

The Argument from Evil

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Evil and Contemporary Philosophical Orthodoxy

The argument from or problem of evil concludes that the existence of evil is, in one way or another, incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient being (God).¹ For anyone who is a student of or familiar with modern philosophical orthodoxy in metaphysics, the philosophy of mind, and the philosophy of action (I will simply refer to the three together as “modern philosophical orthodoxy”), the problem of evil can be likened to the skeletal remains of dinosaurs that are housed in the back room of a museum and occasionally brought out for reexamination and public viewing. This is the case for four reasons.

First, the problem of evil is fundamentally, in the words of C. S. Lewis, the problem of pain (Lewis 1962), where an experience of pain is an irreducible, conscious feeling or quale that hurts. The occurrence of such a psychological event is, however, vigorously contested by many adherents of modern philosophical orthodoxy. Given the seemingly outlandish nature of their position, some defenders of this orthodoxy vehemently insist they do not deny that we experience pain. Nevertheless, when one reads their accounts of pain, one cannot help but be suspicious. Almost invariably, they talk about the “functional role” of pain, which is cashed out in terms of pain’s extrinsic or relational features in the form of causal inputs and outputs. And these defenders of modern philosophical orthodoxy make clear that this functional role *exhausts* what pain is. The problem here is that while no one who is sane will deny that an experience of pain has certain relational features (e.g. other things being equal, one who is experiencing pain will act for the purpose that the pain be mitigated), no one who is sane will hold that an experience of pain is nothing more than its relational features. After all, pain *feels* a certain way. It has an intrinsic nature for which the only adequate description is that it hurts. And it is precisely because pain has this kind of intrinsic nature that it also has the relational features that it has. It is this irreducible, intrinsic qualitative nature of pain that modern philosophical orthodoxy is intent on either

1. The meanings of these concepts are widely debated, but I will assume that sense can be made of them.

reducing to something else or outright eliminating. Were their efforts to prove successful, there would be no problem of evil because there would be no *quale* that is evil. Jaegwon Kim, who is one of the most articulate spokespersons for modern philosophical orthodoxy, describes the nature of the contemporary philosophical milieu as follows:

For most of us, there is no need to belabor the centrality of consciousness to our conception of ourselves as creatures with minds. But I want to point to the ambivalent, almost paradoxical, attitude that philosophers have displayed toward consciousness. . . . [C]onsciousness had been virtually banished from the philosophical and scientific scene for much of the last century, and consciousness-bashing still goes on in some quarters, with some reputable philosophers arguing that phenomenal consciousness, or ‘qualia,’ is a fiction of bad philosophy. And there are philosophers . . . who, while they recognize phenomenal consciousness as something real do not believe that a complete science of human behavior, including cognitive psychology and neuroscience, has a place for consciousness in an explanatory/predictive theory of cognition and behavior. . . .

Contrast this lowly status of consciousness in science and metaphysics with its lofty standing in moral philosophy and value theory. When philosophers discuss the nature of the intrinsic good, or what is worthy of our desire and volition for its own sake, the most prominently mentioned candidates are things like pleasure, absence of pain, enjoyment, and happiness. . . . To most of us, a fulfilling life, a life worth living, is one that is rich and full in qualitative consciousness. We would regard life as impoverished and not fully satisfying if it never included experiences of things like the smell of the sea in a cool morning breeze, the lambent play of sunlight on brilliant autumn foliage, the fragrance of a field of lavender in bloom, and the vibrant, layered soundscape projected by a string quartet. . . . It is an ironic fact that the felt qualities of conscious experience, perhaps the only things that ultimately matter to us, are often relegated in the rest of philosophy to the status of ‘secondary qualities,’ in the shadowy zone between the real and the unreal, or even jettisoned outright as artifacts of confused minds. (Kim 2005, pp. 10–2)

The second reason for likening the problem of evil to the skeletal remains of dinosaurs arises out of contemporary philosophical orthodoxy’s commitment to materialism. Given the lowly status of the felt experience of pain in the contemporary philosophical climate, it is not at all surprising that the concept of an immaterial soul is viewed as an erroneous idea of a bygone, nonscientific age. Thus, even if one can get an adherent of contemporary philosophical orthodoxy to concede the reality of consciousness and qualia, he will insist that a soul cannot be that which is conscious and experiences pain. For example, Owen Flanagan claims that the existence of the soul simply has no place whatsoever in what he calls the “scientific image” of persons:

There is no consensus yet about the details of the scientific image of persons. But there is broad agreement about how we must construct this detailed picture. First, we will need to demythologize persons by rooting out certain unfounded ideas from the perennial philosophy. Letting go of the belief in souls is a minimal requirement. In fact, desouling is the primary operation of the scientific image. (Flanagan 2002, p. 3)

To most individuals who have not been influenced by contemporary philosophical orthodoxy, Flanagan’s attitude toward the soul’s existence is just as counterintuitive and puzzling as denying that people are conscious and pain hurts. As William Lyons has written, the view “that humans are bodies inhabited and governed in some intimate if mysterious

way by minds (souls), seemed and still seems to be nothing more than good common sense” (Lyons 2001, p. 9). Confirmation of the existence of this common sense is found in the extremely successful Harry Potter books, where the author J. K. Rowling makes effective use of dualism (the idea that a human being is a body–soul combination) in portraying the worst death one can die as one where one’s soul is sucked out of one’s body by the kiss of a being called a dementor. And the contemporary nondualist philosopher John Searle reports that “[w]hen I lectured on the mind-body problem in India [I] was assured by several members of my audience that my views must be mistaken, because they personally had existed in their earlier lives as frogs or elephants, etc.” (Searle 1992, p. 91).

Just as there cannot be a problem of evil if no one is conscious and experiences pain, so also there cannot be a satisfactory solution to the problem of evil if souls do not exist and survive death. And not only must souls exist, but I will also maintain they must be free in the libertarian sense (have libertarian free will) to make undetermined choices for purposes (reasons). Not surprisingly, however, modern philosophical orthodoxy views the belief in libertarian free will as just another misguided idea bequeathed to us by our unscientific ancestors. The doctrinal position on free will at present is the view known as compatibilism, which is the idea that freedom and determinism are compatible and that one and the same event can be both free and determined. When adherents of contemporary philosophical orthodoxy do talk about mental actions, they almost to a person assume that the entirety of our mental lives is determined by nonmental events. Thus, even Searle, who is an outspoken critic of those who deny the reality of consciousness and qualia, insists that “all mental phenomena whether conscious or unconscious, visual or auditory, pains, tickles, itches, thoughts, indeed, all of our mental life, are caused by processes going on in the brain” (Searle 1984, p. 18). And while Francis Crick, the codiscoverer of the molecular structure of DNA, acknowledges that we have an “undeniable feeling that our Will is free,” he also maintains “that our Will only appears to be free” (Crick 1994, p. 10). In whatever sense it is true to say that we choose, Crick believes that a choice is completely determined to occur. Daniel Dennett agrees with Crick. According to Dennett, any kind of freedom that we have must be a kind of freedom that is compatible with the truth of determinism. While he concedes that we are not aware of the causes of our choices, there is an explanation of this ignorance:

Whatever else we are, we are information-processing systems, and all information-processing systems rely on amplifiers of a sort. Relatively small causes are made to yield relatively large effects. . . . Vast amounts of information arrive on the coattails of negligible amounts of energy, and then, thanks to amplification powers of systems of switches, the information begins to do some work . . . leading eventually to an action whose pedigree of efficient . . . causation is so hopelessly inscrutable as to be invisible. We see the dramatic effects leaving; we don’t see the causes entering; we are tempted by the hypothesis that there are no causes. (Dennett 1984, pp. 76–7; see also Dennett 2003)

In short, from our failure to be aware of the causes of our choices, we cannot reasonably conclude that there are none. This is because the causes are beyond our ken. Therefore, our lack of awareness of them is to be expected and in no way supports or justifies a belief in their absence, just as the failure to observe from afar a needle on the floor of a field house with bleachers in it does not justify a belief that no needle is lying on that floor. Flanagan summarizes this point nicely:

[T]he myth of a completely self-initiating ego, an unmoved but self-moving will, [is] simply a fiction motivated by our ignorance of the causes of human behavior. [There is] no need for the notion of a metaphysically unconstrained will or of an independent ego as an unconstrained primal cause in order to have a robust conception of free agency. For there to be agency we need the ego as a cause, possibly even the proximate cause of what we do. But the ego may serve as the proximate cause of action and still itself be part of the causal nexus. (Flanagan 2002, p. 112)

The fourth and last reason that explains contemporary philosophical orthodoxy's attitude toward the problem of evil stems from its commitment to the nonexistence of an irreducible teleological explanation of mental actions. Evidence of the rejection of a teleological explanation is often found in discussions of philosophical naturalism (naturalism, for short). For example, according to David Armstrong, naturalism is "the doctrine that reality consists of nothing but a single all-embracing spatio-temporal system" (Armstrong 1978, p. 261). Contemporary materialism is a form of naturalism and maintains that the single all-embracing temporal system contains nothing but the entities recognized by the most mature physics. Irreducible teleological explanation has no place in this (or any other) spatiotemporal system because it entails the existence of explanations by purposes (reasons), and explanations by purposes imply the falsity of naturalism. Thus, Armstrong says that "if the principles involved [in analyzing the single, all-embracing spatiotemporal system that is reality] were completely different from the current principles of physics, in particular if they involved appeal to mental entities, such as purposes, we might then count the analysis as a falsification of Naturalism" (Armstrong 1978, p. 262).

Now if there really are no purposes, then it is folly to spend one's time trying to discover God's purpose for choosing to allow evil. God could not choose to allow evil for a purpose because, ultimately, nothing can be adequately explained teleologically. Any account of God's purpose for choosing to allow evil will be rejected, not because it fails to state correctly what that purpose is but because, ultimately, there simply are no irreducible purposeful explanations of anything. The nonexistence of such explanations has a similar implication for human choices: Given that human beings cannot make choices that are ultimately explained in terms of irreducible purposes, they cannot possess libertarian free will.

It is not my purpose in this chapter to rebut modern philosophical orthodoxy and arguments against the reality of qualia, the soul, libertarian free will, and irreducible teleological explanation. I have done so elsewhere (see Goetz 2005; Goetz & Taliaferro 2008a,b). Rather, my purpose in raising these four issues at the outset of this chapter is simply to alert the reader to the fact that if you think that there is a problem of evil, then you must, if you are consistent, break ranks with contemporary philosophical orthodoxy. At a minimum, you must think that views in the philosophy of mind such as functionalism and eliminativism are wrong and that pain is an irreducible quale with an intrinsic nature. Moreover, even if you do not believe that souls exist and make undetermined choices that are irreducibly teleologically explained in terms of purposes, you must at least be willing to give someone who believes in these things a serious hearing. You must be willing to do this because chances are that those who think that the problem of evil can be reasonably answered believe in these things and invoke their reality in their response. If you are not willing to make such a concession, then there is not much point in your reading further in this chapter.

Defense versus Theodicy

As I stated at the outset of the previous section, the problem of evil is the argument that the existence of evil is, in some way, incompatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient being. Because the problem of evil is a philosophical argument that God's existence is incompatible with the existence of evil, it is a theoretical problem. There is, to be sure, a practical problem of evil, which is, broadly speaking, the practical difficulty of learning how to cope with one's own experience of evil (e.g. the pain experienced from either the loss of a loved one or a severe bodily injury). There is, unfortunately, no guarantee that a plausible response to the theoretical problem of evil (assuming that there is such a response) will prove practically helpful. Indeed, when in the throes of sorrow, silence is often far more appropriate or fitting than words. But while silence sometimes suits us better than words, many if not most of us are all too aware that the theoretical problem will abide silence for only so long before it once again raises its voice and demands our attention. Hence, it must be dealt with in its own time and place.

A moment ago, I wrote that the problem of evil is the argument that the existence of evil is, *in some way*, incompatible with the existence of God. Over the course of the last 50+ years, it has become common practice to distinguish between two kinds of incompatibility, namely, the logical and the evidential. According to the logical problem of evil, the mere existence of evil is inconsistent with or logically contradicts the existence of God. The evidential problem of evil, while it concedes that the existence of evil is logically compatible with God's existence, maintains that the amount and/or kinds of evil in this world provide evidence against the existence of God such that belief that God exists is unjustified and probably false.

In response to the logical and evidential arguments from evil against the existence of God, a forceful line of argument has been developed by some theists (I will assume that a theist is a person who affirms that God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient) to the effect that while it is desirable to know God's justification for permitting evil, reasonable theists (I will call them "defenders") need not² and ought not³ do any more than provide a defense, which is a statement of what God's justification for permitting evil might be. Because of our limited epistemic powers, a defender believes that God's justification for permitting evil is beyond our ken.⁴ As Peter van Inwagen has recently pointed out, it

2. "No doubt the theist would rather know what God's reason *is* for permitting evil than simply that it's possible that He has a good one. But in the present context (that of investigating the logical consistency of [God is omnipotent, wholly good, and evil exists]), the latter is all that is needed" (Plantinga 1974, p. 28; emphasis in the original).

3. Plantinga says the following: "If God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, why is there any evil? . . . The Christian theist must concede that she doesn't know – that is, she doesn't know in any detail. . . . And here I must remark that many of the attempts to explain why God permits evil – theodicies, as we might call them – seem to me shallow, tepid, and ultimately frivolous" (Plantinga 1996a, p. 70). Peter van Inwagen notes that "Plantinga is rather down on theodicies. I have heard him say that to give a theodicy is 'presumptuous'" (van Inwagen 1988, p. 161).

4. "Our grasp of the fundamental way of things is at best limited; there is no reason to think that if God *did* have a reason for permitting the evil in question, we would be the first to know" (Plantinga, 1996a, p. 70; emphasis in the original). Stephen Wykstra explains that our supposed ignorance of the goods that outweigh instances of suffering is expected because God's wisdom in relationship to ours in this matter is analogous to that of an adult human's and that of a 1-month old infant's. "So for any selected instance of intense suffering, there is good reason to think that if there is an outweighing good . . . we would not have epistemic access to [it] . . ." (Wykstra 1990, p. 156).

has become quite common for defenders initially to treat the argument from evil by showing that the belief that both God and evil exist is free from internal logical contradiction (there is no logical problem of evil). Once they have successfully done this, however, they usually see the need to respond to the evidential problem of evil by providing a defense that is a real as opposed to a mere logical possibility. Van Inwagen illustrates his point about the difference between these two kinds of defense in terms of a defense counsel in a court of law:

If defense counsels followed a parallel strategy in courts of law, they would first try to prove that their clients' innocence was logically consistent with the evidence by telling stories (by presenting 'alternative theories of the crime') involving things like twins separated at birth, operatic coincidences, and mental telepathy; only after they had shown by this method that their clients' innocence was logically consistent with the evidence, would they go on to try to raise *real* doubts in the minds of jurors about the guilt of their clients. (van Inwagen 2006, p. 67; emphasis in the original)

As a defender, van Inwagen seeks to present a defense that is a real possibility, one that there is some reason to think might very well be true (and, thus, is stronger than a defense that stops with mere logical consistency). His defense is in the form of a story in which God exists and has reasons for allowing the existence of evil of the kind that occurs in the actual world. The story is a real possibility in the sense that upon hearing it one would respond with "Given that God exists, the rest of the story might very well be true. I can't see any reason to rule it out" (van Inwagen 2006, p. 66). There is, however, a response to the problem of evil that is yet more robust than one that presents a defense that is a real as opposed to a mere logical possibility. This response claims to know not only that a justification for evil's existence is a real possibility but also that this real possibility is God's *actual* justification for permitting evil. I will call theists who believe they know (in part or in whole) God's justification for permitting evil "theodicists." If we stick with van Inwagen's illustration from a court of law, a theodist is like a defense counsel who convinces jurors of the innocence of his client by presenting facts about where his client actually was at the time of the crime, which make clear that it was impossible for his client to have committed the crime. A theodist presents God's (his client's) actual reason for allowing evil with the result that it is clearly seen that evil does not present evidence against God's existence.

Now it is no doubt true that a defender might know God's reason for permitting evil and yet be under no obligation to disclose it to someone else or refer to it in an argument about the problem of evil. For whatever reason, a person might be a defender in public and a theodist in private. This is not the position of the defenders whom I will discuss in this chapter. The assumption behind their defensive position is that if they knew God's justification for permitting evil, they would gladly refer to it in their response to the problem of evil, regardless of whether or not they were obligated to do so. Moreover, as Eleonore Stump has pointed out, knowing God's justifying reason and, thereby, being a theodist, can be important to some theists outside the context of responding to the problem of evil:

The problem with [the defender's] arguments and strategies . . . is that they leave people on both sides of the issue unsatisfied. . . . [F]or the theist struggling with the problem of evil,

even if he entertains no anxieties about the rationality of his theistic belief in consequence of the existence of evil, he may well still be weakened in his religious belief by the consideration that the deity in whom he is to place his *trust* seems to act in ways which are unintelligible to him at best and apparently evil at worst. (Stump 1985, pp. 394–5; emphasis in the original)

Given this brief overview of the distinction between a defense and a theodicy, I develop a theodicy in the rest of this chapter. A theodicy requires knowledge of a good that is great enough to justify God's permission of evil. Knowledge of that good is found, I believe, through consideration of the question of the purpose of life. In essence, I argue in the section "Life's Purpose and Perfect Happiness" that the purpose of an individual's life is that he experience the great good of perfect or complete happiness, and it is the possibility of his experiencing this great good that justifies God's allowing him to experience evil. To set the stage for my discussion of the purpose of life in the said section, I briefly summarize and discuss in the next section one theodicy's attempt to persuade a prominent defender to become a theodicyist. While I conclude that this theodicyist's particular argument fails, I believe that the general form of his argument is worth remembering when it comes time to develop my own theodicy in the section "Developing a Theodicy."

The Free Will Defense

As part of an argument to show that God's existence and the existence of evil are logically compatible, the defender Alvin Plantinga develops the free will defense, which maintains that "[a] world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all" (Plantinga, 1974, p. 30). Given that this is the case, we know that the existence of evil is compatible with persons possessing significant freedom (libertarian free will) and that the possession of this freedom *might be* God's justification for permitting evil. The aim of the free will defense, however, is not to say that we know that the possession of this freedom *is* God's justification or reason for permitting evil.

The theodicyist Jerry Walls has argued that contrary to what Plantinga maintains, the free will defense requires a commitment to the reality of libertarian free will as God's actual justification for permitting evil, thereby making Plantinga a theodicyist. Walls argues that Plantinga is committed to the truth of the principle (call it *P*) that in all worlds where persons are either not free or have compatibilist free will, God could eliminate all moral evil, where moral evil is the experience of pain and/or deprivation of pleasure that results from morally wrong choices and/or actions of free beings, whether human or nonhuman. In other words, in a world that lacks persons with libertarian free will it is impossible for moral evil to exist. A certain *kind* of evil requires a certain kind of justification, and any possible world that contains moral evil must also contain beings with libertarian free will. Given that we know there is moral evil in our world, the only possible justification God can have for permitting the existence of this moral evil is the existence of beings with libertarian free will. Walls concludes that Plantinga is committed to a theodicy where he knows that God permits moral evil in our world because God knows that "[libertarian]

freedom and its related goods outweigh the [moral] evil in our world” (Walls 1992b, p. 333). Plantinga can avoid moving from a defense to a theodicy only by unreasonably refusing to affirm that it is impossible for God to allow persons to experience moral evil and those individuals not have libertarian free will.

In response to Walls, Plantinga claims that it is not obvious to him that *P* is true. For all he knows:

[m]aybe a certain amount of evil is necessary to every really good possible world. Perhaps among the really good possible worlds, there are some in which there is no creaturely freedom, but there are creatures capable of knowledge. Perhaps it is a good thing that those creatures be able to appreciate the great value of the world in question; but perhaps they couldn't appreciate its great value unless there were some evil with respect to which to contrast that value; and perhaps that evil could be of several kinds, including evil due to the free (in the compatibilist sense) activity of creatures. (Plantinga 1992, pp. 336–7)

Plantinga concludes that if a certain amount of evil is necessary to every really good possible world in the way that he suggests, then libertarian freedom is not necessary in order for God to be justified in permitting the existence of moral evil in a world. Perhaps, then, our possession of libertarian free will is not God's justification for allowing moral evil in our world.

At this point, Plantinga recognizes that Walls might grant, for the sake of argument, that any really good possible world requires the existence of some evil, and maybe some of the evil in those worlds includes moral evil produced by beings with compatibilist free will. Thus, we do not know that the possession of libertarian free will by creatures is God's justification for permitting moral evil *per se*. But what about a world such as our own which contains moral evils of a horrendous or very terrible sort? Must it not be the case that worlds with such terrible moral evils must also contain beings with libertarian free will, where that free will is the justification for permitting such horrible moral evils? In other words, while it might generically be the case that any really good possible world requires the existence of some evil, when we get down to the specific evil(s) of a particular really good possible world such as ours, theodicy becomes inevitable.

Plantinga concedes the force of this line of thought: while it might be the case that some evil is necessary for the existence of any really good possible world, it is implausible to believe that the horrific moral evils of this world are necessary, say, for the proper appreciation of what is good. Thus, he says that he is inclined to think that some principle analogous to *P*, which makes reference to appalling moral evils, is true. That is, he is inclined to believe that in all worlds in which persons either are not free or are free only in the compatibilist sense, God could and would eliminate all horrendous moral evil. But being inclined to believe that something is true is not the same thing as being committed to its truth. Thus, even with respect to the appalling moral evils of this world, Plantinga maintains that he is not committed to the truth of an analog of *P* in giving his free will defense. Granted, he fails to see a justifying good other than libertarian free will that God could have for permitting the horrific moral evils we find in our world. He points out, however, that “there is a big difference between failing to see that something is possible and seeing that it is impossible” (Plantinga 1992, p. 338). Therefore, for all he knows, there may be a justification other than libertarian free will that God has for allowing the appalling moral evils in our world.

Life's Purpose and Perfect Happiness

Given their shared assumption that libertarian free will is either itself a good that can, at least in part, justify God's permission of both nonhorrendous (nonappalling) and horrendous (appalling) moral evil (henceforth, moral evil, for short) or is required for the preponderance of morally good actions that can justify God's allowance of moral evil,⁵ it seems to me that Plantinga has given a persuasive response to Walls. Although I think that Walls's argument fails, I will follow his theodical strategy and argue that defenders can avoid moving from a defense to a theodicy only by unreasonably refusing to acknowledge that a certain scenario is impossible. [Walls thinks Plantinga can avoid moving from a defense to a theodicy only by unreasonably refusing to acknowledge the impossibility of God allowing moral evil (or moral evil of a horrendous sort) without libertarian free will.] In my argument against defenders, I assume, like Plantinga and Walls, that created persons possess libertarian free will, but unlike them I explicitly deny that this freedom is a good that can, even in part, justify God's permission of moral evil.⁶

To understand why the move from defense to theodicy is rationally required, it is necessary to spend some time considering the question of the purpose of life, where I will always understand the "purpose of life" as the purpose of an *individual's* life. The issue of the purpose of life is one that defenders rarely, if ever, address. Perhaps the explanation for their not doing so is the same as that which explains their reluctance to become theodacists, namely, that we humans possess only limited epistemic powers. This limitation ensures not only that God's justification for permitting moral evil is beyond our ken but also that the purpose for our existence is epistemically inaccessible to us. It is perhaps of some consequence that defenders such as Plantinga and Stephen Wykstra are Protestant philosophers in the Calvinist tradition, a tradition that understands the effects of Adam's fall to include the fact that the human mind is darkened.⁷ As Alasdair MacIntyre has pointed out, with the rise of Protestantism, the view developed that "[r]eason can supply . . . *no* genuine comprehension of man's true end; that power of reason was destroyed by the fall of man. 'Si Adam integer stetisset' [If Adam has stood or remained whole or upright], on Calvin's view, reason might have played the part that Aristotle assigned to it" (MacIntyre 1981, p. 51; emphasis in the original). The part that Aristotle assigned to reason

5. "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all" (Plantinga 1974, p. 30); and "[I]f we are so free [in the libertarian sense], then it naturally follows that God must think that freedom and its related goods outweigh the evil in our world" (Walls 1992b, p. 333).

6. Thus, I agree with the following comment by the atheist William Rowe: "The first question we need to ask is whether the possession of free will is something that is *in itself* of such great value as to merit God's permission of the horrendous moral evils in the world. I think the answer must be no. We should distinguish the intrinsic value of possessing free will from its extrinsic value. The mere possession of free will does not strike me as itself having much in the way of intrinsic value" (Rowe 1996, p. 279; emphasis in the original). My only quibble with Rowe is that I believe that free will does not have *any* intrinsic value.

7. It is important to make clear that I do not consider pointing out that Plantinga and Wykstra are philosophers in the Calvinist tradition as any kind of argument against defenders. After all, Calvinism, or certain elements of it, might be correct. My purpose in pointing out Plantinga's and Wykstra's association with Calvinism is only to make clear that their approach to the problem of evil is consistent with the more general Calvinist position that the powers of the human mind have been seriously undermined by sin.

included knowing man's telos or end. But Adam did not stand or remain whole, and the result according to Protestant thought was that unaided reason can no longer know man's true end.

What if, however, the result of the fall was not as epistemically disastrous as Protestantism maintains and it is possible to know the purpose of life? And what if knowledge of life's purpose is not only available but also provides insight into God's actual reason for permitting moral evil? Because I am a lapsed Protestant when it comes to the doctrine of the Fall, I believe it is possible to know the purpose of life, and I also believe this knowledge gives us insight into God's actual justification for permitting evil. Therefore, in the rest of this section I state what I think the purpose of life is and consider several objections to my view. Given a successful treatment of the issue of life's purpose, I will turn in the next section to developing a theodicy.

What, then, is the purpose of life? I believe that the answer is fairly obvious: the purpose of life is to experience perfect or complete happiness. What, however, is perfect happiness? Intuitively, it is an experience of what is intrinsically good (what is sometimes thought of as subjectively felt happiness), where something is intrinsically good if it is good and does not derive its goodness from the goodness of something else to which it is related. Because the problem of evil fundamentally concerns the experience of pain, where pain is a fundamental (first-order), metaphysical (nonmoral, where nonmoral \neq immoral), intrinsic evil that does not derive its evil nature from the evil of something else to which it is related, it is plausible to think that an experience of pleasure is a fundamental, metaphysical, intrinsic good that does not derive its goodness from the goodness of something else to which it is related. Happiness, then, is related to the intrinsic goodness and evilness of pleasure and pain, respectively, in a way that makes it the case that the less pain and more pleasure that a person experiences, the happier he is. So there are degrees of happiness, and perfect or complete happiness is a condition in which a person experiences nothing but pleasure (a quale), where this positively good qualitative state continues without end.

That perfect happiness is the purpose for which a person exists is indirectly supported by the existence of the problem of evil itself. After all, what is the problem of evil except the quest for an explanation as to why, if God does exist, this apparent purpose for a person's existing (that he experience perfect happiness) is not fulfilled or realized? Given that God has the requisite attributes to guarantee the fulfillment or realization of this purpose, why is it not accomplished? Thus, when an atheist such as J. L. Mackie asks "why could [God] not have made men such that they always freely choose the good?" (Mackie 1990, p. 33), he assumes that always freely choosing the good is more in keeping with the achievement of perfect happiness, where the experience of that happiness is a person's purpose for existing.⁸

I assume, then, in what follows, that an individual's well-being is or consists of subjectively felt happiness, which is to say that happiness in its complete or perfect form is essentially experiences of pleasure (a positive hedonic state) and the absence of pain (a

8. In criticizing a solution to the problem of evil, which claims that the universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil, Mackie is explicit about the connection in his own mind between pleasure, happiness, and the good: "Let us call pain and misery 'first order evil' or 'evil (1)'. What contrasts with this, namely pleasure and happiness, will be called 'first order good' or 'good (1)'" (Mackie 1990, p. 31).

negative hedonic state). During the course of my examination of the problem of evil in subsequent sections, I will make various points in support of this assumption. For now, I simply emphasize that on the understanding of happiness that informs this chapter, it simply is not possible that a life largely devoid of felt happiness is worth living *for its subject*. I realize that not everyone will agree with me about this point. For example, Flanagan has suggested that “[p]erhaps happiness is not necessary even [for a worthwhile life]. One might live a life largely devoid of happiness but still live a good and worthwhile life – even as seen from the subjective point of view” (Flanagan 1996, p. 5). The argument of this chapter simply assumes that Flanagan is mistaken.

Because (perfect) happiness is intrinsically good, it is a feature of human nature that a person cannot help but desire it for himself. St Augustine expressed this point quite succinctly when he wrote that “It is the decided opinion of all who use their brains that all men desire to be happy” (Augustine 1993, 10.1). One might, however, raise the following objection:

[T]he desire satisfaction theory of human welfare [a person’s well-being is a function of his satisfying his strongest desires concerning his own experiences] has counterintuitive implications. Suppose that (for whatever reason) a person strongly wanted to suffer mental anxiety and physical torment for the sake of satisfying no other want. The desire satisfaction theory implies that such a person would be doing quite well for having such a desire fulfilled, which seems absurd. (Metz 2003, p. 168)

This implication of the desire satisfaction theory is absurd. I am not, however, presupposing the desire satisfaction theory. Rather, I am assuming that a person’s well-being consists of his experiencing happiness and that it is because this is the case that he ultimately desires his perfect happiness. In other words, the intrinsic goodness of happiness constrains what a person can and does desire for himself. No individual can desire that he suffer mental anxiety and physical torment for their own sakes because no one can desire what is intrinsically evil or bad for its own sake. Desire is necessarily ultimately directed at the intrinsic goodness of perfect happiness.

If the experience of perfect happiness is the purpose of life, a meaningless or absurd life is one in which a person fails to experience that degree of happiness. As Thomas Nagel has pointed out, the idea of absurdity is essentially the idea of a discrepancy or mismatch, which is illustrated by both a scenario in which a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic foundation and a romantic moment in which one declares one’s love over the telephone to a recorded announcement (Nagel 2000, p. 178). So if the purpose of life is to have a certain experience and a person fails to have it, there is a discrepancy or mismatch in that individual’s life.

On the view of the purpose of life I am setting forth, life is not necessarily absurd. While some lives might be absurd, others might not. Nagel thinks otherwise, and his argument deserves careful consideration. According to him, we are beings who take things, including our lives, seriously. We have, however, the capacity to step back and survey ourselves and the lives that we take seriously and inevitably exercise that capacity. For example, an individual like Mother Theresa took seriously a life of helping the poor and destitute in Calcutta. And, like anyone else, she had the capacity to step back and survey her life. According to Nagel, when she stepped back and surveyed her life she was inevitably led to ask the

question, “Is a life of helping the poor and destitute in Calcutta worth taking seriously?” Or take a person who lives for trying to impress other people. He too has the capacity to step back and survey his life. When he does so, he will ask, “Is a life of trying to impress others worth taking seriously?” What makes Nagel’s argument important is that he believes no question asked by a person about the worthwhile nature of the life that he takes seriously has an answer that is immune to unanswerable doubt. Every answer to such a question is, therefore, ultimately unjustified. In other words, Nagel believes that no matter what kind of life an individual takes seriously, it will always be subject to a discrepancy in the form of a question about that life that does not have a justified answer. No matter what kind of life one has lived, it is not worth taking seriously: “There does not appear to be any conceivable world (containing us) about which unshakable doubts could not arise” (Nagel 2000, p. 181). Therefore, *any* kind of life involving us is ultimately absurd or meaningless, even one involving perfect happiness. Thus, if we assume for the sake of discussion that a person both takes seriously the idea of being perfectly happy and actually experiences this happiness, Nagel’s point is that such a person will realize, upon stepping back and asking, “Is a life of being perfectly happy worth taking seriously?” that he will always have unanswerable doubt about an affirmative answer. No affirmative answer to his question will ultimately justifiably settle his doubt.

Nagel’s argument, however, surely fails when it is directed at the life of perfect happiness. Given that perfect happiness is intrinsically good, someone who asks whether it is worth taking seriously and believes that there is no good reason to think that it is seriously confused. As Paul Edwards points out, “It makes sense for a person to ask about something ‘Is it really worthwhile?’ or ‘Is it really worth the trouble?’ if he does not regard it as intrinsically valuable. . . . It does not make sense [however] to ask such a question about something he regards as valuable in its own right. . . .” (Edwards 2000, p. 141). Thus, on the understanding of the purpose of life that I am assuming, the most serious discrepancy or mismatch involving an individual would be a failure on his part to give perfect happiness the utmost attention that it is due. If anything is absurd, such a failure is.

Because perfect happiness is intrinsically good, an argument that is sometimes raised against God’s existence can be answered. This argument is a variant of Euthyphro’s dilemma and asks, “Is perfect happiness good because God commands or says that it is good or does God command or say that perfect happiness is good because it is good?”⁹ Given that perfect happiness is intrinsically good, its goodness has essentially nothing to do with what God commands or says. It just is good, period. Of course, if God is omnibenevolent, then He will want to provide us with perfect happiness because it is intrinsically good. But for that to be the case, it is not necessary that the goodness of perfect happiness depend upon what God commands or says about it.

Given, therefore, that complete or perfect happiness is the purpose of life, there is a sense in which God has something to say about its being so and a sense in which He does not. The sense in which God does have something to say has to do with God’s granting perfect happiness to those who deserve it, and I will take up this issue in subsequent sections. The sense in which God has nothing to say has to do with the fact that because perfect happiness is intrinsically good, it does not derive its goodness from anything else, where ‘anything else’ includes anything God might command or say about the matter. Perfect

9. See West and West (1998, p. 52; 10a), where Socrates asks Euthyphro “Is the pious loved by the gods because it is pious, or is it pious because it is loved?”

happiness just is good and it does not take the command or word of anyone, including God, to make it so.

If it is the case that perfect happiness is intrinsically good and that God creates human persons for the purpose that they experience this happiness, then another objection sometimes raised against theism can be answered. According to Kurt Baier, there are two senses of the word “purpose”:

In the first and basic sense, purpose is normally attributed only to persons or their behaviour as in ‘Did you have a purpose in leaving the ignition on?’ In the second sense, purpose is normally attributed only to things, as in ‘What is the purpose of that gadget you installed in the workshop?’ The two uses are intimately connected. We cannot attribute a purpose to a thing without implying that someone did something, in the doing of which he had some purpose, namely to bring about the thing with that purpose. Of course, *his* purpose is not identical with *its* purpose. In hiring labourers and engineers and buying materials and a site for a factory and the like, the entrepreneur’s purpose, let us say, is to manufacture cars, but the purpose of the cars is to serve as a means of transportation. . . . To attribute to a human being a purpose in [the second] sense is not neutral, let alone complimentary: it is offensive. It is degrading for a man to be regarded as merely serving a purpose. If, at a garden party, I ask a man in livery, ‘What is your purpose?’ I am insulting him. I might as well have asked, ‘What are you *for*?’ Such questions reduce him to the level of a gadget, a domestic animal, or perhaps a slave. I imply that *we* allot to *him* the tasks, the goals, the aims which he is to pursue; that *his* wishes and desires and aspirations and purposes are to count for little or nothing. We are treating him, in Kant’s phrase, merely as a means to our ends, not as an end in himself. (Baier 2000, pp. 11–120; emphases in the original)

The two senses of purpose to which Baier calls our attention are real and important. Some of the conclusions he draws from the distinction between these two senses, however, are highly questionable. For example, it is not necessarily offensive or degrading to regard a man as merely serving a purpose. Whether or not it is offensive to regard a person as serving a purpose depends upon what the purpose is. If that purpose is the experience of perfect happiness, then its bestowal is not degrading but ennobling. Moreover, why cannot it be the case, contrary to what Baier claims, that an individual’s purpose in acting, the goal at which he aims in acting, is identical with God’s purpose for him? The two purposes can be the same when a person’s wishes and desires and aspirations are the same as God’s wishes and desires and aspirations for him. Lewis had no problem understanding this point: “God not only understands but *shares* . . . the desire for complete and ecstatic happiness. He made me for no other purpose than to enjoy it” (Lewis 2004, p. 123; emphasis in the original).

In addition to his objection stemming from the two senses of “purpose,” Baier raises two other concerns that intersect with the understanding of life’s purpose that I am defending. The first problem “is to find a purpose grand and noble enough to explain and justify the great amount of undeserved suffering in this world” (Baier 2000, p. 122). Now if the experience of perfect happiness is the great good that it is and the greatest good possible for an individual, it would seem that if any good is good enough to justify the great amount of undeserved suffering of this world, then it is this good. Whether or not a theodicy that makes use of this greatest possible good is defensible will be the subject matter of the subsequent sections of this chapter.

The second difficulty raised by Baier presupposes that perfect happiness is an individual’s greatest good. The trouble as Baier sees it is that this good is too good:

The Christian evaluation of earthly lives is misguided because it adopts a quite unjustifiably high standard. Christianity singles out the major shortcomings of our earthly existence: there is not enough happiness; there is too much suffering; the good and bad points are quite unequally and unfairly distributed; the underprivileged and underendowed do not get adequate compensation; it lasts only a short time. It then quite accurately depicts the perfect or ideal life as that which does not have any of these shortcomings. Its next step is to promise the believer that he will be able to enjoy this perfect life later on. And then he adopts as its standard of judgment the perfect life, dismissing as inadequate anything that falls short of it. . . .

This procedure is as illegitimate as if I were to refuse to call anything tall unless it is infinitely tall, or anything beautiful unless it is perfectly flawless, or anyone strong unless he is omnipotent. Even if it were true that there is available to us an after-life which is flawless and perfect, it would still not be legitimate to judge earthly lives by this standard. (Baier 2000, p. 127)

In response to Baier, it is important to point out that in “adopting” the experience of perfect happiness as the purpose of life one is not making a choice of any kind, let alone an arbitrary choice (one made for no purpose or reason whatsoever). One is simply recognizing perfect happiness for what it is, namely, a great intrinsic good. And as I have already pointed out in reference to Euthyphro’s dilemma, the goodness of perfect happiness is not a matter of what anyone commands, says, or chooses.

As to whether perfect happiness is a legitimate standard for judging the goodness of this life, it seems that Baier is trying to have it both ways. On the one hand, he seems to assume this standard himself when he raises the problem of evil and claims that there is no purpose that is good enough to justify God’s permitting the amount of evil that is present in this world. Presumably, Baier believes that had our Earthly existence been thoroughly pleasurable and free of pain and suffering (perfectly happy), then there would not have been a problem of evil. That quality of existence would have been good enough to preclude any such problem. And it remains to be seen in following sections whether it is also good enough to answer the problem of evil that we actually face. On the other hand, when someone else makes use of this standard to judge the quality of our Earthly lives, Baier asserts that that person is guilty of setting the bar too high. If Baier is right, one is damned if one does and damned if one does not use the standard of perfect happiness. In the end, the facts of the matter are as follows: no one makes a choice about whether or not perfect happiness is good. It just is good and is intrinsically so. Moreover, it is the experience of the goodness of happiness in this life, imperfect as it may be because of the existence of evil, which makes us yearn for that which is perfect.

Perfect happiness, then, is just that: perfect. It excludes all experiences of what is intrinsically evil and includes only experiences of what is intrinsically good. I have, however, also claimed that perfect happiness includes another aspect, which is that it is unending. The consideration which leads to the inclusion of this aspect of perfect happiness is twofold in nature.

First, because perfect happiness is intrinsically good, one cannot help but desire its continuation. In other words, the idea of desiring a temporally finite complete happiness or an unending but incomplete happiness is conceptually suspect, if not incoherent. Because desire is conceptually ultimately aimed at the experience of what is intrinsically good and the avoidance of the experience of that which is intrinsically evil for their own sakes, no sane person can desire the cessation of perfect happiness or prefer the experience of an

imperfect happiness over that which is perfect, given the availability of the latter. As Thomas Talbott has written, “[i]t is simply not possible . . . not to desire supreme happiness for its own sake” (Talbott 2001, p. 423). Walls adds the following thoughts in support of this point:

Nothing short of [endless joy and satisfaction] will suffice to give us what we most deeply crave. The fact that we seek happiness is axiomatic. . . . Clearly, if some partial experience of happiness is desirable, perfect happiness is even more so. Either we have such happiness, or we do not. If we do not, then it is something we want, and if we never get it, our lives will end in some degree of frustration. On the other hand, if we have it, we would not want it to end. If it did end, then again, our lives would end in frustration. The only alternative to a frustrating end to our lives is perfect happiness, happiness without end. (Walls 2002, p. 195)

A comment by the atheist Kai Nielsen provides additional confirmation of the present point: “As I am now in possession of the normal powers of life, with things I want to do and experience, with pleasure in life and with people I very much care for and who care for me, I certainly do not want to die. I should very much like, in such a state, to go on living forever” (Nielsen 2000, p. 154).

The second reason for believing that perfect happiness is unending presupposes the first point about the kind of happiness that we desire and assumes that God is omnibenevolent. Given God’s omnibenevolence, He cannot help but wish for us our greatest good, which is perfect happiness. Talbott puts the point quite succinctly: “If God is supremely loving, then He wills for us exactly what, at the most fundamental level, we want for ourselves; He wills that we should experience supreme happiness. . . .” (Talbott 2001, p. 421).

While a perfect happiness that does not end is what we desire, some have questioned whether what we desire is intelligible. One of the most well-known challenges is that of Bernard Williams in his essay “The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality” (Williams 1973). In summarizing and discussing Williams’s essay, I draw heavily from John Martin Fischer’s paper “Why Immortality Is Not So Bad” (Fischer 1994).

Williams sets forth two necessary conditions of immortality: (1) that the future person must be numerically identical with the individual concerned, and (2) that the future life of that individual must be attractive to him in the sense that his future goals and projects and values and interests must be suitably related to his present goals and projects and values and interests. If they are not suitably related, then there is a risk that he will now (in the present) find it difficult to regard them as sufficiently interesting to support a present desire that he have them as his own in the future.

Given that I am assuming that souls exist and are capable of persisting self-identical from this life into the next, condition (1) is fulfilled. What about condition (2)? Can it be fulfilled? Williams thinks not. With regard to (2), Williams poses a dilemma: either an individual’s fundamental desires, interests, purposes, and projects (his character) remain the same over time, or they do not. If they do remain the same, then given that their number is finite they will eventually be satisfied or fulfilled and boredom will ensue. If they do not remain the same (they change too much), then Williams suggests that the individual’s future desires, interests, purposes, and projects will not be similar enough to his present psychological makeup and the projects it supports to make him now desire to survive to be the subject of what is so different. The person will simply prefer to go out of existence.

What about the first alternative? As Fischer points out, there is a distinction between self-exhausting and repeatable pleasures. A self-exhausting pleasure is one associated with an activity, the performance of which terminates any further need to do it again. An example Fischer provides is of an activity that you desire to do just once to prove to yourself that you can do it:

Imagine . . . that you are somewhat afraid of heights, and you have been working hard to overcome this phobia. You form the goal of climbing Mt Whitney just to show yourself that you have overcome the fear – just to show yourself that you can control your life and overcome obstacles. Upon climbing the mountain, you may in fact be very pleased and proud. Indeed, you may be deeply satisfied. But also you may have absolutely no desire to climb Mt Whitney (or any other mountain) again. You have accomplished your goal, but there is no impetus toward repeating the relevant activity or the pleasure that issues from it. (Fischer 1994, pp. 262–3)

Although Fischer does not mention the following point in response to Williams, it does seem coherent to suppose that even if there were no other kind of pleasure than that which is self-exhausting, the intelligibility of the idea of perfect happiness would still not be undermined. What would be required for perfect happiness would be a potentially infinite number of unrepeatable activities, each of which provided its subject with pleasure. And given that there is nothing incoherent in this concept, it would be possible for a person to be perfectly happy for eternity by means of the performance of an unending series of unrepeatable activities with their accompanying self-exhausting pleasures.

But as Fischer notes, there is another kind of pleasure. There are repeatable pleasures:

Here an individual may well find the pleasure highly fulfilling and completely satisfying at the moment and yet wish to have more (i.e., to *repeat* the pleasure) at some point in the future (not necessarily immediately). Certain salient sensual pleasures leap immediately to mind: the pleasures of sex, of eating fine meals and drinking fine wines, of listening to beautiful music, of seeing great art, and so forth. . . . Given the appropriate distribution of such pleasures, it seems that an endless life that included some (but perhaps not only) repeatable pleasures would *not* necessarily be boring or unattractive. (Fischer 1994, pp. 263–4; emphases in the original)

As Fischer goes on to point out, religious persons (and who is more likely to believe in perfect happiness than a religious person?) can experience not only repeatable pleasures of the sort just mentioned but also repeatable pleasures that come with the repeatable activities of worship of and thanks to God. Thanking God for the repeatable pleasures that He has granted is itself a source of additional pleasure.

Consider, now, the second alternative, which is that an individual's future goals and projects and values and interests must be suitably related to his present goals and projects and values and interests in life so that the former will now (in the present) be attractive to him. If they are not presently attractive, then he will now fail to find them sufficiently interesting to desire to have them as his own in the future. Without such an interest, non-existence will seem preferable to immortality. In response to this horn of the dilemma, Fischer writes that:

it seems that an individual could value such an [unending] existence if he or she felt that the change in character would result from *certain sorts of sequences*. . . . Surely in our ordinary,

finite lives we envisage certain changes in our values and preferences over time. For example, one may currently value excitement and challenge; thus, one might wish to live in an urban area with many career and avocational opportunities (but with lousy weather and a high crime rate). Still, one might envisage a time in the future when one will be older and will prefer warm weather, serenity and security. . . . Thus, there are quite ordinary cases in our finite lives in which we envisage changes in our characters – our values and preferences – and which are not so unattractive as to render death preferable. Why, then, could not the same be true of immortal existence? (Fischer 1994, pp. 267–8; emphasis in the original)

While what Fischer says is surely correct, I think it is important to note that Christians (and, I would assume, Jews and Islamists) actually expect a significant change in character in the afterlife that will not render unending existence unattractive. Indeed, if such a change did not occur something would be amiss. What Christians expect is not only that they will experience perfect happiness, which is in and of itself sufficiently attractive now to make immortality desirable, but that they will also experience this happiness without their present sinful nature and its vices. Indeed, it is the absence of sin and vice that will, in part, make perfect happiness possible.

Williams, then, provides no convincing reason to think that the idea of perfect happiness is unintelligible. Indeed, rather than change threatening the intelligibility of the idea of perfect happiness, the experience of that happiness is linked to a significant change in moral character. At this point, the relevance of libertarian free will to the problem of evil begins to emerge because the significant change in moral character that is a prerequisite for the experience of complete happiness comes about because of a choice. What kind of choice is it that implies such a profound change in a person's future character, values, and interests?

Christians describe the relevant choice as the mental act of repentance. Repentance involves a renunciation of an old way of life of unrestrained pursuit of what is good and an embracing of a new way of life of restraint in pursuit of what is good. Such a choice is an instance of the kind of choice that Robert Kane has termed a "self-forming willing" (Kane 1996, pp. 124–5) and that I will term a "self-forming choice" or SFC. In light of the concept of repentance and a renunciation of a former way of life with its character traits, I think a reasonable case can be developed for the view that an agent's most broadly influential SFC ultimately has a bearing on *when* he will maximize his happiness and the kind of life plan he will adopt in pursuit of that happiness. Moreover, because happiness is intrinsically *good*, I will term this most wide-ranging SFC a *good-seeking* SFC. To illustrate what I have in mind here, consider the case of St Augustine, who lived at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth centuries. The following quote from Flanagan about Augustine's life nicely illustrates by example what I have in mind with the idea of a good-seeking SFC:

St. Augustine was the ultimate party animal until his early thirties, at which point he changed his ways and became an exemplary moral person, a great philosopher, a bishop, and eventually a saint. We might say that Augustine was ruled by his passions until he saw the light in his early thirties. But according to the [libertarian] picture, we would not mean that he *couldn't* control himself. We would mean that he chose not to control himself or chose to control himself badly. (Flanagan 2002, p. 58; emphasis in the original)

What Flanagan is suggesting about Augustine's life is something like the following. At a certain point in his life, Augustine made a good-seeking SFC that entailed he would *not*

restrain himself from pursuing certain means to maximizing his immediate or short-term happiness. Then some years later, he made a different good-seeking SFC that implied he would restrain his pursuit of goods that promoted his short-term happiness, where exercising this restraint involved his avoiding the performance of certain kinds of actions. Augustine's own account of this latter good-seeking SFC supports Flanagan's description of it. While Augustine says he was converted to God, in whom he believed he would find long-term, perfect happiness, it is clear from his summary of the events leading up to that conversion that he understood that this good-seeking SFC entailed that he would no longer seek to satisfy certain desires for goods that would promote his short-term happiness.

But now . . . as I heard how [two men] had made the choice that was to save them by giving themselves up entirely to your care, the more bitterly I hated myself in comparison with them. . . . [N]o more was required than an act of will. But it must be a resolute and whole-hearted act of the will. . . . I was held back by mere trifles, the most paltry inanities, all my old attachments. They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, 'Are you going to dismiss us? From this moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever. From this moment you will never again be allowed to do this thing or that, for evermore.' (Augustine 1961, VIII, 7, 8, 11)

It is plausible, then, to understand Augustine's conversion as a good-seeking SFC, in which he chose a life plan that he believed would maximize his later experience of happiness (this belief, which is implicit in Augustine's comment that the choice of the two men would save them, will be made explicit a few paragraphs hence), where that choice entailed a commitment on his part to restrain himself from pursuing his short-term happiness in certain ways. Although Augustine's good-seeking SFC involved a conversion to Christianity, there is nothing essentially Christian about the idea of a good-seeking SFC that requires restrained pursuit by an agent of his short-term happiness for the sake of that which lies in the future. This is because *any* individual, as or *qua* human being, has a desire for his short-term happiness. Given his desire for his happiness in the short term, he has a reason to act for the sake of (to promote) his own immediate well-being. If, however, such an individual also believes that other persons exist who have a similar desire for their own short-term happiness, then in certain circumstances he will believe that were he to act in certain ways he would undermine their opportunity to satisfy their desire for their own short-term well-being, an opportunity to which they have as much right as he has to his own. As a result of what he believes about the potential impact of his actions on the immediate well-being of others, he comes to have beliefs about the moral impermissibility of performing certain kinds of actions. The upshot of this line of reasoning is that a person, as or *qua* human being, comes to possess beliefs about morally permissible and impermissible ways of pursuing what he believes is good and will promote his short-term happiness, where he views the former ways of pursuing what is good as *just* and the latter ways as *unjust*.

Given these ideas about just and unjust ways of pursuing what is good, a person forms ideas about two corresponding life plans, one which consists of ongoing restraint in pursuit of what conduces to his short-term happiness and the other which does not. A good-seeking choice of the former kind of life plan, which is the kind that Augustine made in his early 30s, is what I will call a just-good-seeking SFC, while a good-seeking choice of the latter way of life is what I will term an unjust-good-seeking SFC. In simplest terms, a

just-good-seeking SFC is a choice (a) to live a life of restraint in pursuit of what is good, where this restraint includes avoiding as best as one can situations in which one believes one will be tempted to pursue what one believes is a morally wrong way of obtaining what is good; (b) to give thanks to God for the good that one experiences, assuming one has a belief that one is created by God; (c) to ask for forgiveness from those whom one wrongs when one chooses to pursue what one believes is a morally wrong way of obtaining what is good; and (d) to forgive others who ask for forgiveness when they freely wrong one in their pursuit of what is good. An unjust-good-seeking SFC is for all intents and purposes one which entails the denial of each of (a)–(d).

Before proceeding, it is important to answer one objection. It might be protested at this juncture that what a person believes about permissible and impermissible ways of pursuing what he takes to be good could be erroneous. In other words, what a person subjectively regards as just and unjust might not be objectively so. Hence, it is possible for a person to choose a life plan that he believes (subjectively) is just when in reality (objectively) it is (in whole or in part) unjust, and for a person to choose a life plan that he thinks (subjectively) is unjust when in reality (objectively) it is (in whole or in part) just.

While the distinction referred to in this objection is a real one, it is not relevant to the issue at hand. What is important is the fact that a person makes a just- or an unjust-good-seeking SFC in light of his beliefs about what is just and unjust, regardless of whether those beliefs are true or false, and he understands that he is obligated to make a just-good-seeking SFC in light of those beliefs by virtue of what is appropriately called his conscience, where his conscience is best thought of as an inner voice or judge that pronounces a verdict of innocence or guilt upon him depending on whether he makes a just- or an unjust-good-seeking SFC. St Paul frequently appealed to this notion of conscience, as in the following comments in his letter to the Romans: “When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them. . . .” (Romans 2:14–5). Kant, too, recognized the importance of conscience:

[T]he accusation of conscience cannot be . . . readily dismissed, neither should it be; it is not a matter of the will. . . . Conscience is an instinct to judge with legal authority according to moral laws; it pronounces a judicial verdict, and, like a judge who can only punish or acquit but cannot reward, so also our conscience either acquits or declares us guilty and deserving of punishment. (Kant 1963, p. 131)

And as Austin Farrer noted, “Conscience claims absolute authority, if you are to have it at all; you can’t tell conscience not to speak out of turn” (Farrer 1973, p. 78).

By way of summary, then, a person desires the happiness that by nature constitutes his well-being and is his ultimate end. Given this human nature, he must make a good-seeking SFC that is concerned with *how* and *when* he will maximize the happiness he cannot help but desire to experience. A just-good-seeking SFC will delay through restraint maximizing satisfaction of his desire for happiness, where this maximization is perfect happiness, until the next life. An unjust-good-seeking SFC will seek to maximize satisfaction of his desire for happiness in the short term, even at the expense of undermining the short-term happiness of others and, as I will argue in the section “Adams and Horrendous Evil,” his own experience of perfect happiness in the future.

As a way of closing this section and transitioning to the development of my theodicy in the following section, I consider an objection of Marilyn Adams which, if sound, would undermine that theodicy. The theodicy that I will develop in the next section will make use of the idea of complete or perfect happiness that I have developed in this section. This idea includes the value claim that perfect happiness is intrinsically good. Adams believes, however, that once one starts to theorize about possible justifications for God's allowance of evil:

the hope of universal agreement in value theory is shattered. . . . Insofar as the highest human happiness is usually conceived of as involving some relation to the best good(s), . . . different ontologies will produce different accounts of the human good. . . . Secular value theories can offer only packages of immanent goods; some religious theories posit an infinite transcendent good and invite relationship to it; while mainstream Christianity believes the infinite good to be personal and locates the happiness of finite persons in loving personal intimacy with the divine persons. (Adams 1999, pp. 11–2)

While it is true that there are differences among theories about where and how the experience of happiness is to be found – what the source of this good is (e.g. philosophizing, worshipping God, playing the horses, engaging in sexual escapades) – it is doubtful that the concept of happiness itself as an experience that is intrinsically good varies significantly in its essentials (e.g. it includes the absence of pain and the experience of pleasure) from theory to theory. In her own writings about the problem of evil, Adams assumes that all individuals recognize the evilness of pain, and she explicitly insists that the concept of horrendous evil (evil, the participation in which provides *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life is a great good to him on the whole such that it would be worth living) is an objective or religion-neutral value (Adams 1999, p. 27). If evil is objective and neutral in this way, however, then why think that good is any less so? Mackie, in setting forth his argument against the existence of God, had no trouble in seeing that pleasure and happiness are what contrast with pain and misery (Mackie 1990, p. 31), and I will follow Mackie and assume that pleasure and happiness, like pain and misery, are objective or religion-neutral values. Because they are religion-neutral, the concept of perfect happiness is values objective or value neutral.

In conclusion, I will henceforth assume that experiences of pleasure and pain are, respectively, intrinsically good and evil. I will also assume that a necessary condition of there being a problem of evil is that individuals who experience pain *be aware of themselves* as experiencing that pain. It is in virtue of this self-awareness that they can have higher-order mental attitudes (e.g. thought, belief, fear) about themselves as the subjects of experiences of pain. Furthermore, I will assume that it is in virtue of this self-awareness that it is possible for experiences of pain to be unjustified. For subjects of pain who lack such self-awareness, it is not possible for experiences of pain to be unjustified. The matter of self-awareness will be of utmost importance when I discuss the suffering of beasts (animal pain) in the last section.

Developing a Theodicy

Although I will have a few more comments to make about the concept of complete happiness in this section, what I have said about it in the previous sections will suffice for the purpose of constructing a theodicy in this section. By way of brief summary, at a minimum, the concept of perfect happiness involves the idea of a person existing forever or eternally

in a state of beatitude or bliss which, at the least, involves the absence of all pain and the experience of pleasure. Such a state is an intrinsic good that satisfies or fulfills a person's most basic desire and is *his* greatest possible good.

Given the nature of perfect happiness, it is the case that it decisively *outweighs* or *overbalances* any moral evil that a person experiences in this life. If we think of an individual's experiencing perfect happiness because he makes a just-good-seeking SFC as the intrinsic good of his retributively *justly* experiencing complete happiness, then the central idea of this section is that a justification for God's permitting a person to experience moral evil is that that person justly experience perfect happiness. Because the just experience of complete happiness is conditional in nature – a person will justly experience complete happiness, *if* he chooses rightly – I will sometimes say that a justification for God's permission of moral evil is the possibility of a person's experiencing perfect happiness.

It is important to underscore at this juncture that while throughout this section I will often talk about God's purpose of granting to *persons* the just experience of perfect happiness, this purpose is a good for each person as an *individual*. Thus, if one thinks of the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness as a good that justifies God's permission of moral evil (which is the kind of evil that will occupy my attention in this section), what justifies God's permitting a particular person *P* to experience moral evil is God's purpose (good) for *P*, which is that *P* experienced perfect happiness.

Why think that the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness is a justifying good for permitting a person to experience moral evil? The following remark by William Rowe provides the rationale for such a belief:

[I]t is reasonable to believe that the goods for the sake of which [God] permits much intense human suffering are goods that either are or include good experiences of the humans that endure the suffering. I say this because we normally would not regard someone as morally justified in permitting intense, involuntary suffering on the part of another, if that other were not to figure significantly in the good for which that suffering was necessary. We have reason to believe, then, that the goods for the sake of which much human suffering is permitted will include conscious experiences of these humans, conscious experiences that are themselves good. . . . So if such goods do occur we are likely to know them. (Rowe 1986, p. 244)

As I have already pointed out, perfect happiness is a person's greatest possible good because it consists of his endlessly experiencing nothing except what is intrinsically good. In light of the eminently reasonable nature of Rowe's remarks, it is plausible to think that if the possibility of experiencing complete happiness were not at least part of God's justification for permitting moral evil, something would be amiss. In support of this position, suppose the following scenario *S* obtains: I am a defender who can provide a possible justification (such as either the goodness of libertarian free will itself or the preponderance of morally good over bad actions that it makes possible) that God has for allowing moral evils to be experienced by human beings (persons) with libertarian free will. For all I know, however, there might be some other possible justification of these moral evils. I am now told that all of these possible justifications are compatible with the truth that no persons with libertarian freedom will experience complete happiness,¹⁰ regardless of the kinds of choices they make in this life, even a just-good-seeking SFC.

10. Strictly speaking, the existence of only one such person is sufficient for my argument, but for the sake of simplicity of presentation, I will assume that no person experiences complete happiness.

Unlike a scenario in which a free will defender such as Plantinga can concede the possibility of God's having, for all he can see, a justification other than libertarian freedom for allowing moral evils, I believe that a defender who is reasonable must maintain it is impossible both that God has a justification for permitting the moral evils that human beings with libertarian free will experience and that none of these persons will experience perfect happiness, regardless of how he has chosen. It is reasonable to think that a defender must deny this possibility because of a belief of his that God's permitting moral evils would be unjustified in such a scenario. And this belief can itself plausibly be thought to be grounded in a defender's knowledge that God's actual justification for creating persons with libertarian free will and allowing them to experience moral evil includes¹¹ the possibility of their experiencing complete happiness.¹² In short, a defender knows that the possibility of experiencing complete happiness is included in God's justification for permitting moral evils because, like anyone else, he knows that experiencing perfect happiness is a person's greatest good that outweighs any moral evil he might experience. Thus, it seems that a defender must move to being a theodicy, if he is to maintain the impossibility of scenario S.

In the spirit of Plantinga's response to Walls's attempt to move him (Plantinga) from defense to theodicy (see the third section), a defender might say in response to my argument that while he fails to see how S is possible (maybe it is, although he does not see how it is), he does not see that it is impossible. At this point, I can only say that I believe that a *reasonable* defender will maintain that he sees that S is not possible. This is because a reasonable defender believes that God is concerned with bringing about a person's greatest possible good and S describes a situation in which that good is not realized.

Or consider the following suggestion: in an effort to avoid the extreme position of claiming to know nothing about God's justification for allowing moral evils while at the same time avoiding the theodicy I am suggesting, a defender might claim to know something about what God's justifying reasons are not. For example, a defender might confidently state that God's reason for allowing a horrific act of rape is not so that the rapist could experience pleasure from his act. Beyond knowing what some of God's justifying reasons are not, however, a defender is ignorant about what God's justification for permitting moral evils is.¹³

Is this *via negativa* theodicy plausible? Can a defender know what some of God's justifying reasons for permitting moral evils are not without knowing what any of them are? I believe that such a position is suspect. To see why, consider a version of scenario

11. I say "includes" and not "is" at this point because my argument so far leaves open the possibility that there are other reasons God has for permitting created persons to experience moral evil. Later in this section, I provide an argument that suggests that the purpose of giving to persons the just experience of complete happiness is God's only justification for allowing them to experience moral evil.

12. There is evidence that Walls is sympathetic with the idea that it is the purpose of granting to persons the just experience of complete happiness that justifies God's allowing persons to experience moral evil. In addressing the issue of hell, he states that "[i]t is because the good [the extraordinary opportunity to live before God in conscious relationship to him] is so wonderful that something as objectively terrible as hell is possible" (Walls 1992a, p. 137). Because the problem of hell is just a logical extension of the problem of evil, if the good of a possible conscious relationship with God (i.e. complete happiness) justifies God's permission of hell, it justifies His allowing human beings to experience moral evil in this life.

13. Michael Bergmann suggested this possible response to me on behalf of a defender.

S: a defender knows what some of God's justifying reasons for allowing moral evils are not and also that any justifying reason He has is compatible with created persons, for reasons that have nothing to do with how they choose, either (1) spending an eternity in hell (for the sake of argument, I assume that hell is a form of existence in which there are significant experiences of pain), (2) spending a finite period of time in hell after which they are annihilated, or (3) being annihilated at death (no afterlife of any kind). On the one hand, if a defender maintains that any justification God has for permitting moral evils is compatible with one or more of these alternatives, then he is a defender, but not a reasonable one. On the other hand, if he maintains that God's justification for allowing moral evils is not compatible with any of these alternatives, then it is plausible to think that this is because he knows that God's justifying reason for permitting moral evils includes the possibility of persons experiencing perfect happiness.

At this juncture, a defender might claim that while it is true that God cannot justifiably permit moral evils under any scenario such as (1), (2), or (3), it does not follow that he knows that God's justification for allowing moral evils is what I have proposed. Consider two versions of such a claim.

First, a defender might claim not to know that God's granting to persons the just experience of complete happiness is the justification for permitting moral evils because it is not clear that the greatest possible good for a person is the experience of complete happiness. After all, it might be the case that the experience by a person of complete happiness is not possible. For example, William Hasker has suggested to me that the experience of complete happiness might not be possible if created persons have a finite capacity for absorbing new experiences such that after a few thousand or million years, the further existence of those persons becomes pointless.

For the reasons that I mentioned in the previous section when discussing Williams's "The Makropulos Case: Reflections on the Tedium of Immortality" (Williams 1973), it seems to me (and, as I will point out in a moment, to several prominent defenders) that the experience of perfect happiness is possible. Even if I am wrong about this, however, it is still plausible to maintain that a defender must become a theodist. This is because the essence of my argument is as follows: In order not to move from a defense to a theodicy, a defender must refuse to acknowledge the impossibility of a scenario in which there is a possible justification for permitting moral evils and it is the case that no persons with libertarian freedom will experience the greatest possible happiness for them regardless of what kinds of choices they make in this life. In other words, even if the greatest possible happiness for an individual cannot (for some reason) be perfect happiness, then whatever that greatest possible happiness is, a defender can avoid becoming a theodist only by refusing to acknowledge the impossibility of a scenario S specified in terms of that happiness. I believe this shows that a defender knows that God's justification for permitting moral evils includes the possibility of persons experiencing their greatest possible happiness.

Second,¹⁴ a defender might claim that even if the experience of eternal, complete happiness is the greatest possible happiness for a person, it is not clear that God must grant it

14. Michael Bergmann suggested the following argument to me on behalf of a defender.

to created persons who choose rightly by making a just-good-seeking SFC. Perhaps God only need be committed to the purpose of granting to a person who chooses rightly a degree of happiness in the afterlife that makes his life such that on balance it is a good thing. Although it is true that the possibility of justly experiencing perfect happiness is a possible justification for God's permission of moral evils in this life, perhaps the possibility of justly experiencing either a temporally finite complete happiness in the afterlife (where the good experienced in it outweighs the evil experienced in this life) or a temporally unlimited incomplete happiness with a modicum of pain¹⁵ might also be God's justification for allowing moral evils. Thus, because we do not know that the possibility of experiencing eternal, complete happiness is included in God's actual justification, a defender need not become a theodocist.

I believe that this argument, like the first, is inadequate, and for a similar reason. A defender who makes this argument must at least know that the possibility of experiencing a certain degree of happiness is included in God's justification for permitting persons to experience moral evils. To this extent, he is a theodocist. There is, however, a reason for thinking that a defender knows that the possibility of experiencing eternal, perfect happiness is included in God's justification for permitting moral evils. This reason is that eternal, complete happiness is what persons actually desire and they desire this because (as I argued in the previous section) a desire for a temporally finite complete happiness or a temporally infinite but incomplete happiness is conceptually suspect, if not incoherent. If one finds the idea of an experience of happiness desirable, then one cannot fail to desire its eternality and completeness. One must desire that it be unending and complete. Given that it is only the desire for eternal, complete happiness that makes sense and this kind of happiness is possible, then provided a defender believes that God is omnibenevolent (completely morally good) and will fulfill our deepest desire (which He gave us) if we choose rightly, it is reasonable to think that he knows that it is the just experience of this kind of happiness that is God's justification for allowing moral evils.

Up until now, I have spoken about what reasonable defenders would say regarding the idea of perfect happiness. It is now appropriate to examine what some of them actually say about it. Consider what Plantinga says that relates to the issue of complete happiness. In response to the evidential argument from evil, he writes "I also believe in eternal life. The precise contours of this are certainly obscure, but it includes an eternity of bliss for

15. Thomas Flint has suggested to me that some persons might well question whether the absence of all pain is possible or desirable for a creature that has sinned. Even in heaven, should not such a creature have some memory of having freely done moral evil? And should not that memory continue to cause it at least some discomfort? Such a memory does not seem to be incompatible with genuine complete happiness, but it is on my account. Would it not be enough for my theodicy to say that complete happiness would involve the kind of bliss that would make pain, if present at all, seem very mild in comparison?

My claim that complete happiness involves the absence of all pain is rooted in the fact that this conception of happiness seems to me to describe the purpose for which I was created. It is without question the kind of existence that I ultimately desire. Even if complete happiness includes memories of having freely done moral evil, it seems to me that they need not cause discomfort (compare how time affects the impact of our memories on us in this life) and that they should not (God's forgiveness requires no suffering by us for our moral wrongs). If readers do not share my point of view about the nature of complete happiness, then they can, as Flint suggests, think of this happiness as a kind of bliss that makes pain, to the extent that it is experienced, mild in comparison.

enormous numbers of God's creatures" (Plantinga 1996b, p. 257).¹⁶ Plantinga writes as a Christian theist, but it is reasonable to maintain that the points he makes relating to complete happiness are part of theism *per se* and not just of Christian theism. This is because the idea of an omniscient, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent being who created persons with the desire to experience complete happiness is at the heart of any reasonable theism, and such a being has the knowledge, moral goodness and power to ensure the satisfaction of that desire (provided that the necessary conditions of its satisfaction are met). Now suppose that Plantinga is told by a fellow defender that it is true that his suggested free will defense is thoroughly reasonable, and that it is possible that libertarian free will (or something else) is God's justification for allowing moral evils and that no persons who have this freedom will experience complete happiness regardless of how they choose. I think Plantinga would respond that his fellow defender is surely mistaken.¹⁷ Provided that he would answer in this way, I believe this indicates that he must become a theodist who believes that God's justification for allowing the moral evils that human beings experience includes the possibility of their experiencing complete happiness.

William Alston is another defender who comments on the issue of perfect happiness. According to Alston, Christian theism maintains that:

one's life on earth is only a tiny proportion of one's total life span. . . . [W]hy suppose that we are entitled to judge that justifying goods, if any, would be realized during the sufferer's earthly life, unless we have specific reasons to the contrary? . . . Why is the burden of proof on the suggestion of the realization of the goods in an afterlife? (Alston 1996b, pp. 104, 123, endnote 17)

For present purposes, it is important that Alston believes that the goods of the afterlife include "experiencing complete felicity in the everlasting presence of God" (Alston 1996a, p. 324). According to him, the problem for formulating a theodicy is that these goods of the afterlife belong to the kinds of goods of which we have no experience and only a minimal grasp of their value. Thus, "we are in a bad position to determine whether the magnitude of [complete felicity in the everlasting presence of God] is such as to make it worthwhile for God to permit a certain evil in order to make its realization possible" (Alston 1996a, p. 324).

How would Alston respond to the possible scenario where moral evils experienced by human beings have a justification and it is the case that no person will experience complete happiness even if he makes the requisite just-good-seeking SFC? Given the belief that we

16. Although he believes in perfect happiness, Plantinga does not invoke it in his free will defense. Andrew Chignell notes that "[m]any versions of the Free Will approach are not concerned with the problem of God's goodness to *individuals*. . . . Plantinga is less worried about how all horrors can be defeated in an individual's life than with how the maximal state of affairs that includes these horrors may be the best that can be actualized" (Chignell 1998, p. 213; emphasis in the original). Charles Seymour points out that Plantinga does not mention the afterlife in giving the free will defense and that the silent implication is that libertarian free will is of such value that it outweighs all the evil in the world, even if there were no afterlife to look forward to (Seymour 1997, p. 259).

17. Cf. the following comment of Plantinga's: "[T]he Christian theist will no doubt concur with St. Paul: 'For I reckon that the sufferings we now endure bear no comparison with the splendor, as yet unrevealed, which is in store for us.' (Romans 8:18). . . . From a Christian point of view, there is immortality and the expectation of a better world. . . ." (Plantinga 1979, pp. 46–7; quoted in Adams 1999, pp. 23–4).

do not have an adequate grasp of the value of complete felicity in God's presence, it seems that he could not rule this out as a possible scenario. If Alston were to deny that it is a possible scenario, however, this would seem to indicate that he knows the value of complete happiness and that he is committed to the theodicy that maintains that God's actual justification for permitting persons to experience moral evils includes the possibility of their experiencing perfect happiness.

In response to my argument, a defender might argue that I have moved too fast. He might maintain that while it is true that any defender would deny that it is possible for God to have a justification for allowing moral evils and it be the case that no person will experience perfect happiness regardless of how he has chosen, it does not follow from this denial that a defender must become a theodicist who knows that God's actual justification for permitting moral evil includes the justification I have proposed. For example, a defender might claim that while the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness is a possible justification for God's permitting moral evil, it is also possible that it is no more than a necessary condition of any other possible justification God has for permitting moral evils. Indeed, Alston might advocate this view. As I noted two paragraphs back, Alston recognizes that experiencing complete happiness might be a good in virtue of which God is justified in permitting moral evils. Yet, he also claims that it might not be a justifying good. Even if it is not, there are other possible justifications (Alston 1996b, pp. 104–10). One other possible justification is the value of soul making: God allows moral evils as a means to the end of developing persons who exhibit moral virtues such as courage, patience, compassion, and so on. Another possible justification is the value of libertarian free will. Still other possible justifications might involve goods that are totally beyond our intellectual grasp. Even if one (or more) of these other possible justifications for allowing moral evils is God's actual justification, Alston seems to believe that a necessary condition of its being such must be that God justly provide persons the experience of complete happiness:

[A] perfectly good God would not wholly sacrifice the welfare of one of His intelligent creatures simply in order to achieve a good for others, or for Himself. This would be incompatible with His concern for the welfare of each of His creatures. Any plan that God would implement will include provision for each of us having a life that is, on balance, a good thing, and one in which the person reaches the point of being able to see that his life as a whole is a good for him. Or at least, where free creaturely responses have a significant bearing on the overall quality of the person's life, any possible divine plan will have to provide for each of us to have the chance (or perhaps many chances) for such an outcome, if our free responses are of the right sort. (Alston 1996b, p. 111)

Why maintain, like Alston, that the provision that each of us have the opportunity for a life that is, on balance, a good thing (and perfect happiness is such a good) must be a necessary condition of whatever is God's justification for permitting moral evils? The only plausible answer is because the possibility of such a life *is* a justification for permitting moral evils in so far as it makes available to a person a good that outweighs any of his experiences of moral evil. Stated slightly differently and more generally, my point is that it is implausible to think that perfect happiness is no more than a necessary condition of whatever it is that justifies God's permission of moral evil. This is because the reason for thinking that it must be a necessary condition of this justification is that it itself is a *good* for a created person. And the fact that it must be a good for a created person makes one

suspicious of the view that it is no more than a necessary condition of God's justification for permitting moral evil.

For purposes of simplicity and continuity, I will assume that what Alston calls "a life that is, on balance, a good thing" is one that ends in perfect happiness and that the possibility of perfect happiness is a justification God has for permitting moral evils. Is, however, the possibility of experiencing complete happiness not only *a* justification for permitting moral evils but also *the* justification? Because an agent might perform an action for more than one reason, I do not know of an argument that shows that the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness is more than just included in God's justification for permitting moral evils. If it is assumed, however, that this justification obtains and that none other does, it seems to be the case that God's permission of moral evils would be justified. For this reason, in what follows, I will assume that the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness is *the* justification for God's permitting moral evils.

Like Alston, Michael Bergmann is a defender who believes that "we have no good reason to oppose the suggestion that the goods we know of are representative of only a minor portion of the goods there are and that many (or even most) of the goods beyond our ken are far greater than and significantly different from any of the goods with which we are familiar" (Bergmann 2001, p. 284). He believes that this point applies to the goods of conscious experience. Thus, he defends the *prima facie* plausibility of the thesis that we have no good reason for thinking that the possible goods we know of that involve conscious human experience are representative of the possible goods that there are that involve conscious human experience. An implication of Bergmann's thesis is that a defender should not become a theodicyist who invokes the concept of complete happiness in his theodicy. He should remain a defender.

The development earlier in this section of a version of scenario S where a person, for reasons that have nothing to do with how he chooses, either (1) spends an eternity in hell, (2) spends a finite period of time in hell after which he is annihilated, or (3) is annihilated at death, can be used to make clear the implausibility of Bergmann's position. If a defender such as Bergmann affirms the impossibility of this version of S, it would seem to be because he believes that the evils of this world constitute or are representative of the evil that cannot be included in the final chapter of a person's existence irrespective of how he chooses. If Bergmann believes this, however, what reason might he have for thinking that we have no good reason for believing that complete happiness, which is a good of conscious experience and a person's greatest possible good, is included in God's justification for permitting moral evil? If the evils of this life are representative of what a person who makes a just-good-seeking SFC cannot experience in the last chapter of his existence, why not think that the happiness that we enjoy in this life is representative or a foretaste of the perfect happiness, that will be experienced in the afterlife by those who make just-good-seeking SFCs? Bergmann says "it may be that enjoyment of goods that are very different from those with which we are familiar would lead to conscious experiences that are very different from – and far more enjoyable than – those with which we are familiar" (Bergmann 2001, p. 285). In support of this claim, he asks us to consider someone who has experienced no greater pleasure than the temporary absence of pain:

Suppose that no one has ever told her of a more pleasant experience and that she cannot even imagine one. That person would be *mistaken* to conclude that the possible positive conscious experiences she is aware of are representative of the possible positive conscious experiences

there are. She would be *unreasonable* to draw such a conclusion for she has no good reason to endorse it. But the same point applies to us. (Bergmann 2001, p. 285; emphases in the original)

But does the very same point apply to us? As Bergmann notes, our actual conscious experience is more positive than the woman's (Bergmann 2001, p. 285). Although he does not explicitly say so, what Bergmann presumably means is that our experience includes experiences of pleasure, where experiencing pleasure is more than the mere absence of pain. Now it is no doubt the case that there are sources of pleasure beyond those known to us. The point that is relevant, however, is that those additional sources are sources of experiences of *pleasure* the concept of which is *not* beyond our ken. Moreover, the experience of complete happiness surely is, in Bergmann's words, "more enjoyable" than the happiness available in this life insofar as it contains no experiences of pain and is more pleasurable. The concept of enjoyment, however, like that of pleasure, is *not* beyond our ken. It seems, then, that all Bergmann does in trying to justify the idea that there may be goods of conscious experience beyond our ken is appeal to the idea of more enjoyable/pleasant experiences than those we experience in this life. This idea itself, however, seems to be nothing other than the idea of perfect happiness for an individual person.

Nevertheless, for the sake of discussion, let us assume that Bergmann is correct: we have no good reason to oppose the idea that there is a good of conscious experience that is greater than the experience of pleasure. Call this good of conscious experience "pleasure+." One can now think of the concept of perfect happiness as that of a person's greatest possible good that includes experiences of either pleasure or pleasure+. My point is this: given our knowledge about perfect happiness, when presented with scenario S, a defender can avoid moving from a defense to the theodicy I have set forth only by unreasonably refusing to acknowledge that S is impossible.

If the possibility of experiencing complete happiness is God's justification for permitting moral evils, what is the nature of the relationship between this justification and the experience of moral evils (pain resulting from morally wrong choices)? It is important to point out that one thing it is not is a *means–end* relationship. In other words, the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness is not a purpose or end to which the experience of moral evils is *intended* by God as a means. What this entails with respect to God's creative action is that the experience of moral evils by persons with libertarian free will is at most *foreseen* and permitted by God, but not intended.

To make clear the distinction between intending an end and merely foreseeing its occurrence, consider the following two stories about bombers. First, there is Terror Bomber. He is trying to ascertain the best way to achieve military victory over Enemy. After considering various alternatives, he concludes that the best way to defeat Enemy is to terrorize Enemy's population by bombing a school that is filled with children. Terror Bomber has some moral scruples about killing innocents but chooses to bomb the school anyway. He believes that by doing so he will promote victory. In virtue of making this choice, Terror Bomber intends to bomb the school and kill children in order to promote victory. His reason for so choosing and intending is that he promote victory.

Second, there is Strategic Bomber. He intends to bomb the munitions plant of Enemy in order to bring about the defeat of Enemy. Strategic Bomber is also aware,

however, that next to the munitions plant is a building filled with innocent children. He also believes that when he bombs the plant he will kill the children. While for Terror Bomber killing the children is an intended means to the defeat of Enemy, for Strategic Bomber their deaths are not intended as a means but are foreseen as a side effect of the bombing.

God is like Strategic Bomber when it comes to permitting moral evils. Although He foresees that moral evils might (will) occur as a result of His creating persons with libertarian free will and for the purpose that they justly experience perfect happiness, He does not intend that the moral evils that occur serve as a means to that purpose. Indeed, when all is said and done, those moral evils might very well be pointless in the sense that they do not serve as means to any purpose. Because this is the case, one should beware of wasting one's time by asking of every moral evil why (for what purpose) God has allowed it to happen. One certainly should not routinely interpret a moral evil one experiences as God's means of punishment. While a moral evil might be a divinely intended punishment, it also might be no more than a foreseen but pointless side effect in the divine plan for our just experience of complete happiness.¹⁸ Moreover, while God can bring something good out of a moral evil one experiences (St Paul reminds Christians in his Epistle to the Romans 8:28 that in everything God works for good for those who love Him), one must not confuse the idea of His doing so with that of His intending that one experience that moral evil as a means to the end that one justly experience perfect happiness or any other end.

Because God does not intend that the moral evils He permits serve as means to the end (purpose) of a person's justly experiencing complete happiness, it is not the case that there is a certain amount of moral evil that God may permit in order for Him to accomplish this purpose such that the occurrence of more than that amount of evil would be unjustified.

18. Compare van Inwagen's recommendation to students of the problem of evil: "Do not attempt any solution to this problem that entails that every particular evil has a purpose, or that . . . God has some special reason for allowing it. Concentrate rather on the problem of what sort of reasons a loving and providential God might have for allowing His creatures to live in a world in which many of the evils that happen to them happen to them for no reason at all. . . . Such things are a part of God's design in the sense that the ticking sound made by a clock is a part of the watchmaker's design: not intended, necessitated by what is intended. . . ." (van Inwagen 1988, pp. 180, 182; emphasis in the original). What is intended by God for human beings? What is their purpose? According to van Inwagen, "human beings were designed for union with God. . . ." (van Inwagen 1988, p. 170). Thus, "[e]very human being has an eternal future . . . [w]hen . . . there will never again be undeserved suffering or any other sort of evil" (van Inwagen 1988, p. 165).

Michael J. Murray and Glenn Ross agree that not every particular evil has a purpose: "[W]e prefer to cast [a discussion of the problem of evil] in terms of evil types rather than evil tokens. In brief, the reason is that we think that it is consistent with and likely on theism that token evils are pointless. . . . [T]he theist should never, in treating the issue of evil, aim to give reasons for token instances of evil. For all we know, there are no such reasons. As a result, the theist should stick to showing why the permission of various types of good are necessary for securing outweighing benefits" (Murray and Ross 2006, p. 187, endnote 6). While I agree with Murray's and Ross's main point that token instances of evil might very well be pointless in the sense that they are not intended by God as means to ends, I do not think that this point entails that the theist should stick to God's permission of *types* of good when thinking about the justification for His permission of moral evil. If my theodicy is correct, the justifying good is a token of a type: it is a *particular individual's* possibility of experiencing perfect happiness, which justifies *his* experience of moral evil.

And given that created persons have libertarian free will, it is also the case that they might have chosen in ways that would have produced (much) less moral evil than that produced by the choices that they have actually made (e.g. more people might have made just-good-seeking SFCs).

In light of the fact that God does not intend that moral evil serve as a means to the good that justifies His allowance of moral evil and this has the implication just noted for the amount of moral evil that He may justifiably allow, it is helpful to consider the following objection raised by the defender Daniel Howard-Snyder against *any* proposed justifying good of which we are aware (Howard-Snyder 1996a, pp. 289f). According to this objection, for any justifying good of which we are cognizant, we cannot see how it would fail to be realized if God permitted a lot less horrific moral evil (examples here might be the Stalinist purges and the Holocaust). As applied to the justifying good that I am proposing, this objection can be posed in the form of a question: would not the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness have been achievable, if God had permitted a lot less horrific moral evil? Because we cannot see how this purpose would fail to be realized if God were to permit a lot less horrific moral evil, there is inscrutable moral evil; that is, there is moral evil for which we cannot see the justification.

In response to this objection, it is true to say that we cannot see how the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness would fail to be realized if there were a lot less horrific moral evil. The reason, however, that we cannot see how this great good would fail to be realized with a lot less horrific moral evil is that we actually see that the possibility of experiencing complete happiness would have been achieved with a lot less horrific moral evil. And we actually see this because, given that created persons have libertarian free will, they might have chosen differently than they did and produced significantly less moral evil. It is also possible that they might have chosen differently than they did and produced significantly more moral evil. Either way, we see that the moral evil produced would be justifiably permitted by God's purpose of granting to created persons the just experience of perfect happiness. Indeed, given that created persons have libertarian free will, the granting of which is itself justified by this purpose, we see that *any* amount of moral evil would also be justified by this purpose.¹⁹ Thus, contrary to what Howard-Snyder claims, there is no

19. What if God has middle knowledge? Might it not, then, be the case that something roughly like the following is true: God is considering creating a world that includes persons who make just-good-seeking SFCs so as to experience perfect happiness. In addition, God is aware of two worlds, *W* and *W**, each of which contains persons A, B, and C who make just-good-seeking SFCs. Moreover, *W* and *W** are identical in all relevant respects except that in *W*, A, B, and C experience less moral evil than in *W**. Is God not morally obligated to create *W*?

If God has middle knowledge, then my point is as follows: *whatever* the amount of moral evil is in *W*, God's permission of it is justified by the purpose that created persons justly experience perfect happiness. Thus, even if the amounts of moral evil in both *W** and *W* had been greater and God created *W* because it contained less moral evil than *W**, God's allowance of moral evil in *W* would still have been justified by the purpose that created persons have the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness. Moreover, while it is no doubt true, as Plantinga says, that although "we can imagine or in some sense conceive of worlds in which the only things that exist are persons always in excruciating pain" (Plantinga 2004, p. 6), no such world is possible "if God, as we are assuming, is a necessary being who has essentially such properties as unlimited goodness" (Plantinga 2004, p. 6).

inscrutable moral evil. There is no moral evil that God has actually permitted for which we do not know the justification.²⁰

If the theodicy I am suggesting is correct, then God's granting to a person the experience of complete happiness is justly conditioned upon that individual exercising his libertarian free will in the right way (making a just-good-seeking SFC). What a critic might ask now is why, given the vast array of possible persons, did God create those who have libertarian free will, if such freedom is not itself a justifying good? Why did God not create from the array of possible persons those who do not have libertarian free will and who, thereby, always act deterministically but from the first moment of their existence and continuously thereafter experience nothing but the great good of complete happiness?

It is important to make two points in answering this question. First, it is doubtful that merely possible beings are entities to which God has an obligation to bring into existence. As Robert Adams has said, "A merely possible being cannot be (actually) wronged or treated unkindly. A being who never exists is not wronged by not being created, and there is no obligation to any possible being to bring it into existence" (Adams 1992, p. 277).

Second, the critic seems to assume that the intrinsic goodness of an experience such as perfect happiness imposes no constraints upon the one who chooses to give it as to whom it might be given. This assumption is itself questionable. For a created person who is self-conscious and aware of himself as a potential recipient of what is for him his greatest good, namely, the intrinsic good of complete happiness, it is necessary for purposes of justice that the giver of this possible good provide him with the libertarian freedom to make a just-good-seeking SFC. In other words, because complete happiness is such a great good, the experience of it must be deserved, and while being self-conscious is a necessary condition of its being deserved, it is not sufficient. What are needed for desert are the existence of libertarian freedom and the making of a choice about a life plan in the form of either a just- or an unjust-good-seeking SFC. W. D. Ross expressed this point about desert as follows:

If we compare two imaginary states of the universe, alike in the total amounts of virtue and vice and of pleasure and pain present in the two, but in one of which the virtuous were all happy and the vicious miserable, while in the other the virtuous were miserable and the vicious happy, very few people would hesitate to say that the first was a much better state of the universe than the second. It would seem then that . . . we must recognize as a[n] . . . independent good, the apportionment of pleasure and pain to the virtuous and the vicious respectively. (Ross 1930, p. 138; cf. Lemos 1994, pp. 40–5)

20. There is evidence that Howard-Snyder implicitly recognizes the purpose of perfect happiness as I have described it for theodicy. For example, he states that "[t]he theist's hypothesis and its implications provide me and many others with a great source of comfort. . . ." (Howard-Snyder 1996a, p. 294). I do not think it is misguided to speculate that the great source of comfort to which Howard-Snyder refers is the great good of perfect happiness that he believes he will ultimately experience for choosing rightly. Dan Cohn-Sherbok (Cohn-Sherbok 1990) argues that without otherworldly reward, there is simply no way to make sense out of particular moral evil such as the Holocaust as part of a world that is the creation of an all-good and all-powerful God. Cohn-Sherbok's understanding of reward includes the idea of the experience of perfect happiness or, in his words, "the realm of eternal bliss" (Cohn-Sherbok 1990, p. 289).

At this juncture, it is helpful to explore a bit more the necessary conditions of making a choice about a life plan in the form of either a just- or an unjust-good-seeking SFC. Upon reflection, it is clear that a choice of a life plan requires a world of goods that are its (the choice's) subject matter. These goods, which in our world include material objects that are instruments of pleasure, must have natures whose properties are what I will call "iffy" or conditional in character, where a property that is conditional in nature is a property that is specified in terms such that if such-and-such is done to object O (e.g. a cause C is exerted on O), then so-and-so will occur to O. In terms of our experiences of pleasure, the goods of this world must be stable objects of the kind which are such that if such-and-such is done to or with them, then so-and-so will result so as to produce pleasure. Consider sugar as a simple, first example of a material object with an iffy nature. It is a material substance whose nature makes it such that if a healthy person ingests it, it will taste sweet and produce an experience of pleasure. Another example of objects with iffy natures is that of the human sexual organs. Men and women who choose to fulfill their sexual appetites do so with the assumption that stimulation of their sexual organs will yield experiences of pleasure and, provided they did not use birth control and their reproductive systems are functioning properly, offspring. Or consider a tyrant who solidifies his power and promotes his pleasure through stealth and brutality. He must rely on the nature of his weapons that are such that if he wields them, they will produce death and destruction.²¹

The iffy nature of material goods of our world helps provide an answer to the following questions that arise out of a consideration of moral evil. Why, it is sometimes asked, does not God intervene in the material world of objects with iffy natures to prevent moral evil? For example, why does not God cause the gun of the murderer to jam when the latter pulls the trigger? Or why does not God cause the knife in the hand of the would-be robber to turn to rubber? Or why does not God cause the tongue of the would-be slanderer to become limp when the latter goes to speak?

While God is certainly able (has the power) to intervene in the material world to perform the actions in question, regular intervention of this kind is not consistent with the purpose of our existence in this world, which is that we make a just- or unjust-good-seeking SFC that is either deserving of or not deserving of perfect happiness. In the world as conceived by the objector, a human being would quickly learn that his choice of a way of life (a life plan) would count for nothing because he could never perform the actions that flowed from that choice. What point would there be, then, in choosing a life plan? Every time he went to perform an action that ensued from an unjust-good-seeking SFC, God would intervene to prevent the occurrence of moral evil. Moreover, as Lewis points out, "if the [objector's] principle were carried out to its logical conclusion, evil thoughts [and, I would add, unjust-good-seeking SFCs] would be impossible, for the cerebral matter

21. It is relevant to note that David Chalmers provides an "iffy" characterization of microscopic, theoretical entities: "Basic particles . . . are largely characterized in terms of their propensity to interact with other particles. Their mass and charge is specified, to be sure, but all that a specification of mass ultimately comes to is a propensity to be accelerated in certain ways [moved at certain rates] by forces, and so on. . . . Reference to the proton is fixed as the thing that causes interactions of a certain kind that combines in certain ways with other entities, and so on . . ." (Chalmers 1996, p. 153). And the Nobel physicist Richard Feynman says, scientific questions are "questions that you can put this way: 'if I do this, what will happen?' . . . And so the question 'If I do it what will happen?' is a typically scientific question" (Feynman 1998, pp. 16, 45).

which we use in thinking would refuse its task [because of God's intervention] when we attempted to frame them" (Lewis 1962, p. 33). In short, if God were to intervene to eliminate the pain and suffering that result from unjust libertarian choices, He would end up eliminating the choices themselves.

At this point, an objector might insist that he never meant to suggest that God, if He exists, would frustrate every unjust choice by tampering with our brains or turning every knife into butter. Such a policy on God's part would undermine the entire objective order of events involving material objects with their iffy natures. Rather, God would intervene only some of the time and thereby reduce the *quantity* of moral evil. In other words, it is not the mere existence of moral evil that results from our choices that is problematic for God's existence. It is the amount of such evil. Surely, if God existed we would find much less moral evil in this world than we do.

The problem with this argument is that for all we know God already does the very thing that the objector says He should do. Sometimes He does interfere with human choice and prevents moral evil. For example, if God has answered even one prayer to protect the innocent from an aggressor by, say, altering the latter's thoughts and (thereby) his action, then He has done what the objector suggests. In the end, it seems as if there is no way to answer the present argument to the objector's satisfaction because it essentially has nothing to do with the actual amount of moral evil in the world. For any quantity X of moral evil, it will always be possible to say that God, if He existed, would have intervened to permit only $X - 1$ instances of such evil. If X were to equal 1, the objector would want to know why God did not eliminate moral evil altogether. And the same point can be made with respect to what some might think of as the *quality* or kind of moral evil that results from free choices (the quality of a moral evil is the pain and suffering that result from a *kind* of action an agent chooses to perform). For example, the objector might ask, 'Would not God have intervened to stop the mad choices of Hitler and/or Stalin and their equally demented minions to send millions of people to the concentration camps and the forced-labor camps of the Gulag?' Once again, for all we know, God did intervene to stop choices that would have resulted in actions to commit worse kinds of atrocities than Auschwitz, Buchanwald, Dachau, and the Gulag. Our failure to be aware that He did does not amount to an awareness that he did not. Furthermore, the logical problem with the objector's suggestion is that one kind of moral evil is "over the top" only in relation to another kind that is typical or normal. Thus, unless God eliminates every kind of moral evil by getting rid of such evil altogether (or somehow allows only one kind), there will always be some kinds which God could and should eliminate because they are worse than others. Thus, if God were to have prevented Hitler and Stalin from carrying out their kinds of madness, then the objector would bring forth some other type of moral evil as evidence that God does not exist.

If what I have argued so far in this and the previous section of this chapter is correct, the idea of a moral or virtuous choice is fundamentally that of making a just-good-seeking SFC. Among other things, the making of this kind of SFC implies that its subject (assuming the person is a theist) will express gratitude to God for his experiences of pleasure in this life and the possibility of his experiencing perfect happiness in the future. Thus, an implication of my proposed theodicy is that while we must take our experiences of moral evil with utmost seriousness, we err if we neglect to take our possible experience of perfect happiness with the same degree of seriousness. Adams points out that in the Judeo-Christian tradition, a person who worships God is typically not encouraged to

praise Him for His moral rectitude and good judgment for creating him. Rather, he is encouraged to express gratitude to God for his existence (Adams 1992, pp. 275–8). I believe that what explains this encouragement of gratitude to God by a created person for his existence are the created person's present experiences of pleasure and, if he chooses rightly, his future experience of the great good of perfect happiness. The libertarian freedom to choose rightly (make a just-good-seeking SFC), however, entails the freedom to choose wrongly (make an unjust-good-seeking SFC). Thus, in order for God to have acted *justly* in choosing to provide created self-conscious creatures with the possible experience of the intrinsic good of complete happiness, He had to allow for the possibility of moral evil.

Ultimately, then, giving created persons libertarian free will is itself a necessary condition of the possibility of experiencing the intrinsic goodness of perfect happiness. As Rowe has rightly pointed out, “the free-will theodicy needs to be included within . . . a theodicy that stresses some intrinsic goods for which free will is a necessary condition” (Rowe 1996, p. 285). In addition, however, the intrinsic good of justice introduces constraints on choices not only for those self-conscious creatures who are provided the possible experience of perfect happiness,²² but also for the self-conscious Creator who provides that opportunity for the experience of that happiness. Because God must act justly, He must provide self-conscious creatures who are the potential recipients of perfect happiness with the libertarian freedom that makes possible the choice that makes His granting of that happiness just.

Rowe is an atheist who has argued that we have reason to believe that God does not exist in light of the occurrence of certain moral evils. For example, he asks us to consider the case of a 5-year-old girl being viciously beaten, raped, and, finally, strangled by her mother's boyfriend (Rowe 1988, pp. 119–22). He notes that the girl's experiencing complete felicity in the eternal presence of God does apparently outweigh the moral evil that she suffers. Indeed, he states that it apparently outweighs almost *any* horrendous moral evil that may befall her in her earthly life (Rowe 1996, p. 277). Rowe believes it strains credulity, however, to think that it is beyond the power of God to realize this great good without having to permit the girl's being brutally beaten, raped, and murdered.

Two points are in order here. First, while I agree with Rowe that complete felicity in the eternal presence of God outweighs any²³ moral evil experienced in this life, I have not maintained that God's justification for allowing moral evil is simply the experience of perfect happiness. Rather, it is the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness. The fact that God's justification for permitting moral evil is the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness helps to answer an additional point raised by Rowe in another context. While he defends the view (as was pointed out earlier in this section) that a justificatory good

22. Seymour says that “we cannot embrace the . . . extreme of rejecting free choice altogether as an important good . . . , for if eternal happiness is the only good God is concerned to actualize, one could ask . . . why God does not create everyone in heaven. . . .” (Seymour 1997, p. 260). According to the theodicy I am proposing, eternal happiness is not the only intrinsic good, but this fact does not require that free choice also be an intrinsic good. Justice in the form of justly experiencing perfect happiness is the other intrinsic good and free choice is a necessary condition of achieving it. It is because of the existence of the intrinsic good of justice that God does not create everyone in heaven. He cannot create everyone in heaven without acting unjustly.

23. I have removed Rowe's qualification of “almost” from “almost any.”

must include good, conscious experiences of those who suffer, Rowe also maintains that “[i]n the absence of any reason to think that [God] would need to postpone these good experiences, we have reason to expect that many of these goods would occur in the world we know” (Rowe 1986, p. 245). Given what I have argued so far in this section, the answer to Rowe’s point is that it is because not just any person deserves to experience perfect happiness that it is reasonable to think that it must be delayed to another life. In order to determine who does and who does not deserve to be completely happy, God gives a period of time (e.g. this life) wherein a person is free to make a choice that serves as the basis of justly granting or denying to him the experience of perfect happiness.²⁴

Second, given that moral evils are not a means to the purpose (end) that justifies permitting them, it does not strain credulity to think that God would have to permit the moral evils experienced by the girl in virtue of this justifying good. God has to permit their occurrence in virtue of this justifying good in so far as He has created persons with libertarian free will who are free to choose wrongly and produce moral evils. Moreover, given that God’s purpose is to grant the just experience of complete happiness to persons and that the girl presumably did not live long enough to be justly granted or denied complete happiness, it is reasonable to hypothesize that she will somehow be granted this opportunity, perhaps in another life.²⁵

Creating persons with libertarian free will is justified by the fact that if individuals exercise it rightly, they will experience the intrinsic good of complete happiness. Having the freedom to choose rightly, however, entails having the freedom to choose wrongly and produce moral evil. We can see, then, why it is necessary for God to permit moral evil even though the experience of that moral evil is not a means to the purpose of giving to persons the just experience of complete happiness. God must permit moral evils in order to achieve the purpose for which He created persons with libertarian free will. Some of the evils that humans suffer, however, do not appear to be explained by the exercise of human libertarian free will. For example, natural events such as earthquakes and tornadoes are evils in virtue

24. It is interesting to note at this point that Rowe maintains concerning any instance s_1 of intense suffering that “[p]erhaps preventing s_1 would preclude certain actions prescribed by the principles of justice. I shall allow that the satisfaction of certain principles of justice may be a good that outweighs the evil of s_1 ” (Rowe 1990, p. 128, footnote 3). The disagreement, then, between Rowe and me comes down to whether or not it is unjust to bestow the great good of perfect happiness on someone regardless of either what kind of good-seeking SFC that person has made or whether that person has made any good-seeking SFC at all. Because the good of perfect happiness is so great, there would be a problem of justice if making the right kind of good-seeking SFC were not a necessary condition of experiencing perfect happiness.

25. Chignell (1998, p. 216) notes that infants like those who are brutally murdered in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* are perhaps reincarnated, if they fail to satisfy a necessary condition for union with God. Concerning the idea of reincarnation, Nathan Nobis says “we need to find a greater good that could ‘balance out’ [a] tortured infant’s suffering and death. . . . It seems that there could be a balancing-off good for the infant in this case only if . . . the infant *herself* benefits from these events. . . . [T]he death by torture has to be a *necessary* component of the greater good, otherwise the torture is gratuitous” (Nobis 2001, p. 106; emphases in the original). On my theodicy, an infant’s torture is neither a means to nor a component of the good end – the just experience of perfect happiness – that justifies God’s permission of it. It need not be either of these because a justification for permitting moral evil need not be means–end in nature. According to the theodicy I am proposing, it is also the case that a tortured infant cannot be translated immediately to heaven where it is conscious of itself as a recipient of perfect happiness that is intrinsically good. It must somehow be given the opportunity to make a just- or an unjust-good-seeking SFC.

of the pain and suffering they produce, but they are not traceable by us to wrong human choices as their ultimate source. Is it possible to be a theodist with respect to such evils (call them “natural evils”)?

Although natural evils do not appear to us to be moral in nature, perhaps they are. Perhaps some of them are caused by human choices, even though we are not able to discern how they are. The present debate in the public square about whether or not human activity is responsible for global warming and the disturbances in weather that go with it should make us all too aware that many individuals are receptive to the idea that natural evils can be ultimately moral in nature. Perhaps the choices of nonhuman beings (e.g. fallen angels) with libertarian free will and the desire for complete happiness are ultimately responsible for some occurrences of natural evil. As Plantinga points out, the mere fact that this idea is unpopular at present with some is perhaps an interesting sociological fact but hardly relevant to the argument from evil (Plantinga 1974, pp. 58–62), and the idea is surely no more bizarre than the suggestion by Crick that life on our earth originally came from that of other intelligent beings in other planetary systems (Crick 1981). Or, perhaps the events that produce natural evils inevitably occur just as a part of nature, and what happened is that human persons lost an ability to protect themselves from these events when the first humans sinned (made an unjust-good-seeking SFC) (van Inwagen 1988, pp. 168–71; cf. Lewis 1962, chap. 5). Even in this last scenario, what do not appear to be moral evils are. What is clear is that we simply do not know what the ontological status of natural evils is because we do not know what their ultimate explanation is. As a defender would rightly say in this context, the explanation of natural evils is a matter that is beyond our intellectual purview.

While the ultimate explanation of natural evils that do not appear to be moral in nature is a matter that is beyond our epistemic wherewithal, the justification for God’s permitting them is not. Regardless of whether or not natural evils are ultimately moral in nature, the theodicy I have set forth maintains that their permission is justified by the possibility of our experiencing perfect happiness. This is the justification of natural evils for the same reason that it is the justification of moral evils. Because experiencing perfect happiness is a person’s greatest good and as such decisively outweighs any evil, moral or natural, that he might experience, the possibility of experiencing it is God’s justification for permitting him to experience that evil.

If natural evils are ultimately moral in nature, then we not only understand *what* their justification is but also *how* that justification explains their permission, because we understand how the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness requires giving created persons libertarian free will whose wrong exercise produces moral evil. If natural evils are ultimately not moral in nature, then while we know what the justification for permitting them is, we do not presently understand (we fail to be aware of) how that justification explains their permission. Thus, what makes natural evils different from moral evils is not that we are ignorant about what justifies God’s permission of the former, whereas we know what justifies His permission of the latter, but that we are ignorant about how that justification explains the permission of the former.

In closing this section, it is relevant to note that a proponent of the problem of evil might argue that if God did exist, we would now understand whether natural evils are ultimately moral or not moral in nature and, if the latter, how the possibility of experiencing complete happiness explains their permission. Our ignorance regarding these matters is itself an instance of evil that does not appear to be moral in nature. Surely, this ignorance is itself an instance of unjustified evil.

I cannot see any good reason to believe that we would now understand the matters that the proponent of the argument claims we would understand, if God exists. While it is plausible to believe that we know what God's justification for permitting our experience of evil is, given that knowledge about these matters is not required for knowledge of this justification, our ignorance about these issues is not surprising. As defenders are wont to point out, if theism is true, one would expect that God's knowledge would dwarf that of created persons. Ignorance about many things is part and parcel of being a created person.

Adams and Horrendous Evil

If the argument of the preceding section is correct, a defender must become a theodist. Marilyn Adams is a theodist who has recently maintained that the free will defense is inadequate because it defends God's goodness as a producer of libertarian free will, which in her terms is a "global" or "generic" good, to the neglect of the good of individual persons (Adams 1999, chap. 2). She believes that if God were to create for this purpose alone, He would at best be indifferent to individual persons and at worst cruel. In the spirit of the justification for permitting evils developed in the fifth section of this chapter, Adams believes that an adequate theodicy of God's goodness must take into consideration the good of persons as individuals. As she understands the issue of justification, there are two ways in which God might justify permitting evil that is experienced by a person.

First, God might ensure that the good in an individual's life balances off the evil in his life: "The balancing-off relation is arithmetical and additive: value-parts are balanced off within a larger whole if other parts of opposite value equal or outweigh them" (Adams 1999, p. 21). Adams claims that the problem with this theodical approach is that some individuals' lives are afflicted with horrendous evils, where a horrendous evil is one "the participation in which constitutes *prima facie* reason to doubt whether the participant's life could . . . be a great good to him/her on the whole. . . . [H]orrendous evils seem *prima facie*, not only to balance off but to engulf any positive value in the participant's life. . . ." (Adams 1999, p. 26). Examples of horrendous evils include:

the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psycho-physical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one's deepest loyalties, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov, child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation, the explosion of nuclear bombs over populated areas. . . . [W]hat makes horrendous evils so pernicious is their life-ruining potential, their power *prima facie* to degrade the individual by devouring the possibility of positive personal meaning in one swift gulp. (Adams 1999, pp. 26–8)

To present an adequate defense against horrendous evils, Adams claims that a theist must invoke a second form of justification which, following Roderick Chisholm, she terms "the defeat of evil" (Adams 1999, p. 21).²⁶ Evil is defeated by good in an individual's life when it is integrated into the whole of his life by means of a nonadditive relation or what

26. Chisholm's discussion of the idea of the defeat of evil is found in Chisholm (1990).

G. E. Moore called an “organic unity” (Moore 1968, pp. 27–36). With an organic unity, not only may the whole have a different value than a part but also a negatively (or positively) valued part can contribute to a great overall positive (or negative) value in the whole. Insofar as defeated horrendous evils make a positive contribution to the overall good of an individual’s life by being integrated in this way, they provide that life with a unity and harmony that it would otherwise lack. To help clarify the idea of the defeat of horrendous evil, Adams appeals to aesthetic examples:

Aesthetic examples illustrate this principle – for example, in Monet’s study of Rouen cathedral in early morning, the ugliness of the bilious green color patches is defeated by their integration into the vast beauty of the artistic design. Obviously, if the value-parts were networked to the whole possible world only by additive relations, it would be impossible that the best of all possible worlds should contain evils. (Adams 1999, p. 21)

Adams maintains that in order for God to justify permitting a person to suffer horrendous evils, He must defeat them by weaving them into a life that is overall worth living (Adams 1999, p. 168). They must be defeated in this way because otherwise they would engulf an individual’s life and defeat it by making it a life not worth living as a whole. Adams claims that there are different aesthetic scenarios under which horrendous evils are defeated. One scenario is where the sufferer has a vision of God that has enough aesthetic value to defeat its correlated horror. Another scenario is where the sufferer by means of his sufferings identifies with Christ’s suffering, most notably his crucifixion. On this second scenario, the fact that God became incarnate in Christ enables a sufferer to identify with Christ’s participation in horrific evils so that a positive aspect is conferred on the sufferer’s experience of such evils ensuring their defeat (Adams 1999, chap. 8).

While Adams maintains that horrendous evils must be defeated, she believes that they must also be overbalanced by the experience of complete happiness in the afterlife if God’s permission of them is justified: “Divine goodness to created persons includes an eventual and permanent over balance of concrete well-being” (Adams 1999, p. 158). In light of her conviction that divine goodness will not allow anyone to suffer eternal damnation because that would entail an ultimate and decisive defeat of good by evil in an individual’s life (Adams 1999, p. 41), it follows that not only would horrendous evils remain unjustified if it were not possible for an individual to experience complete happiness but also that they would remain unjustified if an individual were not guaranteed the experience of such happiness. Thus, Adams says that:

[i]f postmortem, the individual is ushered into a relation of beatific intimacy with God and comes to recognize how past participation in horrors is thus defeated, and if his/her concrete well-being is guaranteed forever afterward so that concrete ills are balanced off, then God will have been good to that individual despite participation in horrors. (Adams 1999, p. 168)

According to my theodicy, all evils, moral and natural (assuming that there are natural evils that are ultimately not moral in nature), horrendous and nonhorrendous, have the possibility of being decisively overbalanced or outweighed by perfect happiness, but in order to be outweighed in this way they must first be defeated. On my view, the defeat of evil is accomplished through justice, where justice is understood as the organic unity in which those who make a just-good-seeking SFC experience perfect happiness and those

who make an unjust-good-seeking SFC do not experience it.²⁷ In the fourth section, I said that choosing rightly included choosing a way of life in which one seeks to avoid situations that are likely to produce temptation. One's best-laid plans sometimes fail, however, and when one is tempted and chooses wrongly, the defeat of evil is accomplished (as part of one's chosen way of life) through the expression of sorrow (the asking for forgiveness) for what one has done. Moral evils that are suffered by oneself at the hands of others are defeated (again, as part of one's chosen way of life) by not returning evil for evil, but instead by overcoming evil with good (cf. Romans 12:17, 21). If there are natural evils that are not ultimately moral in nature, then to the extent that they can be overcome by good (e.g. virtuous responses to victims of an earthquake or tidal wave), they too can be defeated. Most generally, on my theodicy, any evil we suffer at the hands of either moral agents other than ourselves or nature, insofar as it can be responded to in a virtuous manner, can be defeated.

Like me, Adams recognizes the need for a decisive overbalance or outweighing of evil by good. Her theodicy, however, ultimately excludes the just defeat of evil by good. On Adams's view, every person must ultimately experience perfect happiness, regardless of how he chooses. Thus, she maintains that in order to prevent a person's never experiencing complete happiness (hell), God will causally determine a person's will so that he chooses rightly. As she puts it, "I flatter the Creator with enormous resourcefulness to enable human agency . . . to recognize and appropriate positive meanings sufficient to defeat its own participation in horrors. If this should mean God's causally determining some things to prevent everlasting ruin, I see this as no more an insult to our dignity than a mother's changing a baby's diaper is to a baby" (Adams 1999, p. 157). According to my theodicy, God's causally determining an individual's will to ensure the enjoyment of complete happiness would itself be unjust and amount to the defeat of good by evil because it would violate the idea that perfect happiness must be experienced justly. The matter of what a person's choosing wrongly (making an unjust-good-seeking SFC) implies about the duration of his failure to experience perfect happiness (the duration of his stay in hell) is a topic that is beyond the scope of this chapter. A few comments, however, are in order.

To begin, I can see nothing incoherent in the idea that a created person who has made an unjust-good-seeking SFC never reverses course. Because hell (whatever it is like) contains evil and no one can choose what is evil for its own sake, no one can choose to go to hell for the sake of the evil that it contains. What a person can do, however, is choose to pursue what is intrinsically good in a way that casts the restraint that is a prerequisite for experiencing perfect happiness to the winds (again, see the example of Augustine in the fourth section) and which, when all is said and done, results in his justly being excluded from heaven (justly denied the experience of perfect happiness) and confined to hell. Such a choice is an unjust-good-seeking SFC.

27. Chisholm (1990, p. 61) gives as an example of the defeat of good by evil the state of affairs where a wicked man experiences pleasure and good men do not (they need not experience displeasure, although presumably they might). Ross claims that the following is the one clear case of an organic unity: "Few people would hesitate to say that a state of affairs in which *A* is good and happy and *B* bad and unhappy is better than one in which *A* is good and unhappy and *B* bad and happy. . . . The surplus value of the first whole arises not from the value of its elements but from the co-presence of goodness and happiness in one single person, and of badness and unhappiness in another." (Ross 1930, p. 72)

But how could eternal separation from God be just? The answer to this question depends upon how one thinks of retributive justice in this context. Consider, for example, the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (*lex talionis* or literally “law of the claw”) found in Deuteronomy 19:21. As Adams has pointed out, some who accept this principle look for an immoral deed or deeds performed in this life for which the just punishment is hell (Adams 1975). They think of the issue of retributive justice in terms of proportionality and wonder what human act or acts deserve hell as a proportionate punishment. To illustrate the idea that they have in mind, consider a man named “Smith” who makes another individual named “Jones” unhappy for every moment of the latter’s 70-year life, and that Jones never “gets even” with Smith who lives out his years with more than his fair share of happiness. On the “eye for an eye” principle, God should make Smith unhappy to the same degree and for as long as Jones was unhappy, which was for 70 years. Suppose now that Smith not only made Jones unhappy for 70 years but also made a million other people unhappy for various lengths of time. On the “eye for an eye” principle as presently construed, God should sum up the years of unhappiness caused by Smith and make him unhappy to the same degree as everyone else and for the same cumulative amount of time.

It is fairly easy to construct other examples like the ones just mentioned involving Smith (Adams does just this in Adams 1975) and I will leave it to the reader to consider other examples like those I have just set forth. If we stick with my examples involving Smith, then thinking of retributive justice in the way suggested implies that no matter how much unhappiness Smith causes others, that unhappiness will always be finite in amount and Smith will deserve to be unhappy for only a finite period of time. Thus, there seems to be no way to make sense out of the idea of someone’s going to hell for a potentially infinite or unending period of time if the justification for going is thought of in terms of the “eye for an eye” principle.

Perhaps, however, the issue at this point is not with the “eye for an eye” principle *per se* but with how it is being construed. Perhaps we should stop thinking of it too literally. For example, while eyes and feet are sources of pleasure and pain, it is highly doubtful that the amount of pleasure and pain that one person gets from his intact eyes and feet equals the amount of pleasure and pain that another gets from his. Hence, it seems as if there is no way of guaranteeing that a guilty person who unjustly causes the loss of an eye or a foot in someone else will by the loss of his own eye or foot be deprived of the same amount of pleasure and suffer the same amount of pain as his victim. It is perhaps for this and other reasons that biblical scholars believe the Israelites did not in general literally employ the “eye for an eye” principle as a form of retributive justice but instead intended it as an expression of the idea that punishment should be commensurate with the harm that is unjustly caused.²⁸ Perhaps the idea of punishment being expressed in the “eye for an eye” principle is that there are outer limits of retributive justice that might be meted out to a guilty party and that excessive punishment is itself unjust.

What, then, about hell? Is there any interpretation of the “eye for an eye” principle that makes intelligible the idea of a person spending a potentially infinite future in hell? I believe that there is and that it is a function of the freedom of the will and the choice of a life plan.

28. Rick Hess has pointed out to me in correspondence the virtual absence of examples in the Hebrew Bible of applications of the “eye for an eye” principle. The only kind of case in which it seems to have been literally enforced involved “life for life,” where the most famous invocation of the principle is the prophet Nathan’s parable and subsequent indictment of David for the incident with Bathsheba and the killing of Uriah, although even in this case it was not literally carried out.

In simplest terms, retributive justice in this context is the idea of a separation of persons on the basis of their choices about life plans into two separate camps or modes of existence, where this separation leaves both parties permanently isolated from each other to do as they please. Heaven (the domain of perfect happiness) is occupied by those who have made a just-good-seeking SFC and hell is inhabited by those who have made an unjust-good-seeking SFC. Thus, heaven and hell are ultimately about how a person chooses to live his life in pursuit of what is intrinsically good. Will an individual choose a life of restraint and deference to others who are created by God for the purpose of experiencing perfect happiness? Or will he insist on pursuing what is good on his own terms, which means without restraint and at the expense of the well-being of others? It is a not uncommon experience in life that those who make an unjust-good-seeking SFC and reject the exercise of restraint in pursuit of what is good want to have nothing to do with those who make a just-good-seeking SFC, because the latter insist upon exercising restraint in their pursuit of what is good. The former also want nothing to do with God in this life, and for the same reason. Given that the former cannot be perfectly happy in the presence of the latter and God in this life, they couldn't be perfectly happy in the presence of the latter and God in the after-life. Thus, God will justly give the former their wish to be left alone to live with others according to the unjust-good-seeking SFC that has informed each of their lives in this world. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, hell is the "state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1995, sec. 1033). No one makes this point about self-exclusion better than Lewis:

Either the day must come when joy prevails and all the makers of misery are no longer able to infect it: or else for ever and ever the makers of misery can destroy in others the happiness they reject for themselves. (Lewis 2001, p. 136)

[T]he damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the *inside*. . . . In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell, is itself a question: 'What are you asking God to do?' To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to given them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does. (Lewis 1962, pp. 127–8)

There are, then, in the end only two kinds of people: "those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done'" (Lewis 2001, p. 75; emphasis in the original). In the end, certain people go to hell and remain there because they choose to pursue what is good on their own terms and to have nothing to do with others who insisted on pursuing it on other terms. What is the case is that in order to experience complete happiness, a person must (freely) choose rightly. He must make a just-good-seeking SFC. Only then can evil ultimately be defeated by good because an experience of what is a person's greatest good must be had only by those who deserve it. It is this point that Adams overlooks in her theodicy.

Plantinga's "*O Felix Culpa*" Theodicy

After maintaining for some time that theodicies struck him "as tepid, shallow, and ultimately frivolous" (Plantinga 1996a, p 70), Plantinga has recently had a change of mind and embraced a theodicy in which God's justification for allowing created persons to experience

evil is that the great goods of incarnation and atonement be instantiated (Plantinga 2004). He is careful to make clear that atonement, which presupposes incarnation, is a matter of created persons being saved from the consequences of their sin (morally wrong choices). Thus, if there were no moral evil and the pain and suffering that come with it, there could and would be no atonement. Moral evil and pain and suffering are necessary conditions of atonement, and because God wanted to create a world with a certain level of goodness, and every world with that or a greater level of goodness contains incarnation and atonement, our world includes evil.

Plantinga considers various objections to his theodicy. In light of the theodicy developed in the fifth section of this paper, it is most helpful to consider Plantinga's response to what he terms the "Munchausen syndrome by proxy." The Munchausen syndrome captures the idea of parents who mistreat or abuse their children for the purpose that they (the parents) act virtuously and save their children from their mistreatment and abuse. Does not Plantinga's theodicy describe a divine parent who mistreats His children by creating them for the purpose that they choose immorally and experience pain and suffering so that He can then virtuously become incarnate and atone for their moral wrongdoing? Would God really play around with a created person's well-being in this way for the sake of creating a world with the great goods of incarnation and atonement? Is this theodicy not a proxy of the Munchausen syndrome?

In answer to the Munchausen-syndrome-by-proxy objection, Plantinga maintains that a necessary condition of God's justification for allowing evil is that the final condition of created persons be a good one, although that final good is not part of the justification for His allowing evil. Although not part of this justification, it is the case that the final condition of created persons in a world that includes the goods of incarnation and atonement "is better than it is in the worlds in which there is no fall into sin but also no incarnation and redemption" (Plantinga 2004, p. 25). The idea seems to be that God is not morally blameworthy for creating persons for the purpose that the goods of incarnation and atonement be realized, so long as the stated necessary condition of His so doing (that the final condition of created persons be a good one) is fulfilled.

What might one say about Plantinga's theodicy? Early on in his essay, he asks "[W]hat are good-making qualities among worlds – what sort of features will make one world better than another" (Plantinga 2004, p. 6)? Plantinga's first words in response are "Here one thinks . . . of creaturely happiness. . ." (Plantinga 2004, p. 6). This is a perfectly natural response. Why, however, does one think of this? Although Plantinga does not answer this question, he does state that "Suffering is an intrinsically bad thing" (Plantinga 2004, p. 15). If it is, it only stands to reason that happiness is an intrinsically good thing, and because God knows that it is and He is perfectly good and loving, He creates persons for the purpose that they experience this great good. Thus, as Plantinga says, while "we can imagine or in some sense conceive of worlds in which the only things that exist are persons always in excruciating pain" (Plantinga 2004, p. 6), no such world is possible "if God, as we are assuming, is a necessary being who has essentially such properties as unlimited goodness . . ." (Plantinga 2004, p. 6).

Given that God, because of His essential properties, cannot create conceivable worlds in which creatures are always in excruciating pain, and given that it is natural to think of creaturely happiness when one thinks of good-making features of a world, it is no surprise that Plantinga maintains that any world with incarnation and atonement will include the experience of a final good condition (or at least the possibility of the experience of such a

good condition) for created persons. Plantinga claims, however, not only that a world with incarnation and atonement will include a final good condition for created persons, but also, as was already quoted, that this condition “is better than it is in worlds in which there is no fall into sin but also no incarnation and redemption” (Plantinga 2004, p. 25). What justifies this claim? Intuitively, an earthly life that includes only happiness and runs seamlessly into perfect happiness in the afterlife is on the whole better than one that includes Earthly pain and suffering and ends with perfect happiness in the afterlife. Plantinga, however, is favorably disposed toward the idea that it is by suffering that we can achieve an intimacy with God (“enjoying solidarity with [Christ]”; Plantinga 2004, p. 18) that cannot be achieved in any other way. Perhaps, then, he believes that his claim about worlds with incarnation, atonement, sin and suffering being better in terms of their final good condition for created persons than ones without incarnation, atonement, sin, and suffering is justified by the idea that sin and suffering make possible a level or kind of happiness (enjoyment) that cannot be experienced without them.

If this is Plantinga’s reasoning, it is less than persuasive. After all, atheists and theists alike find it quite easy to conceive of a world in which created persons have perfect happiness without the preparatory work of sin and suffering. Indeed, it is because such a world seems better than one in which created persons experience this happiness but do sin and suffer that the problem of evil presents the intellectual challenge that it does. Moreover, if one turns to scripture for possible insight into the problem of evil, something which Plantinga is not averse to doing, one can easily come away from reading the story about the garden of Eden (as many down through the ages have done) with the impression that Adam and Eve had ongoing access to the tree of life (continued happiness and no pain and suffering), access that would not have been lost had they not eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In short, while one can agree with Plantinga that a world with incarnation, atonement, sin and suffering includes the possibility of a final and exceedingly great, good condition for created persons (i.e. perfect happiness), there seemingly is no reason to think that these things are a necessary means to the achievement of this exceedingly great, good condition.

Finally, what about Plantinga’s claim that, while it is a necessary condition of a world that includes incarnation and atonement that it also include (the possibility of) a final good condition for human beings, this necessary condition is not part of God’s justification (reason) for permitting evil? In the fifth section, I stated that it was hard to see how the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness could be a necessary condition of God’s justification for allowing evil, without being (at least a part of) that justification. Has Plantinga shown us a way in which this is possible?

I doubt it. To see why, consider what Plantinga says about the relationship between incarnation, atonement, sin, and suffering.

The priority [of incarnation and atonement over sin and suffering] isn’t temporal, and isn’t exactly logical either; it is a matter, rather, of ultimate aim as opposed to proximate aim. God’s ultimate aim, here, is to create a world of a certain level of value. That aim requires that he aim to create a world in which there is incarnation and atonement – which, in turn, requires that there be sin and evil. (Plantinga 2004, p. 12)

In other words, while sin and suffering are a *conceptually* necessary condition of incarnation and atonement in the sense that atonement just is salvation from the consequences of

sin (“if there were no evil, there would be no sin, no consequences of sin to be saved from”; Plantinga 2004, p.12), in the order of explanation, God’s ultimate purpose that the goods of incarnation and atonement be instantiated explains the subsidiary purpose that sin and suffering be allowed. Now the (possible) achievement of a final good condition for created persons is also a necessary condition of creating a world that includes incarnation and atonement. Why, however, is the former a necessary condition of the latter? Plantinga would have us believe that it is because God is essentially perfectly good and loving and, therefore, must provide a final, good existence for persons in every world that He creates, but it is not because the idea of a final, good existence for created persons is conceptually related to the idea of incarnation and atonement. Is it not the case, however, that just as atonement conceptually presupposes sin (and the suffering that it causes) because it by definition is salvation from that sin (and suffering), so also atonement conceptually presupposes the idea of a final, good condition for created persons because it is by definition *for that good*? In other words, is it not the case that just as “atonement is among other things a matter of creatures being saved from the consequences of their sin” (Plantinga 2004, p. 12), so also atonement is first and foremost a matter of creatures being saved *for the final good end* for which they were created? Moreover, is it not the case that in terms of ultimate and proximate aims, which is a matter concerning the order of explanation, God’s ultimate justification for allowing libertarian free will and moral evil, namely, that created persons have the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness, also explains the proximate or subsidiary aim that the great goods of incarnation and atonement be realized?

The intuitively plausible answer to these questions is “Yes.” Why so? Although we are, to use a favorite expression of Plantinga’s, in deep waters here, it seems reasonable to think that the purpose that incarnation and atonement be realized is a subsidiary purpose in relation to God’s ultimate purpose for allowing libertarian free will and moral evil because God will do what is necessary as a means to achieve this ultimate purpose. If acting justly is a conceptually necessary condition of achieving that purpose, as I suggested is the case in the fifth section, then perhaps incarnation and atonement are a function of God’s acting justly and, thereby, are necessary as means to accomplishing that purpose. Perhaps acting justly itself requires that God submit Himself to what he submits His creatures to, namely, pain and suffering. If this is the case, then God must become incarnate. Or, if we follow a traditional Protestant understanding of the atonement, God atones for our sins by vicariously suffering the punishment due to us because the demands of justice must be satisfied (Aulén 1969, pp. 128–33). In the end, by according the possibility of experiencing perfect happiness primary place as God’s justification for allowing evil, we are able to provide a more adequate conceptual integration than Plantinga does of the concepts of perfect happiness, incarnation and atonement, and sin (moral evil).

Beasts and the Problem of Evil

Finally, what about the beasts that it seems also experience pain? What is God’s justification for permitting them to experience evil? With regard to this issue, it is reasonable for the theist to be a defender and answer these questions with “I do not know,” because the matter is one that lies outside our cognitive purview. One thing that is important to understand is *why* it is beyond our ken. The explanation for this ignorance has to do with our lack of knowledge of both a beast’s nature and the purpose for which a beast exists. Consider the

problem of evil as it relates to created persons. In general terms, the theodicy proposed and defended in the fifth section identifies God's justification for permitting a person to experience evil with this individual's purpose for existing, where knowledge of this purpose requires awareness of a person's nature and what is intrinsically good. Given our knowledge that a person is an entity whose nature includes libertarian free will and a desire for perfect happiness, where this happiness is intrinsically good, it is possible to know what God's justification for permitting created persons to experience evil is. When it comes to beasts, we lack knowledge of their purpose for existing because we lack adequate knowledge of their natures. We simply do not know enough about their psychological makeups and what the structures, if any, of their wills is like.

It is important to stress at this point that being a defender with regard to the sufferings of beasts does not require that one deny that they experience pain. As Michael J. Murray and Glenn Ross have recently pointed out, a defender can consistently embrace the following principle (I will dub it 'SA') concerning the sufferings of animals:

SA: Some non-human creatures have states that have intrinsic phenomenal qualities analogous to those possessed by humans when they are in states of pain. These creatures lack, however, any higher order states of being aware of themselves as being in first-order states. They have no access to the fact that they are having a particular feeling, though they are indeed having it. Since phenomenal properties of states of pain and other sensory states are intrinsic to the states themselves, there is no difference on this score between humans and other creatures. (Murray & Ross 2006, p. 176)

As Murray and Ross note, one might object to SA by arguing that there is moral disvalue in a world that contains experiences of pain, even where the subjects of those experiences do not possess the relevant higher order states of awareness of themselves as in those first-order states. "Access to these states, the critic might contend, is irrelevant to whether it is bad to be in the state itself. Clearly, if a state is intrinsically bad, it is not made better merely in virtue of the fact that the creature does not know about it" (Murray & Ross 2006, p. 176). Murray and Ross rightly respond that a defender of SA need not deny that the pain experienced by a beast is intrinsically evil. What is crucial for this response is the distinction between kinds of evils. In particular, it is important to distinguish between a metaphysical (nonmoral), intrinsic evil such as pain and a moral evil such as unjustly allowing a sentient creature to experience a metaphysical, intrinsic evil such as pain. The truth of SA helps bring to light that there is nothing morally unjust about allowing a beast that is not self-conscious and is unable to represent itself as experiencing pain to experience such a quale and its intrinsic, metaphysical evilness. If we use the terms of thought from Thomas Nagel's "What is it like to be a bat?" (Nagel 1979, pp. 165–80), then it is because a beast lacks higher-order access to its own first-order experiences of pains that "there is simply no victim, no subject for whom it can be said that there is a way it is like for it to be in such a state of pain" (Murray & Ross 2006, p. 177).

In light of this discussion of SA, consider Rowe's example of a fawn:

Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For there does not appear to be any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse. Nor does

there seem to be any equally bad or worse evil so connected to the fawn's suffering that it would have had to occur had the fawn's suffering been prevented. . . . An omnipotent, omniscient being could have easily prevented the fawn from being horribly burned, or, given the burning, could have spared the fawn the intense suffering by quickly ending its life, rather than allowing the fawn to lie in terrible agony for several days. Since the fawn's intense suffering was preventable and, so far as we can see, pointless, doesn't it appear . . . that there do exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse? (Rowe 1990, pp. 129–30)

How can Rowe reasonably conclude, as he does, from the fawn's suffering that we are justified in believing that God's permission of that suffering is unjustified on the grounds that we cannot see what the point of its suffering is (Rowe 1990, pp. 127–32)? After all is said and done, does any one of us have adequate knowledge of a fawn's psychology? Does any one of us know whether a fawn is self-aware and in possession of a concept of itself as a persisting entity that remains self-identical through time? Does any one of us know that a fawn desires the experience of perfect happiness for itself like a person desires this experience for himself? Does any one of us know whether or not a fawn's existence ends with its death?²⁹

I think it is reasonable to hold that if some beasts are like us in terms of being self-conscious and desirous of perfect happiness, then the justification for allowing them to experience evil is the same as that which justifies allowing us to experience evil. But I also believe that if we are honest it is correct to say that, while we might believe some things about a beast's psychology (e.g. that beasts experience qualia such as pain and pleasure just as we do), we must admit that none of us knows the answers to the kinds of questions posed in the previous paragraph. But if we do not, then how can the claim that the fawn's suffering appears unjustified (on the grounds that we cannot see any justification for permitting its occurrence) itself be justified? Is it not the case that the fawn's suffering as such neither appears justified nor unjustified because we simply do not know what a fawn's nature and purpose for existing are? Is it not the case that considered by itself, the fawn's suffering appears to be suffering, and that is it, the issue of whether its suffering is justified or unjustified being beyond our ken? With regard to instances of suffering of beasts, is it not reasonable to be a defender? It would certainly appear so.³⁰

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29. Philip L. Quinn has recently advocated the following for solving the problem of evil for at least some beasts: "I would . . . adopt the assumption that an afterlife is possible for at least some nonhuman animals. An afterlife for chickens? Well, why not?" (Quinn 2001, p. 398)

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