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Alvin Plantinga on the Problem of Evil: An Examination

Ogan, Tamunosiki V.

Department of Philosophy

University of Port Harcourt

E-mail: tamosikivogan@gmail.com

Tel: +234 08182238837

Abstract

The existence of God is an enduring and popular philosophical problem that entwines with many aspects of human experience. One of these aspects is the reality or experience of evil. This experience creates a serious embarrassment to all official theological doctrines and monistic philosophy which claim that the source of all that happen and exists in our world is a makeup of an omnipotent and perfect Being (God) who is traditionally thought to be good. This embarrassment is captured by the existential and intellectual difficulty to believe that a world with such a vast amount of evil as our world contains is the creation of, and under the sovereign control of, a supremely good, omnipotent and omniscient Being. Now, if this Good Being is the source of all that there is, where then does evil come from? If he is all good and we still see evil in the world, then there must be something wrong with his power, perhaps he is not really omnipotent and/or there is an independent source of evil that he cannot control but struggles against. Scholars like St. Augustine, St. Aquinas, and Leibniz provided argument to defend the righteousness, perfection and omnipotence of God in the face of the indubitable experience of evil. Alvin Plantinga in his view offers an understanding of the terms 'freewill' and 'omnipotence' in other to make a case with his views of Mackie and Flew (both of whom are atheist), asserting that God cannot actualize a world in which truly free creatures do only what is morally good, for conditioning them to do so is a logical impossibility that contradicts the created order. Thus, God's gift or freewill to man is a greater good which should not be eliminated because it is only with such gift that man can express love and appreciation to their creator. The researcher adopts the method of exposition and analysis. This is done by employing basically library based literatures on the concerned subject of discussion.

Introduction

The question of the problem of evil has continued centuries ago before its articulation by Alvin Plantinga. This problem was given a new phase right from the time of Augustine who asserts that evil did not emanates from God who is absolutely good and perfect, but is an absence of good (privation boni-privation of good). He opined that God is good and in his goodness created a finitely good universe containing good creatures with tremendous gift of freewill. Unfortunately, these creatures

chose the lesser good of themselves to the higher good of the whole according to their own good purposes. In the same vein, Leibniz, in encouraging people to love God, to take comfort in his divine providence and to benevolently use their freewill acclaimed this world as the best of all possible worlds. He asserts that God's supreme perfection is translated in his creating the best possible world for he must have weighed the importance of various possible worlds before choosing to create this one. In refuting these theistic positions, some atheistic scholars such as Mackie and Flew formulated an understanding of the problem of evil to be one characterized by a problem of logical inconsistency or contradiction. Here, they opine that the existence of evil in our world is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God who is omnipotent, omniscient and absolutely perfect. Hence, they assert that His divine attributes of perfect is logically incompatible with the existence or reality of evil in a world of his creation. This formulation of the problem of evil is called the logical problem of evil for it is founded on the logic of inconsistency or contradiction. It is in view of salvaging this challenge and criticism that Alvin Plantinga articulates a counter argument which he termed the "freewill defense" where he critically reviewed Augustine and Leibniz theodicy by formulating a defense with the logical accent of consistency or compatibility of God and evil.

Furthermore, Plantinga's response to the problem is not just a contribution that provides justification for God's divine attributes in the face of the challenge of evil but one that logically defends with possible reasons his compatibility with evil. Although he argued in defense of the theists, he went beyond their positions which were founded on biblical faith and doctrines to logically show the compatibility of God and evil. Thus, the problem this work grapples with, however, is to critically expose Plantinga's solution to the logical problem of evil and questioning also the tenability of his response.

The Concept of Evil

At face value, the word 'evil' though seems easy to explain, is a very ambiguous term hence difficult to define. Its ambiguity is underscored by the fact that people tend to explain it from their varying life experiences. Thus, there are no univocal definitions that exhaust its complex nature since human experiences are quite distinct, relative and unique.

In explaining the malevolent threat of evil to humanity, Josiah Royce, an early twentieth century American philosopher, describes evil as that "which man finds repugnant or intolerable". Hence, he intends to shrink from it, flee from it, try to expel it and put it out of sight. This implies that man at every point in time is constantly moved to resist, assail and overcome evil. Since, the intolerable nature of evil things discomfort, dissatisfy and unease man, it is reckoned as a torment of life and enemy to human progress. It is on this note that Donald Walhout calls evil that "which hinders and destroys a things being" (170).

However, the above understanding of evil conveys its meaning as a shortcoming or absence of something that should be present. Traditional theists would call this a 'privation'. It is in this line of thought that Augustine, one of the influential thinkers of the medieval era, calls it *privatioboni*. Put similarly, evil is the condition that falls short of the good; it opposes, defies, threatens, jeopardizes or strives to defeat and subdue the good. Donald Walhout quoting Pittinger reminds us that although evil is privative; it is not merely a matter of appearance-it is there in our world-it is an indubitable reality (170). For instance, the reality of people who are born blind is something that is existential in the human society. The deficiency of their sight (that is, their blindness) which demeans their humanness is not only an absence or lack of something that ought to be present (that is, their sight which is a feature of the true human nature) but also a reality in our society. The same goes for the incidence of Boko Haram terrorism which although reflects an absence of peace and mutual cohabitation, is also an existential reality in Nigeria. It should be noted that while the first example explains evil in terms

of a natural impediment, the second explains it in terms of man's unfair treatment to man. These two examples illustrate the two basic kinds of evil which are natural evil and moral evil respectively. Both kinds of evil raise the question of what reasons an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good being could have for permitting or allowing their existence. And if God is the creator of the ordered and perfectly good world, from where then comes evil? (Sasa 13).

With regard to moral evil, they are occasioned by acts perpetrated by man out of his own freewill. According to Alvin Plantinga, they are "evils which result from human choice or volition" (131-132) and hence are borne out of human stupidity, arrogance and cruelty. Put differently, they inhere in the wicked actions of moral agents and the bad consequences they produce. Fyodor mentioned numerous of such evils thus: "a Bulgarian I met in Moscow... told me about the crimes committed by the Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria...they burn villages, murder, rape women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fence, leave them till morning and in the morning they hang them-all sorts of things you can't imagine..." (245-246). Other instances of man's inhumanity to man are expressed in the suffering and savagery that go with war, violence, armed robbery, rape, killing, corruption, genocide, embezzlement etc. Socrates once said that it is better to suffer injustice than to do it-better to be a victim than to be a perpetrator. Perhaps he is right for anyone who becomes morally callous and insensitive by doing the above has lost something more precious than life itself.

Talking about natural evils, they result from natural disasters and impediments such as earthquakes, tidal waves, flooding, virulent diseases, imbecility etc. Put differently, they are bad consequences that apparently derive entirely from the operations of impersonal natural forces.

Unlike moral evil, natural evil has nothing to do with actions and freewill. It inflicts on man a mysterious pain and discomfort. It is mysterious because its origin cannot be empirically and causally inferred. Speaking of the abominable anguish, agony and death of an innocent child (by a mysterious plague), Albert Camus says: "his eyes shut, his teeth clenched, his features frozen in an agonizing grimace, he was rolling his head from side to side on the bolster..." (74-75). This experience relayed by Camus exemplifies the excruciating and incomprehensible influence of natural evil on humanity. Furthermore, expressing the mystery of natural evil Erwin Lutzer writes: "that morning the sky was bright, calm and beautiful, but in a moment everything was transformed into frightening chaos. Ironically, the earthquake hit on All Saints' Day, when churches were crowded with worshippers..."

The foregoing realities of evil (be it moral or natural) in our world poise a serious challenge to the theistic belief in the existence of a perfect and omnipotent God. This challenge of theism is called the problem of evil.

The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is a form of moral protest that questions the existence of a perfectly good and omnipotent God. In no doubt, it is a philosophical puzzle for many people. It raises the questions thus: why did a personal, loving God create a world in which evil exists? Why did God give man freedom to commit evil acts? It is a problem for the theists who believe that God's divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolent cannot be undermined. The problem is expressed in the fact that if God were all knowing, it follows that he should know about all the evil and suffering in the world and know how to eliminate or prevent them. If he were all powerful, he would be able to prevent all of the evils and sufferings in the world. Again, if he were perfectly good, he would want to prevent all the evils and sufferings in the world. And yet, we find that our world is ravaged by countless instances of evils and sufferings. These facts of evil seem to conflict with the divine attributes of God being omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good, hence a challenge to theism.

The above is simply explained in the form of a dilemma by Epicurus in this manner: “is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”. This ancient Epicurean question which has become a serious threat to the belief of an omnipotent and perfect God has been exploited by some atheistic philosophers to argue against the existence of God. The argument advanced by these philosophers is that the reality of evil contradicts the belief that God is both omnipotent and wholly good and therefore does not exist.

In view of resolving this problem which was raised in the ancient era, some Christian scholars of the medieval and early modern period came up with some coherent arguments to posit God’s reason for permitting evil or creating a world that contains evil. These arguments which tend to defend the justice and righteousness of God by providing the reasons for his permitting evil as Hick notes refers to theodicy. Notable theistic philosophers who argue along this line of thought include Irenaeus, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Leibniz et cetera.

Augustine for instance was motivated to refute the Manichean dualism (that is, the belief that the origin of the material world of evil is founded on two uncreated, equal, eternal and oppositional principles which are reflected as good and evil). Thus, his theodicy is seen as a defense to confirm, affirm and uphold God’s attributes of omnipotence, all-goodness and perfect creator of all there is and also to identify the free choice of creatures as the only source of evil among the created order. Since he consummates his argument by asserting the misuse of human freewill as the origin and cause of the evil in the world, his theodicy is called the freewill theodicy (131).

For Leibniz, he has to his credit the invention of the word theodicy. He also asserts this world as the best possible world. Although his thought with that of Augustine has some striking similarities, they differ in some respects. While Augustine advances his theodicy along the freewill position, Leibniz converts theodicy into a model of philosophical optimism against evil by arguing with conviction that this world is the best possible world. For him, considering the contingent nature of the world is the best possible world, and the fact of the possibility of an infinite number of other worlds aspiring to exist, the maker must have taken into account the other entire possible ones before choosing to embark on making this one. And in so doing, God must have chosen the best since he cannot do what is not reasonable or what does not conform to supreme reason. Martin Egbuonu interprets Leibniz saying that for Leibniz before the act of creating, God had foreseen all the prayers of the people, their supplications, good and evil actions; and putting all these together, he made the world in which all things would have to contribute ideally to the resolution which he took about their existence (162). For him, evil can also be used as an emendation or, at times for the true enjoyment of the good. In relation to evil in the world, he says that if what happens in the world lacks the least evil, it will not be this world again; first, protecting the chicken from being carried away by the kite before warning it from wandering into the bush. He says that it is possible to imagine possible world without sin and misery-but this for him will be inferior in goodness to our world. Evil he says can often cause some good that would never had happened or taken place.

The Logical Inconsistency Argument on the Problem of Evil

The theistic position of Augustine and Leibniz (and of course some others) have been questioned by some atheistic thinkers like J.S Mill on the basis that they do not explicitly eradicate the logical inconsistency expressed in the problem of evil. By logical inconsistency, it refers to the logical inference that explains the inconsistency of the set of propositions in an argument. This means that a set of proposition is logically inconsistent if and only if a direct contradiction can be deduced from that set. Some atheistic philosophers have argued that there exist logical inconsistencies in the propositions that constitute the problem of evil. Hence, they propose some arguments known as the

logical inconsistency arguments which tend to deconstruct the positions that maintain that no logical inconsistency can be deduced from the problem of evil. Examples of these arguments include Mackie's Paradox of Omnipotence and Flew's argument on Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom.

Mackie identifies the problem of evil as a more telling criticism that has been exploited by philosophers to out rightly challenge the theistic belief of God's existence. Here, he explains that the problem of evil does lie in the fact that "religious beliefs lack rational supports but that they are positively irrational that the several parts of the essential doctrine are inconsistent with one another" (157). Hence, he opines that the problem of evil is a logical problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs which the theologian believes and holds tenaciously.

Mackie states that the following propositions:

(a). God is omnipotent (b). God is wholly good and (c). Evil exists, are all incompatible with one another in the sense that if "A" and "B" are affirmed, it would be logically contradictory to also affirm "C". In identifying the philosophical problematic in the problem of evil, he suggests that this problem becomes clearer by adding certain propositions he calls "quasi-logical rules" says (d) a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can (e) there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do. As such, he makes it clear that in the addition of "D" and "E", "it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely and in the proposition that a good omnipotent thing exist, and that evil exists are incompatible. However, Mackie defends this problematic in what he calls the "Paradox of Omnipotence" wherein he shows that God's omnipotence can be restricted in one way or the other for it not, it becomes impossible to explain the uncontrollable reality of evil in a world created by an omnipotent God (158).

Similar to Mackie's argument is Flew's contribution to the problem of evil as a direct respect and critique of the proponent of the freewill defense. He argues that there does not seem to be any reason to think that God could not create creatures that are caused by him to always do what is right even if they are totally free to choose what they do. If this is true, then it implies that there are dire consequences of the freewill defense. Hence he says, "if it is really logically possible for an action to be both freely chosen and yet freely determined by caused causes, then the keystone argument of the freewill defense, that there is a contradiction in speaking of God as arranging the laws of nature that all men always as a matter of fact freely choose to do right, cannot hold" (153). What flew proposes here is an alternative view of human freedom-one in which a person can be caused to do as he does base on his beliefs, desires and inclinations. So, he is free in the sense that he does what he wants to do most often, but caused in the sense that he can only do what he is inclined to do.

Responding to Mackie's Inconsistency Argument

With the complication of the problem of evil by the atheist especially in the criticisms levelled against theodicy and the freewill defense, the belief in the notion of a perfectly good and omnipotent God crumbles on the basis that it is logically inconsistent with the reality of evil in the world. Plantinga therefore begins by arguing that the arguments advanced by Mackie and Flew are not logically coherent on the basis that they are structured by false understanding of the meaning of logical contradiction, freewill, divine omnipotence and perfection. To discredit Mackie's argument Plantinga first and foremost analyses his propositions: (a) God is omnipotent (b) God is wholly good (c) evil exist. He calls these set "A" which Mackie claims is an inconsistent set. To further emphasize this set, Mackie states that although set "A" is contradictory, its contradiction or inconsistency cannot be detected immediately but can only be deduced or implied when some additional premises or quasi-logical rules are added to them. He went further to suggest these additional premises (d) a good thing always eliminate evil as far as it can (e) there are no limit to what an omnipotent being can do.

Therefore, according to Mackie, the addition of “D” and “E” to set “A” would show that set “A” is implicitly contradictory.

Plantinga begins his response by doing a clarification of some terms involved. In logic, contradiction means the denial of something, be it a statement or proposition. According to Plantinga, we have three types of contradictions. In explaining these three types of contradiction, Plantinga argues that Mackie’s claim that set ‘A’ is logically contradictory is false. Explaining explicit contradiction, he says that “a set of proposition is explicitly contradictory if one of its members is the denial or negation of another member”. With this, it can be said that set ‘A’ is not explicitly contradictory since none of its members implies a denial of another, that is, we cannot see therein: God is not omnipotent; God is not wholly good and there is no evil. However, a formal contradiction according to Plantinga is one in which an explicit contradiction can be deduced from the members of a set by the laws of logic. Example, if all men are mortal, then Socrates is mortal; all men are mortal; Socrates is not mortal.

Now, Plantinga asks the question, what is implicit contradiction? An implicit contradiction is a contradiction that can be implied (whether formally or explicitly) from a set of propositions by the addition of some other propositions which must be necessary truths. Mackie referred to the additional premises he added as quasi-logical rules which implies that they are not merely true but necessarily true (13-14). By reconstructing Mackie’s additional premises to fully qualify as necessary truths, Plantinga further argues that no implicit contradiction can be deduced from set ‘A’. Having deconstructed Mackie’s logical inconsistency argument, Plantinga went further to appraise the position of the freewill defense as the most logical solution to the philosophical problem of evil.

The Freewill Defense: The Hub of Plantinga’s Solution to the Problem of Evil

One of the challenging questions (implied from the problem of evil) that theistic philosophers who have sought to defend the belief in a perfectly good and omnipotent God is: what might God’s reason or possible reasons be for his permission of evil and suffering in our world? They feel that if some logical and coherent reasons are provided for God’s permission of evil then the threatening criticisms against his omnipotence would be silenced. As a response to this, Plantinga vindicated the most famous philosophical response to the question which is the freewill defense. In his appraisal of the freewill defense, he suggests the following as a morally sufficient reason for God’ permission of evil: He gives us a down to earth example of what he calls a morally sufficient reason a human being might have before moving on the case of God. Suppose a gossipy neighbour were to tell you that Mrs. Uchenna just allowed someone to inflict unwanted pain upon her child. Your first reaction to this news might be one of horror. But once you find out that the pain was caused by a shot that immunized Mrs. Uchenna’s infant daughter against polio, you would no longer view Mrs. Uchenna as a danger to the society or a wicked woman. This is because Mrs. Uchenna has sufficient reasons for overriding or suspending the general moral principle that parents should not inflict unwanted pains upon their children.

In relation to the above, we can say that God allows some evils to occur that are smaller in value than a greater good to which they are intimately connected. If God had eliminated the evil, he would have eliminated greater good as well. God is pictured as being in a situation much like Mrs. Uchenna who allowed a small evil (the pain of a needle) to be inflicted upon her child because that pain was necessary for bringing a greater good (immunization against polio).

The claim of Plantinga’s freewill defense presupposes the view of freewill from a liberation perspective. Here, a person is viewed to be free with respect to a given action if and only if that person is both free to perform that action and free to refrain from it; in other words, that person is not determined to perform or refrain by any antecedent condition or causal forces. This implies that the libertarian freewill is a morally significant kind of freewill whereby ones action is appropriately

evaluated from a moral perspective. Recognizing morally significant freewill as a unique attribute of the human person, Plantinga explains that in the actual world like ours, people are free in the most robust sense of the term; that is, they are fully free and responsible for their actions and decisions; hence they are praised or rewarded when they do the right thing and are blamed or punished when they do otherwise. Therefore, by claiming that it is a tremendous value from God, Plantinga argues that it would be logically impossible for God to determine man to freely choose the good when faced with the option of choosing good and evil (29-30).

The Freewill Defence and the Best Possible World

Plantinga asserts that God's will was to make a world in which there is no evil but our abuse of his unique gift of freedom is the consequence for our living in this kind of world in which there is evil. One might then begin to wonder why God would choose to risk populating his creation with free creatures if he knew there was a chance that human immorality could foul the whole thing up. Responding to this, C.S Lewis says:

Why, then, did God give them freewill? Because freewill, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata-of creatures that worked like machines-would hardly be worth the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united with Him and to each other...and for that they must be free. Of course, God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way: apparently he thought it worth the risk (52).

Concurring to this, Plantinga writes:

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but he cannot cause or determine them to do only what is right. For if he does so, then they are not significantly free at all; they do not do what is right freely. To create creatures capable of moral good, therefore, he must create creature capable of moral evil; and he cannot leave these creatures the fact that these free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against his goodness; for he could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by exercising the possibility of moral good (166-167).

From the foregoing, it can be implied that the best possible world which God could have ever created would be one in which there is no evil. But, due to our abuse of freedom, a priceless gift of God, we see ourselves in a world in which there is evil. However, despite the fallen state of our world, Plantinga still conceives that it is better than a world in which humans would have been like robots without freewill and in which there is no evil. This is because it is only in freedom that true love, joy and happiness can be shared between God and his higher creatures (man). Therefore, since God created man for his purpose, he should not eliminate the possibility of moral evil for by eliminating it, He would end up eliminating freewill which is a moral good.

The Compatibility of Natural Evil with the Existence of God

One strong objections of the freewill defence is that it only provides a response for the challenge of moral evil to the theistic belief of an omnipotent and perfect God. That is, it provides possible reasons for which God permits evil that can be ascribed to free actions of human beings (moral evil). With this limitation, the atheist can regroup to question God's existence by asking, is his existence compatible with natural evil? Can evils such as earthquakes, tornadoes, famines, diseases and other forms of

natural disasters be faulted by the free actions of human beings? How can we explain using the freewill defence in the situation of a child borne an imbecile or blind or the case of a Siamese twin? Can God's omnipotence and perfection be excused or defended with the creation of these imperfections? Is God not malevolent for allowing some innocent children die with some epidemic diseases such as cancer, AIDs, brain tumour et cetera? In short, is the reality of these evils (natural evils) compatible with God's divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and absolute perfection?

As a response to these challenging questions, Plantinga appraises the traditional line of thought indicated by Augustine by ascribing the origin of natural evil to the actions of significantly free nonhuman spirits (Satan). He emphasized this saying:

Satan... a mighty nonhuman spirit who, along with many other angels, was created long before God created man. Unlike most of his colleagues, Satan rebelled against God and since has been wreaking whatever havoc he can. The result of this is natural evil. So the natural evil we find is due to free actions of nonhuman spirits (58).

He went on to argue that since there is no inconsistency in the idea that God could not have created a world with a better balance of moral good over moral evil than this one displays (as seen in the argument of the freewill defence), then we can possibly assert that natural evil is due to the free activity of nonhuman persons. Hence, it was not within God's power to create a set of such persons whose free actions produced a greater balance of good over evil for His doing so would only conflict with the created order of which he has ascribed libertarian freewill as the attribute of these persons. From the foregoing, it can be seen that Plantinga's argument of the compatibility of natural evil with the existence of God follows similar logic with that of his freewill defence (which borders on moral evil).

From the foregoing therefore, it is evident that Plantinga's argument is based on the point that God's inability to exterminate the possibility of evil (be it moral or natural) in our world is not a limitation of his omnipotence and perfection but a justification gift of freewill (which is libertarian in nature) to man and even angels (as in nonhuman spirits) is a greater good which should not be eliminated because it is only with such gift or state (of freedom) that man and angels can express love, praise and appreciation to Him (God) their creator. And since this is so for Plantinga, then it would be inappropriate and/or logically impossible for God to eliminate the possibility of evil; for by doing so, he would end up eliminating a greater good, freedom, which is the best means by which His creatures (man and angels) can relate with him. According to Plantinga therefore, the bridge that reconciles the seeming inconsistency between the existence of a perfect and omnipotent God and the reality of evils is freedom. As such, he strikes a balance in the views proposed by different scholars before him who argues that the problem of evil "robs" God of his features of perfection, omnipotence, Omnibenevolence, omniscient and other qualities that indeed makes and marks him a Supreme. In Plantinga's view, evil cannot exist apart from libertarian free actions that are not causally determined.

The Tenability of Plantinga's Solution to the Problem of Evil

The logical problem of evil (which was formulated by the proponents of the logical inconsistency arguments) claims that it is logically impossible for an omnipotent and perfectly good God and evil to coexist. To denounce this claim, Plantinga puts up an argument which describes a possible situation in which God and evil can coexist. According to the nature of his argument, such a solution does not need to actually be realistic but should give a logically consistent description of a way God and evil can coexist. Planting claims that his description would be possible if there are possible reasons for which God allows evil. According to him, God's morally significant reason (for creating a world like ours) might possibly have something to do with human and nonhuman spirits being granted morally

significant freewill and with the greater good this freedom makes possible. For him, the resultant effect of moral evils in our world is a consequence of man's abuse of God's vital gift of freewill. This was the focus of Plantinga's argument as regards the reality of moral evils. As regards natural evils, Plantinga parroting Augustine's view asserts that natural evil is a consequence of the abuse of the freewill of nonhuman persons.

Now, the above reasons proposed by Plantinga may not represent God's actual reasons for permitting evil but for the purpose of refuting the claim of the logical problem of evil, it is very much useful. Plantinga's explanation of natural evil is extremely difficult to believe because it assumes the literal existence of Adam and Eve and the literally occurrence of the fall however, since it deals with the logical problem of evil as it pertains to natural evil (which claim that it is logically impossible for God and natural evil to coexist); it only needs to sketch a possible way for God and natural evil to coexist. The fact that his claim is implausible does not keep it free from being possible. Since the argument on the compatibility of natural evil with the existence of God is clearly possible, then it appears that it clearly rebuts the claim of the logical problem of evil as it pertains to natural evil. Some philosophers feel that Plantinga's apparent victory over the logical problem of evil was somehow too easy, leaving them with a feeling of suspicion and dissatisfaction (154).

The case with which Plantinga rebuts the logical inconsistency argument suggests that the logical formulation of the problem of evil did not adequately capture the difficult and perplexing issue concerning God and evil that has been so hotly debated by philosophers and theologians. In fact, this is precisely the message that many philosophers took away from the debate between Plantinga and the defenders of the logical problem of evil. They reasoned that there must be more to the problem of evil than what is captured in the logical formulation. This intuition is verified with current discussions of the problem focusing on what is called the evidential problem of evil. According to this formulation of the problem, the evil and the suffering that we find in our world count as evidence against the existence of God or make it improbable that God exists. Responding to this formulation of the problem requires much more than simply describing a logical possible scenario in which God and evil coexists.

Be that as it may, Plantinga's freewill solution to the problem of evil solves the logical problem of evil; it is seen to conflict with some Christian theistic doctrines and faith. This creates a serious problem for a Christian to comprehensively accept the whole of his thought; hence the questioning of his freewill defence. Even though his freewill defence describes a state of affairs that is logically possible, some of the details of his defence seem to conflict with important theistic doctrines. One point of conflict concerns the possibility of human freewill in heaven. Plantinga claims that if someone is incapable of doing evil, that person cannot have morally significant freewill. He also maintains that, part of what makes us the creatures that we are, is that we possess morally significant freedom. This implies that, if that freedom were to be taken away, we might very well cease to be the creatures that we are.

However, considering the sort of freedom enjoyed by the redeemed in heaven, classical theism will furnish us with the information that those in heaven will be changed so that they will no longer commit sin. It is not that they will contingently always do what is right and contingently always avoid what is wrong; they will somehow no longer be capable of doing wrong. In other words, their good behaviour will be necessary rather than contingent.

Conclusion

The unpleasant and devastating occurrence of evil in our world is an indubitable fact. Its consequence is reckoned as the parasite that deteriorates nature, destroys life, frustrates one's ambition and inhibits human progress and existence. Its undeniable reality poses a serious intellectual problem for the

theistic belief in an omnipotent and perfectly good God upon whose influence reality strives. This problem has been advanced by atheistic scholars who argue that God's divine attributes of omnipotence and infinite perfection is contradicted with the reality of evil in our world. To refute this claim, some theistic thinkers came up with some arguments to justify God's creation for a world that contains evil. Augustine, an advocate of the freewill theodicy, denies the reality of evil as a creation and purports its origin to have stemmed from man's abuse of freewill, a tremendous gift of God. In line with this, Leibniz argues that God's supreme perfection is translated in his creating the best possible world for he must have weighed the importance of various possible worlds before choosing to create the one in which we live.

However, with the criticisms advanced by the logical inconsistency arguments of Mackie and Flew, the theistic argument seems to be shaky. While Mackie primarily argued that the positions of the freewill theodicy complicates the problem of evil to reflect a paradox of divine omnipotence, supremacy and sovereignty, Flew argues from a compatibilistic freewill position that it is possible for God to have created this world such that man always choose the good.

In view of defending the theistic positions, Plantinga provides possible states of affairs that explain the compatibility of God with evil. He argues that God's unwillingness to exterminate the possibility of evil in our world is not a limitation of his omnipotence and perfection but a justification of his righteousness, humility, orderliness and responsibility. For him, God's tremendous gift of freewill (which is libertarian in nature) to man and angels (as in nonhuman spirits) is a greater good which should not be eliminated because it is only such gift or state that man and angel can express love, praise and appreciation to him their creator. There God cannot actualize a world in which truly free creatures do only what is morally good for conditioning them to do such is a logical impossibility that contradicts the created order.

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