religion* (New York: Harper & Bros., First Edition), pp. 116-117.

<sup>10</sup> F.R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology: Volume 2* (Cambridge University Press, 1937), p. 202.

... no prediction, no prudence, no accumulation of ordered experience, no pursuit of premeditated ends, no formation of habit, no possibility of character or of culture. Our intellectual faculties could not have developed.<sup>11</sup>

More recently, R.W.K. Paterson suggests that if there was too much intervention on the part of God,

... human life would cease to be a theater of genuine moral responsibility and initiative, which logically require an *attention to consequences* which would be impossible if the consequences of natural law were constantly being counteracted.<sup>12</sup>

While I am inclined to agree with Tennant that wholesale intervention may well produce an 'unintelligible chaos,' the actual world does not appear to be anywhere close to that extreme scenario.<sup>13</sup> While it may be true that a massively unbalanced world is a bad thing for reasons supplied above, it also seems to be the case that we could handle significantly more intervention by God without encountering those problems. F.R. Tennant does indicate that intervention on a lesser scale,

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> R.W.K. Paterson, "Evil, Omniscience and Omnipotence," *Religious Studies*, Vol. 15, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> I do acknowledge the possibility that we are on the brink of a massively irregular world and that there is no room for any further intervention by God. Nevertheless, this does not *appear* to be the case to most people. So long as it does not appear to be the case, regardless of what the actual state of affairs might be, some explanation will be in order by anyone defending van Inwagen's defense.

... is conceivable without subversion of such regularity as is requisite for human prudence and without the stultification of our science.<sup>14</sup>

Another reason Peter van Inwagen's defense still leaves room for further defenses or theodicies is that his defense does not seem to give a satisfying account of the *quantity* of evil in this world. The world does not seem to be even remotely close to massive irregularity. If God did 'close the hatch,' it seems that He did it far too soon.

One could respond by suggesting that the quantity of apparently unjustified evil that we observe might just so happen to be the amount around which it becomes necessary to 'close the hatch' in order to avoid a massively irregular world. This is certainly a logical possibility but I do not think the skeptic will find it very satisfying. It is similar to one who suggests that there are invisible fairies who go about the world preventing illnesses up to some self-imposed limit beyond which their existence might become obvious. When asked why there is so much illness in the world if such invisible fairies are at work, the believer replies that while preventing just one more illness might have a negligible effect on their discreteness, they have to stop somewhere and this is it. The skeptic points out that, given the quantity of illness in the world, the fairies are not even remotely close to making their presence obvious. The believer responds by suggesting that it is logically possible that the quantity

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<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., p. 202.

of illness we do observe just so happens to be the quantity around which the fairies must 'close the hatch.' There is something about this sort of defense that might appear to be *ad hoc* when it comes to offering a satisfying account of why so much illness (or evil) is observed.

To be fair to van Inwagen, I do not think that he is implying that *all* the apparently unjustified evil we observe in this world is actually the sort that must be accounted for by his defense. It is also possible that a great deal of the apparently unjustified evil that we observe, if not all of it, is actually justified in virtue of its own instrumental value and the fact that it is the best alternative. Maybe there is an explanation for the quantity and quality of evil in this world that does not need to rely at all on van Inwagen's defense. This is not to say that his defense is not plausible. It may well be one of several factors that limit God's intervention. Perhaps 90 percent of the apparently unjustified evil in this world is actually justified on its own individual merits. The other 10 percent is evil of the sort that is accounted for by van Inwagen's defense. The argument that I will present in this thesis is compatible with Peter van Inwagen's defense, but will provide an additional explanation for the amount and specific instances of apparently unjustified evil we witness in this world. My defense will augment van Inwagen's defense.

There are three reasons, therefore, why Peter van Inwagen has not rendered this thesis redundant.

1. There is room to supply a story that is even more plausible than van Inwagen's defense.
2. A massively irregular world may indeed be a bad thing and thus be a limitation to divine intervention. So far as we can see, however, we do not appear to be anywhere near that situation. We need, therefore, an explanation for the evil we see that lies between us and the generally undefined border where massive irregularity begins to become a danger.
3. Van Inwagen's defense might provide an adequate response to evidential arguments based on particular instances of evil chosen for their quality (unusual negative intrinsic value) but it seems less satisfying to account for the quantity of apparently unjustified evil we see. There is room, therefore, for an explanation that has broader scope, accounting for not only the occurrence of particular evils that appear to be unjustified, but for the quantity of apparently unjustified evil as well.

Given the above, I conclude that van Inwagen's defense still leaves room for the defense that I will present in this thesis.

## **2.0 What Makes Some Events Apparently Unjustified?**

Foundational to all evidential arguments from evil are observations of evil that are apparently unjustified. Before presenting a defense in response to evidential arguments from evil, I must first examine what it is that determines the difference between justified events, unjustified events and apparently unjustified events.

In this chapter, I shall first clarify what criteria must be satisfied before an event is justified. Secondly, I shall examine why it is that some evils appear to be unjustified. The third section will introduce the two kinds of inductive inferences used in evidential arguments from evil. It is these two types of inductive inferences that I will later argue are not rationally justified.

### **2.1 Justification**

The criteria for justification that I will use in this thesis will be what I will refer to as the minimum requirements. What I mean by 'minimum requirements' will be explained in this section. There may be additional requirements, such as the need to optimize the net value of this world by appropriately selecting whole combinations or groups of events, as suggested by Peter van Inwagen's defense. This will be very briefly discussed as well. For the purpose of my thesis, however, the minimum requirements for justification will be sufficient for my argument. If one wishes to add additional

requirements, such as the consideration just mentioned, it will only serve to strengthen the argument that I will present in later chapters.

It is important to distinguish between an event that is actually justified, an event that God is justified in permitting and finally, an event that we are justified in permitting. For the latter two types of justification, the agent's knowledge becomes relevant. I will first examine what minimum criteria must be satisfied for an event to be actually justified.

The actual justification for an event depends upon two things:

1. the net value of the event and all its consequences
2. the net value of the best alternate event and all its consequences.

For an event to be actually justified, the following criteria must be satisfied:<sup>1</sup>

1. the net value of the consequences of the actual event must be greater than, or equal to, the net value of the consequences if the event had not been permitted.

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<sup>1</sup> These criteria are commonly accepted, although they can be stated in a variety of different ways. For example, William Rowe uses three criteria that are no more than expansions of the two I have presented above (see William Rowe's, "The evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," *op. cit.*, p. 276).



2. the good consequences could not have been achieved by some other means with a greater net value.

The above two criteria can be formulated into one general criterion for an actually justified event as follows. If we define the *actual ultimate value* of an event as the net value of the event and all its consequences, minus the net value of the best possible alternate event and all its consequences, then,

an event is actually justified if its actual ultimate value is equal to or greater than zero.

Now let us look at this notion of an actually justified event.

First, by 'alternate event', I mean any event that is logically possible for God to actualize.<sup>2</sup> The 'best' alternate event would be the one that, when considered with all its consequences, had the highest net

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Alvin Plantinga raises the possibility that there may be worlds that are logically possible, but are not logically possible for God to actualize. Since it is logically impossible for God to causally determine the decisions of free agents, he can only weakly actualize them (see footnote 11 in the Introduction). But, as Alvin Plantinga points out, there may be some decisions by free agents that God cannot even weakly actualize; the free agents simply do not cooperate. In effect, God has given free agents the power to determine what he (God) can weakly actualize and what he cannot weakly actualize. I will assume that God can causally determine any possible event except for the decisions of free agents, some of which he can weakly actualize and others which he cannot.

value.<sup>3</sup>

Secondly, there may be cases where an evil event and all its future consequences have a net value that is negative. However, the best alternative might be the one where the event does not occur, but a string of greater evils results. In this case, the net value of the best alternative would be even more negative than the actual evil event. The actual ultimate value would still be positive because we would be subtracting a value that is more negative from a value that is less negative, yielding a positive ultimate value.

Finally, since we are concerned only with whether or not the actual ultimate value of the event is positive or negative, and not with what the actual ultimate value is, we can make the entire calculation of net values relative to the intrinsic value of the event in question. We can assign any arbitrary value to the event in question, and then grade the intrinsic values of all the other relevant consequences and alternate events accordingly. This is closer to what we do in the

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<sup>3</sup> I am aware that problems can be raised regarding the concept of the best possible alternative or, more generally, the best possible world (David Blumenfeld, "Is the Best Possible World Possible?," *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 84, (1975), pp. 163-177). Blumenfeld points out two possibilities. First, for any world one picks, there could be a better one. Second, more than one possible world could score highest on the scale of perfection. In order to avoid these problems, I will make the following two assumptions. First, if for any alternative one picks, there could always be one better, I will assume that the level of goodness begins to level off toward a horizontal asymptote at some point. Any gains after that point are trivial. For our purposes, anything after that point will do as the 'best alternate event.' Secondly, if there is a number of candidates that tie for the best alternate event, any one of them will do just fine. What I am primarily concerned with, in my discussion of actually justified events, is the possibility that the goods produced by the actual event could have been produced some other way with less suffering.

course of our everyday lives.<sup>4</sup> When considering whether or not an event is justified, we do not usually do a numerical calculation of units of value. Rather, we consider whether or not the consequences outweigh the evil event or not. By doing this, we make the intrinsic value of the event the unit of measurement, and grade the consequences with a greater or lesser value.

To further simplify this concept of actual justification for an event, let 'A' represent the net value of the actual event and all its consequences. Let 'B' represent the net value of the best alternate event and all its consequences. Finally, let 'U' represent the actual ultimate value of an event. Then an event is actually justified if,

U is greater than or equal to zero

where

$$U = A - B$$

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<sup>4</sup> I should note that when we are assigning intrinsic values to discrete events, our own subjective biases may affect our intuitions as to how negative or positive a given event might be. For example, it is commonly held that our most powerful instinct is that of survival. Thus we may see evils that involve loss of life as significantly more negative than an individual such as God who is not driven by that instinct. Furthermore, different individuals may assign different intrinsic values for the same event, depending upon their background knowledge and personal biases. This does not pose a problem for my argument, however. If anything, this lack of agreement over the apparent ultimate value of an event will only serve to strengthen it.

For the remainder of this thesis, whenever I use the terms ‘actual ultimate value’ or ‘actually justified’, they are to be understood as has just been explicated above.

Thus far, I have only been concerned with how the net values of different events *actually* stack up against each other. The role of knowledge has not been a factor. When we begin to talk about whether or not an agent is justified in permitting something, the knowledge and warranted beliefs of that agent become relevant if the following proposition is granted:

R: An agent is morally responsible for what is reasonably knowable to that agent and not morally responsible for what is not reasonably knowable to that agent.

Note that it is not the agent’s actual knowledge that we are concerned with here, but the obligation of the agent to make inquiry into what is reasonably knowable to that agent and act upon the results of that inquiry. That inquiry may result in:

1. True beliefs that the agent possesses after a reasonable inquiry,
2. Warranted (but mistaken) beliefs that the agent possesses after a reasonable inquiry.

The term ‘reasonably’ allows for two things:

1. The agent's inquiry is only as exhaustive as what would reasonably be expected under the circumstances.
  
2. Allowance for the limitations of the agent. It would be reasonable, for example, to expect that fallible human agents may acquire some warranted false beliefs after a reasonable inquiry, and justifiably act on those beliefs. A set of facts might be knowable to a human agent after a reasonable inquiry, but it might be unreasonable to expect that the agent would always have only true beliefs about any set of knowable facts. In general, the limitations of the agent must be allowed for when considering what is *reasonably* knowable to the agent.

Once the agent has performed a responsible inquiry into what is reasonably knowable to them, they can be said to *responsibly comprehend* what is reasonably knowable to them,<sup>5</sup> even though what they responsibly comprehend may consist of both true beliefs

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<sup>5</sup> The notion of responsible comprehension is the combination of two things: due inquiry and warranted belief. Our due inquiry will be limited by what is reasonably knowable to us. What is reasonably knowable to us will be a set of facts that are fairly accessible to us. Due inquiry will have been made when an inquirer has made a responsible effort to discover any relevant facts that are fairly accessible to him, even if he fails for some legitimate reason to discover all those fairly accessible facts. I have introduced this notion of 'reasonably knowable' because my argument will turn on the huge disparity between those relevant facts that are reasonably knowable or fairly accessible to us, and what is knowable to an omniscient being. The point of R is that we are only morally responsible to make due inquiry into those facts that are fairly accessible to us and not morally responsible for facts that are not reasonably accessible to us.

and warranted false beliefs. At this point, the agent is justified in acting upon what they responsibly comprehend.

With this in mind, any being is justified in permitting an event if,

$u$  is greater than or equal to zero

where

$$u = a - b$$

I have used lower case letters here since  $u$ ,  $a$  and  $b$  are all variables. The values they have for any given event, will vary from being to being, depending upon what is reasonably knowable to each being and how each being comprehends that body of facts. In this case, 'a' represents the net value of the actual event with all its consequences as responsibly comprehended by a particular being. The variable 'b' represents the best alternate event with all its consequences, as responsibly comprehended by that being.

Now let us consider what God is justified in permitting. There may be a difference between an event that is actually justified (as defined above) and an event that God is justified in permitting. The difference is contingent upon what is included in the idea of

omniscience. If omniscience includes both middle knowledge<sup>6</sup> and foreknowledge,<sup>7</sup> then God knows all the future consequences of any possible event, both those that he can determine and otherwise. If this is the case with God, then for God,  $u = U$  since, for God,  $a = A$  and  $b = B$ . An actually justified event and an event that God is justified in permitting would be one and the same under this understanding of omniscience.

There is some controversy, however, over what is included in the notion of omniscience. The generally accepted understanding of omniscience is knowing *all that is possible to know*. The controversy centers upon *what* is possible to know. Some have argued that omniscience cannot include middle knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Foreknowledge is also controversial.<sup>9</sup> If we do not assume that God's omniscience includes middle knowledge or foreknowledge, then God is justified in permitting an event on the basis of what is knowable to him, which is 'u'.

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<sup>6</sup> Middle knowledge is commonly understood as knowledge of 'what every possible free creature would freely do in every situation in which that creature could possibly find himself' (Robert Merrihew Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, (1977), p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> Note that when I assume that God has foreknowledge, it is foreknowledge *relative to us*. I am making no assumption about whether or not God is located within time.

<sup>8</sup> For example, see Robert Merrihew Adams, *ibid.*, pp. 109-117 and William Hasker's "A Refutation of Middle Knowledge," *Nous*, Vol. 20, (1986), pp. 545-557.

<sup>9</sup> For example, see William Lane Craig's *Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents*, (E.J. Brill, 1988).

Since we are rational agents, the same criterion for justification holds true for us. Keep in mind, however, that even though the same criterion for justification is operative for both God and us, there may be a large difference between what is knowable to God and what is knowable to us. If this is the case, then what God is justified in permitting would not be equivalent to what we are justified in permitting. There are two more aspects to justification that I want to briefly address before we look at why certain events appear to us to be unjustified.

First, Peter van Inwagen's defense raised the possibility that God must let certain individually unjustified evils occur. In this case, even though God must let certain individually unjustified evils occur, he might still have a choice regarding *which* individually unjustified evils he would allow. It is this combination of individually unjustified evils that would prevent a massively irregular world. As a group, the evils are justified, since they prevent a much greater evil. But the question arises, is there a different combination of individually unjustified evils that would prevent massive irregularity, but with less suffering?

Since the individually unjustified evils act as a group, what would need to be done is to examine different *combinations* of individually unjustified evils to see which combination would prevent massive irregularity, but with the least suffering. Only the optimum combination would be justified. Using the formulation already



developed in this section, a combination of individually unjustified evils is justified if:

$u^c$  is greater than or equal to zero

where

$$u^c = a^c - b^c$$

In this case the superscript 'C' indicates that it is the net value of whole *combinations* of events and all their consequences, as reasonably knowable by some being, that must be calculated.

This same approach would need to be used in the case, commonly accepted by theists, that God has certain great goods or objectives in mind, that he wishes to achieve. It is possible that such goods could be achieved by various combinations of *individually justified* events. Certain combinations of individually justified events might produce the same good, but with less suffering. In this case, an event that is justified when considered individually, might not be justified when considered in combination with other individually justified events. To take this possibility into account, we would have to use the same formulation that considers the net values of combinations of events,

$$u^c = a^c - b^c, \text{ which must be equal to or greater than zero}$$

What all this indicates, is that the justification for certain events may be more complicated than the minimum requirements I laid out at the beginning of this section. There is no need to complicate things more than necessary, however, so I will now make some moves that will simplify our discussion of justification for the remainder of this thesis.

First, in chapter five we will see that calculating the actual ultimate value of single instances of evil is considerably beyond our human ability. If this is the case, then considering whole combinations of events is more difficult by many orders of magnitude (depending upon how many events are being included in a given combination). There is no need, for my purposes, to rely upon the complexities of combination-justified events to make my argument. Therefore, when I talk about justified events, I will be referring to individually justified events, using the minimum requirements for justification as I initially laid out. I would suggest, however, that one keep the possibility of combination-justified events in mind, just in case one is feeling optimistic about knowing whether or not the minimum requirements for justification have been met.

Secondly, I will make two assumptions about God's knowledge that I think are reasonable. The first assumption is that God has foreknowledge. By *foreknowledge*, I mean knowledge of every event that will actually happen in the future. Although this assumption is not without controversy, it is a commonly accepted assumption by

theists of what is included within omniscience. Furthermore, we can even conceive of ways that foreknowledge might be possible.<sup>10</sup>

The second assumption that I will make about God's knowledge is that he has middle knowledge. Recall that middle knowledge is knowledge of what every possible free agent would freely do under any possible conditions. If God has this knowledge, then he not only knows the set of all possible alternatives, but he also knows the subset of alternatives that are logically possible for him to actualize. That subset includes those alternate sequences that he can

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<sup>10</sup> For us, time is one dimensional. It is like an arrow with a starting point in the past (the origin of the universe) and it proceeds toward the infinite future. We can observe only the point immediately ahead of us and the point immediately behind us. If God wanted to have foreknowledge relative to us and our arrow of time, he could simply create time as a two dimensional continuum; like a geometrical plane. Our arrow of time would lie within that plane and we would be confined to that one dimensional arrow of time, like a one dimensional world laying within two dimensional space. However, an agent at a point that is perpendicular to our arrow of time would be able to observe all the points in our arrow of time simultaneously. What we regard as the past and future would be merely regarded as something like 'left' and 'right' for such an agent. What is foreknowledge relative to us would simply be present knowledge relative to such an agent. Another aspect of such an arrangement is that the agent could interact with our arrow of time at AD 2345 before (relative to the agent) BC 1244. Of course an omnipresent agent could interact with all dates simultaneously, relative to that agent. To us, the interaction would appear to be sequential since we are confined to only one dimension of two dimensional time. I am not suggesting that this is the way it actually is. My point is that if we can think of ways in which foreknowledge is theoretically possible, then surely an omniscient, omnipotent being could do as least as well and actualize such a system. If we have free will, then under such a system any decisions we make have already (relative to God) been determined not by God, but by us. Of course, from our one dimensional temporal perspective, we will not determine future decisions until we get there. Relative to God, *we are already there* and are making those decisions. It is critical to realize that we are already there making those decisions (from a two dimensional temporal perspective) in order to understand how future, free decisions can already be determined from a two dimensional temporal perspective but not from a one dimensional temporal perspective.

determine, and those that free agents allow him to weakly actualize. God is thus in a position to know B for any event.<sup>11</sup>

For the sake of clarity, I will now summarize the key conclusions and assumptions.

1. For the remainder of this thesis, when I consider whether or not an event is actually justified, I will be considering the minimum requirements for actual justification; the actual ultimate value must be equal to or greater than zero.
2. When I consider whether or not a person is justified in permitting an event, I will be considering the minimum requirements for justification for persons; the apparent ultimate value, as responsibly comprehended by that person, must be equal to or greater than zero.
3. In the case of God, I am assuming that he has foreknowledge. Therefore, he knows the actual net value of an actual event and all its consequences.
4. In the case of God, I am assuming that he has middle

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<sup>11</sup> Even if one is not inclined to grant that omniscience includes middle knowledge, it would still be likely that omniscience would include a knowledge or understanding of alternate possibilities that would be vastly superior to our own. If at least this can be granted, then the main arguments and the conclusion of my thesis will still stand: we are not rationally justified in inferring whether or not God is justified in permitting any instance of evil.

knowledge; he knows what every possible free agent would do under any possible circumstance. If we assume that all other events can be determined, then God knows what the best alternative is and the net value of that alternative and all its consequences.

5. If (3) and (4) are granted, then we can say that an event that is actually justified, and an event that God is justified in permitting, are one and the same. Thus, God is justified in permitting an event if, for that event, the actual ultimate value is equal to or greater than zero.

## 2.2 Why do Certain Evils Appear to be Unjustified?

Imagine that Bill has just slipped while pulling his lawn mower up an incline, with the result that his foot goes under the lawn mower and is shredded. This event will appear to be unjustified to Bill, if the ultimate value of his misfortune so far as he knows, is negative. Not having read this thesis, Bill might not be thinking in terms of 'knowable ultimate value', but he very likely will be thinking in terms of the two components of ultimate value.

First, so far as Bill can see, the value of the actual event and its immediate painful consequences are all negative. Secondly, Bill is most likely thinking of a better alternative to the event -- not slipping. The alternate possibility is clearly not as negative as the

actual event, with the result that the overall value of the whole event (ultimate value knowable to Bill) is clearly negative.

In general, events appear unjustified to us for exactly the reasons illustrated in Bill's case. They are completely contingent upon what is knowable to us. I will argue in later chapters that what is knowable to us is so minuscule in comparison to the entire set of relevant events, both alternate events and actual, that whether or not an event appears justified to us has no relation to whether or not it is actually justified.

I would like to make another observation. The apparent ultimate value, as distinguished from the actual ultimate value of an event, will change with time as a person accumulates more knowledge relevant to the event in question. Every intrinsically good event, at the moment that it happens, has a positive apparent ultimate value although, as further knowledge is gained, that value may change. Similarly, every intrinsically evil event, at the moment it happens, has a negative apparent ultimate value, though that too may change with time as the person accumulates more knowledge. The observation to make here is that for any intrinsically evil event, knowledge of the event, which has a negative value, is always included in what is known by the observer. Since one's knowledge of future consequences may be quite limited, this deficit position in the value of the event may be hard to overcome. Thus, it should not be surprising if many instances of actually justified evil appear to have

a negative ultimate value and, hence, are unjustified *so far as the observer knows*.

Whether or not an event appears to be justified or not is contingent on what is known by a given person. What is known will vary from person to person. Thus, whether or not an event is apparently justified may differ from person to person. In subsequent chapters, I will argue that there is a very large difference between what is reasonably knowable to us and the entire set of facts relevant to each event. As a result, I will attempt to show that there is no relationship between actual justification and apparent justification.

### 2.3 The Two Inductive Inferences in Evidential Arguments from Evil

Evidential arguments from evil inductively infer that there is actually unjustified evil (and, hence, there is no God) via one of two inferences. In chapters five and six, I will attempt to show that neither of these two inferences is rationally justified. In this section, I shall clarify what these two kinds of inductive inferences are.

The first type of inductive inference, used in evidential arguments from evil, is based on the observation of a particular instance of evil and infers that the instance is actually unjustified. A variation of this sort of inference may go further and conclude that *all* instances of that particular evil are unjustified. The distinguishing characteristic of this type of inference is its claim that a particular

instance of evil is actually unjustified. This is a strong claim and for that reason I will refer to this type of inference as the *strong inference*. An example of the strong inference is found in William Rowe's 'Second Look' argument.<sup>12</sup> The justification for this sort of inference has two components:

1. A survey of the consequences of the instance of evil reveals that there are no good consequences that outweigh the evil, so far as is knowable.
2. The prevention of the evil appears as an eminently better alternative with better consequences, so far as is knowable.

The assumption that the inference makes, in using the above two points, is that what is knowable is sufficient to justify the inference that the particular instance of evil is actually unjustified (there actually are no outweighing goods and there actually are alternatives with better consequences). I will challenge this assumption in chapter four, arguing that what is knowable is so minuscule in comparison with the entire body of relevant facts, that there is no rational justification at all for believing that what is knowable is sufficient to rationally justify the strong inference.

The second type of inference used in evidential arguments from evil begins with observations of evil in general. It assumes that even

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<sup>12</sup> William Rowe, "The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look," *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, op. cit., pp. 262-263.



though we do not know if any particular instance of evil is justified or not, observations of apparently unjustified evil are exactly what we would expect if there are instances that are actually unjustified and *not* what we would expect, at least to the same extent, if all instances of evil are actually justified. Based on this assumption and observations of apparently unjustified evil in general, it concludes that there actually is unjustified evil (and, hence, God does not exist).

This type of inference does not make a strong claim to the effect that a particular instance of evil is unjustified. Instead, it makes a weaker claim to the effect that there is actually unjustified evil, though we may not be able to identify specific instances of it.

Because it makes a weaker claim, I shall refer to this second type of inference as the *weak inference*. In chapter five, I shall argue that the assumption made by the weak inference is false. Instances of apparently unjustified evil are equally what we would expect if there is actually unjustified evil or if there is no actually unjustified evil. If both types of inferences can be shown to be not rationally justified, then all evidential arguments from evil are unsound.

### **3.0 Limitations to Divine Intervention**

There is a story in the Bible in which a youth named Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers, and carried off to Egypt. Eventually God reveals to Joseph, via two dreams of the Pharaoh, that seven years of plenty are coming, followed by seven years of famine. Joseph is charged with the responsibility of preparing for the famine and is placed second in power only to Pharaoh. As a result, the lives of many are saved, including those of his family. Near the end of the story Joseph says to his brothers, "... you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."<sup>1</sup> Did the saving of many lives justify God in allowing Joseph to be sold into slavery by his brothers? If God is omnipotent, could He not have arranged for someone else to interpret Pharaoh's dream? Better yet, why not simply disallow the famine?

In the last chapter I suggested that one of the conditions for the justification of an event, is that the good could not have been achieved otherwise via an alternate event that resulted in less suffering. It would seem that an omnipotent being could achieve virtually anything without having to allow any instances of evil whatsoever. Even if they brought about overwhelming goods, could not those goods have been obtained by an omnipotent being, without having to allow the evil? This raises the question as to whether

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 50:20.

there are sufficient limits to divine intervention that are consistent with omnipotence such that some evil must be permitted.

The objective of this chapter is to clearly state my commitment to sufficient limitations to divine intervention such that some evil must be permitted. I will first lay out the premises that I will be assuming for my argument and show how sufficient limitations follow from them. I will then briefly review a number of defenses and theodicies with special attention to what those theodicies claim in the way of divine limitations.

There is an assumption that lies at the heart of Alvin Plantinga's free will defense that is assumed or implied by every other theodicy and defense. Recall that according to Plantinga,

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 one contains) without creating one containing moral evil.<sup>2</sup>

This assumption can be framed as follows:

L: There are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without allowing some evil.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil, and the Metaphysics of Freedom," *The Problem of Evil*, op. cit., p. 86. Plantinga's paper was originally part of his book *The Nature of Necessity* (Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 164-193.

<sup>3</sup> The word 'allowance' should be taken as an indicator that the obtaining of those certain goods does not *require* a certain amount of evil, only the freedom for that evil to occur. It is possible that the certain goods could be achieved

This assumption will be the primary assumed premise in what I will argue in this thesis and my conclusions will be conditional upon it. The assumption L is certainly logically possible but it does involve two other premises. First, when taken within the context of Plantinga's free will defense, it assumes that libertarianism is true; we are free agents.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, it assumes that omnipotence is limited to the ability to do only what is logically possible to do.

The assumption that we are free agents is widely granted in discussions of the evidential problem of evil, as an acceptable move by the theist. The alternative of determinism requires that God be the first cause of all events, including evil. A theist holding the position of determinism has the impossible task of explaining how a perfectly good being can also be the first cause of all evil. For this reason, it is my position that theistic determinism is indefensible. My primary reason for assuming libertarianism, however, is that it certainly appears as though we actually have free will.

Reductionists, who hold that the phenomenon of the human mind can be entirely attributed to physio-chemical processes taking place in our neural network, may one day demonstrate that we do not

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without any evil actually occurring, even though the freedom for it to occur was there. Of course, Plantinga has suggested that even though this might be possible, the free agents involved in evil suffer from transworld depravity (there is no world that, if it were actualized, they would not commit evil).

<sup>4</sup> Recall that Plantinga defined a free agent as one for whom 'no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not' (Introduction, footnote 9). This position is known as the libertarian view. The alternative is determinism where an agent's decisions and actions are causally determined by antecedent conditions.

actually have free will. However, until they do, the assumption that we have free will is eminently plausible to many people given that it certainly *appears* as though we are free agents.

The other assumption that goes along with L is the assumption that God can not do what is logically impossible to do. In other words, the property of being omnipotent consists of being able to do, at most, everything that it is logically possible to do.<sup>5</sup> Not all would agree with this assumption but it is a very commonly held assumption in evidential arguments from evil and in most theodicies and defenses. There is a problem that arises if we do not hold to this assumption: discussions of God must then include the logically impossible. But discussions of the logically impossible must deal with propositions that are incoherent because of the internal contradictions contained in those propositions.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, responses to the evidential

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<sup>5</sup> W.E. Mann, "The Divine Attributes," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol.12, No.2, (1975), p. 154.

<sup>6</sup> As an example of the incoherence that can arise, consider the argument:

- a) God can do what is logically impossible
  - b) It is logically impossible to exist while one does not exist.
  - c) God can exist while he does not exist. (from a & b)
  - d) If (c) then the conclusion of evidential arguments from evil (God does not exist) and the central belief of theism (God exists) can both be true.
  - e) The conclusion of evidential arguments from evil and the central belief of theism can both be true. (from c & d)
  - f) If (e) then the evidential problem of evil is solved.
- therefore,  
The evidential problem of evil is solved.

The above argument is valid (the conclusion follows from the premises) but is not a good argument because some of the premises are contradictions. To avoid this, one would need to refrain from using contradictions. However, at least in practice, one is then back to assuming only what is logically possible.

problem of evil that assume God can do the logically impossible are unlikely to be coherent, much less compelling to those who advance evidential arguments from evil. I would like to present a defense that is at least coherent and plausible. I will therefore assume that God can only do what is logically possible to do.

Let us now return to the primary assumption, L, of my thesis and what it implies.

- 1) L (There are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without allowing some evil).
- 2) God cannot do the logically impossible.
- 3) If (1) and (2), then there are sufficient limits to divine intervention such that some evil must be permitted.

therefore,

There are sufficient limits to divine intervention such that some evil must be permitted. (from 1, 2 & 3)

Whenever I talk about sufficient limits to divine intervention in this thesis, it must be remembered that these limits are conditional upon the first two premises in the above argument. As I have already mentioned, L is logically possible and (2) is necessary if we wish our discussion to remain within the realm of what is coherent. It follows

from this that there are sufficient divine limitations such that some evil must be permitted. These are basic assumptions of every theodicy and defense. Where the controversy arises is over what the 'certain goods' are and what form the limitations must take if those goods are to be obtained. I will now review a number of theodicies and defenses to see what claims they make regarding these 'certain goods' and the limitations that arise if these goods are to be obtained.

A defense that is closely related to Plantinga's free will defense (and actually pre-dates Plantinga's defense), has been put forward by S.A. Graves. Graves writes,

God, knowing how every possible free agent would behave in every combination of circumstances, ought to have created only those whom he could not causally predict, but see, as never once turning away from goodness. The trouble is that, for all we know, there might be none, at least under conditions where there would be real merit in what they did. We are quite in the dark about such hypothetical actualizations of possible free choices ... the purpose of a free choice between good and evil is that there might be real merit in the good choice, ...<sup>7</sup>

For Graves, the certain good referred to by L is the 'real merit' of a good choice. He claims that in order to achieve this end, we have been given free will, but with it comes a possible limitation on what kind of world God can actualize that is contingent upon the actualizations of free choices. Alvin Plantinga, along a similar line, argues that,

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<sup>7</sup> S.A. Grave, "On Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, Vol.65 (1956), p. 261.

It is logically possible that God can instantiate every free possible person as the instantiation of a perfect possible person and also possible that He cannot. Whether He can or cannot depends upon the sorts of free choices the instantiations of these possible persons would make.<sup>8</sup>

Plantinga's claim here is that it is possible that some worlds that are logically possible, cannot be actualized; the decisions of free agents make certain logically possible worlds impossible. Since it is logically impossible for God to determine the decisions of free agents (under the libertarian view of free will that I am assuming), certain worlds that are logically possible to actualize if the free agents cooperate with God, are logically impossible for God *alone* to actualize if the free agents do not cooperate.<sup>9</sup> Those possible worlds are simply not options. Any world that contains free decisions is actualized not by God alone, but also by the free agents that world contains. The divine limitation here can be summarized by the following argument:

For all X, if X is a possible decision by a free agent other than God, then,

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<sup>8</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Pike and Possible Persons," *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol.63 (1966), p. 105.

<sup>9</sup> Recall Alvin Plantinga's distinction between strong actualization and weak actualization (Introduction, footnote 11), reproduced here for convenience.

"God strongly actualizes whatever he causes to be actual, and he can weakly actualize any state of affairs S which is such that there is some state of affairs S\* he can strongly actualize, and which is such that if God were to strongly actualize it, then S would be actual. Given this, and given the truth of counterfactuals of freedom, there will be many possible worlds God could not have weakly actualized, even though they are in fact possible and even though it is possible that he actualize them."



- 1) If X is such that no free agent will actualize it, then it is logically impossible for God to actualize X.
  
- 2) If possible world Q contains X and it is logically impossible for God to actualize X, then it is logically impossible for God to actualize possible world Q.

therefore,

If possible world Q contains X, and X is such that no free agent will actualize it, then it is logically impossible for God to actualize Q.

The idea advanced by Plantinga is that evil-free worlds, or even worlds containing less evil than this one, may require decisions by free agents that the free agents do not make. They simply do not cooperate. God is therefore limited as to how much evil he can prevent by the extent to which free agents choose to do rightly.

Although this may be a possibility, J.L. Mackie and others have suggested that God could intervene whenever He observes a free creature willing wrongly. Mackie asks, 'Why should he not leave men free to will rightly, but intervene when he sees them beginning

to will wrongly?"<sup>10</sup> William Alston's response is that, 'Human agents would no longer have a real choice between good and evil, and the surpassing worth that attaches to having such a choice would be lost.'<sup>11</sup> Alston's response arises out of a common notion of what is entailed by a free decision: a decision is free if it is not casually determined and the agent could have decided otherwise. If God allowed us only to will rightly, then we could not will otherwise, and free will would be violated. The limitation here is the very nature of free will. God cannot give us free will and then make it so that we cannot will wrongly.<sup>12</sup> To both bestow free will and prevent that free will from making bad decisions is logically impossible, like a disc with only one side, or a line segment that has only one end point.

There is an important and common claim illustrated by Alston's reply. Free will is assumed to be of such great intrinsic value, that the possession and exercise of free will outweighs the evil that sometimes comes of it. The assumption seems plausible in light of the fact that freedom, including freedom of choice and action, is one of the highest values of humanity.

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<sup>10</sup> J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *The Problem of Evil*, M.M. Adams & R.M. Adams eds. (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 34. First published in *Mind*, 64, (1955), pp. 200-212.

<sup>11</sup> William Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5, Philosophy of Religion (1991), p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> It should be noted here that not everyone agrees with this notion of free will. Others are arguing that we need only the first condition: that the decision not be causally determined. One such argument is defended by John Martin Fischer in "Libertarianism and Avoidability: A Reply to Widerker," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol.12, No.1, (January 1995), pp. 119-125.

An objection can be raised, however. Certain free decisions can result in very great evils. For example, the idea that Adolph Hitler's ability to make free decisions was a good that surpassed the intrinsic negative value of the holocaust, is very difficult to accept. Our intuitions may strongly affirm that free will is a good thing. Our intuitions also indicate that the holocaust was a heinous evil. Clearly those who hold that the exercise of free will justifies events such as the holocaust, put a very high value on free will. For a person who holds this position, free will is one of those 'certain goods' referred to by the assumed premise L, and the divine limitations arise out of the claim that it is logically impossible for God to achieve this great good without allowing us to commit evil.

Even if we grant that free will is of such great intrinsic value that it outweighs the evil decisions that come of it, an objection can be raised against the idea that free will entails that God must allow us the freedom to carry out our decisions. We value freedom of choice very highly, yet we also restrain criminals from carrying out their decisions. The idea that free will is of such great value that free agents must be allowed to exercise all of their freely made decisions, runs counter to our own moral intuitions and the way we handle those who wish to inflict harm on others. It also conflicts with the

belief held by some theists that God can and does prevent free agents from carrying out some of their decisions.<sup>13</sup>

How one handles this objection depends upon one's notion of free will. What constitutes free will is still controversial. A thorough discussion of this topic is beyond the scope of this thesis. Indeed, it is likely to require its own thesis. I will merely mention three different notions of free will and how each notion might handle the objection.

The first approach is to put the value on the decision itself, not upon whether or not the decision can be carried out or even whether or not it could have been avoided. An example of this idea is defended by John Fischer.<sup>14</sup> For Fischer, a decision is free if it is not determined. There is no requirement that the agent could have decided otherwise. God is free to not only prevent an agent from carrying out a decision, but he can also prevent certain (evil) decisions from even being made. The agent is free only to make good decisions. If God does allow free agents to carry out evil decisions, it is not because he puts great value on their freedom to exercise their decisions, it is for other reasons, some of which will be reviewed shortly. One problem with this approach is that although God can prevent evil decisions, he cannot cause the agents to freely make good decisions. As a result, we could have a possible world in

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<sup>13</sup> An example is found in Acts 16:7. This example is of particular interest since it is a case where God prevented Paul and his companions from carrying out a desire that seemed to have a positive ultimate value.

which no evil occurs, but little good occurs as well. An attractive feature of this notion of free will is its simplicity; a decision is either determined or it is free. There are no problematic decisions that, although they are not determined, are not free either, which the next view of free will requires.

The second approach is more common, but still centers free will around the decision. Whether or not the agent can actually carry out his decision is another matter. An example of this idea is defended by David Widerker. Widerker's idea centers around the idea that a decision is free, in the sense of freedom required for moral responsibility, if the decision is not causally determined and the agent could have avoided making it. Under this notion of free will, we have the possibility of three categories of decisions: those that are determined, those that are not determined but not free either and those that are free (not determined *and* the agent could have avoided making them). In this approach, God can still prevent an agent from carrying out his decision without violating free will just so long as the decision was not determined and the agent could have avoided making it. A corollary in the legal world is the thinking behind those laws that hold a person morally responsible for *attempted* murder or *conspiracy* to commit a crime as well as those cases where a person is convicted or acquitted not on whether or not they were successful in carrying out a crime, but on whether or not they possessed *mens rea* (the intent to do it). The decision is

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<sup>14</sup> John Martin Fischer, "Libertarianism and Avoidability: a Reply to Widerker," *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (January 1995), pp. 119-125.

primary, the ability to carry out the decision is secondary, sometimes irrelevant.

The third approach to free will makes an additional requirement. Not only must the decision be such that it was not determined and the agent could have decided otherwise, but the agent must also have the means, opportunity and ability to carry out his or her decision, otherwise the decision is not really free. Alvin Plantinga seems to suggest this third notion of freedom. He states that,

a person is *significantly free*, on a given occasion, if he is then free with respect to an action that is morally significant for him.<sup>15</sup>

This needs to be understood in light of an earlier statement he makes,

If a person *S* is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain: no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not.<sup>16</sup>

Note that Plantinga includes the performance of an action as an essential part of moral freedom. This third approach does not rule out the possibility that being significantly free might allow for the occasional prevention of an agent performing their intended action, just so long such interventions were relatively rare. In that case, it would be logically impossible for God to obtain the surpassing value

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<sup>15</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil and the Metaphysics of Freedom," op. cit., p. 85.

of significantly free creatures without allowing them substantial freedom to carry out their decisions. On the other hand, some may value this third type of freedom so highly that no intervention at all is permitted.

I have not defended any of the above approaches or their possible responses to the objection under consideration. On the other hand, the central argument of my thesis will be unaffected by whether or not the objection stands. My purpose is merely to review a number of theodicies and defenses with emphasis on the idea that certain goods are not logically possible for God to obtain unless he permits a certain amount of evil. With this in mind, I will now move on to consider some other theodicies that do not necessarily regard free will itself as the great justifying good.

There are some theodicies that recognize the value of free will, but not as the great justifying good. Instead, free will is necessary for the role it plays in accomplishing some great good. We will now look at some theodicies that suggest certain goods (other than simply possessing free will) that cannot logically be achieved without permitting some evil.

Some have argued that God must allow us to experience at least some of the consequences of our moral wrong doings. William Alston raises the possibility that God may allow us to experience some consequences of our moral wrong doings for the purpose of

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<sup>16</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *ibid.*, p. 84.

rehabilitation or reformation.<sup>17</sup> Too much interfering would leave free agents unable to anticipate the consequences of their violations.<sup>18</sup> The underlying idea here seems to be that the permission of some evil is necessary in order for us to learn moral responsibility.

The claim made by this theodicy is that moral responsibility is of great value and it is logically impossible for us to learn moral responsibility without the experiencing of a certain amount of evil. An additional implication of the theodicy is that, although we may start off badly, it is possible that at least some free creatures can learn moral responsibility by experiencing the consequences of moral evil. Such an achievement may be one of those great justifying goods that must be included in our calculations of the ultimate value of events. The attaining of that great good, however, entails that God must allow some evil.

An immediate objection can be raised to the effect that God can simply causally determine that we are morally responsible. By way of response, the theodicy seems to hold the *a priori* assumption that a creature that freely acts in a morally responsible way is even better than a creature that is causally determined to act a certain way. Given the high value most humans place on freedom, such an assumption does seem plausible.

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<sup>17</sup> William Alston, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>18</sup> William Alston, *op. cit.*, p. 52.



Another objection to the above theodicy is that if it is God's objective for us to learn moral responsibility, it certainly does not seem to be working in many cases. Some persons may be rehabilitated or deterred from committing more evil, through experiencing a certain amount of evil, but a large number of people are only made worse by the instances of evil occurring in their environment. A young man growing up in the inner city, surrounded by regular occurrences of evil, is less likely to lead a moral and respectable life. One response is to suggest that it is not surprising if not all free agents respond the way God wants them to respond. The very nature and role of free decisions in the process of learning moral responsibility make it very likely that there may be a broad spectrum of responses. Another response is to consider the possibility that instances of evil may be allowed for more than just one reason. Some evil may be allowed for the purpose of teaching certain people moral responsibility, but other evil may be allowed as a logical necessity for the achievement of other goods. This raises the possibility that the notion that there is only one sort of good that is not logically possible to achieve without allowing evil, may be simplistic. There may well be several goods that are not logically possible to achieve without permitting evil, and learning moral responsibility is just one of them.

William Alston resurrects a traditional, though now unpopular, explanation for evil related to the retributive theory of

punishment.<sup>19</sup> The sinner deserves to suffer for his sin and that suffering must be no more or no less than what is deserved. Although Alston does not address how this might limit God in preventing instances of evil, there is a possible implication. Some may hold that perfect justice involves letting the offender suffer the consequences of his actions. If the most perfect form of justice requires that a person suffer the consequences of his moral violations, and if God is a maximally just being, then He may have to permit the consequences to unfold.<sup>20</sup> The underlying claim here is that perfect justice may be logically impossible to exercise without the allowance of a certain amount of evil.

This idea is complicated by the fact that the consequences of one person's moral violations often affect other people. The hatred of a few Catholics and Protestants in Ireland has consequences that are not limited only to the haters, but for thousands of ordinary, peace-loving citizens. While it might be just for a person to experience the consequences of their own actions, it is not just if those consequences produce suffering for innocent bystanders as well. Thus, a perfectly just God cannot simply let consequences run their course. He must carefully insure that the evil consequences are justly distributed

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<sup>19</sup> William Alston, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> There is the obvious alternative of grace or mercy, but a maximally just being would still be limited in the dispensation of grace and mercy by whatever perfect justice entails. The central theme of Christianity turns on this notion. Grace and mercy can be extended to individuals and God's requirement for justice is met at his own (Christ's) expense. God can then be just and still justify the sinner (Rom.3:26), at least for those sinners who choose to accept God's grace.

such that it is the perpetrators of evil that suffer the consequences and the innocent are spared.

An obvious criticism of this theodicy is that evil and suffering do not appear to be distributed according to desserts. Even the Jewish and Christian scriptures point out that there are cases where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.<sup>21</sup> If suffering were meted out according to desserts, there should be just the right amount to exactly the right people. Although one might find cases where this appears to have happened, it is far more common that it does not happen. It is clear that this theodicy does not provide a satisfactory account of why God allows evil in general, but it still remains that it could provide a satisfactory account for *some* evil that occurs. Given the apparent unjust distribution of suffering in this world, much of the evil would appear to require some other explanation.

Another possible limitation arises from the process of 'soul making'. John Hick argues that, just as our bodies are the product of a long evolutionary process, so our souls must evolve from immaturity to perfection. Hick describes this second stage of development as follows.

It cannot be performed by omnipotent power as such. For personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled

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<sup>21</sup> Jeremiah 5:28

responses and willing cooperation of human individuals in their actions and reaction in the world in which God has placed them.<sup>22</sup>

The claim made by this theodicy is that God's objective is that we are brought to a point of spiritual maturity or perfection. The suffering that we experience in this life provides the environment, or refining fire, that produces the perfect soul in the end. The pain and suffering is supplied either through nature, or by the moral violations of free agents. The theodicy suggests that it is logically impossible to achieve spiritual maturity without the allowance of a certain amount of suffering. God's objective is not to produce a paradise on earth, but a personal life of eternal worth. The limits to His intervention are imposed by the very nature of the free creatures He has created. The fact that God's purpose for us can only be accomplished through the 'uncompelled responses and willing cooperation of human individuals' imposes limits on how much God can intervene. If He intervenes too much, His purpose for creating us is defeated. The limit here is a result of keeping a balance between two factors: God's goal for us and the role of our free will in accomplishing that goal.

In Hick's theodicy, the assumption is that it is logically impossible to produce a mature soul without allowing a certain amount of evil to occur. We must acknowledge that natural disasters, wars and calamities have driven many people closer to God. It must also be

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<sup>22</sup> John Hick, "Soul-Making and Suffering," *Evil and the God of Love* (Harper & Rowe, revised edition, 1978), p. 255.

acknowledged, however, that those same events have driven many further away from God. If the purpose of allowing evil to occur in this world is to bring us to spiritual maturity, then in many cases it is simply not justified in light of the absence of favourable consequences and favourable outcomes. This is not to say that Hick's theodicy suggests something that is simply false. Perhaps Hick's theodicy does provide a satisfactory explanation of why we have some evil events, but if his claim is true, it appears that we still need some additional explanations for the evil that drives people away from God, or the evil that occurs to people with a devout faith in God.

In a slightly different approach, Peter van Inwagen reconsiders the story of the prodigal son,<sup>23</sup> contemplating the result if the father had worked hard behind the scenes so that his son would not have to suffer. The end result, he argues, would be that the son would not likely to be inclined to return to his father.<sup>24</sup> Van Inwagen's idea is that God wants us to become dissatisfied with our state of separation from Him. According to Van Inwagen, God must achieve this,

simply by allowing us to 'live with' the natural consequences of this separation, and by making it as difficult as possible for us to delude ourselves about the kind of world we live in: a hideous world, much of whose hideousness is quite plainly traceable to the inability of human beings to govern themselves or to order their own lives.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> A parable of Christ found in the Gospel of Luke 15:11-32.

<sup>24</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, "The Magnitude, Duration, and Distribution of Evil: A Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, (Fall 1988), p. 173.

The underlying claim being made is that God must permit us to experience some pain and suffering if we are going to learn moral responsibility, or at least become dissatisfied with our state of separation from God. God, being perfectly good, does not want to leave us in a state of moral irresponsibility and separation from Him. He must, therefore, limit his prevention of evil so that we, of our free will, will learn moral responsibility and desire to be re-united with God. The idea here is similar to that which we saw in John Hick's 'soul making' approach. It is logically impossible for us to grow dissatisfied with our separation from God without the allowance of a certain amount of evil and suffering. If God wants us to return to him, he must limit how much evil and suffering he prevents.

There are some concerns about the adequacy of this theodicy to explain evil. First, the necessity for God to appear to be absent can also lead people to become deists, agnostics or even atheists. His lack of intervention can lead people to believe that there is no God, at least not the sort of god that is perfectly good, omniscient and omnipotent. Secondly, if the central idea of this theodicy were the case, we would expect that the older the people are, the more disposed they would be to desire a relationship with God. The opposite appears to be true. In general, children demonstrate a greater openness and willingness to trust God. This willingness appears to wane with age. On the other hand, it is an empirical fact that suffering has brought many people to a devout faith in God.

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Van Inwagen, *ibid.*, p. 174.

Van Inwagen's claim, therefore, is not without some warrant.

Perhaps van Inwagen's theodicy does explain some of the evil in this world, though not all.

There is another group of theodicies that suggest that God must limit how much he intervenes in the laws of nature and their regularity.

R.W.K. Paterson suggests that God is limited in His intervention in the laws of nature. He states,

Clearly human life would cease to be a theater of genuine moral responsibility and initiative, which logically require an attention to consequences which would be impossible if the consequences of natural law were constantly being counteracted.<sup>26</sup>

F.R. Tennant has also presented a similar argument. He writes,

Without such regularity in physical phenomena there could be no probability to guide us: no prediction, no prudence, no accumulation of ordered experience, no pursuit of premeditated ends, no formation of habit, no possibility of character or of culture. Our intellectual faculties could not have developed.<sup>27</sup>

He then goes on to summarize his claim as follows.

We cannot have the advantages of a determinate order of things without its logically or its causally necessary disadvantages,

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<sup>26</sup> R.W.K. Paterson, "Evil, Omniscience and Omnipotence," *Religious Studies*, Vol.15 (1979), p. 21.

<sup>27</sup> F.R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology: Volume II* (Cambridge University Press, 1937), p. 199-200.

To illustrate his point, he uses the example of water.

... if water is to have the various properties in virtue of which it plays its beneficial part in the economy of the physical world and the life of mankind, it cannot at the same time lack its obnoxious capacity to drown us.<sup>28</sup>

In a theodicy that builds on Tennant's, Murdith McLean, noting that minute changes in the fine structure constants of the universe could produce devastating changes, suggests the Delicacy Thesis. The Delicacy Thesis is 'the idea that no set of constants and conditions could be devised even by an omnipotent being which would be superior to the one we have in its outcomes.'<sup>29</sup> McLean's theodicy fills in some gaps in Tennant's theodicy. The residual evil we experience stems from the regularities of nature and the particular set of regularities we have is the best that is possible to obtain for the goods that can be achieved. The idea common to Paterson's, Tennant's and McLean's theodicies is that natural laws, which give determinate order, do produce some evils, but these evils must be allowed in order to achieve greater goods and benefits.

An objection that could be raised can grant the claim made by these theodicies, but holds that God could still divinely intervene to rescue people from drowning, while still retaining water's natural abilities. A response to this is obvious in Paterson's statement quoted above.

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<sup>28</sup> F.R. Tennant, *ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>29</sup> M. McLean, "Residual Natural Evil and Reasoning," *Religious Studies*, Vol.27 (1991), p. 186.



Tennant allows that God can intervene on occasion, but not too much. He states,

Doubtless some directive agency, or the introduction of new streams of causation into the course of Nature, is conceivable without subversion of such regularity as is requisite for human prudence and without the stultification of our science. But the general suspension of painful events, requisite on the vast scale presupposed in the elimination of physical ills, would abolish order and convert a cosmos into an unintelligible chaos in which anything might succeed upon anything.<sup>30</sup>

Peter van Inwagen's defense (ch. 1) based on the supposed evil of a massively irregular world is *a propos* here as well.

The assumption L is found within these theodicies in the general form as follows. There are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without a determinate natural order which does produce some evil. If that natural order is jeopardized through massive intervention, however, a massively irregular world results in which the hoped-for goods are replaced with even greater evils. God must, therefore, limit how much he intervenes in the natural order of things.

The central idea is plausible. What is particularly interesting is that some of the goods mentioned by Paterson and Tennant are also related to theodicies we have already looked at, regarding the achievement of moral responsibility. I have already suggested that

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<sup>30</sup> F.R. Tennant, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

evil might more adequately be explained by a combination of certain goods with their associated limits on divine intervention. The above theodicies are perfectly compatible with some of the other theodicies we have already examined.

What we have done is review a variety of theodicies and defenses. In each one, L is either assumed or implied. The general idea is that there are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without the allowance of some evil. If this is granted, then sufficient limitations are entailed such that God must allow some evil to occur.

It is an assumption of my thesis that there are certain goods that are logically impossible to obtain without the allowance of some evil. Therefore, there are sufficient limits to divine intervention such that some evil must be permitted. All my argument requires is the assumption L (with the two attendant assumptions mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: libertarianism and that God cannot do the logically impossible). As for what those certain goods are and what form the limits on divine intervention take, we have just reviewed a number of suggestions, several of which are at least plausible. Beyond this, I will leave it at that, just so long as the reader is clear that my argument will be conditional upon the following assumption:

L: There are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without allowing some evil.

**This entails that there are sufficient limits to divine intervention such that some evil must be permitted.**

#### **4.0 Three Sorts of Complexity and the Challenge They Pose to Our Ability to Judge the Ultimate Value of Events**

In this chapter, I shall begin my defense by looking at three types of complexity this world appears to have: structural complexity, simultaneous complexity and consequential complexity. The objective will be to set up an appreciation for the difficulty involved in evaluating the actual ultimate value of any given event. In the next chapter, I shall go beyond just an appreciation for this difficulty and, using consequential complexity as an example, attempt to show that the strong inference is not rationally justified.

Before I begin to look at the three types of complexity, I want to remind the reader of a critically important distinction to make, which I discussed in chapter two. The distinction is between the *actual* ultimate value of some event and the ultimate value of an event relative to what is *reasonably knowable* to a human observer. In the evidential problem of evil, we are not concerned with knowing what *we* are justified in permitting. What we are justified in permitting is evident to us on the basis of the warranted beliefs that arise out of our due inquiry into what is reasonably knowable to us.

We are concerned, rather, with the question of what God is justified in permitting which, given the assumptions I made about God's knowledge in chapter two, is equivalent to the question of what is

actually justified.<sup>1</sup> At first glance, we might very quickly conclude that the ultimate value of most evil events is negative and, therefore, not justified. What we really ought to be clear about, however, is that we can very quickly conclude that the ultimate value, *as responsibly comprehended by us*, is negative and, therefore, *we* would not be justified in permitting it. It is an entirely different matter to conclude that the *actual* ultimate value of an event is negative and, therefore, *God* should not have permitted it.

In the evidential problem of evil, it is the actual ultimate value of events that we are concerned with. A serious challenge we face in figuring whether or not an event has a positive ultimate value, however, is raised by the three forms of complexity that I shall now discuss.

#### 4.1 Structural Complexity

Quentin Smith has presented an atheological argument based on the idea that the law of predation is ultimately evil and that there is a possible world *W* that contains counterparts to our predators that eat

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<sup>1</sup> Recall my assumption in ch. 2 that God has both foreknowledge (knowledge of every future actual event) and middle knowledge (knowledge of what every free agent would do under any possible conditions). Given these assumptions, then the ultimate value of events, as knowable to God, and the actual ultimate value of events, are equivalent. Thus, when we are contemplating what God should and should not allow, it is the actual ultimate value that is the deciding factor.

only vegetables.<sup>2</sup> One difficulty in proposing alternate worlds that contain different laws than this world is that they may require changes in the fundamental structure of the universe. Over the last few decades, theoretical physicists have noticed that there are many parameters of the universe that look as if they must be incredibly fine-tuned if life is to be possible. According to current understanding and theories, the smallest deviation from what we have would have produced a universe incapable of supporting any kind of life at all.<sup>3</sup> As an example, the vacuum energy of the universe determines the rate of cosmic expansion. There are various processes that contribute to the total vacuum energy of the universe. According to Steven Weinberg,

If the various contributions to the vacuum energy did not nearly cancel, then, depending on the value of the total vacuum energy, the universe either would go through a complete cycle of expansion and contraction before life could arise or would expand so rapidly that no galaxies or stars could form.<sup>4</sup>

The various contributions to the vacuum energy must cancel each other out to an accuracy of about 120 decimal places.

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<sup>2</sup> Quentin Smith, "An Atheological Argument from Evil Natural Laws," *Philosophy of Religion*, Vol.29, 1991, pp. 159-174.

<sup>3</sup> Reinhard Breuer, *The Anthropic Principle* (Birkhäuser, 1991). See also Barrow & Tipler, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle* (Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> Steven Weinberg, "Life in the Universe," *Scientific American*, (October, 1994), p. 49.

Quentin Smith believes that predation is the result of a natural law, which he refers to as the 'law of predation'.<sup>5</sup> Because that natural law gave rise to the evil of predation, it is evil. But what specific law of nature, or group of laws, gave rise to predation? We do not know. Perhaps to prevent predators from evolving, a slightly different electro-magnetic fine structure constant could have been used. This would change the angles of many chemical bonds which would, in turn, affect genetics. But what other changes would be effected? What about the balance of nature and overpopulation problems? Predation is one of the most important factors in maintaining the balance of nature. We know that when a species in an area loses its natural predator, there can be disastrous results for the local ecosystem. A world without predation would be radically different from the one we live in, so far as the food chain and the balance of nature is concerned. These new problems would have to be solved as well. Given the extremely tight tolerances the fine structure constants of the universe appear to need, there could be horrendous changes in other areas. As Murdith McLean suggested in his theodicy which we reviewed in the previous chapter, the laws we have may be the optimum that can possibly be achieved. If McLean's suggestion is granted, then any attempt to adjust the fine-tuned laws of nature to avoid predation, would result in some other evil even worse.

A world without predation is certainly logically possible and within the capability of an omnipotent being. My point is that such a world

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<sup>5</sup> Quentin Smith, *op. cit.* p. 161.

would be radically different from the one we live in. Given our knowledge, which falls far short of omniscience, we are not in a position to know whether such a world would have a higher net value than the actual world. Furthermore, if we are still to have free agents in the predation-free world, we have no idea what effect this would have on the decisions of those free agents. Thus we are not in a position to know the net value of that world, or whether the 'certain goods' which are not logically possible to obtain unless God permits a certain amount of evil, would be obtained in such a world. This problem has been articulated in various ways by other philosophers such as C. T. Hughes and F. R. Tennant.

In response to suggestions of other better possible worlds, C.T. Hughes responds by pointing out that "the vast quantity of physical objects and energy systems and what their complex interrelatedness implies" make it very likely that,

- a) "such changes could bring with them their own potential for evils and/or perhaps result in the loss of various goods" and
- b) any improvements proposed by the skeptic "would require him to possess an omniscient perspective in order to substantiate his claims."<sup>6</sup>

Tennant's example of water, mentioned in the last chapter is *a propos* here. The very law, or set of laws, that gave rise to predators

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<sup>6</sup> C.T. Hughes, "Theism, Natural Evil, and Superior Possible Worlds," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1992, p. 59.



may have been necessary for a great many goods as well. Although we understand very little about what the laws of nature actually are, we know enough to understand that minute deviations in many of the constants of nature would have dramatic and drastic effects on the universe's ability to sustain life. Where our knowledge is clearly insufficient is in knowing what other altered laws of nature could be substituted for the set we actually have, and what effects those altered laws would have.

The structural complexity of the universe raises a challenge to our ability to know whether or not certain types of natural evil have a positive actual ultimate value. Given what is knowable to us, predation, for example, certainly appears to be unjustified. But the question is whether or not predation is *actually* unjustified. In order to answer that question, we must not only consider the consequences of predation, but we must also select the best alternate world from among any number of possibilities.<sup>7</sup> If predation is the result of the laws of nature at work, we must be able to consider alternate laws of nature that do not produce predation, along with all the consequences of those alternate laws. Since natural processes and events may follow deterministically<sup>8</sup> from the initial conditions of

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<sup>7</sup> Recall, from chapter two, that the actual ultimate value of an event is the difference between the net intrinsic value of the actual event, including all its consequences, and the best alternate event, including all its consequences.

<sup>8</sup> It is a popular notion that quantum mechanics has shown that there is actual indeterminism in the universe. It needs to be stressed, however, and as Nobel Laureate in theoretical physics, Steven Weinberg has pointed out (*Dreams of a Final Theory* (Pantheon, 1992), p. 79.), this conclusion is the result of a particular philosophical perspective known as positivism. According to Weinberg, positivism dictates that science should only concern itself with

the universe and the laws of nature,<sup>9</sup> the smallest deviation of which could bring huge changes, any changes we propose as the best alternate situation would very likely have consequences that would be difficult, if not impossible for us to fully tabulate.

If what I have just reviewed can be granted, determining whether or not the actual ultimate value of certain types of natural evils is positive, may be very difficult, if not impossible, for us to do. This, in turn, makes it very difficult for us to say that certain types of natural evils are actually unjustified. All we can say is that based upon what is knowable to us, *we* would not be justified in permitting them. Whether or not God is justified, we simply do not know.

One objection that can be raised is to point out that changing the laws of nature is not the only possible alternative to certain types of

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things that can actually be observed. The wave function (so important to quantum mechanics) can not actually be observed which, to make a long and technical story short, results in us having to invoke indeterminism to explain what we see. The trend now among theoretical physicists appears to be away from positivism and toward realism (there is a reality 'out there' regardless of whether or not we can observe it). One consequence of this is that the wave function is considered to be real. It truly determines the state of particles, structures and fields. Since the wave function evolves in a way that is completely deterministic, if it is real then the indeterminism we see in our measurements is only epistemic, the result of our physical human limitations. There is no real indeterminism; it is only a result of our inability to measure the state of a wave function. The advantage of a realist approach to quantum mechanics over a positivist approach is the greater explanatory power the realist approach has regarding the states of particles, fields and structures. For further reading, the technical-minded layperson might enjoy David Z. Albert's, *Quantum Mechanics and Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1992). One final note, even if realism is wrong, actual indeterminacy in the universe would not make the structural complexity of the universe any easier to comprehend. If anything, it would make it more difficult.

<sup>9</sup> My assumption here is that no free agents were involved in the process except for God.

natural evils. God could keep the laws as is and merely intervene whenever those laws were about to produce suffering.

First, by way of response, given what we understand about the extremely delicate fine tuning of the laws of nature, a temporary suspension of one of those laws could be disastrous. It might be possible, however, that God could intervene in very localized and specific cases (e.g., a malignant cyst in a particular person's body). Indeed, those theists who believe in miracles, or prayer, would defend such an idea. It is plausible that such interventions would need to be very limited for reasons contained in some of the theodicies and defenses we have already reviewed. Too much intervention could bring with it its own massive evil.<sup>10</sup>

At this point, we will consider an objection to what I have just argued. Imagine that a particular segment of history is divided up into time segments as follows:

$$E_1, E_2, E_3, \dots E_N$$

where  $E_1, E_2, E_3, \dots E_N$  are consecutive time-slices of history each consisting of one or more events.

Now let  $A_2$  be an alternate collection of events that have a higher net intrinsic value than  $E_2$ . Since,

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<sup>10</sup> I am thinking specifically of Peter van Inwagen's defense, reviewed in ch. 1, and R.W.K. Paterson's and Tennant's theodicies in the previous chapter.

$E_1, A_2, E_3, \dots E_N$

is a logically possible sequence of events and since God can do anything that is logically possible to do, then he could produce the altered sequence that has a higher value. This altered sequence could be produced by the interruption of the laws of nature in two places:

- 1) the causal sequence which produced  $E_2$  from  $E_1$  would have to be interrupted, and
- 2) the causal sequence stemming from  $A_2$  would have to be interrupted and  $E_3$  produced instead.

Given that both sequences are identical except for one time-slice of history, and since the altered time-slice has a higher net value, it is obvious that  $E_2$  is unjustified by the criteria I have laid out regarding actual ultimate value. Since God ensures that the subsequent sequence is identical to the sequence where the evil is allowed, we do not have to worry about any negative consequences from his intervention. Thus, without assuming anything about the complexity of the laws of nature, and without any complex calculations, we can reasonably conclude that God is not justified in permitting  $E_2$ .

This objection is elegant, but it makes a false assumption. It assumes that if a sequence is logically possible, then God can actualize it. However, in the discussion of free will in the previous chapter, we

saw that this assumption is false. Since the actualization of possible worlds that contain the decisions of free agents logically requires a joint effort between God and the free agents of those worlds, God cannot actualize any of those worlds without the cooperation of the relevant free agents. This limitation arises out of the more basic limitation that it is logically impossible for God to *both* give agents free will *and* determine their decisions. As a result, the set of all logically possible sequences (or worlds) can be divided into two subsets: the subset of logically possible sequences that are logically possible for God to actualize (the agents will cooperate), and the subset of logically possible sequences that are not logically possible for God to actualize (the free agents will not cooperate). Since we are not in a position to know within which subset the alternate sequence suggested by the objection lays, we are still just as much in the dark as ever.

Perhaps the objection assumes that if all the antecedent conditions at the beginning of the interval  $E_3$  are *virtually* identical, then the free decisions made in  $E_3$  and subsequent intervals will be identical to the actual sequence. But given the commonly accepted notion of what a free decision entails, this assumption is groundless. Recall that the traditional notion of free will requires that a decision is free if it is not determined and the agent could have decided otherwise (footnote 9, Introduction). What this entails is that, given *identical* antecedent conditions, the agent *could have decided otherwise*. We have no basis to think, therefore, that the decisions subsequent to  $A_2$ , will be identical to those contained in the actual sequence. Although

it is possible that they will be, it is also possible that they will not be. Since we do not know which would be the case, the objection fails.

To illustrate this problem, consider the following possible worlds:

$W_A = \text{Actual World} = E_1, E_2, E_3, E_4, \dots E_N$

$W_1 = E_1, E_2, \text{alternate sequence } S_1$

$W_2 = E_1, A_2, E_3, E_4, \dots E_N$

$W_3 = E_1, A_2, \text{alternate sequence } S_2$

The objection assumes that we know God can actualize the alternate sequence  $W_2$ , since conditions at the end of  $A_2$  are virtually identical to conditions at the end of  $E_2$  in the actual sequence. However if  $W_1$  is possible given the nature of free will, then there is no reason to think that  $W_2$  is more likely than  $W_3$ . At the end of  $E_2$ , whether  $W_A$  is actualized or  $W_1$  is actualized will depend on the decisions of free agents in the subsequent interval. In the same way, at the end of  $A_2$ , whether  $W_2$  is actualized or  $W_3$  is actualized will depend on the decisions of free agents in the subsequent time interval. The antecedent conditions of any sequence do not determine the subsequent free will decisions of free agents. Just because the subsequent sequence has turned out a certain way in the actual world, there is no grounds for thinking it will turn out the same way in an alternate world that has virtually identical antecedent

conditions or even another world with identical antecedent conditions.

Which worlds can God actualize and which worlds are not logically possible for God to actualize? The only world we know he can actualize is  $W_A$ . We do not know which, if any, of worlds  $W_1$ ,  $W_2$  and  $W_3$  God can actualize. If we do not know if God can actualize a given world, then we cannot use it to calculate B: it is not even in the set of known alternatives. Only when we know that it is in the running as a actualizable alternative can we consider whether it is the best alternative, or even a better alternative. Since we cannot know if the alternative proposed by the objection ( $W_2$ ) is actualizable by God, we must still remain agnostic about whether or not the actual ultimate value of the events contained in  $E_2$  are positive or not.

There is another problem to deal with before we can move on. The problem is based on the proposition that if the decisions of free agents are not determined, then God cannot change them by altering an earlier event. This proposition is false. It does not follow that if a decision is not determined, it must therefore remain constant in spite of different antecedent conditions. I have already pointed out in the preceding paragraphs that a free agent could have decided otherwise given *identical* antecedent conditions. If this is the case, then a free agent would certainly have the freedom to decide otherwise given *different* antecedent conditions. What the faulty proposition is really claiming is that if an agent has free will, then the agent could have decided otherwise given identical antecedent conditions, but if the

antecedent conditions are changed, then the agent cannot decide otherwise. Given the criteria for free will, this is simply false.

Furthermore, the decisions of free agents are usually made after some deliberation of the relevant facts that world has to offer. If God substitutes different facts for the ones I would otherwise use in my deliberations, I may decide differently. But even though my decisions may differ in different worlds that have different facts for deliberation, it does not follow that I could not have decided otherwise. For example, let us say that I decide to take a break from sitting at my computer and proceed to rob the local gas station. This is an evil and someone suggests that if God had actualized a world virtually identical to this one, but without the local gas station, I would not have decided to rob it. They would probably be right. Under the alternate scenario, there is simply no gas station to rob. In the alternate world, I decide instead to sneak one of the chocolate chip cookies my wife has hidden in the freezer. In the alternate world, God has effectively changed my decision from what it was in the first one. It does not follow however, that in the first world I could not have decided to forego the opportunity to rob the neighborhood gas bar, or in the alternate world that I could not have decided to refrain from stealing the cookie. In fact, there are possible worlds where I do just that.

In general, an agent is free to decide otherwise given different antecedent conditions and different facts about the world. Whether or not the agent will actually do so, we do not know. Thus we must



remain in a state of agnosticism regarding which sequences or worlds are actualizable alternatives and which are not. Given this, we are in no position to know anything about B (the net value of the best alternative with all its consequences). We are not even in a position to know anything about the net value of even a *better* alternative with all its consequences.

There is a worry that can be raised here. Virtually every sequence  $E_3, E_4, \dots E_N$  is going to contain at least one decision by a free agent. So it begins to appear that there are no alternate sequences that God can realize. What makes this particularly hard to accept is that we normally believe ourselves to be capable of realizing some alternate sequences though we make no claim to omnipotence. When we know how to do something by normal, natural means, it is very hard to accept the idea that an omnipotent being cannot do it.

The solution to the worry is simply to note that just because God cannot actualize *some* logically possible sequences that contain the decisions of free agents, it does not follow that God cannot actualize any. If  $A_2$  does not contain any decisions by free agents, then he can certainly actualize it. What we do not know, if the subsequent sequence contains decisions by free agents other than God, is if God can actualize the identical subsequent sequence if it is preceded by  $A_2$  rather than  $E_2$ . Of course, if God has middle knowledge, which I have assumed, then he knows which of the innumerable possible sequences he can actualize (weakly or strongly) and which of the

possible sequences that he cannot. He also knows what will actually happen if  $A_2$  is substituted for  $E_2$ . We do not.

As we can see, even in the case of divine intervention in the operation and regularity of natural laws, there still remains the difficulty of calculating the actual ultimate value of events. The net value of the intervention with all its consequences would need to be examined, and compared with the actual evil event with all its consequences. Only then could we know whether or not divine intervention was actually justified. If there are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without the allowance of some evil, there may be instances where divine intervention would not be justified.

#### 4.2 Simultaneous Complexity

Experiments done since the late 1960's have shown that some events can have instantaneous consequences somewhere else.<sup>11</sup> By instantaneous, I mean that no time interval occurs between the event and its consequences. If we think of every particle, field and structure as being enveloped within a wave packet, then this simultaneity can be explained as follows.

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<sup>11</sup> Chiao, Kwiat & Steinberg, "Faster than Light?," *Scientific American*, (August 1993), p. 58.

When a system is divided into two separate sub-systems, the wave packet that governs that system 'stretches' to include the two sub-systems as they move apart. For two or more objects or sub-systems that shared a common wave packet in the past, an operation performed on one of those objects will instantaneously affect the quantum mechanical state of the other objects, no matter how far apart these objects may be or what may lie between them.<sup>12</sup> I should emphasize here that nothing is traveling faster than the speed of light; it is really the wave packet that determines the states of the two sub-systems and that wave packet encompasses both components. What this means is that some events can have simultaneous consequences elsewhere in this world. For example, if a cesium atom emits two photons traveling in opposite directions, a measurement performed on one photon will affect the other photon instantly. The effect on the other photon is not contingent on the speed of light; it is instantaneous. This phenomenon is not limited to just photons or small particles. It is thought to be true for all systems, no matter how large. For the most part these consequences may be minute, though not necessarily. Each object in the universe is thought to have its own wave function (e.g., protons, telephones, planets), which itself is part of a larger wave function until, theoretically, we get to the wave function of the universe itself.

The point of all this is that according to current theories, all objects and systems in the universe shared a common past and, hence, a

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<sup>12</sup> David Z. Albert, *Quantum Mechanics and Experience* (Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 61-72.

common wave function. Given this, we cannot make a change in any part of the universe without there being an instantaneous effect on the rest of the physical universe. Granted, the quantum mechanical odds are that most of these effects may be minute, but the key word here is 'most'. There may be a very small subset of consequences that are not minute. Even for those effects that are minute, those minute changes can have large, cumulative consequences in the future.

If this sort of simultaneous complexity is true of the universe, and current experiments do seem to verify this, then we have a problem when it comes to calculating the actual ultimate value of a specific event. Recall that, as part of our calculation, we must tally up the net value of the event and all its consequences. But since we must include all simultaneous consequences of an event in our calculation and we do not know what those consequences are, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for us to know whether the actual ultimate value is positive or not.

One response is to suggest that these simultaneous consequences are minute and can therefore be regarded as insignificant, at least over the short term. They may well be insignificant, but we do not know that. One thing that we do know is that conscious observers, such as ourselves, seem to be the only factor that changes the evolution of the wave function in an unpredictable fashion. Why this appears to

be the case is still a matter of controversy.<sup>13</sup> But given that we seem to be involved in at least one aspect of this complexity, it appears that we must take this complexity into account when contemplating candidates for alternate events. The bottom line is that simultaneous complexity poses a challenge to the notion that we are in a position to evaluate the actual ultimate value of an event.

#### 4.3 The Consequential Complexity of History

At 7:45 am, Tuesday morning, Bert is on his way to work. Just ahead, the light turns red at the intersection of Waverly and McGillvary and he brings his car to a stop. In the car behind, a university student is momentarily distracted and fails to notice that the light ahead has turned red or that the car immediately ahead of him is stopped. The student slams into the back of Bert's car at 50 kilometers per hour initiating a series of consequences, both positive and negative, that continue to multiply exponentially to this day.

Later on that day, Bert is contemplating his misfortune. He realizes that the following are all likely to be true:

- a) If he had left home 10 seconds earlier, he would have made it through the intersection before the light turned red.

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Weinberg, "Life in the Universe," *Scientific American*, (October, 1994), p. 48.

- b) If he had gotten out of bed when the alarm first rang, he would not have been in position to be hit.
- c) If the city employee who synchronized the lights eight months earlier had turned on the switch 15 seconds later, the accident would not have happened.
- d) If his wife had not held him up at the door with her question, the accident would not have happened.
- e) If he had not gotten held up by the train on Corydon, he would have been elsewhere when the inattentive student approached the intersection.
- f) If he had not taken time to make a lunch this morning, the accident would not have happened.

Bert realizes that the above propositions are only a fraction of those relevant to the accident and that there would be another set relevant to the student. The immediate conditions necessary for the accident to occur were, themselves, contingent upon prior conditions that extend back as far in the past as one cares to look. Bert realizes that if the student's great, great grandfather had taken just two minutes longer to feed his horse one evening, the intimate relations he had with his wife later on that evening would have been delayed by a few minutes with the result that, of the millions of spermatozoa involved in the event, the overwhelming odds would have favored a different spermatozoon reaching the ovum, with the result that the student would never have existed 150 years later. Instead, a whole different set of possible relatives would have existed with the likely result that Bert would not have been rear-ended that morning. He

then goes on to wonder what effects that different set of relatives would have had on the world.

The purpose of the above story is to illustrate the consequential complexity of history (henceforth to be referred to as simply 'consequential complexity'). Every event that has recently occurred, is contingent on a vast prior network of historically necessary events, any one of which, if it were missing, would have forestalled the event. Furthermore, the vast majority of the historically necessary conditions for any event are relatively innocuous and seemingly insignificant, as in Bert's case. This is evident in spite of the fact that we often make statements such as, "The cause of World War II was this," or, "The cause of the Great Depression was such and such." What we usually mean is that we have identified a very obvious prior event that, had it not occurred, the subsequent event would not have likely occurred. However, we do not consider the host of other seemingly insignificant prior events that also formed parts of the various causal chains leading up to the event under investigation. Of course, there may be other combinations of events and causal chains that could have led to the same event. The challenge would be to calculate the net value of each network of causal chains to see which yielded the best alternative.

Biologist, Stephen Jay Gould, has described the exotic world of the Burgess shale, laid down during the Cambrian Era. None of the many phyla found in the Burgess shale had any apparent advantage over any of their counterparts. The life forms we observe today, Gould

argues, could have been very different had past natural events been only slightly different.<sup>14</sup> The state of the world today is a result of innumerable past natural events, most of which were probably quite insignificant at the time. A very minor, local event in the Cambrian seas could easily have produced a world with no chordates at all, or one in which arthropods ruled. Gould suggests that seemingly insignificant events in the past have had a huge effect on life on the planet today.

One of the complicating factors in the unfolding of history is that many events do not just influence the consequences of one particular causal chain. They produce consequences that influence other causal chains as well. For example, as a young man, Sir Winston Churchill's lack of success in his studies led to consequences that not only affected his later life, but the lives of millions of people in the British Isles and the specific course that World War II took. The result was that an event that was insignificant and negative at the time, produced consequences that affected millions of causal chains, for better or worse. Those effects continue to unfold exponentially.

Since the human population of the earth is approximately six billion at present, we can conservatively say that history is made up of billions of causal chains,<sup>15</sup> each of which is composed of thousands, if

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *Wonderful Life* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1989), pp. 292-323.

<sup>15</sup> I remind the reader of the particular definition of history that I am using in this thesis (see final footnote in the Introduction). It includes all the events in all the causal chains that describe this world: past, present and future.



not millions of events. These causal chains do not unfold independently of each other but interact with each other in a highly complex way. Furthermore, events in one causal chain are often not unique to that particular causal chain, but can be shared by millions of other causal chains, as illustrated in the case of Sir Winston Churchill's poor grades.

History is composed of a interrelated network of causal chains each of which is composed of at least thousands of events. There are two challenges to evaluating the ultimate value of any event to see if it is positive or negative. The first challenge is to find out the net value of the event with all its consequences. The consequences, of course, include those in all causal chains affected by the event. No consequence can be ignored. For example, it might be thought that all we need to do is to look at the positive consequences to see if they outweigh the initial event, if it was negative. But I must remind the reader that the positive consequences must not only outweigh the initial event, but all the negative consequences as well. Furthermore, it is the net value of *all* the consequences that must outweigh the net value of the best alternative. Evaluating only the positive actual consequences could substantially skew the evaluation in favor of justification. Furthermore, even if the positive actual consequences do not outweigh the negative event, it may still be justified if the best alternative is even worse (as in the case where a negative event prevents a greater evil). It also needs to be pointed out that most great events in history, positive or negative, are contingent on a host of prior events, the vast majority of which, by themselves, would

appear to be trivial and insignificant. Each actual consequence of any event needs to be carefully followed up to see what effect it has later on.

The second challenge that consequential complexity poses to the evaluation of the ultimate value of any event is in the calculation of the net value of the best alternative. Here the problems loom even larger. First, to be a candidate for the best alternative, it must be actualizable by God. As I have already pointed out, we do not know which worlds are actualizable by God and which words are not logically possible for God to actualize. Secondly, we must concern ourselves not only with a variety of possible alternatives, but with all the consequences of those possible alternatives as well. An alternate event brings with it its own set of consequences which can affect dozens, thousands or billions of causal chains. The best analogy that I can think of treats each causal chain as an equation that is composed of thousands or millions of variables. The variables represent events. I refer to them as variables, since each event could be replaced by a host of alternatives. Since many events (variables) can be shared by hundreds or thousands of causal chains (equations), in order to find the best alternate event we must, in effect, solve thousands (or millions) of equations simultaneously for thousands (or millions) of variables in order to see which event and its consequences yield the optimum result (the highest net value). I should mention that it is in the investigation of alternate events that divine intervention is an option at every step and can be investigated to see what the net result is. If L is the case, as I have

assumed it is, we will begin to see it verified at this stage for certain events.<sup>16</sup>

In this chapter I have looked at three sorts of complexity that this world appears to have. My objective was to show that these sorts of complexity pose a challenge to the notion that we are in a position to evaluate the *actual* ultimate value of an event in order to see if it is negative or positive. All I have made, in this chapter, is the weak claim that some forms of complexity pose a challenge to evaluating the actual ultimate value of events. I have not argued that we cannot perform such evaluations. In the following two chapters, I will focus only on consequential complexity and attempt to show that, as a result of this complexity, both the strong and weak inferences are not rationally justified.

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<sup>16</sup> Recall that L is as follows:

L: There are certain goods that are logically impossible to achieve without the allowance of a certain amount of evil.

## 5.0 The Lack of Rational Justification for the Strong Inference

The objective of this chapter will be to argue that the strong inference used in some evidential arguments from evil is not rationally justified. In the first section I shall present my argument. In the second section I will respond to an objection that argues that the strong inference is justified in the case of massive evils. In the final section I will look at the implications my argument has for personal responsibility in what we are justified in permitting.

### 5.1 The Argument Against the Strong Inference

First, I want to remind the reader that the strong inference is concerned with whether or not God is justified in permitting an instance of evil, not with whether or not *we* would be justified in permitting it. In other words, the strong inference is concerned with the *actual* ultimate value of an event, not with the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by a particular person.<sup>1</sup> I shall discuss the implications of the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by a particular person, in the final section of this chapter.

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<sup>1</sup> Recall that I have assumed back in ch. 2 that God has foreknowledge (knowledge of every actual future event) and middle knowledge (knowledge of what every possible free agent would do under any possible circumstances). Given this, God knows both A and B. Therefore, what God is justified in permitting and what is actually justified, are equivalent.

Recall that the strong inference takes place when one observes an instance of evil and inductively infers that it is actually unjustified (and, hence, God does not exist). Recall also, that to be actually unjustified, the actual ultimate value of the event must be less than zero (negative). The actual ultimate value (U), as laid out in chapter two, is the difference between the net value of the actual event with all its consequences (A) and the net value of the best alternate event with all its consequences (B);

$$U = A - B.$$

A person who makes the strong inference is making the assumption that their knowledge of A and B is sufficient to infer that U is negative. In light of the consequential complexity of history however, a person's knowledge of A and B is likely to be so minuscule, that this assumption is utterly unwarranted. The most rational position to hold regarding whether or not the actual ultimate value of any event is positive, is agnosticism. Therefore, the strong inference is not rationally justified.

Let us first consider how much knowledge a person is likely to have of A. Recall that A is the net value of the actual event and all its consequences up to the end of history. If the consequential complexity of history discussed in the previous chapter can be granted, then for most, if not all events, the number of consequences increases exponentially with time. The number of causal chains affected also increases exponentially with time as well. It would be

very conservative to say that, for an event occurring right now, there will be at least millions of consequences, both small and large, between now and the end of the universe, affecting thousands of causal chains.<sup>2</sup> A computation of A (the net value of the event with all its consequences until the end of the physical universe) would include, at the least, first finding each one of those millions of consequences and assigning some intrinsic value to each one. These values could be added up event by event, or grouped time interval by time interval. Such a procedure can be written as follows:

$$A = I_1 + I_2 + I_3 \dots I_n$$

where I = the intrinsic value of an event or group of events.

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<sup>2</sup> The 'end of history' is a concept I am invoking here in order to bring closure to morally relevant causal chains. If there is no end to the causal chains of history, then tallying up the intrinsic values of the consequences of events would become essentially meaningless. The reason for this is that no matter how far along the causal chains we tallied up the intrinsic values of the consequences of some event, we would only have covered a finite sample that was less than infinitesimal in comparison to the infinite number of consequences that would always be unexamined.

I will suggest that the end of history, for the purpose of this thesis, be taken as the end of the physical universe. My reason for suggesting this is that it is commonly accepted by most atheists and many theists, that the physical universe will come to an end. (Cosmologist, Tony Rothman, has written an interesting and readable article on the end of the universe for the magazine *Discover*. See "This is the Way the World Ends," *Discover*, July 1987, pp. 82-93). From an atheistic perspective, any plausible morally relevant activity would have ceased by this point, if not long before. To get agreement among theists as to when the endpoint should be set, would be more difficult. Many Jewish and Christian theists however, do believe that some sort of final moral accounting does take place around the time of the end of the universe (see for example, Daniel 12:1-4, Revelation 20:11-21:1). Since the end of the universe ('end of time', in the Jewish Scriptures) is the closest I will get to anything resembling a mutually accepted endpoint, I will use it for this thesis.

There are two major problems in acquiring sufficient knowledge of A. The first problem is compiling all the actual consequences of the event that have occurred up to the present. The second problem is knowing what the future consequences will be.

The first problem involves the difficulty of tracing all the consequences through the causal chains up to the present. This problem is compounded by the fact that, although the immediate consequences of an event may be quite obvious, most of the secondary, tertiary (and so on) consequences of any event appear to be relatively insignificant by themselves, yet may be historically necessary for future consequences that might have a substantial positive intrinsic value. For example, the cause of Sir Winston Churchill's poor grades might be difficult to trace and the poor grades, by themselves, appear to be an insignificant link in a causal chain until one observes that they led to events of substantial intrinsic value. Sir Winston's poor grades, however, were not the only events historically necessary for the salvation of the British Isles during WW II. There were a host of others that are so insignificant that few have even paused to consider them. Yet, if any one of them had failed to obtain, the state of history that we are now experiencing would likely have been substantially different. Even if we attempt to make our analysis of A simpler by taking the net value of events of whole time intervals, we cannot determine the net value of some time slice, or some grouping, until we know the values of the discrete components of that time interval, or grouping. Any

attempt to unravel all the consequences of any event soon leads to one becoming lost in a web of interrelated events and causal chains.

The difficulty involves, first noticing consequences that are so insignificant that they are very easy to miss, and secondly, tracing out the consequences of those apparently insignificant consequences. Every link must be followed up, no matter how insignificant, in case it leads to something important. Had Lady Jennie Churchill fallen asleep in a slightly different position on the night her son Winston was conceived, the odds would have overwhelmingly favored an infant with a different set of chromosomes being conceived, with the likely result that European history from 1939 on, would have been substantially different. Yet there is hardly anything considered more insignificant to the future history of the world than in what position someone happens to fall asleep. In tracing out the consequences of some known evil event, we do not normally consider such apparently insignificant consequences such as how it affects the position in which a person falls asleep, yet some of those apparently insignificant consequences could form a historically necessary link in the chain of events leading to something of great moral significance.

Even if one decides to ignore all the consequences of an event that are negative, focusing only on the positive consequences to see if they outweigh the initial evil event, we must still find those positive consequences. Once again, this means following up every insignificant consequence to see if it leads to any positive events.



The second major problem in acquiring sufficient amount of knowledge to make a rationally justified inference regarding the value of A, is knowing what the *future* consequences are of the evil event under investigation. Even if the present consequences of an event appear to be insignificant, they are multiplying and affecting causal chains nevertheless. It is almost certainly false that none of the present consequences will form an historically necessary condition for any great events in the future. Nevertheless, which subset, of the present consequences of the evil under investigation, that will have significant effect in the future, is information that we simply do not possess.

The point of what I have stated about A is that our knowledge of A is minuscule. It is usually limited to knowledge of the event, its immediate consequences and, perhaps, some of the more obvious, and clearly linked, consequences that occur some time later.

Our problems increase when we consider B, the other component of the actual ultimate value of an event. We can write B in a form similar to A:

$$B = I_1 + I_2 + I_3 + \dots I_n$$

where I = the intrinsic value of a consequence, or set of consequences, of a proposed alternate event.

The problems we encounter when computing A, occur again when we attempt to compute B, but with two complicating factors. First, the actual event has some known consequences. These are objective facts. But, when we begin to consider possible alternate events, the consequences are conjectural. We might find some consensus on some of the immediate consequences of a proposed alternative, but the secondary and tertiary consequences would likely begin to be controversial. The second complication is the reaction of free agents to the proposed alternate event. With the actual event, at least some of the reactions of free agents are known facts; not so with proposed alternate events. Free agents might react in a way that we did not foresee, or thought to be improbable. Even if most free agents react as anticipated, a few might react otherwise, skewing the long term direction of consequences substantially off the course we had predicted. It is not sufficient to merely suggest a better event to replace a known instance of evil. We must be able to trace out all the consequences to the end of the alternate history, to make sure the net value of the entire sequence is higher than A. The fabrication of a detailed possible history is utter conjecture. If our knowledge of A is relatively minuscule, our knowledge of B cannot help but be smaller.

In fact, our knowledge of B is completely non-existent. Recall that in chapter three I presented an argument with the conclusion that:

For all X, if X is a possible decision by a free agent other than God then,

If possible world Q contains X, and X is such that no free agent will actualize it, then it is logically impossible for God to actualize Q.

What this shows, and what Plantinga's free will defense stands on, is that it is possible that there are some worlds that are logically possible, but it is not logically possible for God to actualize them. This limitation arises out of the more basic truth that it is not logically possible for God to both give an agent free will *and* determine its decisions. As long as it is possible that there are some worlds that God cannot actualize (and it is possible) and we do not know which worlds they are (which is the case), then even though we can imagine a logically possible world that is superior to the actual one, we do not know if God can actualize it. Such knowledge would require middle knowledge, which we do not have.

In order to qualify as a candidate for the calculation of B, an alternate world must be actualizable by God. If God cannot actualize a possible world that we have imagined, then such a world is not an option for the best alternative. Since we do not know which worlds God can actualize and which world he cannot actualize, we cannot even collect candidates for the calculation of B. Thus for any actual event, even if we knew A, we must remain utterly ignorant of B.

On the face of it, this seems preposterous. We can imagine a world that is identical to this world but different in only one single event. Since such a world is so close to the actual world, surely God could

actualize it. Unfortunately we do not know that. As I pointed out in my response to a similar objection in section 4.1 of the previous chapter: given the nature of free will and given the exact same antecedent conditions, a free agent could have decided otherwise. Since we do not have middle knowledge, we are not in a position to know which possible worlds free agents would cooperate with God in actualizing and which ones they would not, no matter how close the actual world they might be. It is of no help to us whatever to imagine all sorts of better possible worlds if the fact of the matter is that we do not know which ones, if any, God can actualize. We must, therefore, remain utterly agnostic about which possible worlds are candidates for the calculation of B. Given this situation, of course, we must also remain agnostic about B. When it comes to the calculation of B: we know nothing.

With the above in mind, the problem of calculating whether or not the actual ultimate value of some event is positive, can be illustrated as follows. Let us say that we are aware of an event and four consequences. The event has an intrinsic value of -3 and the four consequences have intrinsic values of -4, -1, 0 and 2. Now imagine taking an arithmetic test and seeing the following question:

Given:

A = (-3-4+2-1) + (eight million other unknown numbers)

B = the sum of eight million unknown numbers

Question: Is  $A - B$  positive or negative?

Most of us would think such a question to be absurd, yet it is the same type of question we face every time we ponder the actual ultimate value of some event. The information we have is not much different in quantity. If we were missing only a few numbers in the calculation, there is a chance that we could be mistaken. The chance of being mistaken increases with the amount of information we are missing, until eventually we have just as much chance of being right as being wrong. Most of us, when faced with the above arithmetic question, would probably admit that we have no idea whether  $A - B$  is positive or negative. Given the lack of sufficient information, we would have a very good rational basis to be agnostic about whether or not the answer is positive. If we can agree that, for the above arithmetic question, concluding that the answer was positive or negative would not be rationally justified, but being agnostic would be, then we should agree, given consequential complexity, that the strong inference is not rationally justified. When faced with some event, the most rational position to hold, regarding whether or not the actual ultimate value is positive, is to be agnostic. The information we have available to us is far too minuscule to justify the strong inference.

An obvious objection to what I have just argued is to point out that we can think of all sorts of logically possible sequences that are better than the actual one. For example, if God actualized the exact sequence we are experiencing, except for one evil event which was

replaced with something benign, then that alternative would be better than the actual one. Therefore, that particular evil is actually unjustified.

This objection is really the same one that I looked at in chapter four, at the end of section 4.1. The objection assumes that God can actualize any logically possible sequence. I've already argued that this assumption is false. Since we do not have middle knowledge, we do not know which sequences God can actualize and which he cannot. This makes it impossible for us to calculate B and, hence, the actual ultimate value of any event.

## 5.2 Massive Evils and the Strong Inference

Genghis Khan and his hoards are thought to have killed many hundreds of thousands of people. It is estimated that Joseph Stalin starved to death at least two million people in Ukraine in the 1930's. Adolf Hitler is responsible for the deaths of six million Jewish people. These are examples of what I shall refer to as massive evils. A *massive evil* is a large number of instances of evil, each of which may be relatively ordinary, that are linked together by a common antecedent cause, be it a natural event, a person or a group of people. The cases I cited above are all examples of a massive evil.

There is an objection that can be raised in favor of the strong inference. A massive evil has such a large negative net value, that it

would require some very substantial positive actual consequences to make up for it. Because of the magnitude of the evils, we would expect that the justifying good consequences would be of impressive magnitude as well (either in quality or quantity). Thus, they would be quite noticeable. For the known massive evils of history, there is no compelling evidence for any goods, sufficient for justification, that stemmed from those events. Therefore, we are rationally justified in making the strong inference in those cases.

This objection does two things. First, it assumes that for massive evils, we are in a better position to calculate A (the net value of the entire collection of events composing the massive evil along with all their consequences to the end of history). I will show that this assumption is false. Secondly, it either ignores B or assumes that we are in a position to know of an alternate world that is at least better than the actual one which contains the massive evil. I will argue that we know nothing about B. Even if we were justified in concluding that A was negative, our absence of knowledge of B would still prevent us from rationally justifying the strong inference.

Are we in a better position to calculate A for massive evils? Recall that A was the net value of the evil with all its consequences. In the case of massive evils, what makes them massive is the large number of evil events all linked by some common denominator. For example, in the case of Genghis Khan, the number of people (events with their causal chains) affected by a first-hand encounter with his hoards would very conservatively number in the millions. This not only

includes the number of people who were killed (hundreds of thousands) but the many times greater number of people who survived but were directly affected by the Khan's activities. The number of people who did not have a first-hand encounter with the hords, but who heard about Genghis Khan at the time, would likely number in the tens of millions. Thus we have millions of events to follow up. When we break the massive evil down into its constituent events, we find that the individual evils in the individual causal chains are relatively normal evils (a killing, a rape, a looting) that have relatively normal negative intrinsic values. We call the entire set of killings, rapes and lootings a massive evil because they all happen at about the same time and are all perpetrated by the same person or group.

Our subjective feeling about massive evils is that A is negative. We must remain objective about the calculation of A however, and base our conclusions about A upon objective criteria such as I have already laid out in Chapter 3. Since the massive evil consists of thousands or millions of constituent events, in order to calculate A, we must first calculate the net value of each constituent event with all its consequences to the end of history. Having done this, we must sum all of these net values to find the overall net value of the massive evil (A). This can be represented as follows:

$$A_{\text{massive evil}} = A_{E1} + A_{E2} + A_{E3} \dots A_{EN}$$



We must then begin with the first event (E1) and calculate the net value of the event with all its exponentially increasing consequences to the end of history ( $A_{E1}$ ). As I have already argued, we must confess that our knowledge of the entire set of exponentially increasing consequences of E1, affecting an exponentially increasing number of causal chains to the end of history, is minuscule. The vast bulk of necessary information is missing. If we were missing knowledge of only a few consequences in one or two causal chains, then we might be able to make a reasonably good guess about  $A_{E1}$ . But we are missing more than knowledge of just a few events. We are missing almost all of the requisite knowledge. In this case we are just as likely to be right as wrong in judging whether or not  $A_{E1}$  is positive, not to mention *how* positive or negative it is. In this situation, the most rationally defensible position to hold regarding the actual ultimate value of  $A_{E1}$ , is agnosticism. Thus  $A_{E1}$  turns out to be a question mark in our calculation of  $A_{\text{massive evil}}$ .

When we move on to consider  $A_{E2}$ ,  $A_{E3}$  and so forth, we find the same situation. Our relevant knowledge for each is minuscule. The most rationally justifiable position to hold for each one is agnosticism; each one must be represented by an unknown number. When we attempt an objective calculation of  $A_{\text{massive evil}}$ , what we end up with is:

$$A_{\text{massive evil}} = \text{the sum of thousands or millions of unknown numbers}$$

In a situation like this, it is absurd to think we are in a position to infer whether  $A_{\text{massive evil}}$  is negative. The most defensible position to

take is to state that we are simply missing far too much necessary information. We must remain agnostic about  $A_{\text{massive evil}}$ .

Recall that the assumption made by the objection was that we are in a better position to calculate A for massive evils, to the effect that we are justified in concluding that A is negative. I have just shown that this assumption is false. Now let us turn our attention to the problem of calculating B for massive evils.

In calculating B, we must at the very least find a possible world that is actualizable by God and has a higher net value. We can imagine any number of possible worlds that do not include the massive evil under investigation. As I have already argued however, to qualify as a candidate for the calculation of B, the possible world must be actualizable by God. Given the very large number of primary events ( $E_1, E_2, E_3 \dots E_N$ ) constituting the massive evil, the closest alternate world would be radically different from the one in which we live. It would require not just the substitution of one event, but the substitution of thousands or millions of primary events, not to mention all their consequences. Although we can imagine all sorts of radically different possible worlds, we do not know if any of them are actualizable by God. For all the better possible worlds we can imagine, we are missing one vital piece of information; we do not know if free agents would actually cooperate to actualize any of those worlds. Thus we cannot even get started in our calculation of B. All we know about alternative possibilities is that we can imagine them. We know nothing about whether or not God can actualize any

of those possibilities if they contain the decisions of free agents. As Alvin Plantinga has pointed out (see the Introduction), not only might God be limited in what possible worlds that contain free agents he can bring about: this might be the best that is possible.

The problem of B is that we do not know which worlds, containing free agents God can actualize and which he cannot. Lacking this information, we know nothing about B. Even if A were negative, if we know nothing about B, we cannot rationally justify the inference that the actual ultimate value of a particular massive evil is negative.

The complexity of actual history and the future interaction of causal chains in the actual world make it impossible for us to calculate A. The calculation of B is an exercise of utter conjecture. Given these problems the strong inference regarding the actual ultimate value of any event, good or bad, is not rationally justified. The most rationally justifiable position to hold is agnosticism.

Up to now, we have only examined the calculation of the actual ultimate value of individual evils. In chapter 1 and in some of the free will theodicies, the possibility was raised that some evils, though unjustified by themselves, were justified in virtue of belonging to a combination of evils that, as a combination, prevented a massively irregular world (Peter van Inwagen). They were justified in virtue of being the result of free decisions which, themselves, were the best combination of free decisions weakly actualizable by God (Plantinga's free will defense). In chapter two I laid out a formulation for the

calculation of the actual ultimate value of these combination-justified evils. It is possible that the actual world contains combination-justified evils. This possibility dashes even the faintest hope of a rationally justified strong inference, for it raises another unknown. The unknown is whether or not an instance of evil is part of a combination of evils that, as a combination, are actually justified. Before we can make the strong inference, we must assure ourselves that the particular evil, or massive evil, that we are investigating, is not combination-justified. As pointed out in chapter two, this requires that we calculate the net intrinsic value of whole combinations of events with all their consequences to the end of history and compare that value with alternate combinations (the alternate combinations which may be composed of a mixture of actual and possible events) with all the consequences to the end of the alternate history. It should be evident that this task is many orders of magnitude harder than the relatively simpler task of calculating the ultimate value for a single event.

If our minuscule knowledge of the web of causal chains of actual history and lack of middle knowledge makes the strong inference rationally unjustifiable in the case of individual evils, then it is an understatement to say we are not rationally justified in making the strong inference if it is possible that the actual world contains combination-justified evils.

### 5.3 Agnosticism Regarding the Actual Ultimate Value of Events and Our Personal Moral Responsibility

Our moral intuitions indicate to us that many events are not justified, even if my argument is plausible. As I have already pointed out however, it is important to distinguish between the *actual* ultimate value and the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by us. When considering whether or not God is justified in permitting certain events, we must consider the actual ultimate value of that event which, as I have argued, we are not in a position to do.

The agnosticism that I have argued for (regarding whether or not an instance of evil is actually unjustified), does not affect our own moral obligations however. Recall from chapter two,

R: An agent is morally responsible for what is reasonably knowable to that agent and not morally responsible for what is not reasonably knowable to that person.

If this is granted, then even if we do not know if the ultimate value of an event is positive or not, we still know what we must do. We must act on the basis of what is responsibly comprehended by us after due inquiry into what is reasonably knowable to us.

In all likelihood, there will be many events in history that have a positive actual ultimate value, but a negative ultimate value as perceived by us. In these cases, God would be justified in allowing

those instances but we would be justified in preventing them. It would remain up to God to see to it that our justified efforts were not successful.

In conclusion, I have argued that our knowledge falls far short of what would be sufficient to justify the inference that certain events are actually unjustified. If this is granted, then evidential arguments from evil that rest on the strong inference are faulty. We can, however, know what *we* are justified in permitting and are obligated to act accordingly.

## **6.0 The Expectation of Apparently Unjustified Evil and the Weak Inference**

The weak inference is based on the assumption that instances of apparently unjustified evil are exactly what we would expect if God does not exist but not what we would expect if God exists. Based on this assumption and observations of apparently unjustified evil, the weak inference concludes that there must be actually unjustified evil, even if we are not in a position to know exactly which events are actually unjustified.

In the first section of this chapter I shall argue that we are missing so much information, necessary to know the actual ultimate value of an event, that the apparent ultimate value<sup>1</sup> of an event has nothing to do with whether or not the actual ultimate value is positive or negative, or whether or not God exists. Based on our methods of arriving at the apparent ultimate value of events, apparently unjustified evil is exactly what we should expect if God exists and exactly what we should expect if God does not exist. The basic assumption of the weak inference is therefore false.

In the second section of this chapter, I shall briefly consider God's moral responsibility toward those who mistakenly make the weak inference. What I shall be concerned with is whether or not God has

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<sup>1</sup> The *apparent* ultimate value of an event is the ultimate value *as responsibly comprehended by us*. This is not to be confused with the *actual* ultimate value of an event.

a moral obligation to prevent us from being deceived (from making either the strong or weak inference).

### 6.1 The Faulty Assumption of the Weak Inference

The weak inference assumes that the instances of apparently unjustified evil that we observe are exactly what we would expect if God does not exist but not what we would expect if God exists. But this assumption can only be supported if there is some sort of connection, or relationship, between the *apparent* ultimate value of events and the *actual* ultimate value of events. Hence, if God exists and all actual instances of evil are actually justified, then they should all be apparently justified as well. The reasoning and assumptions behind the weak inference can be summarized as follows.

1. There is a relationship between whether or not the actual ultimate value of any event is positive and whether or not the apparent ultimate value is positive
2. If (1), then if all actual instances of evil are actually justified, then most actual instances of evil should appear to be justified. (Note that I say 'most' in order to allow for the fact that humans can sometimes be mistaken about what ought to be apparently obvious.)
3. If all actual instances of evil are actually justified, then most



actual instances of evil should appear to be justified. (from 1 & 2)

4. It is not the case that most actual instances of evil appear to be justified.

5. If (4), then it is not the case that all actual instances of evil are actually justified. (from 3 & 4)

6. It is not the case that all actual instances of evil are actually justified. (from 4 & 5)

7. If (6), then some actual instances of evil are actually unjustified.

therefore,

Some actual instances of evil are actually unjustified. (from 6 & 7)

I will argue in this section that the above argument fails because (1) is false. The instances of apparently unjustified evil that we observe are exactly what we would expect if God does not exist *and* exactly what we would expect if God exists. The reason for this situation is that whether or not the *apparent* ultimate values of events appear to be positive, have nothing to do with whether or not the *actual* ultimate values are positive or negative or whether or not God exists.

Our minuscule knowledge of the consequences of events insure that there is no relationship between the apparent justification of an event and the actual justification of an event. Let us review how the actual ultimate value is calculated and then look at how the apparent ultimate value is calculated.

What the calculation of the ultimate value amounts to is simply the summing of a very large quantity of positive or negative numbers minus the sum of another very large quantity of positive or negative numbers.<sup>2</sup> Positive numbers represent the various positive intrinsic values of the different positive consequences, and negative numbers represent the various negative intrinsic values of the different negative consequences to the end of history. In considering the actual ultimate value of an event, what we are interested in is whether the actual ultimate value is positive or not. If it is positive it is justified, if it is negative it is unjustified. There are really only two possible answers to the question of whether or not an event is

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<sup>2</sup> Recall from chapter two that the ultimate value of an event was not only the sum of the intrinsic values of the event and its actual consequences, but also included the negation of the net value of the best alternative with all its consequences.

If we treat the event we are concerned with as merely the first event in a causal chain, then the actual ultimate value can be represented as follows:

$$U = A - B$$

where:

U = actual ultimate value

A = net value of the actual event with all its consequences

B = net value of the best alternative with all its consequences

justified; yes or no.<sup>3</sup> Thus if we were to take a guess at whether a particular event was justified, we would have just as much chance of being wrong as right. Most of us probably do not guess, however. We have other methods of deciding whether or not an event is justified. Let us now consider how we calculate the apparent ultimate value of an event.

The *apparent* ultimate value of an event is the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by us. We tend to judge the apparent ultimate value of an event by estimating the sum of the intrinsic value of the observed event (using some subjective, abstract unit of value) and the intrinsic values of the few consequences we are aware of. If that sum seems to be positive we conclude that the event is probably justified. If the sum looks as if it is negative we conclude that the event was likely unjustified.

Here is the problem. Our estimation of the ultimate value of an event is related to only those few consequences that we are aware of out of a collection of possibly millions, or more, that have various values, both positive and negative. The problem was illustrated in the previous chapter, but I will review it again here.

Let us say that we are aware of an event and four consequences. The event has an intrinsic value of -3 and the four consequences

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<sup>3</sup> This holds true for the more complicated case of combination justified events which I discussed in chapter two. It also holds true for events that are the best of a bad lot, as B is more negative than A, yielding a positive U.

have intrinsic values of -4, -1, 0 and 2. Now imagine taking an arithmetic test and seeing the following question:

Given:

$(-3 - 4 + 2 - 1 + \text{several million other numbers}) - \text{several million alternate numbers} = U$

Question: Is  $U$  positive or negative?

As I suggested in the previous chapter, most of us would consider such a question to be ridiculous, yet it is the same type of question we face every time we ponder the actual ultimate value of some event. Most of us, when faced with the above arithmetic question, would probably admit that we have no idea whether  $U$  is positive or negative. Given the paucity of information, we might as well flip a coin; heads it's positive, tails it's negative.

Others may take the sum of the few numbers supplied and if the sum turns out negative, they would take  $U$  to be negative. This is more typical of how we arrive at the apparent ultimate value of an event. But given that almost all of the necessary information is missing, they would just as likely be wrong as right. The answer they provided would be no more reliable than one obtained by the flip of a coin. The more information we are missing, the poorer our position becomes to make a good inductive inference. In the case of the actual ultimate value of events, we are missing so much

information, that our conclusions about whether or not the actual ultimate value of an event is positive, is no better than a guess. Our guess no longer has any relationship to whether or not the actual ultimate value of an event is positive.

Given consequential complexity and how little information we have about the future of a particular causal chain as opposed to a possible alternative, our estimation of whether or not the actual ultimate value of an event is negative or positive is just as likely to be wrong as right. The apparent ultimate value that we derive has nothing to do with whether or not the actual ultimate value is positive or negative, or whether or not God exists. Rather, it has everything to do with the minuscule part of the causal chain that we actually observe, the event and a few consequences. If, for any evil event, we are just as likely to be mistaken as right, then we should expect that instances of evil that *appear* to be unjustified, should be relatively commonplace even if all instances of evil were *actually* justified. It all depends upon which particular consequences we are aware of. Thus, we still go about evaluating the ultimate value based on the few consequences we see and are therefore likely to come to the same conclusions regarding a particular event, whether or not God exists. It is our limited knowledge and the minuscule portion of the causal chain that we are aware of that are the main factors in whether or not an event appears to be justified, not the existence of God, or whether or not the event was actually justified.

The weak inference assumes that the instances of apparently unjustified evil that we observe are exactly what we would expect if God does not exist but not what we would expect if God exists. I have just argued that this assumption is false. The weak inference, which is based upon this false assumption, is therefore not rationally justified.

A defender of the weak inference might suggest that even if we grant the above, the *quantity* of apparently unjustified evil is of the amount one would expect if God does not exist and is greater than what one would expect if God exists. Critical to this objection is knowing what a Godless world would be like so that we can compare our world to it and see if it is less evil. We do not have this knowledge. The person offering this suggestion has some subjective standard in mind as to how much apparently unjustified evil God would allow. That standard is likely to vary from person to person. A theist is likely to assume that a Godless world could be a good deal worse than the one we have. We can all likely imagine worse worlds and better worlds. Assuming that this world is worse than a world in which God exists, is making an assumption that simply cannot be supported by any objective standard if there are some restrictions or limitations on how much freedom God has in substituting alternate events in place of events that are evil. In chapter three, I made the assumption that there are goods that are logically impossible to achieve without allowing a certain amount of evil to occur. If God is going to realize these sort of goods in this world, then he will have to limit his interventions to what is logically allowable by those goods.

Although we have various suggestions as to what those goods might be (chapter 3), we do not have agreement. If we do not have agreement on what those goods might be, then we should expect even less agreement on how much evil must be permitted to realize those goods.

Ultimately, the weak inference must be rationally justified on the basis of some facts. The facts that we have are instances of apparently unjustified evil. This forms the basis of the weak inference. But as I have just argued, given the way we judge the ultimate value of events, the basis for the weak inference has no relationship to whether the event is actually justified or not, or whether or not God exists. How events appear to us is related to whatever minuscule portion of the causal chain we happen to be aware of, not to the actual ultimate value. We are missing sufficient information to establish a relationship between apparent ultimate value and actual ultimate value. There are, therefore, insufficient grounds for making inferences about whether or not there are actually unjustified events.

In real life, we are not likely to simply guess at the ultimate value of an event. We are more likely to conclude that evil events have a negative ultimate value and good events have a positive ultimate value. One reason for this is that we are sorting portions of causal chains into two classes: those portions that begin with a negative event and those that begin with a positive event. This alone will bias our estimation of the ultimate value. Every portion of causal chain

that we associate with a negative event will *always* include at least one negative event, the evil event itself. Since our sampling of the causal chain is so minuscule (usually just the event and a few known consequences), this will tend to skew the apparent ultimate value in the negative direction. It will not be surprising, therefore, if we see a substantial amount of apparently unjustified evil, even if all evil is actually justified. Our methodology will insure it.

My response to the weak inference can be summarized as follows:

- 1) There is no relationship between whether or not the actual ultimate value of any event is positive and whether or not the apparent ultimate value is positive
- 2) If (1) then the world would look the same to us (in respect to the apparent ultimate value of events) if all events that actually form our history were justified, or if they were all unjustified or if they were a mixture of justified and unjustified events.
- 3) The world would look the same to us (in respect to the apparent ultimate value of events) if all events that actually form our history were justified, or if they were all unjustified or if they were a mixture of justified and unjustified events.  
(from 1 & 2)
- 4) If (3), then the weak inference is not rationally justified and



agnosticism regarding the three options in (2) is the most rationally justifiable position to take.

therefore,

The weak inference is not rationally justified and agnosticisim regarding the three options in (2) is the most rationally justifiable position to take. (from 3 & 4)

## 6.2 God, Deception and the Weak Inference

The argument in the previous section is based on the proposition that the apparent ultimate value of an event has no relationship to the actual ultimate value of an event, given how we estimate the apparent ultimate value of events. Given this, I have argued that the weak inference is not rationally justified. There is an objection, however, that argues that the very fact that there is no relationship between the apparent ultimate value and the actual ultimate value, supports the rational justification for the weak inference. The objection can be formulated as follows:

1. God is omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good.
2. If a being is perfectly good, then he cannot be morally responsible for any false beliefs.

3. If a being cannot be morally responsible for any false beliefs then he will always make things appear as they actually are, so far as it is in his power to do so.
4. A perfectly good being will always make things appear as they actually are, so far as it is in his power to do so. (from 2 & 3)
5. An omnipotent being can always make things appear as they actually are.
6. Therefore, God will always make things appear as they actually are. (from 1, 4 & 5)
7. If all evil is actually justified, then God will make it appear to be justified. (from 6)
8. All evil does not appear to be justified.

therefore,

Not all evil is justified. (from 7 & 8)

By way of response, I concede that the conclusion follows from the premises, but one of the premises is false. The objection, therefore, fails to establish what it attempts to.

The false premise is (3). The state of not being morally responsible for any false beliefs does not entail the consequent. The premise is claiming that a non-deceiving being must insure (so far as possible) that the total evidence available to us will indicate the way things actually are, in order to avoid moral responsibility for any false beliefs. This is not the only option open to a non-deceiving being. The state of not being morally responsible for any false beliefs is also consistent with *not* making things appear as they actually are *but* insuring that there is additional information available that would indicate that it might be unwise to pass judgment on the basis of appearances. In other words, a being can avoid moral responsibility for any false beliefs if such being insures, so far as is possible, that the total evidence available favors agnosticism regarding the outcome.

For example, consider a case where a person is strolling along the banks of a river and observes a large tree clinging to the edge of a badly eroded bank. All appearances indicate that within the next year or so, the bank will be eroded to the extent that the tree will topple into the water. Unbeknownst to the observer, however, the future of the tree holds no such misfortune. Over the next number of years, the course of the river will gradually alter through natural processes and the tree will continue to flourish and grow for another hundred years. The person strolling along the river of course, is not in a position to know the outcome of the natural processes affecting the tree. If the observer were to consider the question of whether the tree will fall into the river or not, appearances would certainly

suggest that it will. In actuality, it will not. If God is to avoid moral responsibility for any false beliefs regarding the future of the tree, must he make the tree appear as though it will never fall into the river? In keeping with what I have suggested in the previous paragraph, if there is additional information readily available such that the total evidence favors uncertainty or agnosticism regarding the outcome, then God can still avoid moral responsibility for any false beliefs regarding the outcome of the tree's precarious position. In this case the additional information is available to anyone willing to make careful inquiry into the vagaries of nature. This larger body of evidence will tend to introduce uncertainty regarding the future of the tree with the result that a careful observer is more likely to be led at least in the direction of agnosticism regarding the outcome of the tree.

In the case of the actual ultimate value of events, even though the tiny snapshot of history that we observe may indicate an apparently negative ultimate value, there is additional information available that when taken in conjunction with our limited knowledge of any given event, should favor agnosticism regarding the actual ultimate outcome. In this case, the additional information is the consequential complexity of the ever increasing, interrelated causal chains. This larger body of evidence should lead a careful inquirer into agnosticism regarding the actual ultimate outcome of any event.

Since the objection contains at least one false premise, the objection fails. Now for a counter-argument to the objection:

1. If there is sufficient information available to us such that we are not rationally justified in concluding that any evil is actually unjustified, then God can allow instances of actually justified evil to appear unjustified and he is not guilty of deceit.
2. There is sufficient information available to us such that we are not rationally justified in concluding that any evil is actually unjustified.
3. Therefore, God can allow instances of actually justified evil to appear unjustified and he is not guilty of deceit. (from 1 & 2)
4. If God can allow instances of actually justified evil to appear unjustified, then instances of apparently unjustified evil we observe in this world may actually be justified.

therefore,

Instances of apparently unjustified evil we observe in this world may actually be justified. (from 3 & 4)

I have already argued for (1) in my criticism of the third premise in the objection. My support for (2) is drawn from Descartes as follows.

My response to this is that, if God exists, he has done something so that we need not be deceived. The essence of my response is found

in Descartes's "Meditation IV: Of Truth and Error".<sup>4</sup> In this meditation, Descartes acknowledges that "it is impossible for him (God) to ever deceive me."<sup>5</sup> He goes on to state that God has also given us the power to firmly "retain the resolution never to judge where the truth is not clearly known to me."<sup>6</sup> The idea Descartes was explicating was the notion that God has given us the ability to refrain from drawing conclusions on insufficient evidence. It is a common realization that we ought to wait until we have sufficient facts before drawing conclusions. The problems or erroneous conclusions arise, according to Descartes, when we fail to restrain ourselves from drawing conclusions before we have taken adequate time to examine the evidence.<sup>7</sup>

If this is the case, then all that remains is for God to insure that the evidence available to us be such that, if we take adequate time to examine it, we will see that neither the strong nor weak inference is warranted. This is exactly what I have done in this thesis.

Furthermore, the consequential complexity of history is not so obscure and technical that only the highly intelligent and greatly learned could understand it sufficiently to avoid falling into error. The consequential complexity of history should readily be apparent

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<sup>4</sup> *The Rationalists*, (Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1974), pp. 144 - 152.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> "Meditation VI: Of the Existence of Material Things, and of the Real Distinction Between the Mind and Body of Man," *ibid.*, p. 175.

to anyone with normal cognitive abilities who will take sufficient time to contemplate it.

According to Descartes, we should only consider to be true that which “is very clearly and distinctly apprehended.”<sup>8</sup> It should be clear from my thesis that the *actual* ultimate value is not even remotely close to being something that is very clearly and distinctly apprehended. Furthermore, the consequential complexity of this world is something that, although perhaps not clearly and distinctly apprehended in the sense that Descartes might have required, is nevertheless abundantly evident to anyone who will take adequate time to contemplate the causal complexity of history. As a result, we can avoid the error of the strong and weak inferences if we will restrain ourselves from drawing conclusions before we have taken adequate time to examine the evidence.

In conclusion, I have argued that the weak inference is based upon an assumption that is false. The weak inference is therefore not rationally justified. I have also argued that even though the world contains many events that appear to be unjustified, God has given us the ability to recognize that this lack of justification may be only an artifact of consequential complexity. Furthermore, we have sufficient comprehension of this world to realize that we do not have sufficient information to justify either the strong or weak inference. Our part is to restrain ourselves from drawing conclusions before we have

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<sup>8</sup> “Meditation III: Of God: That He Exists,” *ibid.*, p. 128.

taken adequate time to contemplate the consequential complexity of history.



## 7.0 Some Concluding Points

The objective of this chapter is to clearly distinguish between what I have attempted to establish and what has not been established or addressed. In the first section I will review what I have attempted to establish. In the second section, I will survey some points that have not been addressed in this thesis.

### 7.1 A Summary of What has been Argued for

The evidential argument from evil raises a challenge to the belief that God exists. There are two ways a theist can respond to this challenge. One can either defend the belief, or attempt to neutralize the challenge. The first approach attempts to show that it is rational to believe that God exists and, therefore, that God must be justified in allowing evil even if we have no idea what that reason must be.<sup>1</sup>

The current trend in scholarly circles however, is to take the second approach, addressing the challenge by providing either a defense or a theodicy. My thesis took this second route. I began by looking at Peter van Inwagen's defense, with the question of whether or not any further contribution to the discussion of the problem of evil was necessary by anyone else or myself. Although I granted that Van

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<sup>1</sup> This approach has been taken by R. Douglas Geivett in his book, *Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy*, Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press (1993). Michael Bergmann has reviewed Geivett's book *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 436-441. This approach is also very common among laypeople committed to a particular religious faith.

Inwagen's theory may possibly be true,<sup>2</sup> I supplied three reasons why there is still room for further contributions to the discussion. First, there is always room for a story that is even more plausible. Second, we do not appear to be even remotely close to experiencing too much divine intervention in this world. Finally, although van Inwagen's defense might provide an answer to specific instances of evil, it does not provide a very satisfactory account of the quantity of evil. With these three reasons in mind, I then proceeded to provide a defense that would respond to *all* evidential arguments from evil.

I then considered what is required to justify an instance of evil. I suggested that any being is justified in permitting an event if and only if the ultimate value of that event, as responsibly comprehended by that being, after due inquiry into what is reasonably knowable to that being, is positive. I then went on to make a distinction between the actual ultimate value of an event and the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by some being. The actual ultimate value is the difference between the net intrinsic value of the actual event with all its consequences to the end of history and the net intrinsic value of the best alternative with all its consequences to the end of history. The ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by some being, was the difference between the net intrinsic value of the actual event with its

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<sup>2</sup> Recall that Peter van Inwagen suggested that God cannot intervene to prevent all evils if he wishes to avoid a massively irregular world. He may have to allow some evils that, considered by themselves, do not appear to be justified. They are rather, combination justified evils; as a combination, their allowance prevents a much larger evil.

consequences as responsibly comprehended by that being, and the best alternative with all its consequences as responsibly comprehended by that being.

I then made the assumption that God has foreknowledge and therefore knows the intrinsic values of any actual event and all its consequences to the end of history. I also assumed that he has middle knowledge and therefore knows all possible alternatives and their consequences, for all persons. Given these assumptions, it then followed that God is justified in permitting an event if and only if the *actual* ultimate value of that event is positive.

I pointed out that in discussions of the evidential problem of evil, we are not interested in what *we* are justified in permitting, but what God is justified in permitting. If we are going to make claims about what God is justified and not justified in permitting, those claims must be on the basis of the actual ultimate value of the event, not on the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by us.

I then proceeded to suggest that all evidential arguments from evil depend upon one of two inferences. If both of those inferences could be shown to be not rationally justifiable, then the challenge posed by all evidential arguments from evil would be reduced. The strong inference occurs when a person infers that a particular instance of evil is actually unjustified. I referred to that sort of inference as a *strong* inference because of the strong claim that it makes. The weak inference, however, makes a weak claim. It works on the

assumption that observations of apparently unjustified evil are exactly what we would expect if there is no God and not what we would expect if there is a God. It is a weaker claim because it does not conclude that any particular instance of evil is actually unjustified.

Before proceeding to the heart of my thesis, I introduced the assumption that there are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without allowing some evil. If God wishes to see these goods obtain, he must limit his intervention in this world to the extent that he does not jeopardize the realization of those goods. I then reviewed a number of theodicies and showed how each one either implied or suggested this idea. My purpose was to show that the assumption of sufficient limits to divine intervention is a common assumption by those who present theodicies and defenses. I concluded this discussion by indicating that I would make the same assumption. What my argument does is begin with the assumption implied by Plantinga's free will defense, and attempt to show that if that assumption is true, then the two kinds of inferences used in evidential arguments from evil are not rationally justified.

My first step in responding to the two inferences, was to challenge our ability to know the positive or negative state of the actual ultimate value of an event. I did this by showing that there are three types of complexity that this world appears to have. These three types of complexities make it very difficult, if not impossible,

to calculate the actual ultimate value of any event, or even know if it is positive or negative.

In the following chapter, using the consequential complexity of causal chains as an example, I argued that since we are utterly incapable of knowing whether the actual ultimate value of an event is positive or negative, it is not rationally justifiable to make the strong inference. The strong inference is based on the assumption that we have sufficient knowledge of the actual ultimate value of an event to justify an inference as to whether it is positive or not. I responded by arguing that our knowledge of the actual ultimate value of any event is so minuscule, that it falls vastly short of being sufficient for any rationally justifiable inference. Our conclusion will be no more rationally justifiable than one based upon the flip of a coin.

At this point, I addressed the problem of how we can justify preventing or permitting events if we cannot know the actual ultimate value of those events. My response was that if we accept that,

R: A person is morally responsible for what is knowable to that person and not morally responsible for what is not knowable to that person.

then our justification for permitting or preventing events depends upon the ultimate value as responsibly comprehended by us, not upon the actual ultimate value.

Finally, I addressed the weak inference. The weak inference is based on the assumption that observations of apparently unjustified evil are exactly what we would expect if there is no God but not what we would expect if there is a God. I argued that this assumption is false and the weak inference, therefore, is not justified. The apparent ultimate value of any event has no relationship to the actual ultimate value of an event or to the existence of God. Rather, it is completely dependent upon our knowledge of the event and the minuscule sample of actual consequences that we are aware of. This minuscule sample is so deficient in what we would need to know to even infer the actual ultimate value of an event that if an event appears to be unjustified, we should expect it to appear that way whether or not it is actually justified, or whether or not God exists. The result is that we should expect to observe instances of *apparently* unjustified evil if God does not exist and if God exists. I must remind the reader that this is only true if there are some limits to divine intervention such that God must allow some evil to occur, which my assumption regarding certain goods that are logically impossible to obtain without allowing some evil, entails.

At this point I addressed one final problem. If there are events that are apparently unjustified, has God done enough to keep us from being deceived? I argued that he has. He has given us the ability to

restrain ourselves from drawing conclusions on insufficient evidence. I went on to point out that the consequential complexity of history is readily apparent to one of normal cognitive abilities who takes sufficient time to contemplate it. Such a person will see that we have insufficient information to draw conclusions about whether or not the actual ultimate value of any event is positive. Given this, God has done enough.

The two major conclusions of my thesis, that both the strong and weak inferences are not rationally justified, are conditional on the assumptions that I made during the course of my argument. For the sake of clarity, it is necessary to clearly discharge them at this point. First, I have assumed that we have free will. This assumption was made when I made my second assumption on the basis of Alvin Plantinga's free will defense and his suggestion that there may be certain goods that are logically impossible to obtain unless God permits a certain amount of evil (my second assumption). This second assumption entailed that God must limit his intervention in this world to what is logically allowable if he wishes to see those certain goods obtain.

The first premise is subject to debate but it is certainly plausible, given that it *appears* to us as though we have free will. The second assumption is commonly made by all those who advance defenses and theodicies. This now brings me to the second section of this chapter, a discussion of what has not been established or addressed.

## 7.2 Loose Ends

There are two significant items that were not addressed. The first item is whether or not God actually exists. The second has to do with what the goods might be that are logically impossible to achieve without the allowance of a certain amount of evil. In this section, I will review these two significant loose ends.

As I indicated in the previous section, there are two routes open to someone who wishes to defend the belief that God exists in the face of the evidential argument from evil. I chose to address the challenge to the belief that God exists, rather than attempt to defend the rationality of the belief by presenting some evidence for the existence of God. Even if it was granted that I have completely neutralized the challenge (which, at best, I have only conditionally done), I have presented no reason at all to believe that God exists. At the very best, all I have done is to argue that one reason for *not* believing that there is a God, is not rationally justified (I refer to all evidential arguments from evil). It does not follow, however, that there is a God.

In general, no successful defense or theodicy, by itself, establishes the existence of God. The issue of whether or not there is an actual god and if so, what sort of god actually exists, is still unresolved. A good theodicy does not rule out, for example, the actual existence of a less than perfect god, or even a malicious god. It might be entirely possible in a world in which there was a malicious god, to construct a



successful theodicy that explained how an omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good god could allow the evil and suffering in that world, even though there was no such god and the real god was malicious.

Conversely, a good evidential argument from evil may make the proposition that God exists implausible, but it does not show that there actually is no God. It might be entirely possible in a world in which God exists and evil occurs, to construct a very compelling evidential argument from evil against the existence of God, even though God existed in that world. Regardless of how good a theodicy or defense might be, the question as to whether or not God actually exists will have to be settled by examining the evidence. This may include personal experience or some other line of justification for the belief that God exists.

The second significant loose end arises out of the major assumption I made in chapter three. In chapter three I showed that, beginning with Alvin Plantinga's famous free will defense, every defense and theodicy either suggested or assumed that there are certain goods that are not logically possible to obtain without the permission of a certain amount of evil. If this is true, then God must limit how much evil he can prevent.

During the course of chapter three, I reviewed a number of suggestions as to what these certain goods might be. There did not seem to be any one good that adequately explained all the evil we

observe in this world, although I suggested that a conjunction of two or more goods might have much greater explanatory power. What these goods might be is highly relevant to the evidential problem of evil. If we knew what these goods were, or at least could suggest a combination of goods that would explain all evil, we would then be in a position to determine to what extent they would impose logical limits on divine intervention. Certain goods, such as those suggested by Peter van Inwagen's 'Prodigal Son theodicy' might impose huge limits on how much God could intervene in this world if he wanted humanity to grow weary of separation from him. Other goods might logically permit a high degree of intervention. Until we have a model of what these goods might be that has sufficient explanatory power, we are left at a disadvantage in being able to resolve just how extensive the logical limitations to divine prevention of evil are.

Many theists, upon reading chapter three, would be in agreement with at least two or more of the goods suggested by the theodicies reviewed there. Furthermore, I think that many theists might agree that it is simplistic to hold that there is only one sort of good that logically entails limits to divine intervention. There is room, therefore, for complex theodicies that consider a conjunction of goods which are not logically possible to obtain without the allowance of a certain amount of evil. The objective, of course, would be greater explanatory power in accounting for the instances of evil that we observe in this world.

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