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**ON THE MATTER OF GOD'S GOODNESS:**

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE FAILURE OF THEODICIES, HERMAN  
MELVILLE, AND AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO THE PROBLEM  
OF EVIL**

by

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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## Introduction

*“Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” – Epicurus<sup>1</sup>*

In 2010, a collection of surveys and questionnaires reported that 2,184,060,000 people in the world declare that they are Christian. That amount is 31 percent of the total world population making Christianity the most practiced religion in the world (Street). The greatest problem Christianity has is clearly not a shortage of believers. Instead, historically, the problem of evil is the greatest complaint atheists and skeptics pose to Christianity. Christianity, along with Judaism and Islam, all face the problem of evil in contrast to other religions because all three religions share an idea of God in their religious doctrines that presents an inconsistency which poses a great problem for the three religions. Within traditional Western theism there is a belief that God is “the greatest being possible” (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 13)<sup>2</sup>. In order to determine what that kind of greatness is theism offers a set of five qualities that would be considered attributes of greatness or perfection. Those five qualities are maximal power (omnipotence), maximal knowledge (omniscience), maximal goodness (omnibenevolence), incorruptibility, and necessary existence. With this complete set of qualities we can reasonably call God the greatest being possible (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 15). My study will focus on the first three qualities which when combined are called the OmniGod thesis or God’s omniperfection, by philosophers like Yujin

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes at the beginning of my chapters, aside from Chapter 3, can be found on this website: [www.goodreads.com](http://www.goodreads.com)

<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, Western Theists who reject this conception of God. In later chapters I will be discussing alternative conceptions of God that Western Theists have considered.

Nagasawa (2-3). God's omnipotence implies that God has the power to do anything. His omniscience means that He also knows everything. His omnibenevolence means that He is a perfectly good being, and when one is omnibenevolent, it is expected that He will always try to eliminate evil as much as he can or not create evil at all (Mackie, "The Miracle of Theism" 45). However, recalling that in this world things like the Holocaust, slavery, child soldiers, the atom bomb, hunger, disease, and poverty occurs it is evident that evil does exist in this world. Hence, we have the problem of evil.

There are two versions of the problem of evil. For some, like J.L. Mackie, the problem of evil is an argument that claims that there is an inconsistency in the OmniGod thesis when we look at the evidence around us and see that the world is not as good as we would expect an OmniGod to create. This is the logical version that argues that an omniperfect being is not logically consistent with the existence of evil. The second is the evidential version which claims that even if we find a way to make the presence of evil logically consistent with God, all of the evil in the world still provides strong evidence against the existence of God (Nagasawa 7). This version argues that any evil in the world lowers the probability of God's existence (Gale 206). The problem of evil has four parts to it:

- (1) God is omniscient
- (2) God is omnipotent
- (3) God is omnibenevolent
- (4) Evil exists

If we accept the first statement then that means that God knows evil exists in the world. If we accept the second statement then God must be able to eliminate evil.

If we accept the third statement then God should be willing to eliminate evil. The fourth statement is accepted to be true by the majority of philosophers. However, there are philosophers that would argue that evil is an illusion of the mind, like Spinoza for instance, or that evil is merely a lesser good or “privation of good” like followers of St. Augustine (Hick 23 & 52). While this debate is relevant to the problem of evil it is not my focus to debate whether or not evil exists, but rather to acknowledge it in order to enter into the conversation of theodicies and religion. So, for the purposes of my argument I will accept that evil exists. The first three statements, therefore, are inconsistent with the fourth statement. Since the problem of evil commonly deals with statement 2, 3, and 4 so we can ignore the first premise and agree that God does know that evil exists. What we are left with then are issues with his omnibenevolence and omnipotence and the question: “why does he allow evil to exist?” (Nagasawa 8)

Let us consider the second premise, God’s omnipotence and the third premise, God’s omnibenevolence. It seems that these two qualities are incompatible with each other because if we recall their definitions God should have the power to do anything, which could include creating evil if he wanted to. The problem that arises is that God’s omnibenevolence makes it impossible for him to do such an act thereby challenging his omnipotence and thus the two contradict each other (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 173). Simply put, “If an omnipotent God is powerless to do evil, then how can he be omnipotent?” (Hoffman and Rosenkrantz 166). So it seems impossible that God can be omnipotent and not do evil at the same time. This means He is not so powerful or



He is not so good. However, Keith Parsons in his book *God and the Burden of Proof* notes, “since omnipotence and perfect goodness are part of the *definition* of the term ‘God’, to surrender either of these claims is to surrender belief in God. Hence, the existence of evil seems to disprove the existence of God,” (106). But the theist cannot accept that the existence of evil is the end of God and believes that there must be a solution to the problem of evil.

The solution is called a theodicy. A theodicy is a way to maintain God’s attributes by explaining why He permits evil. If theodacists can find a moral justification, or explanation, for why God allows evil to exist in the world then the existence of God is more probable. A theodicy must explain two kinds of evil – moral evil and natural evil. Natural evil is “all evil which is not deliberately produced by human beings and which is not allowed by human beings to occur as a result of their negligence” (Swinburne, “Why God” 110). This includes some physical suffering and mental suffering of humans and animals, such as some diseases, natural disasters, and unpredictable accidents. Moral evil is anything that is caused by preventable acts of humans. Humans can cause evil when they do a wrong action that is morally significant for them. A morally significant action is defined as an action that would be one that is wrong to perform and right to abstain from doing, or, one that is right to perform and wrong to abstain from doing. Keeping a promise is a morally significant action; however choosing to drink water instead of soda is not (Plantinga 166). Human beings are capable of morally significant actions like causing death, starting wars, and stealing from

others, and as time progresses it seems humans are becoming capable of greater evils in the world, such as causing evil with stronger instruments of destruction.

But why do theologians even need to bother creating theodicies if they are already believers of God's existence? J.L. Mackie argues, "The mere fact, then, that faith often rests upon a tragic sense of the evil in the world does do away with the need for a theodicy. It means, no doubt, that some of the firmest believers *feel* no need for a theodicy, but one is still needed if their position, and that of theism generally, is to be made rationally defensible" ("The Miracle of Theism" 158). His argument is that faith exists because we need a reason to live in a world with evil and thus faith offers a sense of goodness and an answer to the existence of evil so it seems irrelevant to be even discussing the problem of evil in this way for those who already feel justified by faith. However, Mackie emphasizes the fact that if Western theism is to be defended against those who would question the rationality of its doctrine a theodicy is necessary for its defense. Without one, Western theism would be open to more attack from skeptics and atheists. I believe a parable offered by the philosopher Roland Puccetti will help to explain the need for a theodicy:

Suppose we are all tenants of a large apartment building and we meet to discuss common problems. It is clear that the building has many faults. Walls are crumbling, ceilings develop cracks, the heat is sometimes off in winter and on in the summer, the elevators are unreliable, etc. The general feel is that our landlord, whom none of us has ever seen, is either incompetent or selfishly indifferent to our fate. Some tenants, however, rise to his defense. They say he *may* have good reason for letting the buildings go on in this way, though when pressed they can't suggest any which sound convincing to most of us. Now what would we normally do if we saw no prospect of getting a reasonable explanation in the future? Surely we wouldn't just sit back and suspend judgment indefinitely. It is

always *possible* that anyone really had good reason for what he did, or what he did not do. Ignorance of possible motivation does not prevent us, in human affairs, from making a decision about someone's moral qualities. (Parsons 125-126)

The apartment building is meant to represent the world and the tenants are those who live in the world now. Like the world, the building has problems that seem to be out of the control of the tenants. Like God, the landlord has never been seen and like those who believe in God some of the tenants assume that his intentions must be good while others, the non-believers, think he does not care, or he does not exist. Puccetti explains that a decision will be made about the landlord's character due to his actions, or rather inaction, and if there was an explanation for those actions then maybe the tenants would not consider his character powerless or careless. People do this kind of reasoning every day because reasoning involves explanations, so it should be easy to see why, like those angry tenants, there is still a group of people in the world that need a justification for God's actions in regards to the existence of evil. Therefore, without a theodicy Christianity is forced to accept the greatest challenge to its faith, the existence of unjustifiable evil (Parsons 132).

This work aims to consider the problem of evil by exploring major strands of theodicy and offer an alternative way of conceiving God that will allow us to avoid the problem of evil all together. I will first present what I believe to be the three major philosophers' theodicies: Alvin Plantinga and his free will defense, John Hick and his soul building theodicy, and Richard Swinburne's combination of free will and soul building theodicy. As I consider these theodicies I will prove that each fail at justifying the existence of evil. I will then consider the problem of

evil through a literary lens by considering the works of Herman Melville. Finally, I will present a new set of definitions for the God of Western of theism. I will argue that this new definition of God is not as constraining as the current definition and allows us to ignore the problem of evil altogether so that it is no longer a problem for Western theism. The new definition will remove the “omnis” from God’s attributes and substitute them with a God that is not wholly perfect, but rather a God capable of doing certain tasks. I will discuss this further in the latter half of this chapter.

In order to fully flesh out and understand the problem of evil I will not only discuss the philosophical arguments, but also consider the representation of the problem of evil in literature. Because this work is not solely grounded in philosophical works but also in literature I will consider the theodicies presented in my first chapter and apply them to the works of Herman Melville in my second chapter and third chapter. I believe that my argument requires a literary lens because it allows us to take into consideration the individual and human experience alongside the arguments presented by the major strands of theodicy. Onora O’Neill, in her paper “The Power of Example,” which argues in favor of using literary examples in philosophy, states that, “there are instances of problems in human lives which stand in need of resolution. Reflection and even understanding are not enough to bring to human difficulties—unless, of course, these difficulties are merely imagined, as they are in works of literature,” (17). O’Neill believes that the imaginings of literary work, not the hypothetical scenarios that are controlled by the philosopher making the argument, make

literature valuable to the discussion of philosophical issues. I will also take it another step further and claim that that the literary works I intend to examine also give us insight into the religious experiences of Herman Melville and the way he perceived the problem of evil and the conception of God.

The second and third chapters will analyze two of Melville's literary works: *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* (1849) and *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851). Both stories involve the sea in some way and the idea of adventure. *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* is a journey to find a woman named Yillah and *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is a journey to find the White Whale. While both are on the surface a journey for different things, I believe that each are in actuality journeys to find a solution to the problem of evil and allow Melville to write what he could not say. By looking at these works as book ends I will be able to analyze Melville's philosophical ideas on the problem of evil. I will demonstrate how Herman Melville still struggled with the notion of God and the presence of evil in both novels.

In order to understand how Melville perceives the problem of evil I will briefly put into context Melville's personal relationship with religion that has been discussed by many Melville analysts. Herman Melville was born on August 1, 1819 "in a period of tremendous and philosophical turmoil that affected every aspect of society". The American population lacked manners and morals which resulted in religious revivals and self-improvement programs that hoped to help these immoral citizens (Elliot 171-172). His family stood on the moral side of things with a strong history in Calvinist religious traditions. Within the religious

framework of Calvinism there are two important ideas to consider—predestination and the hidden God. Now, predestination is a belief that everything in life that will happen and has happened was predetermined by God. This includes whether or not someone will receive salvation and go to Heaven at the time of their death. The hidden God implies that God actively hides Himself from us in this world, which for some believers causes distress for in this world filled with suffering God remains silent. Melville's earlier years of development were therefore greatly centered on religious thought and a very particular religious thought. However, after his father's death that religious path no longer seemed favorable to the young and already questioning Melville. We can see that change in Melville, who after experiencing the world outside of religion in his youth, argued that the belief that the nature of this world is evidence against God's infinite benevolence. Melville wrote that if you look at the nature of this world, in particular the ruthless sea which he gained a lot of experience with at later points in life, it can only provide evidence for the "infinitely ruthless malice of God" (Thompson 133). This demonstrates that the one version of God Melville was raised with became tainted by the reality of the world and altered. God was no longer so good. Melville questioned this God humanity followed, but rejecting him was not enough. In a letter to Hawthorne he describes this God-humanity relationship: "The reason the mass of men fear God, and *at the bottom dislike* Him, is because they rather distrust His heart, and fancy Him all brain like a watch" (Thompson 131). This dehumanization of God that is part of Calvinistic doctrine plays a role in why Melville could not easily accept God. In the Book of

Job Satan needed to challenge God about his power and relation to humanity until he was proven right or wrong and perhaps Melville did too. While Melville questioned religion he was still greatly influenced by it as is shown by his upbringing and that intersection of influence and doubt is why I find Melville's works so intriguing.

In a span of a few years after *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* Melville wrote *Redburn* (1849), *White Jacket* (1850), *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* (1851), and *Pierre* (1852). He did not write another novel until 1855 which he titled *Israel Potter: His Fifty Years of Exile*. In between 1852 and 1855 however Melville did write novellas and short stories. Within each of his works the conflict of evil is always present in some manner. This concern with the problem of evil began to arise in Melville's literature once his definition of a benevolent God was in conflict with the fact that there was evil in the world and it seemed to be caused by God. So Melville began his attempt at forming a theodicy or religious alternative through his further journeys and literature. Hawthorne wrote in a journal entry after an encounter with Melville on a visit to England:

It is strange how he persists—and has persisted ever since I knew him, and probably long before—in wandering to and fro over these deserts, as dismal and monotonous as the sandhills amid which we are sitting. He can neither believe, nor be comfortable in his unbelief; and he is too honest and courageous not to try to do one or the other. If he were a religious man, he would be one of the most truly religious and reverential. (Olson 91)

It is this wandering to and fro that makes Melville's literature a subject worth analyzing when considering the problem of evil for it is an effort to seek an answer. As I consider two pieces of his work I aim to examine how Melville

struggled with the problem of evil in literature and explore the ways his literary work can offer us an understanding of God that allows us to evade the problem of evil altogether.

The final chapter will present a way that may resolve the problem of evil for Judeo-Christianity in a way the theodicies could not, and perhaps even solve the problems Melville dealt with in his literature. The final chapter will reject the OmniGod thesis and provide a new thesis, or set of qualities, that would make the presence of evil and the definition of God compatible and would result in removing the problem of evil from Judeo-Christianity's concerns. I will do so by removing God's three "Os" and modifying the "Os"; for example, with omnibenevolence I could claim that perhaps God is not all good, but only partially good. This approach is called the Non-OmniGod response by Nagasawa (Nagasawa 10) The Non-OmniGod response has three options: 1. Give up God's omnipotence, 2. Give up God's omnibenevolence, 3. Give up both (Nagasawa 10). The third option is the least popular of the three, which makes sense, because as Mackie notes you only need to give up *either* omnipotence or omnibenevolence, but not necessarily both, to find a solution to the problem of evil (Nagasawa 11). An example of the first approach is allowing God to be morally perfect and limiting his omnipotence to a kind of power where God is only able to create the world and perform some miracles. Nagasawa comments that he is unaware of anyone that gives up God's omnibenevolence (Nagasawa 11). This is understandable because that would mean at the core of things God is not as good as we think and that seems to be far more damaging to Western



theism. If God is not all good then that would mean that people believe in something that is not perfectly good but still better than human beings. We exist as imperfect creatures who do wrong things. The being we believe in should serve as a moral compass and therefore should not do wrong things. However, the remainder of this thesis will do exactly that—remove God’s omnibenevolence after analyzing how Melville presents an imperfect and not wholly good God. While Nagasawa may believe that it is not wise to remove God’s omnibenevolence I claim that it is not beneficial to Western theism to remove God’s omnipotence. If he is not omnipotent he still clearly needs to be powerful enough to create the world, start a tornado, kill an entire nation and create the creatures that live in this world. If he is capable of all of these things, as written in the Biblical scriptures and creeds, then God cannot be too weak to stop evil. In fact, he would have to be so weak that he either could not control his will or that he lacked a significant amount of power. The God of the Bible however is not this weak and therefore arguing that God is not omnipotent does not solve the problem of evil. My endeavor seems to be the most fruitful approach to the problem of evil: If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you (Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence” 46). While Mackie believes that the problem of evil does not arise if a person is willing to say one of the above mentioned arguments I still believe a justification is necessary for the alternation of God’s definitions once you have made one of

those arguments (aside from the argument that claims that evil does not exist). If my alternative theism proves that a less constraining theism can salvage God's existence and allows us to avoid the problem of evil better than any theodicy can solve the problem of evil I will still need to consider the consequences of my approach. What will this mean for Christianity? What kind of God will I be creating for theists and for Herman Melville? What does this do for the literary works of Herman Melville? The God I will present does not initially appear to be a Judeo-Christian God so my final task will be to prove why without His omnibenevolence He can still be the Christian God that millions of people believe in. I will have to demonstrate that the God I am presenting exists in religious literature and is therefore still a God to believe in. I acknowledge that these are grand questions to consider and my goal for this thesis is to offer an alternative approach to the problem of evil by simply letting it not be a problem.

## Chapter 1

### **The Suffering, The Wicked, and a World with a Good God: Philosophical Attempts to Justify the Presence of Evil**

*“All sacrifice and suffering is redemptive. It is used to either teach the individual or to help others. Nothing is by chance.”*  
— Arthur J. Russell

*“People couldn't become truly holy, he said, unless they also had the opportunity to be definitively wicked.” — Terry Pratchett, Good Omens: The Nice and Accurate Prophecies of Agnes Nutter, Witch*

### **Alvin Plantinga and the Free Will Defense**

The first theodicy is called the Free Will Defense, which Mackie considers to be the “best known move in theodicy” (“The Miracle of Theism” 155). This theodicy is a line of argument that was first developed by St. Augustine. St. Augustine was an early Christian theologian whose works impacted and formulated early Christian thought. St. Augustine’s argument is that God is not responsible for evil and that the blame lies in the fall and exists because of free will (Hick 43). The basic form of the Free Will Defense argues that the only way the world can be created with moral goodness is if its agents are free (Parsons 108). Stephen T. Davis, in his essay “Free Will and Evil”, explains that the Free-Will Defense makes two claims about God’s aims for this world. First, God wanted to create the best possible world and second, God wanted a world with rational agents who were capable of deciding on their own to love and obey God. At first God thought that this was best with the first version of the world he created, the world with Adam, Eve and the Garden of Eden. The first version of the world was free of evil and his creations had free will (74). An obvious

consequence of free will is that human beings are capable of doing wrong and unfortunately God's first creations did fall into sin (The Fall). Thus, God is not responsible for the existence of moral evil because mankind is. God attempted to make a world free of evil and that was not possible so we are left with a world filled with evil, which is now the best possible world (Davis 75).

There are three key terms that are used with the Free Will Defense, the first obviously being *free will*, the second being the term *significantly free* (Plantinga 166), and the third being *the best possible world*. Alvin Plantinga, in his book *The Nature of Necessity*, defines free will as a condition: "If a person *S* is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not" (166). This argument is contrary to Determinism, which is a philosophical doctrine that claims that all events are caused by events that came before. Some philosophers argue that human action is not free because everything is causally determined by external forces that affect the will. There are others who also say that free will is compatible with determinism and others reject determinism all together. Plantinga's theodicy, though he prefers to call it a defense (Parsons 117), is concerned with morally significant actions. Those actions also have to be significantly free, meaning that person *S* is free to do, or not do, an action that is morally significant for him (Plantinga 166). Finally, we need to consider what is the best possible world and it is best to think through the arguments of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, an 18<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher. According to Leibniz, God would only will the best

possible world. Leibniz argues that there are two wills to consider, the first is the acts of the antecedent will and the second is the acts of the consequent will. The antecedent will causes God to promote the good and prevent evil; for example, God should want to bring about happiness for everyone and to hate vice and love virtue. The act of his consequent will then is to produce as much good as his antecedent will requires, which should result in creating the best possible world (Rowe 6). In order for God to create such a world he contemplated the infinite amount of possible worlds and deliberated which one was best. For Leibniz, God “not content with embracing all the possibles, penetrates them, compares them, weighs them one against the other, to estimate their degrees of perfection or imperfection, the strong and the weak, the good and the evil” (Rowe 7), and after doing so God chose the best possible world which satisfied the requirement of being all good (Rowe 8). In this best possible world employing vice is a moral necessity that without its existence would not have brought out the good (Rowe 10).

The structure of Plantinga’s Free Will Defense is as follows:

(1) God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent (This implies that he exists)

And this *is* consistent with the fact that

(2) There is evil in the world

Plantinga argues that both (1) and (2) can both be true thereby disproving the problem of evil (Plantinga 165). The Free Will Defense claims that if you provide a third proposition then it is possible to argue that both (1) and (2) are true. It

claims that the missing proposition needed is the possibility, “that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this one contains) without creating one containing moral evil” (Plantinga 167). Recalling St. Augustine’s argument, moral evil exists due to the actions brought about by the free will of moral agents that God created (Davis 76). The key to Plantinga’s defense is thus free will, “because a world containing creatures who are sometimes 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 167). Thus, there is more value in a world with significantly free creatures than there is in a world with creatures who are not significantly free because of presence of good. The upshot to this theodicy is that the burden of evil is no longer only directed at God, but at mankind. It makes the presence of moral evil due to the free actions of human beings. As Mackie notes, “Evils...are due entirely to bad free choices made by human beings and perhaps by other created beings that have free will” and “since these (bad) choices are freely made by me or by fallen (or falling angels), neither they nor their effects can be ascribed to God” (Mackie, “The Miracle of Theism” 155).

## **Objections**

Of course this theodicy is not without its faults and objections have been made against it. Let us consider some of the major objections against the Free Will Defense.

*.Objection A: Isn't it possible that God could have made a world where significantly free creatures always choose good actions? Since God is omnipotent, one, he should be capable of making a morally perfect world and two, it seems wrong to say that he can only create a morally imperfect world (Mackie, "The Miracle of Theism" 164).*

Mackie's understanding of freedom is important to consider for this objection. In his paper, "Evil and Omnipotence", Mackie believes that human beings are capable of causing actions, however human beings were caused by God so God is responsible for them and their actions. For Mackie, God is like a parent who has brought a child into the world, or thousands of children. As a parent, God caused that child to exist and is now responsible for the actions the child will do. Should a child do something wrong those that seek to punish the child will go to the parent and make a complaint. To say that no one would call the parent responsible for the child would be to go against our understanding of the parent's role; therefore God is responsible for his creations because he is the one that caused them. For this reason, since God created human beings he is responsible for what they do, and, as an omnipotent being should, could have caused them to always choose good actions.

A common response to this type of objection is that having God create agents that always choose to do the good is not a coherent option because that would not be a free choice (and without a free choice no one can become morally good). Mackie seems to be forgetting that Plantinga's Free Will Defense places a kind of value on freedom that makes free will a necessity. Plantinga states:

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 after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, he must create creatures capable of moral evil; and he cannot leave these creatures *free* to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. (167)

This theodicy acknowledges that by allowing for free will one has to expect that evil would be a consequence, for free will implies the ability to bring about the good or the bad (Swinburne, "Why God" 112). However, the free ability to bring about the good and bad allows for people to have moral responsibility. Moral goodness is only the result of being significantly free so a good act done only because the person cannot do otherwise is not really a good act that helps to develop morality (Parsons 108).

Mackie's reply to this defense is that it is not logically impossible to think that God could have made humans always freely choose the good. By being created by God an agent's freedom is destroyed because He has determined that agent's existence. So, to claim that God created free agents would be to say that He "created beings without any specific natures, leaving those natures to spring up from nowhere" meaning that human beings would have been created without any particular type of nature or attribute (Mackie, "The Miracle of Theism" 172). Human beings, however, were created and caused by God and therefore do have particular types of natures and attributes. As agents we would have to be caused or else our actions would be completely random. Parsons adds, "If our choices are merely random, then they are things that just happen to us rather than things that we do, and how could that be of any value to God?" (Parsons 116) Parson's and Mackie's argument implies that randomness is equally as bad as determinism



because randomness does not really create a moral character either for agents. The response Mackie considers for the objection that our will could have been to always freely choose the good is that God created free agents while being aware of the fact that he would not know how they would use their freedom and because he does not know he cannot control our will so our will is free (Mackie, "The Miracle of Theism" 175). This response acknowledges that while human beings were caused by God it does not mean that He has any control over our will post-creation. However, Mackie goes on to say that this creates a problem for God's omniscience and therefore his omnipotence because a limitation of knowledge results in a limitation of power. Furthermore, if we say that he did not know then he should be accused of negligence or recklessness (Mackie, "The Miracle of Theism" 175). Mackie demonstrates with his objection that the problem rests on the fact that God either chose to be ignorant of our characters when he created us or he failed to give us wholly good characters at the time of creation. Either way God is at fault, because given his immense power he should have been able to create a world where agents are free with good wills. Instead, we live in a world where free agents can do good things or can do bad things, so it is plausible to have been created in a world where free agents tend towards the good all of the time.

In order to rescue themselves from Mackie's attacks, the theodicy in favor of the free will defense would add a further response claiming that a world without free will would not be filled with human beings (Phillips 54) or that we would all be like robots performing automatic actions (Parsons 108). However,

even this fails to prove the value of free will. D.Z. Phillips in his paper, “Theism Without Theodicy,” comments that, “the problem with the argument comes from thinking of the deprivation of freedom of the will as such, as though it were akin to being deprived of a specific mental or physical capacity. But lacking freedom of the will as such is not a larger scale defect than, say, being brainwashed or becoming insane” (Phillips 54). Phillips replies that if our wills could be fixed to always choose the good we would all have lives that would not be normal or human. However, those philosophers are confused. Lacking free will is just like having your mind work differently than it already does. We, if we were brainwashed or insane, would not know the difference. We also do not need to argue that God could have made us *always* choose the good. He simply could have made mankind *more disposed* to choose the good freely and this would not threaten or remove free will. If there was a single instance in time where I could have chosen the good instead of the bad and I did not then that means that this world is not the best possible world we could have. We can still predict a person’s actions even with free wills based on their habits and their tendency to make bad or good choices so free will still results in determined actions. Thus, God could have given us free will along with the ability to choose the good more than the bad. In the end, we do not know what it is like to only do good things and we would not know if that alternative would be worse so it is not a justification of God not making us this way to say that somehow we would not be human. That determination is up to God and not within our realm of understanding.

*Objection B: Even if we accept that the Free Will Defense proves that God chose to only actualize this world and no other kind of possible worlds this theodicy still only accounts for moral evil. It fails to address the vast amount of evil that exists in the world, specifically natural evil (Parsons 108 & Mackie, “The Miracle of Theism” 162).*

I believe that this is the greatest problem for the Free Will Defense. The defense explains the actions of human beings; however human beings are not the cause of floods or typhoons, so how do we account for natural evil in the Free Will Defense? In order to respond to this objection Plantinga offers the possibility of non-human beings being the cause of natural evil. He makes this claim using the argument of St. Augustine who blames most of the evil in the world on Satan and his followers, whom Plantinga calls non-human beings (Plantinga 192). Non-human beings are free beings created by God that God cannot control. These are angels and devils. The devils go around causing evil. If it is true that such beings exist then, he says, there are special cases that can be called *broadly moral evil*, meaning evil events—natural and moral—that result from the actions of beings human *and* these non-human beings (Plantinga 193). Similar to the line of thought for why human beings have free wills that can choose the good or the bad, Plantinga claims that maybe God could not even make a special kind of non-beings whose free actions were always for the good. Thus, these non-human beings go around the world causing natural evil and even moral evil. One important thing to note is that Plantinga does not argue that this is true, he is simply using this line of thought to make it possible that natural evil is compatible

with (1) (God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent) and according to his hidden proposition this argument does make natural evil compatible with (1) (Plantinga 192-193). However, this defense offers only the possibility of a solution and it is still a poor solution. If non-human beings exist then that means God created beings who have the ability to torment and torture his other creations which leaves God still at fault for the problem of evil and results in him being more bad than good. Furthermore, Plantinga does not even argue for its validity just its possibility. It is as if he is putting duct tape over a leaky pipe rather than getting the pipe fixed. Satan, or non-human beings, is therefore not a real solution. Plantinga's Free Will Defense fails to solve the problem of evil.

### **John Hick's Soul-Building Theodicy**

This version of a theodicy focuses on arguing that suffering has a purpose in the world. Even with all of the variations of the theodicy, each suggests that evil is necessary because it allows us to understand the world in a particular way and offers a brighter perspective so evil does not seem as evil as we might think. There are many ways to argue for this kind of theodicy. The first is the argument that the universe is better with some evil in it than it would be if there were no evil in it (Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" 49). The theodicy that offers this solution asks you to imagine things like works of art. Sometimes a painting is improved by a mistake, like a spill that enhances the piece. The world then is like a painting that is only enhanced by the bits of evil that exist. One theodicy that presents this argument is Leibniz who states that God can only make the best possible world (Hick 153). That best possible world needs to be a richly varied

realm and the variation comes from the presence of good and evil (Hick 160). If God were able to create something better than evil he would have, but there is nothing better so this is the world he created (Rowe 229). Another version is one that states the evil is a necessary counterpart to good. If evil did not exist then there could be no good (Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" 47). This argument assumes that evil and good are relative terms. The claim is that there are terms that are defined in relation to another term. Think of the word cold, for example; we know something is cold because it is not hot and vice versa. The opposites offer us a spectrum and in between we have words like warm, chilly, burning and so forth. Finally, there is the argument that evil is a necessary means to a good meaning that God needed to create a world filled with evil so that it can bring about the good. Think of someone who suffers from cancer who learns that they can survive by undergoing chemotherapy. Chemotherapy is not an easy experience. Many times patients feel sick during the therapy, experiencing nausea and vomiting. They can develop mouth sores, have nerve damage and so much more. However, should chemotherapy work, the cancer will recede. Therefore, the suffering that the patient goes through, because of chemotherapy, can result in something good, their life. This version can also be translated into a soul-building theodicy for not only do evil experiences create good in the way chemotherapy heals a patient, they can also provide opportunities for character development, like making the patient more courageous as she faces cancer and those around her to feel empathy. This final version follows John Hick's soul-building theodicy.

Hick's theodicy is an Irenaean type of theodicy. Irenaeus, a second century Bishop of Lyons and author, believed that humankind was made to be an immature creation that was placed in a challenging world. Since it is challenging, humankind is given the opportunity to build their character in order to survive (Davis, "Encountering Evil" 39)<sup>3</sup>. Of course, Irenaeus did not actually create a theodicy, but Hick does believe that Irenaeus managed to establish a foundation from which a theodicy can be formed. The appeal of Irenaeus' idea is that it is not dependent upon arguments that are no longer relevant to modern day sensibilities; meaning that this argument does not rely on the Christian idea of the fall of mankind that began with Adam and Eve. Hick associates the use of the fall in arguments regarding the problem of evil with St. Augustine who argued that the Fall is the reason for existence of evil. In contrast, Irenaeus' view accepts a more modern sense of the origins of the human race allowing for the language of evolution to be part of the discussion. Irenaeus does not argue that there was a fall of mankind, but that man was created, evolved and is still living in a world where they must build their souls.

Hick's Irenaean theodicy has four parts to it:

- (1) God's intention for humankind was to create perfect finite personal beings who are in a filial relationship with him.
- (2) Humans were logically not made in this perfect state because the state requires that a person exists at an epistemic distance from God and freely comes to an uncoerced realization of God by being able to freely choose the good.

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<sup>3</sup> These passages can be found in Davis' book *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy* in the chapter "Irenaean Theodicy" written by Hick himself

- (3) In order for (2) to occur humans had to be created immature spiritually and morally and allowed to evolve in a world that is religiously ambiguous and ethically challenging.
- (4) Thus, existing in a world with all of its challenges, like natural evil, and being morally imperfect, thus causing moral evil, is a necessary aspect for God's plan to have each person gradually become perfect finite personal beings. (Davis, "Encountering Evil" 48)

In order to understand this structure I believe it is best to start from the last part and work my way up. So, when considering an Iranian theodicy there is a concept of human creation that must be understood which has two stages to it. The first is the "image" of God, which is man's nature as "an intelligent creature in a fellowship with his maker" (Hick 217). In the first stage, human beings are born creatures endowed with moral freedom and responsibility in order to grow. The second is the "likeness" of God in human beings, which is the final perfecting by the Holy Spirit (Hick 217). The two images are important in understanding Iraneus' theodicy because he argues that mankind is created, grows, is strengthened and abounded, recovers from sin, is glorified and at the end of her life sees the Lord (Hick 219). Thus the first image leads to the second image. To put it more modern terms, the first stage is the development of *homo sapiens* through evolution that causes them to be more intelligent, more ethical and more religious (Davis, "Encountering Evil" 40). When the development first began, and this is not when Adam and Eve were created but when mankind was created, we can imagine that mankind lived in a constant struggle and had a primitive immature life. This is why the first stage is only called the "image", because mankind is not yet mature enough to be *like* God (Davis, "Encountering Evil" 41). Every day, since the creation of mankind, human beings progress towards perfection and the presence of good and evil (hence the challenging world)

become lessons for human beings to learn from. Iraneus believed that human beings are imperfect or childlike and need moral growth; and that evil was placed by God for said growth (Hick 220). So, natural evil is part of that life and assists in the pilgrimage to God (Hick 296) This fact is evident by the way our societies have developed systems of morality, government, religion, and ways to live as a society, or a community of people. However, this growth cannot occur without the freedom to do so independently of God, so God created man at a distance from him. This distance cannot be spatial because God is omnipresent so it must be a mental, or epistemic, distance. Iranaeus defines this distance as a state where the existence of human beings is “within and part of a world” that is religiously ambiguous, meaning that God does not have an obvious and overwhelming presence to human beings like he did with Adam and Eve (Davis, “Encountering Evil” 42) . With this distance a person has the freedom to doubt God or follow and worship God. This sort of freedom allows mankind to act on their own volition, but that would not be possible in a world where mankind already knows and loves God, like with Adam and Eve (Davis, “Encountering Evil” 42). Thus, the second stage is the development of human beings to be more like God and a point of perfection that lies ahead in the future for each person as an unrealized goal.

It is important to remember that at the core of this theodicy is the notion of a fellowship between God and his creations and the use of eschatology. Eschatology deals with the part of Christian theology that deals with the death, final judgment, and the final destiny of the soul of human kind (Merriam-



Webster). This fellowship is the loving relationship God has with his creations that begins when they are born and continues for an eternity in heaven. This fellowship is meant to justify the existence of evil because it promises a final end-product of human life that makes evil necessary and good. To be clear, this theodicy promises life in heaven so that there can be a fair compensation to the suffering had on Earth (Hick 376). For a Christian, this idea is very appealing because it is part of their religious language to be part of the divine kingdom in the end. Yet, Hick's theodicy also assumes that there is no hell because everyone is promised a life in heaven (Hick 378). As Phillips puts it, evil is part of God's plan for our character development, that makes evil logically necessary (because God could not create the world in any other way), and furthermore "to want a world without evil is to want at the same time, albeit unwittingly, a world without character development" (Phillips 56-57). However, that character development does not end or is not perfected on earth. This is evident by the fact that there are many people in the world who do not reach moral perfection. Thus, the person-making process must be continued even after each person's life ends on earth. In fact, Hick argues that this perfect community cannot even be attained on earth because, if it was possible, it would have existed already with all of hundreds of generations of human beings that have lived and died already (Davis, "Encountering Evil" 51). For this reason, Hick's theodicy is dependent on an after-life for everyone that makes further development possible.

## Objections

*Objection A: Like the Free Will Defense, there are still flaws to the soul-building theodicy. This theodicy limits God's power because he is subject to the causal law that makes evil necessary as a means to good. It seems to deny his omnipotence because it sets a limit on what God can do because he had to create evil in order to get a result (Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" 49).*

According to Mackie, agents who have a limited power or limited by causal laws should have to accept evil for the sake of good that results from it. God, however, should not be subject to such laws and his power is not limited so he should not have to create evil as a means to good. For Mackie, omnipotence should, at the very least, mean having power over causal laws. Thus, if there are causal laws then God must have made them and should have the power to override them. So, if there is a God then He should not need to use evil to attain an end goal of creating perfect beings (Mackie, "The Miracle of Theism" 152-153). God does not have to put up with the necessity of evil. He can decide to make a world filled with good if he wanted to. However, Hick's theodicy argues that God *had* to create evil so there must be a problem with Hick's theodicy. Hick could respond saying being omnipotent does not mean you can do what is impossible and this argument is sound because it does reject any theistic doctrine (Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" 47). This however still does not explain why not creating evil is an impossible task. If God is *only* capable of creating good *and* evil then He still appears to be limited in his power which makes him a non-omnipotent god.

*Objection B: Couldn't God have given us innate ideas of evil or couldn't we just have inductive knowledge of evil without actually having to experience evil?*

(Parsons 138).

An alternative way this objection is presented is given by Swinburne, "they could have a concept of bad (they could be born with an ability to recognize bad states, if they were to occur) without there actually being any instances of bad states" (Phillips 52). Swinburne suggests that God could place in our minds the concept of evil without the actual experience. Of course this goes against Hick's soul building theory. For Hick, we need to experience the pain and the joy, the kindness and the cruelty of others and the gift and loss of life and so on. Both allow us to develop our souls to the kinds of creatures that can spend eternity in Heaven. To alter Swinburne's suggestion I wonder then why we need so much evil to understand and develop ourselves. Evil, at many times seems superfluous in this world. Many wonder why so much evil needs to exist. A possible reply to this objection is offered by Swinburne: "a creator who gave them only coughs and colds, and not cancer and cholera would be a creator who treated man as children instead of giving them real encouragement to subdue the world" (Phillips 59). My claim, however, is not that we need to remove all of the worse kinds of evil, but that we do not require so much to grow stronger. If God is truly all powerful then he could have determined how much evil is truly necessary for his creatures to develop, yet there remains unnecessary evils in the world so again we are left to believe that God is not as powerful as many claim.

## **Swinburne's Free Will and Soul Building Combination**

In order to understand Swinburne's theodicy we must first define how Swinburne perceives four key terms: omnipotence, omnibenevolence, the good and evil. First, Swinburne accepts that by definition an omnipotent being is capable of preventing "any evil he choose", but he does not accept the claim that an omnibenevolent being will always try to prevent any evil to occur (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 30). His argument is that if God does exist then it is expected that he would do certain things and one of those things can be allowing certain evils to occur (Swinburne, "Why God" 109). Swinburne justifies this by arguing that God creating evil meets three requirements. First, if an omnibenevolent being allows evil to exist he must have the right to do so. Second, some good has to be brought about by the presence of evil that could not be made possible by him with an alternative. Third, the good has to be so great that it makes the presence of evil worth experiencing it (Swinburne, "Major Stands" 31). In a simpler form his argument structure is:

An agent P, God, can allow evil E to occur and still be omnibenevolent so long as:

- (1) There exist some good G that can only be brought about by allowing E to occur
- (2) "P does everything he can to bring about G (e.g. God gives the above free choice)"
- (3) "P has the right to allow E to occur" and this is because he created human beings and will bring us into heaven
- (4) There is a greater positive good value from P allowing E to occur than there is negative value (Swinburne, "Problem of Evil")

Swinburne's argument is based on the belief that God is entitled to allow humans to suffer so long as it is for the greater good.

According to Swinburne, the good is many things that cannot be listed in its entirety. Still, in his multitude of articles he attempts to start such a list that he believes are relevant to discussions of theodicies. Swinburne's first good is what he considers to be the "most basic good of all", which is the good that comes from the satisfaction of desire (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 32). He determines that the satisfaction of desire is a basic good because it makes possible the existence of greater goods in many other states of affairs thus it is the beginning of all other goods. Swinburne understands a 'desire' to be "an involuntary inclination with which an agent finds himself to do some action or to have something happen," (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 32). Simply having a desire is a good to Swinburne and desires themselves are a good (35). A person's desire is satisfied if she has experienced pleasure after. Pleasure, in Swinburne's view, is also a good. For example, if a person desires to be a pilot and upon completion of all the flight classes and exams the person receives her pilot license. When she receives the license she feels joy, pride, happiness or the like and it is that emotion that Swinburne considers to be the pleasure attained from satisfying the desire to be a pilot. There is, however, one exception to the statement that a satisfaction of a desire is a good and that is when the desire is for something that is bad in itself, such as desiring someone to suffer pain or die in a crash. From that the pleasure received from satisfying a bad desire is also not a good (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 33).

After determining that satisfaction of a good desire is the basic good Swinburne then goes on to explain the hierarchy of goods. For Swinburne,

satisfying a strong desire is a greater good than satisfying a weak desire. Also, satisfying a desire that is good for other reasons is better than any other desire. Swinburne provides the example of desires that ensure a person's state of affairs in regards to health is good. For said person it is a better good to desire to "read great novels rather than [watch] pornography" or to desire wine rather than Coca-Cola (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 33-34). Then there is the satisfaction of joint desires, when two people desire a shared end. An example of this is when two people desire to build a home together. Shared desires are good because it based on the goodness of sharing and cooperating with another person (34). From that an even better desire is to desire to have another person's desire satisfied.

Recalling the parents, imagine that they now have a child and they want that child to get into the college of their dreams. Now, instead of having a desire for their own satisfaction or shared satisfaction, the parents will desire someone else's satisfaction. This is a good because it creates the goodness of mutual concern and a joint concern for another person is even better than a single person's concern for another person (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 34).

Still, with all of this good that Swinburne presents in regards to desires and their satisfaction he acknowledges that desires are also capable of being an evil on the way to becoming a good. A desire becomes an evil when that desire is not met and the person is frustrated. Swinburne mainly focuses on the frustration of desires that persist and are not satisfied for extended periods of time. As people allow desires to persist until they are satisfied it is likely that along the way the evil of temporary frustration will arise. Take for example when an individual

spends their life finding love and at each year as nothing occurs they grow frustrated and angry. However, this experience of frustration that Swinburne considers to be an evil is exactly what he believes is a necessary component to a theodicy, because it demonstrates that good cannot occur without experiencing evil. In this world, God allowed his creations to have persisting desires because even though they cause evil, in the end, the satisfaction of those persisting desires becomes a good (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 35). Similarly, desires that are not satisfied can also be a good. According to Swinburne, in order to understand everything that is good God needed to allow his creations to desires that will be *permanently* frustrated. Thus, we have dreams that are never made true and experience failure constantly in our lives (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 35).

This form of suffering, meaning experiencing permanent frustrations or lengthy periods of frustration, brings out a good because it causes people to feel love and compassion. It is a good to love people, particularly those who you are most connected to. It is a good to love those you are closest to more than it is a good to love strangers, because if the two groups shared an equal amount of love then you are trivializing the former relationship. Compassion is a good that comes from suffering because it connects two people in a way that sharing in only happiness cannot. This can be caused by natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is a good because it gives us knowledge about how the world works. From it we learn how to bring about good and evil, such as creating cures and creating fires. It allows us to perform at our best and connect with people better with sympathy and courage (Swinburne, "Why God" 116-117). For Swinburne, a sufferer is

someone whose desires are frustrated so she is more vulnerable to others. From her suffering, whether it be lying in her death bed desiring to live or unable to walk due to a car accident, others can respond with compassion, sadness, or grief. That response is a good for the person observing the sufferer because those emotional states are a good and it also is a good for the sufferer because it gives her pleasure knowing that people have those good emotional states for the (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 36). This sharing of good emotional states thus allows people to connect with one another in ways that are not possible without pain or failure or loss so, evil must therefore be necessary to bring about the good.

A good that is above all that I have previously mentioned is the satisfaction of desires to do actions that benefit not just yourself but others also. This is the good of being of use to others. Now this good cannot occur without the good of free will, which Swinburne prefers to call "free and responsible choice". For Swinburne, the foundation of any theodicy requires the Free-Will Defense (Swinburne, "Why God" 110-111). Free and responsible choice is a good because it allows humans to choose to do good or evil to themselves and others and develop their own characters, and have the choice to use reasoning to discover and create cures to natural evils that affect beings, and the good of being of use to others. The ability to affect others through free will is a good because it provides full and genuine responsibility for everyone in the world. This responsibility is also not restrained by time because it assumes that each person is responsible for every generation to come, which Swinburne defines as a "deep responsibility" (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 39). Of course this ability has the consequence of



having people cause moral evil, but again God is allowed to permit such a consequence because of the good that is brought about because of free and responsible choice (Swinburne, "Why God" 112). Without free will Swinburne argues that God would be like a parent asking his elder son to watch the younger son and then telling that son that he would be watching the entire time to ensure that nothing bad as well as intervene should anything bad happen. The elder son would not be happy with this arrangement because it means he is not really doing anything and does not have real responsibility. Swinburne believes the son would reply that in order to do the task he would need to be able to make his own judgments and so a good father would only be good if he let the son have the freedom to succeed or fail at the task (Swinburne, "Why God" 112). For this reason, Swinburne believes free will is a good.

Returning now to the good action that is one of the highest goods, Swinburne defines a good actions as one that is intentional, effective, free, spontaneous or contrary to temptation. The last two cannot define a good action simultaneously, so a good action can either be spontaneous or contrary to temptation but not both (Swinburne, "Major Strands" 36). However, the goodness of the action is not determined by the intent but the effect of the action. How much good does it bring about? Still, the good action does not need to be successful. It is alright if one tries to save the homeless and fails because trying is better than doing nothing at all. For this reason a good action is always good for the agent because it is good for her to be of use to others whenever she can be. This is the good of having our life serve a purpose, and, as Swinburne constantly

states in reference to St. Peter, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” and the “son of man came not to be served but to serve” (Swinburne, “Why God” 113 & “Problem of Evil”). Thus, the pursuit of the good is a great good and being provided the opportunity to do so is also good. The opportunity can occur at any time also. It can be when the action to do good is the hardest for an agent or it can be present due to evil actions of yourself and others. Maybe your harmed someone thereby causing evil and you are now given the opportunity to make amends. Or, there is a war and in response to that evil you risk your life to save your country. Or, you are in a car accident that hurts you greatly. From that evil event you can then find ways to ensure that no one gets in an accident ever again in the same way. All of the evil is thus justified by the good of being of use to others. Swinburne argues that God is right to allow such evils because it leads agents to be of use to others, including God, and this is an enormous good, therefore God has the right to cause evil (“Problem of Evil”). Thus, Swinburne’s theodicy proves that because this world is filled with so much good and that evil is necessary to bring about a lot of that good there is still a possibility that God exists and that is an omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient being.

### **Objections**

Similar to the previous two theodicies, Swinburne’s theodicy, an attempt to unite Plantinga’s and Hick’s work, also fails at solving the problem of evil.

*Objection A: Being of use to others implies that the suffering of others becomes instrumental so we are only taking advantage of each other (Phillips 59).*

This objection brings in Kantian ethics. For Kantians, it is morally wrong to treat anyone as a means to an end rather than as ends themselves. When we fail to follow this principle we then fail to respect the humanity in another person and assume that human beings can be objects for our own benefit. With Swinburne's theodicy others must suffer so that one, or many, may have the opportunity to experience goodness or have good will towards the sufferer. This, of course, does not seem morally right. According to Swinburne, however, it is morally right because being of use is a good thing. We suffer for others in order to benefit them. He writes, "I am fortunate if the natural possibility of my suffering if you choose to hurt me is the vehicle which makes your choice really matter" (Swinburne, "Why God" 113). Swinburne's reply assumes that the suffering caused by others should be considered a gift by many. However, I believe that those who suffered through the Holocaust would not feel the same way about the soldiers.

Swinburne's reaction to the Holocaust? He claims that bad decisions led to the Holocaust happening due to agents with free will. But what does this have to do with the victims of the Holocaust? The decision was not theirs it was someone else's. Theodicians can only respond that free will has consequences that are often at a high price and it has to be paid for in exchange for the value of free will (Phillips 76). For Swinburne, agents need to be fully responsible for each other, meaning able to harm and do good to each other, because genuine responsibility is a good (Swinburne, "Why God" 111). Yet the problem here is that there are instances where the bad outcomes of free will outweigh the good results of suffering and it is not enough to say that this is our purpose in life.

*Objection B: No one, including God, has the right to allow one person A to suffer for the benefit of another one B without A's consent.*

If human beings cannot cause others to suffer without consent neither should God. Take the example of a doctor with two patients. One is suffering from kidney failure and the other is perfectly healthy. The doctor is preparing both patients for surgery which he knows will leave both patients unconscious for several hours. Knowing his healthy patient only requires a single kidney he removes a kidney from their body and replaces the failing kidney in the other patient's body. Both wake up with one feeling immensely better and one feeling as if something is wrong. Given the laws of today that healthy patient has every right to challenge the doctor for performing a surgery against their consent, even if it managed to save a person's life. Like the patient who feels wronged, human beings feel wronged when God or any other agents attempts to use them.

Swinburne could reply that God is not like the doctor in this situation. Since He caused us he has certain rights over us that we do not have over each other. So, while one may feel as though agents cannot use other agents with or without consent for the benefit of others God can. Furthermore, there is a limit to our suffering. Our lives are finite so our suffering is finite (Swinburne, "Why God" 114-115). Still, what is Swinburne's idea of limitless exactly in terms of suffering? You cannot count or quantify a person's suffering. Five minutes of suffering can still harm a person just as much as two days of suffering given the kind of harm that is being inflicted on them. For Phillips, the fact that our suffering is limited "can be no reason for calling God good" (81). While God may

have power to do what he wills a good God should not will his creations to suffer or be harmed by other human beings. So, even Swinburne's attempts fail to explain the problem of evil and furthermore decrease the probability that the God of the OmniGod thesis exists.

## **Conclusion**

What all three theodicies have failed to do is explain the problem of evil in this world so what remains is a lack of understanding for why we suffer.

According to the philosopher Herman Tennesen many are horrified by theodicies, "So whatever they [theologians] mean by religion *cannot* be what theodicies offer" (Quoted in Phillips 140). Phillips adds to this statement that not only do theodicies not reflect Western theism they also fail to represent the natural world justly.

Theodicists attempt to tidy up the world so that all evil can be explained away and "refuse to leave the ragged ragged" (Phillips 141). With Plantinga, Hick, and Swinburne each theodicy lead us to understand that either their explanation is flawed or the God we are discussing within Western theism is the one who is flawed. With Plantinga and Hick we saw that God lacks omnipotence and with Swinburne we saw that God is not omnibenevolent. While these failed attempts at theodicies were flawed they did reveal something about the nature of God: The God that we should conceive of is not wholly perfect and this is the God I wish to explore in my remaining chapters.

## Chapter 2

### **Herman Melville and the Certainty of Doubt: Melville's First Discussion of the Problem of Evil**

*"If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things."  
— René Descartes*

#### **Introduction**

Thus far we have seen that finding a solution to the problem of evil is not an easy task for Judeo-Christianity and its followers. The previous chapter attempted to search for a solution through modern theodicies; however these solutions proved to be insufficient and flawed. For that reason I am still left with a feeling of uncertainty about being able to reconcile the existence of evil with the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient god. With this chapter and the chapter following I intend to consider the problem of evil from a literary standpoint rather than a philosophical perspective in order to demonstrate that even through literature mankind struggles to find an answer. As I stated in my introduction the literature I will discuss are two works of Herman Melville's *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* and *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. Within Melville's works there is evidence that he was always aware of the evil within this world and is considered a novelist who "thought long and deeply about the mysteries of good and evil in society and in creation, especially in man," (Canfield iv). While I agree that this problem is always present in Melville's writing the theological issue of good and evil does not present itself in his writing until his third book *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*. *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* is the beginning of

Melville's literary search for an answer to his internal religious conflict (Canfield 2). Thompson writes that while writing this book Melville was addressing for the first time his personal conflict with religion and spirituality. He notes, "The crux of the problem was that his mystical yearning after a satisfactory religious belief had been heightened rather than lessened by his disillusioning experience" and had he clung to this mystical yearning he "would have been liberated from the Calvinistic concept of a harsh personal God who did not inspire love" (Canfield 59). The disillusioning experience Thompson is referencing to is the point where Melville began his journeys at sea and realized that the world was not as good as he imagined. He transitioned from loving God to skeptically hating Him, but even in this hate Melville remained unsettled. Thus, without realizing it Melville managed to create a novel as confusing as his own emotions. Within this chapter I aim to examine how Herman Melville struggles with the philosophical problem of evil for the first time in his literary career.

The plot of *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* is told by the narrator who calls himself Taji. Taji is a man who deserts a doomed whaling ship and is considered a demi-god. Taji and another comrade take over a brig that they find while out at sea. That ship, however, sinks and the men are forced to use a small boat for the remainder of their journey. While they continue their journey at sea they find a priest and his sons who have imprisoned a woman named Yillah, a Polynesian woman who has bleached skin and hair that the men intend to sacrifice. In order to save her, Taji kills the priest and he subsequently falls in love with her. Taji,

his men, and Yillah continue the journey together and later arrive in Mardi<sup>4</sup> where they meet King Media. Soon after, Queen Hautia's handmaidens visit the king and Yillah goes missing. The remainder of the novel consists of Taji searching for his new love Yillah. During the journey Taji is accompanied by a group of men who all provide a different perspective. Babbalanja is known as the philosopher, Mohi is the historian, Yoomy is the poet and King Media the ruler who seems to oversee the conversations. The crew searches all over Mardi to find Yillah and ultimately fails to find her. At the end of the novel, Taji, in his refusal to quit the search, jumps into the sea in the hopes of finally finding Yillah.

As I sifted through the information and commentary regarding *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* I found an overwhelming dislike for Melville's third novel. Not much is written about *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* and most of it is negative. However, what I did find was a strong interest in Taji the narrator, Yillah, and Hautia who makes the search a difficult task for Taji. As Kenneth Bernard notes, "The book has most often been interpreted as a quest for either ultimate truth, beauty, love, or peace. Yillah represents the attainment of these goals, and Hautia, whether viewed as death or sin or experience, represents a barrier to them. Taji is the eternal searcher... Yillah a vision of heaven; Hautia the threat of hell" (23). This narrative about searching, specifically the success and the failure of the search through the three characters, is a recognizable model. My concern, however, is not with these three characters but with the other characters that seem

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<sup>4</sup> The word Mardi means world in Polynesian



to drive the story for within it Taji never speaks, Yillah is never found and Hautia is barely seen till the very end.

While lack of presence is one interesting topic to approach, I am also curious about the abundance of presence by the subsidiary characters of *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*, in particular Babbalanja. Throughout the journey these secondary characters are a way for Melville to “project his own conflicting hopes and doubts by letting these three characters [Babbalanja, Mohi, and Yoomy] argue with each other” as they search for the meaning of the word “Truth” (Thompson 67). For Thompson, “*Mardi* may well represent the second phase of Melville’s growing disillusionment,” which was when he fell into skepticism and began to hate God. I believe that if we simply focus on Taji, Yillah and Hautia we would miss the entirety of the disillusionment and the struggle to find the truth that is found through the speeches of the secondary characters, like Babbalanja. For that reason, this section will focus on the presence of religion and the problem of evil in *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* through the lens of the speeches of secondary characters and their actions. Through them I intend to present Melville’s first literary discussion of the problem of evil with Babbalanja serving as a vehicle for Melville’s distrust of God and ultimate desire to find resolve.

### **The Presence of the Bible, God and Jesus Christ in *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither***

Within the novel there are several Biblical allusions that demonstrate that *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* is an examination of Western religion. First, there is

the character Alma who is an illustrious prophet seen on the islands of Mardi in many forms, or avatars, as the book refers to him. In the narrator's description of Alma he notes that, "It was devoutly believed, that he came to redeem the Mardians from their heathenish thrall; to instruct them in the ways of truth, virtue, and happiness; to allure them to good by promises of beatitude hereafter" (31). This language mirrors the language seen in Biblical narratives of Jesus Christ and his time on Earth as God the son. Then, there is Oro, the supreme god whom Babbalanja discourses on at many points in the novel. Oro serves as the God the Father for the novel. In chapter 31, "Babbalanja Discourses in the Dark," he argues, "We are men, we are angels. And in his faculties, high Oro is but what a man would be, infinitely magnified" thus demonstrating that Oro is not human but something superhuman (123). He continues, "in times past the future was foreknown of Oro; hence in times past, the future must have been foreordained," which shows that Oro is all knowing if he can predict the future (121). Later he acknowledges that Oro is omnipresent (124). Recalling the definitions I laid out in my introduction it is clear that this depiction of Oro is an allusion to the all-perfect God himself. Furthermore, by commenting on predestination in the quote, "By consequence of predestination 'all my acts, are Oro's'" we see that this Oro is a reference to the Protestant God Melville encountered in his own life (124). Thus, the god of Mardi is an allusion to the God of our world.

From the discussions surrounding Oro and Alma, the novel's depictions of God and Jesus Christ, we see Melville's doubt and the problem of evil are

portrayed through the character of Babbalanja. Babbalanja, who appears to represent Melville's doubt, claims:

The prophet [Alma] came to do away with all gods but one; but since the days of Alma, the idols of Maramma have more than quadrupled. The prophet came to make us Mardians more virtuous and happy; but along with all previous good' all the evil remained...The prophet came to guarantee our eternal felicity; but according to what is held in Maramma, that felicity rests on so hard a proviso, that to a thinking mind, but very few of our sinful race may secure it. For one, then I wholly reject your alma...I never was so thorough a disbeliever as now. (32)

Babbalanja, in his determination to discover truth through philosophical discussion, denies Alma and the work he did while on Earth. He notes how Alma came to the world to make things better and provide one God, but in his attempts to do so he has only created more difficulties and more idols for Mardi. The goal of Alma was to bring happiness and virtue, but he failed to eradicate the evil that challenges both qualities. The proviso, or agreement, guarantees mankind's eternal happiness so long as they remained faithful to Oro and lived as he commanded. For this reason, Alma made an impossible task for mankind and this leads Babbalanja to reject Alma. He thus questions whether or not religion can truly make things better for society. With regard to Oro, Babbalanja states, "Oro is *in* all things, and himself *is* all things—the time-old creed. But since evil abounds, and Oro is all things, then he cannot be perfectly good; wherefore, Oro's omnipresence and moral perfection seem incompatible" (124-125). At this point, we are presented with the problem of evil. Oro is everything and everything includes evil therefore Oro cannot be perfectly good.

## **The Presence of Evil in Mardi (or the World)**

However, Oro, in reference to God, and his characteristics is not the complete discussion of the problem of evil. In chapter 77 “A Voice from the Gods” Babbalanja claims, “Though all evils may be assuaged; all evils cannot be done away. For evil is the chronic malady of the universe; and checked in one place, breaks forth in another” (244). Here, Babbalanja argues that we can appease all evils, but we cannot remove any of it for evil is part of the world and must be considered a constant rather than a variant trait we can eradicate. Babbalanja later adds: “tyrants seldom can prove blessings; in as much as evil seldom eventuates in good” meaning that we cannot claim that evil necessarily brings about a good as the theodicies that I have discussed argue (258). From these two passages we see that the character of Babbalanja denies the possibility that evil necessitates good and that evil can be removed from our world. Thus, Babbalanja, as the philosopher, rejects the argument that evil causes good in the world that many theodicies claim. His perspective then is that there is evil, it is constant and never ending, and it rarely creates a good only more evil. It is this perspective that ties Babbalanja to Melville’s emotions of skeptical hate for both men refuse to see the good in the world and doubt God’s goodness.

Knowing that Melville’s Babbalanja blames Oro, or God, for the evil in the world and that his main issue is with God having all attributes including being evil, natural evil will be the only type of evil discussed by the characters. A discussion of moral evil is non-existent in this novel for it is considered to be an evil that still stems from God and thus man is not the cause but rather God.

Therefore, the evil this novel is concerned with is natural evil, the suffering you cannot control. Returning to chapter 31 “Babbalanja Discourses in the Dark”, the narrator describes an adventure in the dark where the character Vee-Vee manages to fall, nearly breaking his arm. Vee-Vee cries aloud that he did not fall on purpose, but that he is hurting. Babbalanja responds to Vee-Vee’s pain: “Woe to us all, then...for what direful events may be in store for us which we cannot avoid” implying that in this world there is suffering that we are meant to experience and cannot evade (120). To explain this reasoning to Lord Media, Babbalanja states, “My lord, think of it. Minus human inducement from without, and minus volition from within, Vee-Vee has met with an accident which almost maimed him for life. Is it not terrifying to think of? Are not all mortals exposed to similar, nay, worse calamities, ineffably unavoidable?” (120-121) An “ineffably unavoidable” event is something we cannot explain through language and cannot escape, therefore we will never understand it. We do, however, live our lives experiencing such events. Since Vee-Vee’s fall is something out of his control and not really caused by any other person, it is considered to be one of these events to Babbalanja. However, unlike many others, Vee-Vee manages to remain unharmed despite his injury. According to Babbalanja, Necessitarians rationalize events like Vee-Vee’s fall. A belief in Necessity is a belief in the fact that all events are linked together naturally according to the laws of Nature and will always follow each other without God needing to interfere; however, Providence plays an eternal role in these events (121). In contrast to the Necessitarian the Fatalist believes that heaven is completely involved in the cause and effect of all

actions (121). In the end, both views are grounded in the fact that there are events we cannot control caused either directly or indirectly by God and amongst them are events that will cause us to suffer. Thus, suffering is out of our control and we can neither prevent nor avoid it.

Suffering appears to be a major component of life for Mardians, but the question is whether suffering has a purpose, as is discussed by the theodicies. If it does have a purpose, perhaps the purpose is not to better this life but to secure the next life. If it does not, does that mean that we are in a constant state of suffering until death? These thoughts are discussed in two scenes from the novel, the first being an interaction with an island of abandoned Mardians and the second being the experience of death in the journey. After the group finds an island full of inhabitants who would be considered crippled in the land of Mardi. During their travels they are told to never leave the island for it is where all crippled children go and remain till their death. The ruler of the island identifies the travelers as crippled also and this bothers Babbalanja. He thus considers what makes him crippled “Fellow-men! if we live hereafter, it will not be in lyrics; nor shall we yawn, and our shadows lengthen, while the eternal cycles are revolving. To live at all, is a high vocation; to live forever, and run parallel with Oro, may truly appal us. Toil we not here? and shall we be forever slothful elsewhere? Other worlds differ not much, from this, but in degree” (300). Babbalanja realizes that he and everyone else is equally as crippled as the islanders before them because we are meant to toil through life without any successes. However, the opportunity to live is something we must cherish while the opportunity to live forever in Heaven is

something we should not desire. We are crippled by the belief that another world would be better than the world we are in, but, according to Babbalanja, Heaven cannot be better than this. Thus, living should be the only thing we do, even if that means enduring suffering. For “the universe can wax old without us; though by Oro’s grace we may live to behold a wrinkle in the sky. Eternity is not ours by right; and, alone, unrequited sufferings here form no title thereto, unless resurrections are reserved for maltreated brutes. Suffering is suffering; be the sufferer man, brute, or thing” (302). To Babbalanja, suffering is not an experience for a selected few, but for everyone. Furthermore, that suffering is meant to occur without explanation and should simply be endured because there cannot be anything better than the world we are in. Life is wasted if we wait for Oro, or God, to bless us with a life in Heaven and thus we should only focus on the present and the world we live in now.

The fact that we all suffer is one part of the human experience and the fact that we suffer in myriad ways is also part of that human experience. Death is one of those experiences that every human shares and cannot avoid. During their journey Babbalanja explains to the crew that “we die by land, and die by sea; we die by earthquakes, famines, plagues, and wars; by fevers, agues; woe or mirth excessive. This mortal air is one wide pestilence, that kills us all at last... We die because we live” (315). Death is part of living and is the most unavoidable form of suffering that occurs. Death is not prejudiced against anyone and will take a life at any point because life in this world is a mortal one that we have no control over. In the chapter, “A Death-Cloud Sweeps By Them, As They Sail,” a

crewmen falls into the sea and is swept up by the tides. Everyone mourns his loss and Lord Media demands a reflection on death from Babbalanja. Babbalanja responds, “Oro himself, in Alma, died not without a groan. Yet why, why live? Life is wearisome to all: the same dull round. Day and night, summer and winter, round about us revolving for aye” (357). Again, Babbalanja questions the purpose of living and returns to the idea that we toil without purpose. Throughout the novel it is clear that Babbalanja is set on his belief that suffering is meaningless and that we exist for no other reason than to toil through life. However, Babbalanja confuses the reader as he claims that we should live with our suffering in one instance and claims that there is no point in living in another instance. That confusion that Babbalanja portrays seems to reflect Melville’s confusion as he went to and fro between his faith and his doubt.

### **From Doubt to Belief and Back Again: Is Babbalanja’s Change Melville’s Change?**

Upon reaching the end of their journey, all the men start to share in Babbalanja’s sentiments and begin to lose hope. They consider giving up on their journey because it has not given them anything positive. Babbalanja, however, changes his perspective after arriving at Serinia where he finally finds a reason to believe. At first Babbalanja critiques the Serenians beliefs claiming that their laws are about love and Alma, nothing else. There are no temples and there are no priests. Without such things the travellers imagine that there is no structure for faith on the island, but an islander responds by saying, “For many ages has not faith lived, in spite of priests and temples? and shall it not survive them?” He goes



on to say, “we are apostles, everyone. Where’er we go, our faith we carry in our hands and hearts. It is our chieftest joy. We do not put it wide away six days out of sever; and then, assume it,” (369). For the Serenians there is no need for priests and temples, the very thing Babbalanja dislikes about organized religion and yet expects to see. The Sarinians only need Alma as their priest while they commit themselves entirely to their faith. The final line seems to be Melville’s stab at Christians who attend church on Sunday to demonstrate their faith and spend the previous six days doing otherwise. It is this kind of loyalty and picture of fellowship between Oro, Alma and the Mardians of Sarinia that causes Babbalanja to alter from a doubter to devout believer. Babbalanja replies to the Sarinian who spoke: “How eloquent he is...Some black cloud seems floating from me. I begin to see. I come out in light. The sharp fang tears me less. Quickened in me is a hope,” (369-370). Almost instantly, Babbalanja finds hope in their faith and believes he has been changed. He goes on, ““Oh, Alma, Alma! prince divine!’ crie[s] Babbalanja, sinking on his knees, ‘in thee, at last I find repose...Gone, gone! are all distracting doubts. Love and Alma now prevail. I see with other eyes...I here recant. Here I kneel, and own great Oro and his sovereign son’” (371). Following Babbalanja Yoomy, Mohi and Media all fall to their knees devoting themselves to Oro. As each kneeled the old man they spoke with blessed each of them. Without much effort the secondary characters are overwhelmed by the power of the words and automatically respond as if they have found enlightenment about the relationship man has with Oro and Alma.

In an attempt to solidify this experience Melville allows Babbalanja to have a vision that assures Babbalanja he is right to believe. After their encounter with the islanders the crew decides to rest. When the group awakes, Babbalanja tells them that he was visited by an angel who relayed to him an answer about all of his doubt. In his vision the a guide appears and takes into heaven, a place Babbalanja has wondered about throughout the novel. When looking at the people in heaven Babbalanja asks his guide whether all in heaven were in a state of 'happiness supreme'. The guide replies:

No mind but Oro's can know all; no mind that knows not all can be content; content alone approximates happiness. Holiness comes by wisdom; and it is because great Oro is supremely wise that he's supremely holy. But as perfect wisdom can be only Oro's; so perfect holiness is his alone. And whoso is otherwise than perfect in his holiness is liable to sin. Still they fear the thing of evil; though for them 'tis hard to fall. Thus hoping and thus fearing, then, theirs is no state complete. (375)

The guide explains to Babbalanja that there is no way to have supreme happiness because without perfection one will always be capable of sin, even in heaven. Only Oro, who is supremely holy and knows all is capable of being content. Therefore, human beings will always remain in a state of flux and never enter eternal bliss. After accepting that response, Babbalanja then asks, "why create the germs that sin and suffer, but to perish?" in regards to those that live lives of sin and do not do good in Oro's name. Again the guide responds: "That...is the last mystery which underlieth all the rest. Archangel may not fathom it; that makes of Oro the everlasting mystery he is; that to divulge, were to make equal to himself in knowledge all the souls that are; that mystery Oro guards; and none but him

may know” (376). Here, the guide reveals the ultimate fact: we cannot know nor understand Oro.

This mirrors the dialogue had at the very beginning of the novel between a young man and a guide. The guide refers to himself as the great Pani, a blind guide that knows all about Mardi. The young man was a pilgrim who landed on Mardi with several other pilgrims seeking to find something in Mardi. Everyone in his group accepted Pani’s offer to be a guide except for the young man who goes unnamed in the novel. The young man desires to climb the mountain on the island of Maramma, the tall peak of Oro. The peak is inaccessible to man and yet many still make a pilgrimage to it to climb to the top. It is said that from the peak the god Roo came down and now there is no way for him to climb back up. It is this impossible task that the young man seeks out. Upon learning about the young man’s goals Pani offers his assistant and the young man rejects him because he believes his age and physical ability makes him more capable of the task. He tells Pani that he must take this journey alone. Pani asks, “But how knowest thou the way?” and the young man replies, “There are many ways: the right one I must seek for myself” (8). Pani considers him a fool for believing so greatly in his own abilities and calls him deluded for rejecting wisdom and counsel. Pani claims that the boy will fail. In response the boy states, “Though I act counter to thy counsels, oh Pani, I but follow the divine instinct in me” which causes Babbalanja to say to himself, “Poor youth!...How earnestly he struggles in his bonds. But though rejecting a guide, still he clings to that legend of the peak” (8-9). Babbalanja sees the boy’s journey to also be futile. His language also reflects

Melville's struggle with doubt and faith. The young man wants to escape his bonds to seek out his own truth and yet clings to an idea that cannot be true in the same way Melville desired to break away from a Calvinistic concept of God and yet sought out some God to believe in.

In another encounter the young man challenges Pani's wisdom and in that challenge we see a foreshadowing of Babbalanja's vision. While at the great Morai, a tree, where within its sap lives the holy god Annanna, the young pilgrim challenges Pani and his understanding of the gods. He tells him that the tree is the image of another god, Doleema. In anger, Pani tells the boy to leave and hopes that he fails to ascend the peak. The boy sadly replies: "I may perish there in truth...but it shall be in the path revealed to me in my dream. And think not, oh guide that I perfectly rely upon gaining that lofty summit. I will climb high Oro with hope, not faith; oh mighty Oro, help me!" (19) Pani tells him, "Oro, to all, is Oro the unknown...Why claim to know Oro, then, better than others?" (20) The boy replies:

I am not so vain; and I have little to substitute for what I cannot receive. I but feel Oro in me, yet cannot declare the thought...To believe is a haughty thing; my very doubts humiliate me. I weep and doubt; all Mardi may be right; and I too simple to discern...I will go my ways...but Oro will shape the end. (20)

The young man seeks to climb the peak even if the journey will end in failure or death. He believes so firmly in hope rather than faith because faith and belief is the action of arrogant people. The young man acknowledges his doubt and admits that while he may be wrong he must search for the truth on his own. The young man claims that such truth will be revealed to him in a dream and that dream

brings us Babbalanja's vision. It seems then that Babbalanja's vision with the guide that takes him to the top of the mountain to witness heaven is tied to the dream the boy claims he will have at the beginning of the novel. The young man in his doubt thus becomes the old man in his faith, the newly devout Babbalanja.

Of course, the boy's words also cause Pani to doubt himself which relates to Babbalanja's experience. He states: "I am dumb with doubt; yet 'tis not doubt, but worse: I doubt my doubt. Oh, ye all-wise spirits in the air, how can ye witness all this woe, and give no sign? Would, would that mine were a settled doubt, like that wild boy's who without faith, seems full of it. The undoubting doubter believes the most. Oh! that I were he" (21). Pani becomes unsure of himself and his faith immediately after interacting with the young man who showed certainty even in his doubt. This matches the way Babbalanja becomes more sure of himself after interacting with a group of people who showed certainty in their faith. Pani desires to be the young man and seeks out a sign for all of this suffering. Babbalanja desires to be like the islanders and finds an answer to all of this suffering. Even with this difference we are still left with the same answer, that there is none. God remains unknown to us with or without visions. We can search all we want but in the end we must accept not knowing. In the end Babbalanja remains in Sarinia because he has found Alma and Oro and Taji, 'fixed as fate' to find Yillah, has the crew push on even though Babbalanja tells the crew that should they return they would find Yillah on the island (381).

## Conclusion

*Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* leaves us with many possible secondary characters to connect with Melville. He seems at times to be the young man in his certainty of doubt. At other times he seems to be Pani even more unsure of himself. Or is he Babbalanja, the philosopher who doubts and then believes? Or can he be Taji who does not quit his journey for the truth? Or is it possible that Melville is a composite of all of his characters revealing to the reader how much he struggled with a concept of God and the problem of evil. All we can gather from this novel is that we can never know. We can never know God. We can never know if we are right to doubt. We can never know what happens in a journey that seeks out the truth for we never know what happens to Taji or Yillah. Thus, I remain uncertain even with the assistance of a literary examination of God and the problem of evil.

### Chapter 3

#### **Moby Dick, Job and the Hunt for Evil: A Biblical Examination of Moby-Dick; or, The Whale and the Problem of Evil**

*“...if after all these fearful, fainting trances, the verdict be, the golden haven was not gained;—yet in bold quest thereof, better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on volger shoals; and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do.”*  
—Herman Melville (*Braswell* 93)

#### **Introduction**

In my previous chapter, I analyzed the language Melville first used to discuss the problem of evil in his literature. In *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*, there were several instances of doubt and faith, but not a clear answer to the problem of evil. While much of the novel leaves the reader with more questions than answers, I believe an analysis of Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* will serve as a book end to my literary analysis of *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is, as are many of his works, a sailing novel. It is about a sailor named Ishmael who recounts his journey on the whale ship Pequod. This ship is commanded by Captain Ahab who is determined to capture the white sperm whale named Moby Dick, who managed to take his leg in a previous encounter, and achieve his revenge. Like all of Melville’s works, the story is not simply about a sailor and a whale and to look at the novel in this simplistic way would be to miss the series of allusions, metaphors and allegories that presents themselves in the novel. Instead of presenting a straightforward understanding of the novel, this thesis will consider *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* as a story of a man in conflict with God. It presents us with Captain Ahab, a man so bent on killing the White

Whale that he is willing to risk the lives of his crewmen to pursue his vengeance, and Ishmael, a man who follows Ahab on this quest for the whale till the very end. I believe that the whale, which many times is referred to as the great leviathan, is both representative of the evil in the world and the God that Ahab is seeking out. I intend to use the Book of Job to demonstrate this argument and claim that the Book of Job is the key to understanding *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* as a story about a man in conflict with God who is searching for the truth. For many theodicians the Book of Job functions as a classic case of theodicy by offering a complex narrative that explores the problem of evil. It is this complex narrative that Melville examines in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* and it is the narrative I will use to examine the journey of Captain Ahab and Ishmael as a literary form of theodicy.

The Book of Job is a narrative about a man named Job whom God and Satan put to a test. One day Satan goes to God and God asks if Satan has thought of his servant Job who is the most perfect and upright man that “feared God” and “eschewed evil” (King James Version, Job 1:1). Satan challenges God’s statement by asking “Doth Job fear God for nought?” (Job 1:9). Satan asks the Lord whether Job fears God because he has kept him safe and made a hedge about him so that no harm could come to him. The only way the Lord could truly know this is if he removes the hedge. God allows this deal and gives Satan permission to harm Job. As a result Job loses his possessions, offspring, health and is shunned by his community. In order to console him three friends come and try to explain the reason for the evil that has been inflicted on Job. Job argues against them and



demands justification for the evil in his life from God. Finally, God comes down in a whirlwind to demonstrate his power and answers Job. Job finally submits to God and recants his previous statements. This story is considered a “masterpiece of Wisdom literature”, the “most problem-plagued text in the Bible” as well as the one most commonly used for the current study of theodicy (Tilley 257, Larue 72). Melville was obsessed with the Book of Job because from it he felt that it summed up the problem with God, which is rooted in the problem of evil.

Given Melville’s interest in the Bible and the problem of evil it is easy to see why Melville would find the Book of Job the most useful piece of Biblical scripture for his work. Furthermore, among Melville’s prose works *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* has the most Biblical allusions. Canfield argues that this significant number should prove that “not only was Melville always extremely conscious of Holy Scripture, but *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* exhibits a special awareness of the Bible” (147). Wright observes that the most used allusions from Melville’s own Bible are from the Book of Job. Janis Stout, in her essay “Melville’s Use of the Book of Job,” adds that one can find allusions to the Book of Job even in Melville’s early writings. We can find reference to the Book of Job in *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* with the way the book is very aware of the problem of evil and also with specific instances that seem to mirror the narrative in the Book of Job. *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* contains scenes that reveal Melville’s inclination to doubt God and Stout calls these “speculative passages”. She argues that, “it is significant that speculative passages in *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* often begin from a juxtaposition of the greatness of Oro and the misery of human life and

innocent suffering” (74). The fact that the speculative passages are structured this way suggests that Melville, even at the beginning of his career, was thinking of the problem of evil and using the Book of Job to decipher that problem. *Redburn* also has three allusions to the Book of Job. *White Jacket* has one allusion but it also one about the presence of undeserved suffering. *Pierre* deals with the problem of evil and suffering just as Job does. Again with *The Piazza Tales* and *The Confidence-Man* there is the same narrative of evil, doubt, and God. Finally, with *Billy Budd* evil is still at the forefront, but this time Melville is thinking about the reconciled Job and not the angry Job that doubts God (79-82). With such a strong tie to the Book of Job in all his stories it is clear that Melville used the Book of Job as a way to focus his thoughts on the (word) with divine injustice, as many have since his time.

When considering some of the many allusions to the Book of Job we can count several instances. There are the times that Ishmael specifically refers to Job in the novel: “Who wrote the first account of our Leviathan? Who but mighty Job!” (118), “The awful tauntings in Job might well appal me” (143), “Here, then, was this grey-headed, ungodly old man, chasing with curses a Job's whale round the world” (197). Then there are quotations and characters that are referenced from the Book of Job: The character Bildad is an allusion to one of the comforters of Job in the Book of Job and in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* Bildad is part-owner of the Pequod, in chapter 32 “Cetology” Ishmael asks himself “Will he the [leviathan] make a covenant with thee? Behold the hope of him is vain!” (Job 41:4 quoted in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* 143), and in the epilogue Ishmael

quotes the Book of Job again, “And I only am escaped alone to tell thee” which is Job 1:15, 17, and 19. Finally, the whale is constantly called the Leviathan, which is the same name of the creature God presents to Job as an example of His immense power.

Along with the many direct allusions to the Book of Job there are also ideas presented in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* about God and the problem of evil that align with the Book of Job. Canfield reveals in his dissertation that Melville had forty-five markings in his personal Bible for the Book of Job (148). Citing Nathalia Wright, Canfield points out the main areas marked in Melville’s personal Bible: Jehovah’s discourse to Job regarding the Leviathan, which are also quotes made by Ishmael in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, areas which Job affirms his faith, the word “merchant” in Job 41:6, and passages that demonstrate distrust in humanity. Two specific passages that Melville marked that are the most relevant to this chapter are: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (Job 28:28) and the question posed by Zophar to Job, “Canst thou by searching find out God?” along with his response, “[God] is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know?” (Job 11:7-8). Both passages reveal how we are meant to understand God, which is that we cannot. The best decision we can make in the face of evil is to back down and accept that we are not capable of understanding the way of God. Ahab’s determination to seek out the White Whale is that same need Job has to seek out God, and Ishmael’s ability to miraculously be the only one to survive the journey

in the end mirrors the Job who is gifted with many treasures after finally understanding that he cannot understand God.

I believe then that it is fair to say that part of the key to *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is the Bible, particularly the Book of Job, given the extensive amount of time Melville spent with the Book of Job and how many Biblical allusions can be found in the novel. Knowing these facts, this chapter aims to connect the characters, meanings and lessons within the Book of Job along with the passages regarding Ishmael and Ahab to Melville's novel *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* thereby offering an answer to the many questions posed by Melville's third novel *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*. I will do so by first examining how we can understand Ishmael, the narrator of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, as the Ishmael of the Bible and the narrator in the Book of Job. Second, I will follow the same procedure with Captain Ahab, examining his connection with the Biblical Ahab and the character of Job. I will then consider how Moby Dick serves as a representation of God and evil from the Book of Job. Finally, I will consider what *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* offers the reader for the problem of evil and if Melville was capable of seeking out his solution to the problem of evil by using the narrative of Job. I will also consider Melville's secret key that he revealed in a letter to Hawthorne, which is that *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is, in reality, a wicked book and not a Holy book.

## **Ishmael: Ishmael of Old and the Narrator of the Book of Job**

Ishmael serves as a character who helps us to understand the novel as the narrator and in order to understand his role we must first consider the Ishmael of old. In the Bible Ishmael is the son of the Egyptian slave Hagar and Abraham. While pregnant with Ishmael, Hagar tried to run away, but an angel stopped her and prophesized that she was pregnant with a son whom she would name Ishmael. The angel told Hagar that this son, “will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren” (Genesis 16:11). Abraham has another son after Ishmael named Isaac with his wife Sarah and that son is chosen by God to establish His covenant. Ishmael the, was left out in the cold roaming the wilderness as a “wild [and discarded] man” until he settled with an Egyptian wife and bore many children.

Ishmael’s story as the man who wanders and is rejected both by his father and God helps us understand the Ishmael of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, but only partially. By connecting the two Ishmaels Melville makes it possible for his Ishmael to be open to many religions other than Christianity. This is seen in the way he befriends Queequeg. On contemplating his mannerisms and character, Ishmael tells himself, “I’ll try a pagan friend...since Christian kindness has proved but hollow courtesy” (56). This mirrors the sentiments behind the story of Ishmael in the Book of Genesis for there God rejects him. When he finds Queequeg in the middle of prayer, he continues to convince himself that uniting

with Queequeg would not go against his beliefs, but would follow them completely:

I was a good Christian; born and bred in the bosom of the infallible Presbyterian Church. How then could I unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood? But what is worship? thought I. Do you suppose now, Ishmael, that the magnanimous God of heaven and earth—pagans and all included—can possibly be jealous of an insignificant bit of black wood? Impossible! But what is worship?—to do the will of God—THAT is worship. And what is the will of God?—to do to my fellow man what I would have my fellow man to do to me—THAT is the will of God. Now, Queequeg is my fellow man. And what do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why, unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him in his; ergo, I must turn idolator. (57)

In this moment of reflection Ishmael considers himself to be a good Christian that at first could not unite with Queequeg in his worship of a pagan idol and then changes his mind in the end. That transition from feeling different from Queequeg to feeling connected with Queequeg happens as he contemplates the meaning of worship. His first argument in favor of worshipping with Queequeg is that God could not possibly be jealous of his worshipping something with no religious value to him. Of course, we know that God in the Old Testament is called a jealous God so this line presents how Ishmael is capable of being ironic in his discussion of religion. He then concludes that to worship is “to do the will of God” which is to treat your fellow man with respect. Determining that Queequeg is his fellow man he then decides that the appropriate thing to do is “turn idolator” and participate in the pagan practices of Queequeg. Again, God does not allow his followers to pray before another God and yet Ishmael rationalizes himself into the decision. At the end of the evening Queequeg and Ishmael share a bed together much more comfortably than the first evening: “Man and wife, they say, there open the very

bottom of their souls to each other; and some old couples often lie and chat over old times till nearly morning. Thus, then, in our hearts' honeymoon, lay I and Queequeg—a cosy, loving pair” (57). Melville presents to his reader an image of paganism and Christianity joining together in a marriage bed as if to say Ishmael, like the Ishmael of the Bible, is capable of bringing together what seems to be conflicting ideologies. The Ishmael of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* then is more open to differences in religions and at the same time he seems even more committed to his Christian God by declaring that he is doing the will of God. This passage seems to show the irony in the way Christianity portrays itself and how Melville mocks Christianity through the relationship of Queequeg and Ishmael.

Melville also connects the two Ishmaels by placing his Ishmael on a journey. The beginning of the novel starts off with Ishmael wishing to abandon his desire to end his life by embarking on another journey on the sea. He explains that sailing “is [his] substitute for pistol and ball. With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship” (3). Like the Biblical Ishmael and his mother, the narrator of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* sees that his life is nearing an end. In the Book of Genesis Hagar believes that her son will die in the wilderness. Seeing her suffering, “God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink” (Genesis 21:19). In thinking of death God offered water for Hagar and her son Ishmael. In thinking of death, Melville’s Ishmael seeks out the sea (water) to save himself. It is this connection to water that allows both Ishmaels to grow strong and survive. Thus, this allusion to the Ishmael in the Book of Genesis

allows us to understand the position of the Ishmael of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* within the novel. He is tied to a narrative of a boy who was cast off into the wilderness by his father and the promise of a covenant with God, who was saved by God with water, and thrived with a new life. This connection allows us to see that Ishmael's fate in the novel would promise him survival, and this is proven at the end when all the ship's crew dies at sea while Ishmael is saved by the ship Rachel on the second day floating in the water.

While my previous paragraphs have proven that Ishmael in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is tied to the Ishmael in the Book of Genesis, there is still much to be said of how Ishmael is connected to the narrative in the Book of Job for as we see in the end he tells us that "I only am escaped alone to tell thee" (Job 1:15, 16, 17 and 19 quoted in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* 615). What is interesting about this chosen quote from the Book of Job is that all of these are part of the final messages told to Job. With the first reference the message is that Job's oxen were taken and the servants were slain except the one that escaped to tell him. The second messenger tells Job that his sheep and servants have burned and that they managed to escape to tell him. The third messenger tells Job that the camels were taken and the servants slain with the messenger again being the only escapee. Finally, the fourth messenger comes to tell Job that his daughters and sons were eating together till a great wind "smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men" and killed them leaving the messenger as the only one who escaped to tell him. Thus, the novel itself must be Ishmael's message of the suffering of the men on the Pequod that leaves the reader in the position of Job. If



the reader is therefore Job by the end of the book and Ishmael serves as the messenger, it seems then that Melville is asking his reader to decide how to react to the suffering in the world.

The quote at the beginning of the epilogue is also interesting because it is an allusion to the beginning of the book of Job. After Job receives these messages of all that he has lost, he still remains faithful to God, asking his wife “shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil” after she commands him to curse God and die (Job 2:9-10). It is not until Job sits for seven days and nights that he determines that “the terrors of God do set themselves in array against [him]” (Job 6:4). Thus, the passage that is quoted at the end of the novel could either place the reader in the position of someone who maintains their faith in the face of evil or as someone who is righteous against the injustices of God. The reader then must react to Ishmael’s story in the same way the Job’s story requires reaction.

*Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is then another Book of Job narrative with Ishmael as the messenger and Captain Ahab as Job. Biblical narratives are defined as historical narratives with more emphasis on historical fact than drama and the first seventeen books of the Old Testament follow this definition (Balancing). The Book of Job, however, emphasizes the latter much more than the former in terms of historical fact and drama. The Book of Job is a special exception typically considered a poetic book and a Biblical narrative at the same time allowing it to have that drama and allegorical sense of relaying truth to its readers. *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* can be seen in a similar way being a dramatic tale of a sea voyage

that the narrator tries to prove valid even though he is the only one capable of telling the tale. The narrator in the Book of Job has control of the facts and appears omniscient throughout the story allowing the reader to learn about God, Satan, Job and his comforters from a distance. The story is about Job and the narrator controls that story so much that Job serves, for the reader, as a human example of how mankind deals with the problem of evil. In a similar fashion, *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is not only a story solely Ishmael, but also one about the journey of Captain Ahab that Ishmael witnesses. Captain Ahab is then another reader's Job to observe as Ishmael recounts the captain's desire to destroy the White Whale and Ishmael is then like the narrator in the Book of Job allowing us to examine the problem of evil from a more human perspective.

### **Captain Ahab: The Job of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale***

If Ishmael is the narrator in the Book of Job then Captain Ahab is offered as a kind of Job for the reader. First off, there is the shared experience of suffering. Job loses his children, his sheep, his oxen, and his camels, and his body suffers because of God. Captain Ahab loses his leg because of Moby Dick. In response to this suffering and loss, both men seek out justice by attacking the cause of their suffering, God and Moby Dick. At the beginning of their journey Captain Ahab seems inaccessible, remaining in his cabin. Ishmael writes that "though nominally included in the census of Christendom, he was still an alien to it...And as when Spring and Summer had departed, that wild Logan of the woods, burying himself in the hollow of a tree, lived out the winter there, sucking his own paws; so, in his inclement, howling old age, Ahab's soul, shut up in the caved

trunk of his body, there fed upon the sullen paws of its gloom!" (162). After the loss of his leg Ahab appears distant to his crew which mirrors the behavior of Job. For seven days and seven nights Job does not speak to his comforters, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, and they do not speak to him because they saw how much grief he was feeling. It is not until chapter 36, "The Quarter-Deck" that Ahab appears and speaks to his crew.

Furthermore, after Job suffers through all of his evils he feels like an outcast in his community in the same way Ahab is called "an alien" to Christendom even though he is included in it. Job calls himself a "byword of the people" or an object of scorn because of his suffering which connects him to Ahab who no longer feels the same because of his lost leg (Job 17:6). Captain Ahab tells his ship, "Aye, aye! it was that accursed white whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me for ever and a day!" (173). Ahab blames the White Whale for his suffering and acknowledges that, because of the whale, he now appears different from other seaman. The ship even has to be adjusted in order to accommodate a captain with a false leg and Ahab struggles when entering other ships that do not have accommodations for such things.

There are also slight character differences that make Ahab unlike Job, and it is these differences that cause his undoing. Upon discussing the character of Ahab, Captain Peleg tells Ishmael that, "He's a grand, ungodly, god-like man, Captain Ahab. Ahab's above the common...Oh! he ain't Captain Bildad; no, and he ain't Captain Peleg; HE'S AHAB, boy; and Ahab of old, thou knowest, was a crowned king!" and Captain Bildad adds: "And a very vile one. When that wicked

king was slain, the dogs, did they not lick his blood?" (85). The Book of Job begins with discussing Job's greatness as well calling him "greatest of all of the men of the east" (Job 1:3) and man like no other on Earth (Job 1:8). So, both Ahab and Job are above the common man with Ahab being affiliated with a king and Job being considered unique amongst all. The only difference is that Ahab's greatness resides in the way he is described, as a "grand, ungodly, god-like man". That difference makes Ahab less like Job because Job is reverential to God and does not see himself a god amongst men while Ahab is willing to challenge God if that is what it takes to kill the White Whale.

Captain Peleg's statement that Ahab is the "Ahab of old" and Captain Bildad's reply refer back to the Biblical narrative of Ahab. According to the Bible, Ahab was the seventh king of Israel and reigned for 22 years. Throughout his time as king Ahab encounters several prophets that condemn and judge Ahab for his actions as well as predict that he will die in battle. In *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* Ahab also has several encounters: First, on his voyage he meets the Goney (Albatross) though they never manage to speak to each other; the Town-Ho where he successfully has a gam<sup>5</sup> in which we learn about a conflict with Moby Dick; the Jeroboam where a man named Gabriel calls himself a prophet that declares that Ahab will die because of *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*; the Jungfrau (Virgin) a German ship in need of oil whom the Pequod beats at capturing a whale; the Bouton-de-Rose (Rosebud) whom Stubb tricks, the Samuel Enderby where one of the crewmen tells Ahab to leave the whale alone; the Bachelor whose Captain

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<sup>5</sup> A gam is a meeting between two whaling ships

denies the existence of Moby Dick; and the Rachel who asks the Pequod to stop searching for the whale in order to assist in a search for the captain's young son. Like the prophets that confront the Ahab of old, many shipmen confronted Captain Ahab about his efforts to kill the White Whale and like Starbuck suggest this quest is either futile or blasphemous or both.

Of course, those that tell Ahab to stop his hunt can also be seen as the comforters in the Book of Job. Take for example, the moment when Ahab meets the Jeroboam and the crew member who announces himself as the archangel Gabriel. Jeroboam is an allusion to Jeroboam from the Bible who was considered "a mighty man of valour" (1 Kings 11:28) and Gabriel is an allusion to the angel who serves as a messenger for God. When Ahab inquires about Moby Dick Gabriel tells him, "Think, think of thy whale-boat, stoven and sunk! Beware of the horrible tail!" (337). Ishmael notes how "Gabriel solemnly warned the captain against attacking the White Whale, in case the monster should be seen; in his gibbering insanity, pronouncing the White Whale to be no less a being than the Shaker God incarnated; the Shakers receiving the Bible" (337). Gabriel so strongly believes that the White Whale is his God and for that reason Ahab should stop searching for him because He will destroy them. While speaking with the captain of the Jeroboam, Ahab learns that when another crewman wanted to catch the whale on the Jeroboam, that man died and "Gabriel called off the terror-stricken crew from the further hunting of the whale." At the conclusion of the story Gabriel shouts, "Think, think of the blasphemer—dead, and down there!—beware of the blasphemer's end!" (338). Again, Gabriel invokes the idea that by

chasing the whale a man shows no reverence to God, the White Whale. When Ahab attempts to give a letter from Macey to the Jeroboam, “‘Nay, keep it thyself,’ cried Gabriel to Ahab; ‘thou art soon going that way’” indicating that nothing but death or hell can come from hunting Moby Dick (339). This kind of confidence that Ahab is wrong to pursue the whale and will be punished for it mirrors the sentiments of Elihu who tells Job that he should be tried for his rebellion, for his sin and his words against God (Job 34:36-37). Like Gabriel, Elihu believes that the man who wishes to attack God should be punished for his actions.

Then there is Starbuck who constantly contends with Ahab about the search for the White Whale. After convincing his crew that the whole ship should be on the lookout for the White Whale, Captain Ahab sees that Starbuck is not so easily convinced. He asks Starbuck, “But what's this long face about, Mr. Starbuck; wilt thou not chase the white whale? Art not game for Moby Dick?” and Starbuck replies, "I am game for his crooked jaw, and for the jaws of Death too, Captain Ahab, if it fairly comes in the way of the business we follow; but I came here to hunt whales, not my commander's vengeance. How many barrels will thy vengeance yield thee even if thou gettest it, Captain Ahab? it will not fetch thee much in our Nantucket market” (173). Starbuck evaluates the hunt for the White Whale in economic terms. He does not share Ahab’s metaphysical issues with the whale and is presented as a conventional Christian. This is similar to the way Bildad tells Job to stop speaking against God. Bildad asks, “How long will thou speak these things? And how long shall the words of thy mouth be like a

strong wind?” He goes on to say that if Job were just in his pursuit, then God would surely make amends and present himself, so Job must not be just, as the comforters believe, and God was right to punish Job (Job 8:2-6). But in the Book of Job, God presents himself as above justice. By the end of the novel as Ahab continues his pursuit of the White Whale Starbuck grabs Ahab’s arm and tells him, “God, God is against thee, old man; forbear! 'tis an ill voyage! ill begun, ill continued; let me square the yards, while we may, old man, and make a fair wind of it homewards, to go on a better voyage than this” (541). Starbuck’s advice of turning away from the chase and having a better life with more voyages ahead echoes the advice given from the comforters in the Book of Job: “thou shalt visit thy habitation, and shalt not sin...Thou shalt come to thy grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in his season. Lo this, we have searched it, so it is; hear it, and know thou it for thy good” (Job 5:24-27). Like Starbuck, Job’s comforters attempt to convince Job that he may have a long future so long as he did let his anger consumer him, “for wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one” (Job 5:2).

Similar to the narrative style of the Book of Job, Ahab is also given the opportunity to reply to his many comforters. In another encounter with Starbuck pleading for Ahab to quit his quest, Ahab replies to Starbuck:

All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. (174)

The reasoning thing that hides behind the unreasoning mask appears to be the hidden God. What stand between Ahab and God is that mask and the wall that imprisons him. The White Whale is that wall and serves as the target Ahab wishes to subdue because it represents the problem of evil in this world. This passage also reveals how Melville identifies with Ahab's rage against an irrationally unjust world. That language of being trapped is also present in the Book of Job where Job says that God "has compassed [him] with a net" (Job 19:6) and that God "hath fenced up [his] way that [he] cannot pass" (Job 19:7). Like Job, Ahab feels trapped by a wall and the wall that he faces is the White Whale. There is also the shared sense of dealing with the unknown in the Book of Job: "Oh that I knew where I might find him...Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him...he hideth himself" (Job 23:3-9). For much of Job God does not reveal himself, but the instant that he does then becomes an opportunity for Job to make his case. The presence of Moby Dick in the sea is much like this reveal. The unknown thing behind the mask finally reveals its features and opens itself up to attack from Ahab and Job. For Ahab and Job, both feel that they have every right to strike the mask given what they have experienced due to the masked thing, God or the whale. Ahab continues:

He tasks me; he heaps me; I see in him outrageous strength, with an inscrutable malice sinewing it. That inscrutable thing is chiefly what I hate; and be the white whale agent, or be the white whale principal, I will wreak that hate upon him. Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me. For could the sun do that, then could I do the other; since there is ever a sort of fair play herein, jealousy presiding over all creations. But not my master, man, is even that fair play. Who's over me? (174)



That same anger the Ahab exposes in his speech against the whale is seen again in the language of Job: Thou art become cruel to me: with thy strong hand thou opposest thyself against me (Job 30:21) and in a passage earlier states how he cries because he was wronged, but he is not heard and no judgment is made. All that Job receives is destruction and is counted as one of God's enemies (Job 19:7-12). While both Job and Ahab recognize the strength in the masked thing they see that strength to be tied to wrath. For this reason both men hate the thing that has caused them harm and feel just in making those statements.

Ahab also believes that there should be fairness in the world. Job wants to know that the world is fair by being able to argue against God for the wrongs he has suffered. Of course, Job does not consider himself above God in the way Ahab announces himself as above the White Whale and for that matter everything else. Now that we have seen the connections between Ahab and Job we can understand how the journey of Ahab is another literary example of the human experience of the problem of evil. What is now required is how Melville, through the narrator Ishmael and the White whale, considers the problem of evil.

### **The Problem of Evil**

Ishmael, as narrator, offers the reader insight into the problem of evil by contemplating it throughout the novel and by presenting Moby Dick as both God and evil at the same time. Let's begin with the contemplation Ishmael provides the reader. At the start of the novel Ishmael presents himself as one who suffers enough that he desires to kill himself and the sea is the only thing that can save

him from his pain. However, until he gets on board the Pequod, he is forced to suffer on land and witness the suffering of others. Early on in the novel Ishmael attends a mass led by Father Mapple, a former whaling captain who maintains the image of a ship with his pulpit. While waiting for the sermon to begin Ishmael sees the many cenotaphs, empty tombs, along the walls of the church that were meant for seamen lost at sea as “unrecorded accidents in the fishery” (39). After seeing the cenotaphs he began to see the women in the church in pain with re-opened wounds caused by the sight of the cenotaphs around them. It is at this point that Ishmael considers these women to suffer more painfully than those who are able to bury the dead because the cenotaphs hold nothing but an inscription. He wonders to himself, “What bitter blanks in those black-bordered marbles which cover no ashes! What despair in those immovable inscriptions! What deadly voids and unbidden infidelities in the lines that seem to gnaw upon all Faith, and refuse resurrections to the beings who have placelessly perished without a grave. As well might those tablets stand in the cave of Elephanta as here” (39). He imagines that these cenotaphs only hold despair as “bitter blanks” because these souls are lost. They might as well remain in un-Christian land for there is nothing there in the tablets to save, for the cave of Elephanta is one of many Hindu and Buddhist caves in Mumbai. When he recalls one of the names on the cenotaphs he feels despair for the man, but also desires to strengthen him. He tells himself “so, better is it to perish in that howling infinite, than be ingloriously dashed upon the lee, even if that were safety! For worm-like, then, oh! who would craven crawl to land! Terrors of the terrible! is all this agony so vain? Take heart,

take heart, O Bulkington! Bear thee grimly, demigod! Up from the spray of thy ocean-perishing—straight up, leaps thy apotheosis!” (113-114). Ishmael sees more glory in death in confronting the howling infinite than in taking the safe route as Starbuck would. He wonders if all of that suffering and such a dramatic death is worth anything and concludes that at least death at sea changes a man to a sort of deity or god. That change then is what makes a man’s suffering of value, but no one is aware of such change other than Bulkington. Yet, we will never truly know because we never hear from Bulkington in the novel.

While Bulkington’s soul may have reached apotheosis, what remains within the cenotaph is deadly emptiness and unmasked disloyalty in the line that eats away all Faith. These lines he’s referring to constitute the image of death that surrounds each person. In a later chapter while out at sea he calls these lines whale-lines:

All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side. (301)

Whale-lines are ropes used as towlines or harpoon lines that surrounds its captive and carries it to its death. For all men to live with such things around their necks implies that at any moment they can be hauled in to their death by a simple tug of the line. This idea was first seen in Melville’s *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither* where Vee-Vee is hurt due to a fall that was out his control and its constant presence in Melville’s novel shows how significant of an idea it must have been for Melville.

For Ishmael the feeling of a poker by your side rather than a harpoon invokes more terror, because whales can escape harpoons but once they are caught the poker is unavoidable due to the fact that they are already trapped within the line. In this image of the whale-line and the way that Faith is gnawed at by such lines, we can see that for Melville the experience of man is inevitable suffering and this makes our faith shrink with each death. Our faith shrinks because we fear death as Ishmael demonstrates, “we still refuse to be comforted for those who we nevertheless maintain are dwelling in unspeakable bliss; why all the living so strive to hush all the dead; wherefore but the rumor of a knocking in a tomb will terrify a whole city” (39). Even though there is the widespread belief in Heaven and eternal salvation, the living fear the dead and death. We spend our lives knowing that at any moment we could die and thus live in fear of death and suffering. It is as if Ishmael is telling the reader that Heaven does comfort the living because we will never truly know if it is real. Perhaps those that return from the dead do not even return from Heaven. This passage shows the reader that our faith in Heaven is shaky. Of course, Ishmael adds “But Faith, like a jackal, feeds among the tombs, and even from these dead doubts she gathers her most vital hope” as if to say that while we may have our doubts about the after-life faith still manages to survive allowing the believers to keep their faith in eternal felicity (39). While the whale-line devours faith with every person it kills, faith uses that death to feed itself, which is why though many of the women in the chapel are grieving they still remain faithful as shown by their presence in the church.

On anticipating his journey on a whale ship, Ishmael acknowledges that he may die, but sees the meaning of life and death differently. He notes that while “there is death in the business of whaling—a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity,” he does not believe that we understand life and death. While death at sea is quick and brings one to Eternity sooner than one may have expected, there is still something to be said about what happens to the soul. He adds:

Methinks that what they call my shadow here on earth is my true substance. Methinks that in looking at things spiritual, we are too much like oysters observing the sun through the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air. Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being. In fact take my body who will, take it I say, it is not me. And therefore three cheers for Nantucket; and come a stove boat and stove body when they will, for stave my soul, Jove himself cannot. (40)

This passage demonstrates Ishmael’s ability to see himself beyond the physical. He imagines mankind to live like oysters that only understand a portion of the world around them. His body then is just the basest part of his being and nothing more and therefore whatever happens to his body is irrelevant to what happens to his soul. At this point Ishmael welcomes the death of his body and dares death to come because not even Jove, the Roman King of the Gods, can break his soul. We see that boldness against death again while Ishmael is on board the ship:

There are certain queer times and occasions in this strange mixed affair we call life when a man takes this whole universe for a vast practical joke, though the wit thereof he but dimly discerns, and more than suspects that the joke is at nobody's expense but his own... He bolts down all events, all creeds, and beliefs, and persuasions, all hard things visible and invisible, never mind how knobby; as an ostrich of potent digestion gobbles down bullets and gun flints. And as for small difficulties and worryings, prospects of sudden disaster, peril of life and limb; all these, and death itself, seem to him only sly, good-natured hits, and jolly punches in the

side bestowed by the unseen and unaccountable old joker... There is nothing like the perils of whaling to breed this free and easy sort of genial, desperado philosophy; and with it I now regarded this whole voyage of the Pequod, and the great White Whale its object. Now then, thought I, unconsciously rolling up the sleeves of my frock, here goes for a cool, collected dive at death and destruction, and the devil fetch the hindmost. (241- 243)

Here, Ishmael sees death not only as something that affects merely his body but as “a vast practical joke” made by the “old joker” who remains “unseen and unaccountable”. That old joker appears to be God with the reference to a being unseen. It is interesting here that Ishmael calls God unaccountable for the jokes his plays on his creations. The statement evokes the same idea found in the Book of Job that God cannot be measured against man for his actions. God wills what he wants and Job spends the majority of the Biblical narrative seeking out an answer from God for the suffering he has been forced to go through without any given cause. Suffering then is a joke, and sometimes called “the cosmic joke,” and the beliefs, creeds and persuasion we accept to explain away our suffering are also jokes. The fact that these jokes are played on human beings makes God appear less kind and crueler to mankind than anything else. Recalling the beginning of the Book of Job, God only agrees to punish Job to prove a point. He makes a wager with the Devil that Job will remain faithful. Though confident in Job’s ability to remain faithful, God still has to present himself to Job after causing him to suffer for the sake of proving a point. Thus, we are all of use to God and his will. In the end, Ishmael seems to mock death again calling on it to take his life if it should desire to because life and death are not as worrisome as some may think, or at least at times they are not for Ishmael.

God, however, is not as simple for Ishmael because he understands Him to have many traits other than just the joker. When looking upon the pulpit in the chapel Ishmael says to himself that the pulpit is full of meaning:

For the pulpit is ever this earth's foremost part; all the rest comes in its rear; the pulpit leads the world. From thence it is the storm of God's quick wrath is first descried, and the bow must bear the earliest brunt. From thence it is the God of breezes fair or foul is first invoked for favourable winds. Yes, the world's a ship on its passage out, and not a voyage complete; and the pulpit is its prow. (43)

The pulpit is where the preacher delivers the sermon in a church and at the same time the part of the sailing ship where directions are given. The pulpit then is a place of authority, which is why it leads the world. From such a place God is able to make any command and for Ishmael that command can consist of a quick wrath that the front of the ship must bear first. If we consider the pulpit of the ship to mirror the pulpit of a church then those at the front are those who are intent on listening to the speaker, the faithful Christians. Interestingly enough, Melville does transform the pulpit in the church Ishmael attends into a ship and from there Father Mapple preaches with authority to his congregation about the lesson found in the story of Jonah and the Whale.<sup>6</sup> Later on in the novel the cook also has a sermon to a congregation of sharks attempting to feast on the whales caught by the ship thereby turning the ship into a religious pulpit. From such a position God subjects them to fair or foul weather as the world moves forward like a ship with God at its command.

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<sup>6</sup> If you are interested in this sermon see Chapter 9 “The Sermon” in *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*. There you will find a chapter that does not satirize religion in the way cook’s sermon does in Chapter 64 “Stubb’s Supper”.

Still, there are times that Ishmael considers God to be a “Spirit of Equality” and the “great democratic God!” who reigns with “democratic dignity” as “the great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy! His omnipresence, our divine equality!” (123). Thus, Ishmael acknowledges God’s power and that He is a democratic being that is everywhere even though he also calls God a joker who enacts his wrath when he so pleases. This relates to the idea in the Book of Job that God will hurt the wicked and strengthen the good because he is just, which conflicts with the God who seems to be harming anyone he chooses thereby making God’s will contradictory. Is He all good or not? After watching Pip nearly die at sea Ishmael notes how “we are all in the hands of the Gods” and how “Pip saw the multitudinous, God-omnipresent...He saw God's foot upon the treadle of the loom, and spoke it; and therefore his shipmates called him mad. So man's insanity is heaven's sense; and wandering from all mortal reason, man comes at last to that celestial thought, which, to reason, is absurd and frantic; and weal or woe, feels then uncompromised, indifferent as his God” (442-443). While stuck in the ocean waiting for the Pequod to save him Pip believes that he sees God’s foot pushing forward a machine to thread yarn. Again, we are brought back to the image of the rope and the noose around man’s neck. Here, God is making the material for that rope or noose implying that God determines when we die and has determined that we will all die. Though Pip appears mad to his crew, Ishmael sees him as someone who has reached a heavenly understanding of God, which is that God is indifferent to mankind and questioning his will is futile.



From Ishmael's thoughts we learn that this world is filled with suffering that is caused by God. We learn that God is indifferent and cruel while faith works alongside death so much so that all mankind remains a pawn used for jokes and the building of faith in others. The God Ishmael presents his reader is not good to mankind. In contrast to that however we also see Ishmael's ability to break free from these ideas by believing that he is not just his body and that death can only make him stronger. The problem of evil then for Ishmael is only a problem if you fear suffering and think of your death as the end. In a way Ishmael offers us the opportunity to see God differently and feel indifferent to the problem of evil as God does for there is something better.

### **Moby Dick as God and the Representation of Evil**

While this different and indifferent God that Ishmael offers the reader is discussed in his ponderings, He and the problem of evil can also be understood through Moby Dick, the White Whale. We saw earlier how Gabriel from the ship the Jeroboam considers Moby Dick to be his God, the Shakers' God, and this habit of directly referring to Moby Dick as a god or the Christian God appears several times in the novel. Upon discussing his travels Ishmael recounts an experience he has when he stayed with the lord of Tranque and studied the body of a sperm whale. When he arrived to see the whale he saw that the skull was an altar with smoke ascending from where the water spurts out of the whale. While Ishmael tries to measure the skeleton of the whale the priests asks, "How now!...Dar'st thou measure this our god!" (480-481). Like Gabriel, the priests of Tranque also see the sperm whale as their god. In "The Prairie" chapter Ishmael

refers to Moby Dick as a being better than Jove in appearances, “Nevertheless, Leviathan is of so mighty a magnitude, all his proportions are so stately, that the same deficiency which in the sculptured Jove were hideous, in him is no blemish at all. Nay, it is an added grandeur” (371). Since, Jove is the king of gods this means that Moby Dick appears greater than the Roman King of Gods. That superiority to the King of Gods goes beyond appearance also. At a later point Ishmael emphasizes how the White Whale is worthy of deification:

And this reminds me that had the great Sperm Whale been known to the young Orient World, he would have been deified by their child-magian thoughts. They deified the crocodile of the Nile, because the crocodile is tongueless; and the Sperm Whale has no tongue... If hereafter any highly cultured, poetical nation shall lure back to their birth-right, the merry May-day gods of old; and livingly enthrone them again in the now egotistical sky; in the now unhaunted hill; then be sure, exalted to Jove's high seat, the great Sperm Whale shall lord it. (373)

Here, Ishmael argues that the Sperm whale would have been deified by other parts of the world if they knew of its existence and that should the Roman nation revert back to the past then that nation would also certainly make the Sperm whale a deity. In place of Jove the Sperm whale would sit and lord over the nation. Thus, the Sperm whale should be considered a god and the White Whale most certainly is the greatest version of such a deity. Ishmael even comments on how Moby Dick has a “high and mighty god-like dignity” within his brow, “that gazing on it, in that full front view, you feel the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature” (372). Here, the whale is god-like not only due to the way he looks but also due to the power he exudes as if you feel the presence of the Deity gazing in your direction. Great power is also an attribute of God, so again Moby Dick is seen as a being that replaces God in the

novel or as a being that can be seen as another God. By the end of the chapter we see Ishmael calling the whale “the grand god” (587). So, throughout the novel Moby Dick and the sperm whale as a creature is considered god-like or even God.

This desire for the whale to show himself because he remains unseen at this point is also seen in parts of the novel as if to imply that Moby Dick is like the Hidden God. As described in Job, “we cannot find [God] out” and “great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend” (Job 37: 5 and 23). Similarly, in attempting to describe the White Whale the only description that Ishmael can offer is that the whale has “a peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high, pyramidical white hump”, but these features were only revealed “at a long distance, to those who knew him” (193). There is not much to describe the White Whale other than his white features and those features are only revealed to those who knew him meaning that, like God, Moby Dick is only seen by certain people and he chooses to remain hidden except from a distance to those who seek him. When discussing the way others have tried to paint the whale he notes how “not one distinct feature is revealed; no nose, eyes, ears, or mouth; no face; he has none, proper; nothing but that one broad firmament of a forehead, pleated with riddles; dumbly lowering with the doom of boats, and ships, and men” (372). Thus, Moby Dick remains mostly unknown to the whalers and shows no resemblance to a creature of this world due to his lack of a nose, face, mouth as well as eyes and ears. Like God, Moby Dick is a hidden creature, only he has chosen the sea for his dwelling place. In order to emphasize Moby Dick’s hiddenness Ishmael adds several chapters later how he cannot dissect the whale

any further than he has, "I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he will about his face, I say again he has no face" (406).

Returning to the attempts to paint the whale Ishmael adds that "there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by so doing, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him" (283). Ishmael reveals here that nothing in the world can help us to know Moby Dick because he is beyond our reach. While you may seek him out for yourself as a whaler you may find yourself closer to death than to the whale. At the end of the novel, Starbuck cries out, "but for one single instant show thyself" indicating how much he desires Moby Dick to reveal himself (601). What we learn from Ishmael's struggle to understand Moby Dick is that it is equally difficult to understand as God is. Furthermore, if Moby Dick is another allusion to God then God remains hidden to us even when we seek him out. Recalling the complaints of Job and the responses made by his comforters we see this same conclusion being made about God: "Canst thou by searching find out God? canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know?" (Job 11:7-8). As stated earlier in this chapter, this passage is one Melville returns to again and again in his Bible. It speaks to the way God remains unknown to us because

He is beyond our comprehension and also the way He remains purposefully hidden from us. This touches on the idea argued earlier that God is indifferent to mankind. In his hiddenness God appears distant to his believers, which causes them to consider Him to indifferent to their needs.

We can see the connection in Moby Dick's attributes to God in several other parts of the novel as well. Take for instance the way Moby Dick is described as an omnipresent being. In the chapter titled "Moby Dick", Ishmael notes how  
than when discussing the White Whale many came to believe that the whale was, "ubiquitous; that he had actually been encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time" (192). Bringing in the philosophical perspective, Ishmael even calls the White Whale an intelligent agent that is aware of the suffering he causes, "in most instances, such seemed the White Whale's infernal aforethought of ferocity, that every dismembering or death that he caused, was not wholly regarded as having been inflicted by an unintelligent agent" (194). Moby Dick is even considered immortal in the stories concerning his existence because of the way he continues to swim away unharmed from all of the attacks made by man. Thus, he is a rational, powerful, immortal, omnipresent, and hidden being, much like God.

Of course, Moby Dick is also a representation of evil and much of that evil draws from his whiteness for, "It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled [Ishmael]" (199). In fact, Ishmael dedicates an entire chapter to his whiteness similar to the way he dedicates a significant portion of the novel to the godliness of the whale. At the beginning of the chapter, "The Whiteness of the

Whale”, Ishmael discusses the way the color white has been used positively by mankind. He demonstrates how the color white is commonly seen within religion and lists the way whiteness and thus goodness are associated with “the divine spotlessness and power”, the image of Jove as a snow-white bull, the White Dog that the Iroquois gave to their Great Spirit during their holiest festival, the clothing of Christian priests, in the Roman celebration of the Passion of the Lord, in the Vision of St. John where the redeemed and the twenty four elders are wearing white while the Holy One is “white like wool” (200). While much of the color white seems positive, Ishmael asks the reader to consider that whiteness, in particular the whiteness of Moby Dick, is more evil than good. Ishmael explains: “This elusive quality it is, which causes the thought of whiteness, when divorced from more kindly associations, and coupled with any object terrible in itself, to heighten that terror to the furthest bounds” (200). Thus, as the color can enhance the goodness brought out by an image or object the color can also enhance the terror brought out by already terrible objects, like the White Whale. He notes later “as we have seen, it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind” (206). So, the color white implies both goodness and evil and that implication is dependent on the object bearing the color. The objects he begins with are polar bears and white sharks. He describes their whiteness as ghastly which thereby “imparts such an abhorrent mildness, even more loathsome than terrific, to the dumb gloating of their aspect. So that not the fierce-fanged tiger in his heraldic coat can so stagger courage as the white-

shrouded bear or shark” (200). For Ishmael, the whiteness in their skin causes fear in their viewers more so than the fangs and striped coat of the tiger. His next object is the Albinos who lived in the world as a being rejected by mankind due to his color. He explains that, “the Albinos is as well made as other men—has no substantive deformity—and yet this mere aspect of all-pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion” (202). After connecting the whiteness present in living beings to something strange Ishmael considers the hue of dead men, which is also white: “It cannot well be doubted, that the one visible quality in the aspect of the dead which most appals the gazer, is the marble pallor lingering there; as if indeed that pallor were as much like the badge of consternation in the other world, as of mortal trepidation here” (203). Again, the color appals Ishmael and leads to him to reflect on other ways we use white is such a dreadful way. From the color of the dead we decided to wrap them in shrouds of the same color and from that we imagine that ghosts are also white.

Ishmael demonstrates to the reader that because of the whiteness of the whale, he fears it. When he presents the reader with the story of the New England colt that can sense the presence of a black bison from Oregon even though he has never seen the animal and still reacts with fear, Ishmael offers the reader insight to his own feelings about Moby Dick. While he does not see that White Whale till much later in the novel he still believes that he fears it and like the dumb brute has “the instinct of the knowledge of the demonism in the world” (206). Like the colt, the “muffled rollings of a milky sea; the bleak rustlings of the festooned frosts of mountains; the desolate shiftings of the windrowed snows of prairies...are as the

shaking of that buffalo robe to the frightened colt” (206). On considering what exactly about the color white causes him to fear the object bearing this color Ishmael determines that is the absence of color that disturbs him. Though there is absence of color in white Ishmael also adds that white is foundation of all colors and from this fact Ishmael finds himself confused about the meaning of the color. He asks himself, “Is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink?” (206). This question seems to indicate that the color white appears to be so unholy that we fear it because it is so contrary to Christianity. After explaining his issue with the color white, Ahab concludes that “of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol” (207). Moby Dick is then the supreme being who is also an anti-religious creature. While his connection to God should imply that his whiteness is a sign of goodness it appears, to also reveal Moby Dick’s evil attributes, making him an allusion to evil and God at the same time.

Moby Dick as a representation of evil is critical to the understanding of Moby Dick as well, because the whale is the thing Ahab hunts most which results in the novel being about a man who desires to kill evil. While the White Whale’s very color seems evil to Ishmael, we also see other ways in which the whale is like the devil. When discussing two naturalists idea of the Sperm Whale, Ishmael writes that the two “[declared] the Sperm Whale not only to be a consternation to every other creature in the sea, but also to be so incredibly ferocious as continually to be athirst for human blood” demonstrating the whale’s desire to not



only harm but kill human beings while also being a creature other creatures in the sea fear (190). This is further proven by the statement made by a man Ishmael refers to as the Baron: “at sight of the Sperm Whale, all fish (sharks included) are ‘struck with the most lively terrors,’ and ‘often in the precipitancy of their flight dash themselves against the rocks with such violence as to cause instantaneous death’ (191). The fear triggered by the whale even goes as far as to cause creatures to kill themselves. Thus, the Sperm Whale represents a terror in the sea. After meeting with all of the ships Ishmael finally learns that the White Whale will harm anyone: “and now that all his successive meetings with various ships contrastingly concurred to show the demoniac indifference with which the white whale tore his hunters, whether sinning or sinned against” (572).

Again, we are brought back to idea of an indifferent god for Moby Dick shows indifference to those he harms. Similar to the God Ishmael presents to us through Pip and other examples and to the God Job feels has wronged him, Moby Dick does not care about whether you have sinned or not and will cause you harm simply because he can. For Ahab, this very fact is the reason why he must kill the White Whale. Ever since Moby Dick took Ahab’s leg, the whale became the representation of all things evil in the world including his “bodily woes” and his “intellectual and spiritual exasperations” so much so that Ahab pursues him for the entire of the novel till he dies in his attempts to kill the whale (194). Ishmael describes the pursuit:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung. That intangible

malignity which has been from the beginning; to whose dominion even the modern Christians ascribe one-half of the worlds; which the ancient Ophites of the east revered in their statue devil;—Ahab did not fall down and worship it like them; but deliriously transferring its idea to the abhorred white whale, he pitted himself, all mutilated, against it. All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart's shell upon it. (194-195)

In short, the White Whale is all of the world's evil composited into one being, the grand ungodly god-like Moby Dick. Of course, these are not Ishmael's view and the fact he calls Ahab crazy for believing such things shows how Ishmael attempts to distance himself from Ahab's views. Ahab fanatically devotes himself to one single thing—the death of the White Whale. For him, the White Whale symbolizes the cause of our suffering that Christianity has accepted as part of the world. However, instead of worshipping this experience Ahab “pitted himself, all mutilated, against it.” While the whale represents “all evil” Ahab represents all of the anger mankind has felt due to their pain that has existed since the time of Adam. For this reason the White Whale becomes like the God of the Book of Job whom Job seeks out so passionately for His crimes against mankind and Ahab becomes Job. This is further demonstrated by Starbuck's advice to Ahab: “Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekes him!” (609). While the comforters attempt to prove to Job that he is in the wrong and should not seek out God for what happened to him, Job feels that it is his right. He replies, much as Ahab would, “let me speak, and answer thou me... Wherefore hidest thou thy

face” (Job 13:22-24). Like Job, Ahab is determined to find the thing that represents all of his suffering and at the same time appears to be God.

## **Conclusion**

After publishing this novel Melville wrote to Hawthorne telling him that he has written a “wicked book” that was “broiled in hellfire” with the secret motto being a line placed in the book: "Ego non baptizo te in nomine patris, sed in nomine diaboli!" (522 & Davis and Gilman 141-142). Interestingly, Melville only writes the first part to Hawthorne (*Ego non baptize te in nomine*). Translated from Latin the motto means “I baptize you not in the name of the father, but in the name of the devil”. This final piece of the puzzle allows us to see the use of the Book of Job more clearly also. With this motto *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is then a tale that goes against Christianity as a wicked book willing to challenge the way God is viewed.

At the end of the novel Ahab is defeated by the White Whale and his ship is torn asunder only to leave Ishmael behind to survive. Ahab is finally silenced. At the end of the Book of Job, Job finally meets God and is also silenced by the great power of the Lord. However, what differentiates the two men is that Job is rewarded for challenging God and speaking rightly of him while Ahab is punished. I will contend however that Job does not receive what he truly desires in the end, similar to Ahab, and I believe this is the interpretation Melville presents in his novel. There is no explanation for Job’s suffering and there is no victory for Ahab. Neither men win against God. Only the messenger survives to

tell the tale of a man's persistence to find an answer. Melville is and is not Ishmael in the novel, but he is certainly Ahab willing to pursue his White Whale until his death. Like Ahab and Job, Melville never found his answer to the problem of evil. His writings offer many kinds of ideas about how we could live in the world with the problem of evil, but much of his work still remains unreconciled with the problem. All he could offer us was two things: One, from *Mardi: and a Voyage Thither*, that we must accept the fact that we cannot understand God, which leaves many questions unanswered; and two from *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale*, that God is not as good as we believe Him to be and we have every right to pursue this fact until our death. In the following chapter I aim to present Melville's lessons and demonstrate that perhaps he did not fail in his search entirely and that his lesson from *Moby-Dick; or, The Whale* is a way we can understand God.

## Final Chapter

### **Seeking Out Another God: My Alternative God Theology and the Non-Existence of God's Goodness and Evil Attributes**

“The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.” — Richard Dawkins

“Good and evil have nothing to do with gods. It has to do with us.”  
— Matthew Woodring Stover, *Caine's Law*

“In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that-and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison-you do not know God at all.”  
— C.S. Lewis

After taking into consideration Melville's literary journey of doubt with God and the many attempts at creating a successful theodicy, it is clear that the problem of evil challenges our concept of an all perfect God. As Mackie stated best, “If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you” (“Evil and Omnipotence”, 46). For this final chapter, I am prepared to claim that God is not wholly good and that our concept of an OmniGod, or perfect being theology. In this chapter, I will first demonstrate that perfect being theology is a problematic approach to God given its history in Judeo-Christian tradition and lack of scriptural support. I will then

present an alternative to perfect being theology called relational being theology<sup>7</sup> after providing evidence that perfect being theology is not the only way to comprehend God for the Judeo-Christian tradition. I will also apply a set of standards to determine if relational being theology, a theology that is willing to give up God's perfections, presents a God that is worthy of worship and is religiously adequate to be called God. Finally, I will take the relational being theology one step further and argue that this discussion proves that God is not wholly good.

### **The History of Perfect Being Theology**

After examining the many discussions about God it is evident that God's perfection is an accepted and common part to the dialogues. We see it in the philosophy of Descartes, Leibniz, Kant, Plantinga and many others. Thomas Morris, a philosopher who believes in the OmniGod theology, writes, "Beneath the many deep differences that divide philosophers on the nature of God, a single unifying conception seems to have been operative in much of the work that has been done...In one way or another, a great many recent contributors to the literature on divine attributes have worked in the broad tradition of perfect being theology" (Morris, "Perfect Being Theology" 20). Slowly, the notion of an all perfect God found itself travelling from one philosopher's argument to another till eventually it became a traditional aspect of the theologian's work. But who began this tradition?

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<sup>7</sup> A theology presented by Jeanine Diller, assistant professor of philosophy and religion at the University of Toledo

If we look at the history of Judeo-Christianity between 300BCE and 400CE we can find the beginnings of the perfect God concept. In this period of time Jews were spread across much of the Greco-Roman empire in cities like Babylon, Antioch, Damascus, and Alexandria, a city known for an active intellectual life (Diller, "Theism" 107). Within these cities Jews interacted with Greek philosophers who were preoccupied with the idea of one perfect God in contrast to the many gods of Hellenism. Philo, a devout Jew, scholar and mystic living in Alexandria during this period was devoted to the authority of scripture and the belief the God is perfect (Diller, "Theism" 119). In his time, he attempted to integrate the scripture with the perfect God concept offered by the Greek philosophers. According to Jeanine Diller, "His work, and the primary sources of the Greek philosophers themselves, somehow *encouraged* the next generation to continue the attempt to harmonize the two traditions...since Philo, both inter- and intra-cultural influences were pushing major thinkers in the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the direction of perfect being theology" ("Theism" 123). This push occurred all the way into the fourth century CE where Augustine (354-430 CE), possibly one of the most important theologians in the history of the Christian church, could make his claim that God is the greatest being conceivable. Augustine declared that God had perfections such as impeccability, omnipotence, perfect freedom and perfect justice (Diller, "Theism" 43). In a piece to the Manicheans<sup>8</sup> Augustine writes, "If we wish to avoid blasphemy, we must either understand or hold it on faith that God is the supreme good, the being than which

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<sup>8</sup> The Manicheans were a religious sect that was founded by the Persian Mani in the last half of the third century. Sources claim that Manichaeism was a synthesis of many religions.

nothing better can be or be conceived” (Diller, “Theism” 124). Following suit, Anselm, then Archbishop of Canterbury, took Augustine’s argument and pushed perfect being theology further into the Judeo-Christian tradition.

We must also recognize how Philo and other religious leaders found their argument for a perfect being in the Bible. What has been presented thus far is a series of discussions and ideas from religious leaders, and not the Bible, that lead to the current perfect being theology that exists today. There are, however, moments in the Bible that could justify these discussions and the end result of perfect being theology. Later texts in the Bible affirm perfect being theology. In the Gospel of Mathew it states, “You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” which occurs when Jesus tells his disciples how they are meant to behave as men (Mathew 5:48 ).Diller believes this is the *only* text in the scriptures and the creeds that claims God is perfect on an attribute level<sup>9</sup> (Diller, “Theism” 80). Still, there are instances that could cause one to conclude that God is perfect. In the Book of Job, Job acknowledges God’s greatness after witnessing him in the whirlwind and being told of God’s power by God: “[God] can do everything” (Job 42:2). The Gospel of John constantly acknowledges that the “ Lord knows everything” (John 16:30, John 21:17, I John 3:20). Still, these are references to the Lord Jesus Christ whom the disciples are speaking to. However, because he is the son of God and knows everything then God too must know everything. In one instance in the Gospel of John we do actually see the narrator describe God as the being who knows everything at the very beginning of his

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<sup>9</sup> Diller defines attribute level to be the characteristics of God. For perfect being theology, the attribute that is ascribed to God is that God is perfect.



gospel lesson where in teaching others how to love he states, “For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knows all things” (John 1 3:20). When combined it seems possible that we could say that God is perfect. Now, we have a presentation that philosophers and religious leaders say God is perfect and that the Bible says God is perfect so it must be evident from the two points that God is perfect or an OmniGod.

Perfect being theology is also logically simple. The formula is simple; all it states is that God is a maximally perfect being which means he is the best at everything. It is also quite memorable and easy to understand (Diller, “Theism” 56). It seems to require less of an explanation (Diller, “Theism” 58). Diller notes that “out of all possible beings, it is *appropriate* to worship a being who is the best possible being, along every metaphysical category” (Diller, “Theism” 59). Everything about this concept of God is simple enough to transfer from the mouth of a bishop to the mind of a devout believer and for this reason it has been maintained as the only conception of God. Today, if we were to drop God’s perfections then it seems like we drop God altogether because people believe that this is the only way of conceiving God within the Judeo-Christian tradition (Diller, “Theism” 65). I want to argue that if we drop God’s perfections we can still have a God that follows the Judeo-Christian tradition and that begins with considering what sort of God the Bible presents.

## Perfect Being Theology: Not the Only Accurate Conception

Thus far, I have demonstrated how we have come to understand God as a perfect being. Now, I want to explore how we can understand God as a not so perfect being and why perfect being theology is not as grounded in the scripture as we would like to believe. As Diller argues perfect being theology:

Is not *explicitly* proclaimed in the Christian scriptures or creeds...[ and] the only ‘omni’ or ‘im’ that occurs in the entire text of the English versions of the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament is ‘omnipotent’ ...occurs only once, in the King James rendering of Revelation 19:6 (Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth), and is deleted altogether in later translations...The word ‘perfect’ and its variants occur 154 times in the King James Version, it is associated with God or Jesus in only eleven of these instances...[Furthermore,] nowhere in the Shema, the Nicene Creed or the Apostles’ Creed does it say outright that God is perfect. (“Theism” 65-66)

While there may be instances that imply God’s perfections they are few and far between. As Diller makes obvious the whole notion of an OmniGod is not as rooted in the Bible as one would like to believe. While God is called perfect eleven out of the 154 times the word is used we must still be skeptical about God’s absolute perfection. Diller asks us to consider that while the scriptures and creeds may say that God is perfect how literally can we take these statements? According to Diller, “many [instances of God being called “perfect”] turn up in contexts that are either poetic or rhetorically charged...Consider for a moment the Hebrew Bible passages ascribing one or the other of the perfections to God. Almost *all* of them occur in prayers or poems (“Theism” 84). She claims that is an important point to make because the language of poetry is quite different from prose. Poetry is situated in a realm of metaphors, similes, allegories and so forth.

In short, poetry exaggerates what is real or changes the way reality is presented. In an effort to strengthen her claim Diller cites Anthony Kenny from his book *The God of Philosophers* who explains what sort of truth value we can attain from these poetic passages: The Old and New Testament passages describing God's knowledge are too poetical and rhetorical for it to be possible to decide how literally their writers intended the idea that God knows everything (Diller, "What It Takes" 6). Furthermore, Howard Wettstein, in his paper "God's Struggles", notes that "the power of ancient texts is not that of straightforward articulation" but instead the meanings are presented through poetically written narratives and "dramatic and mythological tropes" (2). Discussions of how we are meant to interpret the Bible's language are continually happening, but for the sake of my thesis I will not delve into the complexities of interpretation. I will, however, state that Diller and Kenny's argument is worthy of consideration in order to think about the way we perceive God within Judeo-Christian religion. Finally, within the Bible God is called many times "Lord of land and sea" and "Lord of the Cosmos", but so are the rulers. For that reason you can't call these instances scriptural evidence for God's omnipotence (Diller, "Theism" 86-87). Given these facts I find it difficult to agree to the claims of perfect being theology because it does not appear to be as scripturally accurate as we have come to believe.

The question then becomes what is an accurate representation of God. In order to answer the question it is best to return to the texts and locate instances that present God in another light. Unlike the few examples of God's perfection there are numerous examples of God's imperfection. According to Morris,

“God...instruct[s] his chosen people to massacre indigenous tribes...plague[s] the Egyptians and takes the lives of all their first-born children...allow[s] Job to be tortured psychologically, his family killed, just to prove a point...and the great prophets themselves represent God saying that he is responsible for evil as well as good” (Morris, “Our Idea of God” 49). For Morris, and for myself, there are many moments within the Bible that I could present that demonstrate God’s imperfection. Take for instance God in the Book of Genesis. Before the flood he says, “I will blot out from the earth the men whom I created—men together with beasts, creeping things, and birds of the sky; for I regret I made them” (Genesis 6:7) and regrets making Saul King in the Book of Samuel (I Sam. 15:10-11). Regret is not an emotion that a perfect being should express because a perfect being cannot regret anything. Therefore, God cannot be perfect in these two examples. According to Diller, it implies that God lacked foreknowledge about what would happen and a lack of good judgment (Diller, “Theism” 93). This demonstrates God’s inability to be all knowing since God should have been aware in advance what would happen if he were to create mankind and the world or if he were to make Saul king. Yet, he did not know so God cannot be all knowing, at least in these two cases.

Then there is the passage in Deuteronomy where Moses speaks to the assembly of Israel on behalf of God:

For a fire is kindled in My anger, And shall burn to the lowest hell; It shall consume the earth with her increase, And set on fire the foundations of the mountains. ‘I will heap disasters on them; I will spend My arrows on them. *They shall be* wasted with hunger, Devoured by pestilence and bitter

destruction; I will also send against them the teeth of beasts, with the poison of serpents of the dust. (Deuteronomy 32:22-24)

Here, God is angry and his anger motivates him to punish his people with disasters, arrows, hunger, “pestilence and bitter destruction”, and with beasts that will do his bidding. In this passage God is not attempting to be omnibenevolent. He seeks to punish Israel for their crimes. This passage serves as a message to the Israelites that God has predicted their rebellion against Him and will punish them accordingly. One could claim that this behavior is appropriate for a perfect being given the circumstances. He is claiming to treat them so because He knows that they will break their covenant with him so God appears just. I believe that He is being quite cruel and fearful. He desires to punish them because they will follow other gods and stop praising Him thereby demonstrating God’s jealous behavior and how He behaves when rejected. It is this flawed God that needed to be talked out of killing the Israelites in the wilderness after they made the golden calf by Moses (Exodus 32). A God that requires council from his own creation and is easily swayed by his anger cannot be perfect because a perfect being would not be controlled in either way.

Two other instances that speak of God’s imperfection are the well-known stories of Job and Abraham. In the Book of Genesis, God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham, considered the first Jew, has a particular relationship with God because he is singled out by God in the Book of Genesis to find the promised land. Yet, God requires Abraham to do something that would violate his moral sensibilities. For Wettstein, “God asks of us what is not only immoral, but a violation of something at the heart of what God presumably stands

for” (4). If God were perfectly good Abraham would not have been forced to kill his child out of fear or faith in God. In another interaction with God Abraham is told that God desires to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah due to the extent of their sin. Abraham, in the hopes of changing God’s mind, tells him “that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Genesis 18:25) Here, Abraham attempts to remind God that is not his character to willingly hurt everyone for the sake of punishing a few. He is advising the God many consider perfect. This demonstrates that God struggles and that “the Biblical narrative is the history of God’s learning that He cannot do it alone, that His plan requires partnership with His human reflections” (Wettstein 11). I acknowledge that this is not an image of God that is shared by many. A perfect God should not need guidance from those who seek out God’s guidance. But what if God is not as perfect? In the Book of Job, God clearly does not behave perfectly because God harms Job without any reason in order to demonstrate Job’s faith. When Job challenges God and demands answers for his sufferings the Comforters tell Job to discontinue speaking of God in such a negative way because God always has a reason for his actions for they are always just. In response to the Comforters praise of God, God tells them twice “ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath”( Job 42:7 and 42:8). For Wettstein this is very important moment because it implies that “the usual pietisms are false and objectionable, that Job’s pre-Whirlwind near

blasphemous remarks about God's injustice were well taken" (6). If this is true then not only is God imperfect it is not against scripture to say so.

What these examples demonstrate is that based on Biblical text we cannot claim that God is perfect; in particular God is not perfectly good. However, I am not using these examples to excuse God's actions or to minimize them for the sake of religion. Many defenders of God have no issue with innocent people dying because "being with God in heaven is, for all we know, a superior situation than life on earth, so that even the killing of babies, when divinely mandated, may not represent a morally significant problem" (Wettstein 2). There is, in fact, a morally significant problem. The problem, however, is not God's. To be clear, when I say this and at the same time say that God is not good I mean to say that God is not good in our terms of goodness. Whether we are Utilitarians, Kantians, Consequentialists, or Aristotelians the actions of God in the Bible and the actions of God now do not fit with our terms for what is the good. For D.Z. Phillips, "*It makes no sense to speak of God's perfect goodness...As the result of treating God as a moral agent like ourselves, an appeal is made to the inscrutable will of God which is beyond our comprehension. But one cannot have it both ways. Either God is to be treated as a member of a moral community we share with him, or he is not*" (122). We desire to assume that God is like us and for that reason we should judge him the way we judge others and that, for Phillips and myself, may not be feasible.

In his book, Phillips asks, "if God is weighed in the scale of human justice, he is found wanting. What is the consequence of this verdict?" and

Tennesen replies: The human demand for order and reason is leaping towards the heavens like a flame; Job is hammering away at the ear of his God, hoping to strike a chord of human fibre” meaning that Job wants to know why he is punished for something he has not done and demands a response from God (122-123). Then something changes in Job and Tennesen perceives this change as Job’s new understanding of God, he “realizes that these moral standards cannot be applied to God” (Phillips 124). He adds, “Job discovers that if God resides beyond morality, the creature to be found there is certainly not a man. The problem is, however that God is now seen as a creature who occupies the logical space we reserve for ‘the monstrous’” (Phillips 124). This is of course not what we want for our Judeo-Christian God, but Tennesen makes a fair point. God is not like us. While I may not consider God a monster, he is certainly other because the power to create the universe and everything within it, the power to harm or benefit us at any given moment and the power to have millions of people believe in you belongs to a being that is not human. For this reason we cannot begin to believe that we understand the will of God, because if we use our terms, to answer Phillip’s question, God seems to no longer be God in the sense that he is not good.

When I say that God is not good in our terms I am not saying that the presence of evil is not cruel, but I am asking one to consider whether or not that has to be a problem. If God is not good then there is no problem of evil. Take for instance this hypothetical situation: Say you have lived your life as a human and you have the opportunity to join a community of ants. Ants have a particular way of doing things. Their sense of community is driven towards working together to



survive for as long as necessary. You, having spent x amount of years as a human cannot comprehend this way of life and you try to suggest an alternative. The ants see this as opposition and consider you to be a bad ant. Perhaps you seem lazy or careless. To them, you are not good. In the same way ants would not see you as good in their community we do not see God as good in our world.<sup>10</sup> Should this example fail you there is a folk fable about inmates at the Auschwitz concentration camp that may offer the picture in a setting more relatable to our human experience. In the fable the inmates put God on trial for “crimes against humanity and against his chosen people” (Wettstein18). At the end of the trial they determine that God is guilty. After making this determination the group begins its afternoon prayers. Like the inmates, I agree that God has harmed us with the presence of natural and moral evil, but that does not stop me from believing in God. It simply means that God is not good based on our understanding of the world. Goodness is a human concept that cannot apply to God because He is not an agent like us. While the Bible presents him as an agent it only does so to allow us to better understand God. The problem with that however is that we continue to talk about God as if He is a human being and He is not. Wettstein claims in an interview with Gary Gutting from the New York Times that “overlying this is the sense, sometimes only a dim sense, that somehow God is beyond being a person, that we are over our heads in even raising the question” (“Is Faith”). In agreement with Wettstein, I believe that we are over our heads in trying to understand God within our framework of

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<sup>10</sup> Analogy provided by Professor Yuval Avnur, Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Scripps College

understanding. For this reason, we cannot judge God the way we judge ourselves and we must accept that God is not good but also that He is not evil because those are *our terms* for defining the world around us and they do not apply to a being that is not human.

### **Proposing An Alternative God: Diller's Relational Theology**

If my claim is God is not perfect, and surely not perfectly good, what God am I then proposing for this thesis? I will use Diller's Relational Theology to assist in answering this question. In her paper, "What it takes to be God", and in her dissertation Diller proposes that we consider a relational being. Her goal is to offer a being that remains within the Judeo-Christian tradition by forming this being from the presentation of God in the Biblical texts. Her hope is to form a role for God that seems probable given what we know. In her paper, Diller structures relational theology as a belief in a God "who some substantial or central number of these [following] things":

- A. God must explain the existence of the universe
- B. God must intervene both providentially and miraculously in the universe
- C. God must generate or affirm some of our moral obligations, and deliver justice in the long run.
- D. God also has to be the actual and proper object of the religious attitudes of awe, hope, fear, trust, and love so plentiful in these texts
- E. God also has to be the object of the firmly established practices of worship and prayer of all kinds, including penitential, petitionary and communing prayers. ("What it Takes" 12)
- F. God must be the unique doer of all the *other* jobs in the divine role. ("What it Takes" 13)

There are three points Diller makes about this type of role for God. First, this role does not require that God do every job that she lists. She claims that her

depiction of the divine role has slack in it and that this slack is necessary because it leaves room for mistakes. Of course, while God does not have to do all of these jobs God will be required to do enough of these jobs to be considered God for Diller. Second, God must do job F because the presence of many beings doing some of these jobs breaks with the tradition of monotheism within Christianity and Judaism. Third, this theology is quite different from perfect being theology. As stated earlier, God has to be perfect to be part of perfect being theology. Diller's relational God, however, does not. Furthermore, a perfect being would not as God in relational being theology (Diller, "What it Takes" 16). The being may have some perfections, but God cannot be maximally perfect. Take omnipotence for example. For Diller, "a being who satisfies the role has to have enough power to create the world and break the laws of nature when she wants to" which clearly requires a large amount of power, but not a maximal amount Diller, "What it Takes" 17). God could be limited in power and this would still satisfy the role. Still, God has to have some power, some knowledge, some amount of goodness and so forth to do the jobs, but what the amount comes out to be is unknown to relational theology. Alternatively, perfect being theology assumes that God has a maximal amount of everything. So, with relational theology we can have God who lacks *all* of the perfections and thus can have a God who is not perfect therefore proving the perfect being theology is not the only way to conceive of God (Diller, "Theism" 169).

## **A Test for This Alternative God**

Now, we must determine if this God is plausible. According to John Bishop any alternative concept of God must meet two requirements. First, the concept must be “genuinely distinct” from the omniGod presented in perfect being theology. Second, the concept has to be an authentic concept of God that follows the theistic religious tradition and its history (Diller, “Theism” 174). As we have just seen relational theology is quite different from perfect being theology in the way it views God’s perfections so this requirement is met. We can further test the second requirement by determining if this alternative God Diller offers us a. comes from a sufficiently rich grasp of the tradition; b. expresses the tradition of the Bible; and c. is capable of defending the fact that the concept offered is an account of the Biblical tradition’s notion of God (Diller, “Theism” 70). As Diller claims along with my presentation of God from scriptural text, we can trust that this alternative God is rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition as much if not more so than the God of perfect being theology and therefore meets the second requirement.

Diller also takes into account whether or not her alternative God is worthy of being worshipped. According to Diller, God must be a numinous object, which she defines as “a numen [that] has to be perceived to be powerful enough to overwhelm the subject, and vital” (Diller, “Theism” 204). The numen has to be fascinating. If he or she is not then there would be no reason to worship them (Diller, “Theism” 206). The numen also does not have to be perfect however it has to be something we can adore and devote ourselves to and that can only be

something superior to us (Diller, "Theism" 208). This is because in order "for someone to worship something one takes to be inferior to oneself, or even for one to worship something one takes to be a peer" (Diller, "Theism" 214). It has to be a being that is lord of something no human can control (Diller, "Theism" 220). Within Judaeo-Christian tradition God has to be lord of all. (Diller, "Theism" 221) Worship, then, is adoration of a numen. The act of worshipping a numen "involves not just glorying in the object's nature, but also allying one's energies with it" (Diller, "Theism" 218). Any concept of God then must follow the definitions of a numen in order to be worthy of worship. Recalling Diller's A-F jobs for God I believe that her relational God is a numen and therefore worthy of worship.

### **Objections and My Solution**

Now that we have considered the plausibility of Diller's God and all of its positives we must take into consideration its flaws. One noticeable issue with Diller's relational God is that If God is not perfectly good then another person could come along and be even more morally worthy than this God is. For Diller's relational God she acknowledge that there may be a morally better being or an even morally worse being in the universe. Diller permits those who make this argument to shift their alliances to this new being in the universe because she agrees that this being's existence is a valid possibility. She adds however that doing so would go against the nature of worship (Diller, "Theism" 226-229). To abandon one God for another would mean that we never truly believed in and worshipped the original in the first place. Within the Judeo-Christian traditions

and within relational being theology there can only be one being who does the jobs required of them to be God. That new and seemingly better being therefore cannot be the being we worship and call God.

The next issue is that relational being theology is an unclear picture of God and therefore does not provide a suitable alternative to perfect being theology. Her definition makes God's nature underdetermined because of the slack in the role and slack of their properties. We have no definition of what the jobs are that God does or could do and what characteristics equip God to do these jobs (Diller, "Theism" 231). A relational theologian does not know which jobs a divine being does of any world, does not know God's nature and does not know what is necessary for God to do these jobs. In short, a relational theologian only knows what jobs could be possible for God to do in order to be considered God. In contrast, perfect being theology offers a better definition of what God is and what his role is. As Swinburne explains in *The Existence of God*, since there are no finite limitations in this sort of understanding of God there is no need to explain his nature. It consists of everything (282-283). A maximal God is maximally good, powerful and knowledgeable. There are no limits to his abilities and therefore he is capable of anything. In opposition to this claim Morris comments:

Some philosophers seem to think of perfect being theology...as providing a wholly *a priori* method of thinking about God which self-evidently will entail a fully adequate, exactly defined conception of deity free of open texture, or any hint of underdetermination. But this it cannot do. Recall that, in the tradition of Anselm, the operative conception of God for perfect being theology is that of a greatest possible maximally perfect being. What this means is that God will be conceived of as having some

unsurpassable array of compossible great-making properties, properties it is intrinsically better to have than to lack. What precisely those properties are thought to be a function of our intuitions concerning what properties are great-making properties. (“Perfect Being Theology” 23)

Morris demonstrates here that even the definition of perfection requires us to use our intuitions, yet the issue with that is that we do not have a complete set of intuitions for what absolute perfection is and perfect being theologians do not agree about what God’s properties are even if God is perfect. Thus, perfect being theology is not more simple than relational being theology. This issue does make evident that relational theology is not in its entirety better than perfect being theology in regards to simplicity. However, I do believe that relational being theology, because it meets the same requirements as perfect being theology does, is a worthy alternative that we must all consider.

The main contention I believe that makes Diller’s relational theology flawed within the context of my thesis is that this God will still not solve the problem of evil. Diller acknowledges the fact her God still has to deal with the problem of evil, but advocates that her God can respond to the problem of evil more easily than the omniGod. She believes that the theodicies would work if theodicians were beginning with a relational God as its foundation. Diller also notes that her God even with the theodicies may still fail to solve the problem of evil. Theodicians may be capable of explaining some of the evil, but not all of it. For this reason I propose that we add to Diller’s list job *G. God cannot be good or evil*. As demonstrated by the many examples from the Biblical scripture and from the sheer amount of evil in the world there is no way that God can be good in our

eyes. This added job may seem to break away entirely from the Judeo-Christian tradition, but after analyzing the Bible and its scriptures it is clear that this addition is rooted in the Biblical traditions.

Now there are two possible objections to my suggestion: 1. My addition does not appear to be a necessary addition to Diller's list of jobs and 2. There are clearly passages that argue that God is good so I cannot claim that God is not good. Let me consider the first objection. In order to truly not have the problem of evil affect Judeo-Christianity we must be willing to remove an attribute of God. Diller's list, however, does not manage to do this and thus even with her list of jobs the problem of evil is still an issue. It is also clear that God's power is a necessary attribute, though it need not be an attribute of absolute power. Yet, simply stating that fact does not allow us to deal with the problem of evil. We would have to decide how weak God is in order for Him to be incapable of stopping evil, but the Bible clearly demonstrates that God's power is so great that He could stop evil and start evil if He desires to. Thus, limiting God's power does not solve the problem. On the other hand, it is not clear from the Bible that God's goodness is necessary. If we remove God's goodness then the problem of evil is no longer a problem. As I have argued in the first half of this chapter claiming God is neither good nor evil solves the problem of evil by no longer making it a problem, so my addition is necessary. Taking into consideration the second objection now we also see that God's goodness is not something that can be proven completely because there is also evidence of God not being good. Furthermore, as stated previously in this chapter we cannot claim that God is good



*or* evil because those are labels that are not applicable to God. Since God is not an agent He cannot be considered good and He cannot be considered evil, He is simply above our heads in terms of understanding Him and his ways. Herman Melville reveals this same fact to his readers as even he fails at trying to understand the ways of God. Melville spent his life confused due to the problem of evil and my solution provides us an opportunity to go beyond confusion to a solid definition of God. While Wettstein believes God is beyond our understanding I believe that we can define Him as a being who is neither good nor evil which results in it not being against His nature to cause suffering. This solution allows His believers to accept God without having to rationalize His actions through a theodicy. It asks us to see God beyond good and evil. It asks us to change the way we understand religion without actually changing the Biblical tradition. While my solution does not end suffering I believe that it can end the confusion that theodicies bring into this world.

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