CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMATIZATION OF EVIL: A CONTEXTUALIZED OVERVIEW[1]

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Abstract

Western philosophical study of religion, particularly by the analytic philosophers in contemporary times, has raised many issues about religious truth in reference to theism. One of the major issues is their problematization of evil, which they treated as logical and evidential arguments against the existence of theistic God. With the consideration of being neutral and objective, their treatment of the problem assumes a dialectical relevance for the theists, including the Muslims, to respond in two customarily ways of either theodicy or defense. However, a question should rather be raised, at least by the discerning Muslims, on to what extent their philosophical formulation and establishment of the problem is relevant to religions other than Western Christianity. This article aims to articulate a contextualized overview of contemporary development in the philosophical problematization of evil especially the ones developed in the analytical

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discourse. This contextualization is crucial to adjudicate that their treatment of the problem, in its essence, reflects more of the religio-philosophical experience and consciousness of Western man, hence, diluting at once their claim for neutrality and objectivity.

Keywords: theism; religious truth; problematization of evil; religio-philosophical experience and consciousness.

Khulasah

Kajian falsafah Barat tentang agama, khususnya oleh ahli falsafah analitik pada zaman kontemporari, telah menimbulkan banyak isu tentang kebenaran agama yang dirujuk sebagai teisme. Salah satu isu utama ialah permasalahan falsafah mengenai konsep kejahatan, yang mereka anggap sebagai hujah-akliah dan hujah-pembuktian bagi menentang kewujudan Tuhan. Dengan pertimbangan bahawa pendekatan mereka adalah secara neutral dan objektif, mereka mengandaikan bagi golongan 'teistik', termasuk kaum Muslimin, suatu tuntutan untuk menjawab hujah dengan menggunakan dua cara yang lazim mereka pakai; iaitu sama ada melalui penghujahan-jawab secara dogmatik (*theodicy*) ataupun penghujahan-jawab secara logik (*defense*). Ini sepatutnya menimbulkan persoalan, sekurang-kurangnya oleh umat Islam yang peka, tentang sejauh manakah kebenaran perumusan falsafah dan pengenalpastian masalah mengenai kejahatan itu relevan dengan agama lain selain agama Kristian di Barat. Tujuan utama makalah ini adalah untuk merencanakan suatu tinjauan ringkas mengenai perkembangan isu "kejahatan" pada masa kini sepertimana yang ditelaah dalam falsafah agama analitik. Tinjauan ringkas ini disampaikan dengan cara memberi konteks bahawa pada intinya, permasalahan falsafah mengenai kejahatan adalah tidak neutral, malahan membayangkan pengalaman dan kesedaran agama dan falsafah manusia Barat, khususnya tradisi Yahudi-

Kristian yang merupakan salah satu bahagian teras dalam peradabannya.

Kata kunci: teisme; kebenaran agama; permasalahan kejahatan; pengalaman dan kesedaran agama dan falsafah.

Introduction

Speaking of God in the contemporary intellectual sphere of Western man has rather lost its previously eminent currency, especially in the sense of its meaningfulness. It is said that, "so strange and inconceivable has the phenomenon of religious experience become to modern [Western] man, that he puzzles only over the origin of the idea of God."[2] Indeed, *religion* in Western culture and civilization–which was once instinctively perceived as the cause and source of man's conceiving of the idea of God in the medieval *Weltanschauung*–has since the modern times until recently become the subject of contrasting 'climate of opinion'.[3]

The impact of this secularizing trend on the part of their changing climate of opinion is definitely not limited only to their geographical areas or language domain. On the part of the Muslim world for instance, as recognized by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas (1931–) in his *Islam and Secularism*, he remarked that: "problems arising out of secularization, though not the same as those confronting the

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[2] Erich Frank, *Philosophical Understanding and Religious Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 27. Parenthesis is mine.

[3] By the phrase 'climate of opinion' herein we refer to how the historian Carl L. Becker has adapted it in his book *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*. It is considered synonymous to phrases like 'instinctively held pre-conceptions, 'spirit of an age' and 'conventional worldviews. For a vivid depiction of the medieval *Weltanschauung* see Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1932; repr., 1960), 5-6.

West, have certainly caused much confusion in our midst."[4] To be sure, it is not uncommon, to say the least, that the introduction of Western ways of thinking and judging and believing has in many instances tacitly operative through Muslims articulation while problematizing certain religious discourse.

One of the Western theologico-philosophical problems that have been made to flourish again is the notorious 'problem of evil'. The revival of the problem chiefly throughout the later part of the twentieth century has received more compelling argumentative structures within the disciplinary treatment of analytic philosophy of religion. As it is in their oath that, "the ideal of the analytic philosopher of religion is to commit to an *objective and neutral* methodology that involves the analysis of language and concepts."[5] Then, it is not surprising that a considerable number of representatives from each of the major religions related to Western Civilization, including the Muslims, have reactively assumed a direct and immediate dialectical relevance to the problem. Perhaps this is due to the apparent theological consequences impressed by its problematization. In fact, if one were to peruse a number of contemporary Muslim literature on this subject, one can quickly encounter how the infusion of this philosophical problematization of evil in its simple formulation has been taken for granted as their point of departure.

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[4] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism* (Kuala Lumpur: ABIM 1978; ISTAC 1993; repr., Kuala Lumpur: IBFIM, 2014), 15. This particular work of al-Attas has been widely read and it has been translated into many languages such as Arabic, Turkish, Persian, Benggali, Malayalam, Serb-Croatian, Kosovan, and Indonesian. Also see Wan Mohd. Nor Wan Daud, *Islamization of Contemporary Knowledge and the Role of the University in the Context of De-Westernization and Decolonization* (Kuala Lumpur: Penerbit UTM Press, 2013), 17, 79n.

[5] James F. Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, *Handbook of Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002), 27. Italic is mine.

Therefore, it is the motivation behind this contextualized overview to adumbrate an implicit claim that the oft-cited philosophical problematization of evil is rather culture-specific, or to be exact worldview-specific. In so doing this contextualized overview will be divided into two main parts. First, it will cover the development of a disciplinary context that sets the stage for the contemporary philosophical problematization of evil. This is an important contextualization because the articulation of a particular problem (or simply, problematization) always assumed or already pre-conceived a network of ideas or a scheme of constructive unity as its environmental context. Furthermore, there can be layers of context related to a problem whose traceability ultimately arrived at a supersystem or a worldview. Secondly, as the problematization of evil has not always been treated in Western philosophical tradition as a challenge to God's existence, this article will explore some specimens of contemporary analytically-treated arguments that have properly established the shift of problematizing evil from being aporetical to atheological.

Part 1: Contemporary Disciplinary Context for Philosophical Problematization of Evil

a) Emergence of a New Discipline named Philosophy of Religion

It is noteworthy to have a glance at a relevant observation made by Mortimer J. Adler (1902–2001) on the transformation in the Western study of religion of recent origin, which in his work namely *Truth in Religion* says,

> "Until the nineteenth century, religion was not a subject of academic study or research. If there were teachers and students of religion, they did their teaching and studying in the great universities of the Middle Ages, in the parochial schools of Christians and Muslim countries, and in the Yeshiva schools of Hassidic Jewish

communities… In the twentieth century, for the first time, a study of religion that was not parochial and neither apologetical nor theological came into being."[6]

What Adler has here indicated, even only casually, is the coming into being of first, a study of such scientific investigation involving a history of religions and religious institutions or a comparative study of world religions. Then also, the other usual siblings in research like sociology and psychology of religion before he later focus on the subject matter of philosophy of religion.[7] True enough, religion as a subject of philosophical inquiry enveloped as a field of study seems to be a relatively recent academic innovation, and it is only one among the other aforementioned disciplines that investigate religion. In the twentieth century, ironically, as we shall later see in the case of the analytic philosophy of religion, it grows on top and only after religious discourse first being philosophically shut into the silence of 'meaningless' for a few decades.

We can also, in considering the above, relate to another relevant observation about what is the philosophy of religion itself. With regard to the complex term 'philosophy of religion', to borrow a remark by Mark D. Jordan (1953–), it is rather ambiguous because its

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[6] Mortimer J. Adler, *Truth in Religion: The Plurality of Religions and the Unity of Truth* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1990), 40.

[7] *Ibid*., 43-44. In conjunction to this development, al-Attas has made some critical remarks on the nature of this discipline, he said, "Their secular authorities have indeed put forward what in fact amounts to descriptions of religion, which they ultimately reduce to a system of doctrines and pledges and rites which they understand to have 'developed' and 'evolved' with man as part of the historical process and the 'maturing' of man. The deeper aspect of religion is dealt with and interpreted not by theology, but by a new science which they have developed for that purpose called the Philosophy of Religion." See al-Attas, Islam and Secularism, 49.

constituting single term 'philosophy' and 'religion' have respectively "taken dozens of meanings in the European languages from antiquity on…"[8]. Thus, he further said, "it is impossible to speak of 'philosophy of religion' as if it were one subject-matter stretched across Western intellectual history." [9] In addition to this, interestingly, when discussing the relationship between religion and philosophy, Linda T. Zagzebski (1946 –) has argued that,

> "There would be no philosophy of religion if philosophy were not distinct from religion and if philosophy did not assume the role of critic of all major human practices, including the practice of religion. These conditions never existed in the East, where philosophies and religion are not separated as they are in the Western world, and even in the West, philosophers did not aggressively assume the role of religious critic until the last two or three hundred years."[10]

If we can gather all the points thus far, it is said that the philosophy of religion in its disciplinary form is a new invention along with some others in the contemporary academic scene, however, its subject-matter might perhaps be older. But it is also said that the subject-matter also cannot be that easily trespassed in terms of its traceability back into history, and it would only make sense to speak of 'philosophy of religion' at the juncture where philosophy and religion are separated whereby philosophy assumes the role as a critic of religion. We think this much has already given some hints about the buried seed of this enterprise

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[8] See the entry on 'religion, history of the philosophy of' in Ted Honderich, ed. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 802-805.

[9] *Ibid.*, 802.

[10] Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *The Philosophy of Religion: An Historical Introduction* (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), 1.

that is concomitant with the modern spirit.[11] In order, to further confirm this, it would be enriching if we could survey some of the sources pertaining to when and why this later contemporary disciplinary stage of philosophical inquiry on religion, in Western intellectual history, had first commenced.

b) Its Root in the Modern time

As mentioned previously, even though the observable presence of the philosophy of religion in academia may be considered a newborn, the effort of some scholars mainly looking from the perspective of its development as a specialty in philosophy has managed to arrive at opinions about the historical traces of its subject-matter. However, there is no one clear-cut agreement to their findings on when and why it emerged although many have generally charted its shoot to be germinated by speculative manuring in the soil of the seventeenth and mainly eighteenth centuries.

One of the earlier noticeable efforts is done for example by James D. Collins (1917–1985), in which through his investigation of David Hume (1711–1776), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and Georg W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), has marked "the century 1730–1830 as the

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[11] By 'modern' here we mean it as opposed to the ancient or medieval era of Western civilization. It is usually said that, "The modern era is held to be contemporaneous with the rise of natural science, and the decline of the centralizing tendency in Christendom… Within the modern period certain cultural and intellectual episodes are marked out as particularly important – notably the Enlightenment, by which is meant the irresistible current of secularization which began in seventeenth century and which culminated in the profoundly unenlightened follies of the French Revolution." See Roger Scruton, *Modern Philosophy: An Introduction and Survey* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994; repr., New York: Penguin Group USA Inc., 1996), 1.

foundational age for modern philosophy of religion"[12]. His further interesting remark about that period is as follows:

> "What made the century 1730–1830 such a vital period of change was the aim of its leading philosophers to insure a study of religion which would be at once free from functional dependence upon any theology, sensitive to the full power of the sceptical challenge in its religious implications, and thoroughly philosophical in nature."[13]

Max J. Charlesworth (1925–2014) also in a way has acknowledged a more or less similar historical perspective that Collins had held as above, even though later he decided to use, as he put it, a 'very loose and imprecise' meaning of philosophy of religion in his work in order to appreciate the discussion of the Greek and the medieval thinkers.[14] In his introduction, he has also acknowledged a point of view that the invention of the philosophy of religion was predominantly in the eighteenth century, "for it was then that philosophers such as Hume, Kant, Lessing and Schleiermacher began to consider religion as a distinct phenomenon susceptible of being investigated in a critical and systematic way."[15] Nevertheless, having resolved to the

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[12] Here he is also referring to six leading issues that give some determinate historical meaning to the unity of inquiry in the movement from Hume to Kant to Hegel. Those six jointly shared problems are, in Collins words, as follows: "Among these questions are: the manner in which religion falls within the scope of philosophy, the impact of philosophy of religion upon natural theology, the relationship between morality and religion, the philosophical approach to religious faith, the persistent mystery of the revealing God, and the interrelation between the religious belief, worship and service to mankind." See James Collins, *The Emergence of Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1967), 353.

[13] *Ibid.*

[14] Max J. Charlesworth, *Philosophy of Religion: The Historic Approach* (London: The Macmillan Press, 1972), viii.

[15] *Ibid.*

whole history of Western philosophy as his canvas, his work is rather historical in the sense of more to mapping out the journey of relationships between philosophy and religion. Particularly, in account of the evolution of the nature, task and scope of philosophy while involving religion since the ancient Greek.[16] This is understandable, perhaps, considering also another statement made by Jordan regarding the similarities of the topics and arguments that were dealt throughout their distinct ages of philosophical-cum-religious discourse, in which he points out that,

> "…it is important to see that contemporary English-speaking 'philosophy of religion' treats topics and arguments that were earlier conceived as belonging to very different studies. The topics and arguments fell under what certain Greek philosophers called simply 'philosophy' or 'metaphysics', what patristic medieval Christians called 'wisdom' or 'holy teaching' or 'theology', and what philosophic writers in the modern period called 'natural theology' or 'preambles of faith' or 'natural religion'."[17]

Lastly, a more recent work that can be appropriated in our concern here is by Charles Taliaferro (1952 –), who has

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[16] He has discerned four distinct views in the history of Western philosophy about the relationship between philosophy and religion; philosophy as religion, philosophy as the handmaid of religion, philosophy as making room for faith, and philosophy as the analysis of religious language. See ibid. This work has been published into its second edition with a new title and a totally new introduction but the many parts of the book are still the same as before. See Max J. Charlesworth, *Philosophy and Religion: From Plato to Postmodernism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002).

[17] Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 802.

argued for the Cambridge Platonists[18] in the seventeenth century to be, shall we say, a more strategic point of departure in history for modern philosophy of religion.[19] Taliaferro has offered explicitly at least three reasons for his choice but not without caution to misinterpret him as providing a narrative that the history of philosophy of religion is a series of footnotes on Cambridge Platonism[20]. Firstly, perhaps subtler than Charlesworth's way of appreciating the tradition of the past, he has highlighted the ability of the Cambridge Platonists to become the two faces of looking to the past as well as to the future.

Hence, he avowed that "the Cambridge Platonists occupy an important middle ground in the history of ideas"[21], as they were in the position of while having "understood the power of modern science… and yet they worked in allegiance with an important Platonic philosophical and religious heritage spanning ancient, medieval and Renaissance philosophy."[22] Due to that, secondly, he noted that the Cambridge Platonists have dealt with almost all the themes that characterized the early modern philosophical study of religion in their literature.

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[18] For more details on a group of philosophers collectively known as Cambridge Platonists see Charles Taliaferro, *Evidence and Faith: Philosophy and Religion since Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11-15. Among them were Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), Henry More (1614-1687), Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688) and John Smith (1618-1652). It is said that "they strongly urged the primacy of reason in religion, ethics, and science, and endeavored to develop a rational understanding of Christian religion, in opposition to sects and doctrines which appealed directly to revelation and sought to make faith immune to rational scrutiny." See also the entry on 'Cambridge Platonists' in Thomas Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* (England: The Penguin Group, 2005), 93.

[19] Taliaferro, *Evidence and Faith*, 5.

[20] *Ibid.*, 5-6.

[21] *Ibid.*

[22] *Ibid.*

"Among the many subjects addressed by the Cambridge Platonists is a topic that bears not just on the philosophy of religion but on philosophy of science, philosophy of art, and other subfields of philosophy."[23] And thirdly, he also observed that the kind of philosophy of religion put forth by the Cambridge Platonists is now undergoing revitalization, hence, his emphasis on the aforementioned ability of two faces.[24]

From this brief survey, it is not in our best position to make a definitive statement on their behalf, while it is not our main purpose here to fathom into detail the historical process while also pointing to the exact critical event that gives birth to the philosophical study of religion, if that is possible at all. However, by knotting some observations before and revising some sources just now, we can already discern there is something striking while also lurking behind the pride of what has been said about the emergence of that manner and dimension of philosophizing about religion, especially with regard to seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is not irrelevant to mention that this seems to have occurred around the time that Western Christianity, the usual meant religion itself, was coming under remarkable attack, by some of the avant-garde philosophers, including the leading one named above. It is a time of transition within Western civilization, from medieval to modern. During that transitional process, there is this exchange of gain-in-loss and loss-in-gain as nicely put by Francis H. Parker (1920–2004) as the following:

> "From the point of view of medieval philosophy this transitional period was a loss, a loss of security, a loss of solidarity of man with his God, his church, and his past. Yet from the point of view of nascent modern philosophy it is a gain, a gain in freedom for the individual and

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[23] *Ibid.*, 3.
[24] *Ibid.*, 7.

his mind from the shackles of tradition and
authority."[25]

Ironic as it may sound, one can observe from the above
description that as it came to pass that they lost their love
for the divine which was long reflected by Christianity,
their loss was recovered as a theory about what they had
lost, and to some extent about its impossibility in the first
place. It is true enough as these philosophers staked their
claim for, as expressed by Collins, freedom from functional
dependence upon any theology and took atheism as a
growingly sensible position, philosophy of religion was
already born among them albeit not in a disciplinary form
as what is currently practiced. Indeed, out of this awkward
longing was born also, as noticed by Adler before, a
diversity of academic study of religion that was not
parochial and neither apologetical nor theological and in
this case is philosophical.[26]

Hence, it can now fairly be grounded, we think, that
the seed of the 'philosophy of religion' is already tacit in
the character of modern philosophy, [27] and then later
followed by the coinage of its name as such in the title of
the works of seventeenth century and eighteenth-century

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[25] Francis H. Parker, *The Story of Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (South Bend,
Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2014), 166.

[26] See above, 16, 39n.

[27] In the history of philosophy, what we called as modern philosophy is
usually the label assigned to the new philosophy that emerged early in
modern era, and which had as its early major representatives Bacon
and Descartes in the late sixteenth to early seventeenth centuries. It is
said that, "the most basic and general feature of the transition from
medieval to modern philosophy is a new, deeper, and more enduring
separation of reason from faith. Since philosophy is a rational
endeavor, this deeper separation of reason from faith meant for
philosophy an increase in the freedom of man's natural reason from
the authority of traditional faith and revelation." See Parker, *The Story
of Philosophy*, 159.

philosophers,[28] and then systematize into discipline in the twentieth century.

c) The Rise of the Analytical Approach in the Philosophical Study of Religion

If we can recall from the previous exposition, among the frequently acknowledged major philosophical figures of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century who had paved the way for the twentieth-century philosophy of religion are Hume, Kant and Hegel. Of course, each of these philosophers has his own philosophical orientation; Hume is famous as the culmination of the story of British Empiricism,[29] Kant having made awake of his dogmatic slumber by Hume, has constructed his own Critical philosophy,[30] while Hegel is well-known for his principle of Absolute Subjectivism.[31] Natural enough then, each of

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[28] As we have accounted before, Taliaferro has argued for the Cambridge Platonists in the seventeenth century as a starting point, particularly from the works of Ralph Cudworth, see Taliaferro, *Evidence and Faith*, 11-56. Other opinion said it was first used in the late eighteenth century particularly by the German scholars Abraham Friedrich Ruckersfelder and Sigismund von Storchenau, see Timo Koistinen, *Philosophy of Religion or Religious Philosophy: A Critical Study of Contemporary Anglo-American Approaches* (Helsinki: Luther-Angola Society, 2000), 12, 1n. Mark D. Jordan has also made a general statement about eighteenth century, he states that as philosophical terms go, "They were coined towards the end of eighteenth century as replacements or specifications of the earlier term 'natural theology'." See in Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 802.

[29] For an extraction of the gist of Hume's philosophy along the line of earlier British Empiricism, see Parker, *The Story of Philosophy*, 250-65. See also Zabeeh, *Hume: Precursor of Modern Empiricism.*

[30] As for an exposition of Kant see Parker, *The Story of Philosophy*, 266-95. A more lucid and informative introduction one can also see S. Körner, *Kant* (Pelican Books 1955; repr., England: The Penguin Group 1990).

[31] As per Hegel's philosophy see also Parker, *The Story of Philosophy*, 296-313.

their characteristic system of thought has also influenced their attitudes while considering religion.[32]

As the development of philosophy, in general, has gone through many episodes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one important situation that gradually has become discernible among the philosophers is the analytic-continental split.[33] This pattern has also been emulated in its subfield especially the philosophy of religion.[34] In relation to this, it is interesting to quote a schematic definition that characterized each of these trends although it is doubtful that a clear and precise line of demarcation can be drawn between the two. It is said that,

> "*Analytic philosophy* refers to the kind of philosophy that takes Gottlob Frege, G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell as its founding fathers, and is usually practiced today in English-speaking philosophy departments. *Continental philosophy* describes the kind of philosophy that is derived from the European continent, especially Germany and France, and heavily indebted to the writings of the 'three

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[32] For instance, Hume apart from being a great empiricist, "he also was a skeptic: he believed that we don't know, and aren't justified in believing, much at all. This skepticism spread to religion. He is famous for providing powerful critique of the teleological argument, for his statement of the problem of evil, and for his objections to belief in miracles." See the entry on 'Hume, David (1711-76)' in Raymond J. Van Arragon, *Key Terms in Philosophy of Religion* (London & New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 130. Another instance would be Kant, in which through his critical method has also put forth objections to the major arguments for God's existence: the cosmological, teleological, and especially the ontological arguments. See the entry on 'Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)' in *ibid*., 132.

[33] Another relevant writing is from Nick Trakakis, *The End of Philosophy of Religion* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2008), 31-53.

[34] See an attempt to discuss meta-philosophy of religion in ibid.

> H's', Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger, as well as the 'masters of suspicion', Marx, Nietzsche and Freud."[35]

Since our concern here is the analytical trend, we will, for purposive reasons, set aside the discussion of the continental one. The twentieth-century analytic-positivist tradition in philosophy is very much inspired by Hume and Kant while also arises out of reacting to the Neo-Hegelian idealism of F. H. Bradley (1846–1924).[36] The beginning of this tradition is usually marked by the gathering of a group of notable philosophers with a scientific and mathematical turn of mind that has been called the Vienna Circle.[37] Out of which, as mainly inspired by Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1889–1951) *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, they have developed an outlook or school of philosophy namely Logical Positivism. [38] This trend of philosophical discourses is the developed into further diverse approaches namely the Wittgensteinian and neo-Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy.

As we can notice, the preoccupation of philosophy at the turn of the twentieth century has taken its 'linguistic turn', and by that revolution, the nature and task of philosophy have been reduced to mere analysis, and because of their tendency towards empiricism while also rejecting metaphysics, then, the discussion on religion

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[35] *Ibid.*, 33.

[36] See Jesse A. Mann & Gerald F. Kreyche, *Perspectives on Reality: Readings in Metaphysics from Classical Philosophy to Existentialism* (New York, Chicago, Burlingame: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), 426-449. A good outline also can be found in the introduction of Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 1-27.

[37] For further description of this circle see the entry on 'Vienna Circle' in Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, 945.

[38] See the entry on 'Logical Positivism' in *ibid.*, 541.

within that milieu can be said to be less than marginal.[39] The concern of these philosophers is not merely to explain in detail the sundry ways in which language performs significant communication, but also how and why it fails to do so, especially in those non self-evident cases. It is in the latter category that religious language has entered the picture to be problematic.

In conjunction with that, it would be very helpful for us to have a survey of some major themes that generally color the discourse of analytic philosophy of religion. For our purpose, we have only highlighted two general topics, which have been their main concern throughout their discourse development. One of them, as we have indicated above, is the meaningfulness of the religious language and the other is the coherency of theism. In fact, William Hasker (1935–) in his essay has divided the history of the discipline into three phases corresponding to the subject matter most actively discussed, in which he explains that,

> "In the first phase, lasting until about 1965, the overwhelming preoccupation was with religious language, especially with the cognitive meaningfulness of such language. In the second phase, lasting through the early 1980s, most effort was focused on what may be termed the 'philosophy of theism', In the most recent period, there have been a notable diversification, and the field now embraces a greater variety of topics than at any pervious time."[40]

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[39] William Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 422.

[40] *Ibid.*, 421.

Having quoted that, however, since our intention here is rather thematic, [41] and the problem of evil is included among the discourse on the coherence or philosophy of theism, then we will not account for the topics of the third phase in Hasker's division.[42]

Naturally also, the climate of discussion in the analytic philosophy of religion, especially in its early stage, is very much influenced by the agenda of its motherland, viz., analytic philosophy. Despite other earlier impactful philosophical works such as from G. E. Moore (1873–1958), Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) and Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), it is through the work of A. J. Ayer (1910–1989) entitled *Language, Truth and Logic* that the problem of religious language has later taken a spotlight, albeit not in a positive way.[43] As commented by Hasker, "Ayer's work was not particularly original in comparison with that of the continental positivists, but it had the effect of challenging the foundations of religious

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[41] For a thoroughgoing historical account of twentieth century philosophy of religion from both analytical and continental trends see Eugene Thomas Long, *Twentieth-Century Western Philosophy of Religion 1900-2000*, ed. Eugene Thomas Long, vol. 1 (Dordrecht: Springer Science+Business Media, 2000), 1.

[42] The third phase as described by Hasker is a phase towards maturity for analytic philosophy of religion. He declares that, "the past two decades have seen a notable broadening of the field of analytic philosophy of religion, with many new, or previously underexplored, topics becoming important subjects for research. These topics include philosophical studies of particular religious (especially Christian) doctrines, divine command theories of ethics, the relation between religion and science, the philosophical analysis of non-Western religions, the problem of religious pluralism, religious realism and antirealism and the implications of religious beliefs for general epistemology, along with still others." See Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 435.

[43] *Ibid.*, 422. See Chapter VI on "Critique of Ethics and Theology" in Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover 1946; repr., New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952), 102-120.

thought in a way that was hard to ignore." [44] It is the principle of verificationism, [45] which Ayer had been defended, that is hostile to the religious thought for "not merely the *truth* of theological assertions was in question, but even their very *meaningfulness…*"[46]

After the fading away of verificationism, the claim of the meaninglessness of the religious language is then tackled by Antony Flew (1923–2010) but now from the approach of falsification.[47] The discourse on this issue is interestingly ushered by Flew in the debate which appears in the pages of the *University* from 1950 to 1951 and later reprinted under the heading of "Theology and Falsification" in the co-edited volume between him and Alasdair MacIntyre (1929–) entitled *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*. [48] Flew's adaptation of John

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[44] Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 422.

[45] Verificationism is any view which embraces some version of the verification principle. Verification principle, in turn, is a distinctive and central tenet of Logical Positivism, a banner under which a group of philosophers like A.J. Ayer, Rudolph Carnap, Herbert Feigle, Ernest Nagel, Otto Neurath, Moritz Schlick and others are gathered together. Generally, verification principle assumes that all cognitively meaningful statements can be divided into two broad classes; analytic statements and synthetic statements. "The verifiability principle formulates a criterion of meaningfulness of such statements, which is that in order for a synthetic statement to be cognitively meaningful, i.e. to be true or false, it must be possible to determine the truth-value of the statement directly or indirectly by menas of sensory experience." See the entry on 'verifiability principle', and 'verificationism' in Mautner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*, 644. And also see 'verification principle' and 'verificationism' in Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* , 944.

[46] Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 422.

[47] It is said that, "Flew's falsifiability criterion of meaning for religious statements is an attempt to take Popper's [Karl Popper (1902–1994)] falsifiability test for scientific claims and apply it within the philosophy of religion." See Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 31-35.

[48] Antony Flew & Alasdair MacIntyre eds., *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 96-130.

Wisdom's parables in setting the stage for his position was in return responded to by R. M. Hare (1919–2002) and Basil Mitchell (1917–2011). Without going into details of the debate, the argument from falsification for claiming that religious statements are meaningless can simply be put as follows: If a claim is unfalsifiable, then it is not a genuine assertion and is meaningless; theism is an unfalsifiable claim; therefore, theism is not a genuine assertion and is meaningless.[49]

The next theme following the 'quiet death'[50] of the cognitive meaninglessness of religious claims is the changing weather in the discipline towards "the unique set of characteristics that are attributed to God within theism."[51] As the inherent heir of the analytic philosophy that puts high regard on analysis and clarification of concepts, it is very much demanded for the theists "to define the main theistic attributes as rigorously as possible and to defend the definitions as logically coherent."[52] In connection to the issue of coherency involving theistic conception of God are also the proofs or arguments for the existence of such God and consequently also its objections.[53] Apart from a budget of theological issues, they also invest their analysis into the epistemological

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[49] Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion."

[50] *Ibid.*, 427.

[51] See for example Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* and also Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 77-104, 416.

[52] Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 427.

[53] A good contemporary reader on the existence of God see John Hick, ed., *The Existence of God: From Plato to A. J. Ayer on the Question "Does God Exists?"* (New York & London: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1964). Also some notable works such as Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God*.; J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford Clarendon Press, 1982); Swinburne, *The Existence of God*. For a detailed summary on this issue in the contemporary analytic discussion see Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 104-140.

aspects of religious belief, for example, on the issue of justification and the problem of faith and reason.[54]

Traditionally, God of theism is referring to a necessarily existing supernatural perfect being and usually having three central perfections, that is to say, his key attributes of omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good. Other related attributes like a divine timeless eternity and divine simplicity have also gained some interest. Each of these attributes has been discussed with some new considerations by the analytical philosophers of religion, especially the perplexity or paradox pertaining to the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience.[55] As to the arguments for the existence of God, although they have been severely attacked by Hume and Kant before, each of the three classical arguments, viz., ontological, cosmological and design argument, have been very much attractive to analytical philosophers of religion moreover in light of the development in science and logic.[56]

Regarding the epistemology of religious belief, the analytical philosophers of religion have also devised some sophistication in their approaches. For instance, one can observe an increased habit of utilizing probability for justification of their claims;[57] the development of the new project namely 'Reformed Epistemology', which attempts

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[54] Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 427. See also a detailed summary of contemporary analytical discussion on religious epistemology in Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 141-93.

[55] See a succinct exposition of theistic God in Chapter 1 of Richard Swinburne, *Is There A God?*. 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1-18. See also Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 428.

[56] Hasker, "Analytic Philosophy of Religion," 429-30. For contemporary discussion on ontological argument see Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 104-22. As to cosmological argument see *ibid*., 122-33. As per design argument see *ibid*., 133-40.

[57] One can usually see this application in their discussion on the problem of evil. See for example in Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil*.

to establish that belief in God can be rationally justified even if there are no good arguments for His existence; also their examination of the value of religious experience as an important source of support for belief in God.[58] Apart from the abovementioned verificationism and criticisms of the arguments for the existence of God, the most impactful objection in contemporary times has been the argument from evil. Indeed, if one peers at the characteristics of Western civilization, it is already inherent in the nature of their amalgamated worldview – particularly the fusion of mutually conflicting elements from the Graeco-Roman and Judaic tradition residing in Christianity–the manifestation of an untiring resurgence of the interplay between two hats, the theists and atheists, which interlocked throughout their religious and philosophical experience.[59]

In the modern period, when atheism growingly became dominant in the West, some critics of traditional theism affirm that evil, especially its occurrence in the form of manifold suffering can be taken as evidence that the theistic God does not exist. On the other hand, some theists, still remain to their admission that evil is a perplexing difficulty, although not to the extent of considering it as a disproof of God's existence. In the analytic philosophy of religion itself, it can hardly be seen that the section on the objections to theism is not predominantly occupied by the issue pertaining to the problem of evil.

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[58] Many of the related articles on this issue has been published under one volume in R. Douglas Geivett; and Brendan Sweetman, eds., *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology* (New York & London: Oxford University Press, 1992). For religious experience see William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[59] Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 16, 134.

Part 2: Problematizing Evil as Arguments Against God's Existence

Evil, especially suffering, has been the subject of many inquiries in the Western tradition, and there is a plethora of attempts to understand evil to the consideration of its origin and nature, its relevance, and the ways to overcome it.[60] Indeed, interpretations of evil as a problem have a long history in the West traceable to both its main ancestries from the line of Graeco-Roman up to the early Greek poetry and also from its Judeo-Christian side as in the account from the Book of Job.

One can easily see how the topic of evil and God really runs deep through the Western vein, and keeps on to resurface from time to time, by looking at the enormous literature written by their intellectuals on it across their history.[61] Particularly in their tradition of philosophy and

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[60] What is meant by 'evil' in this sentence is that we are trying to refer to the perception of evil itself in general. As for the interpretation of it as a problem, i.e. the problem of evil or problems of evil, it presupposes first its perception.

[61] For a general survey of the discussion on evil in Western tradition, albeit mainly from the point view of Judeo-Christian development with only a short account of the Greek, see Joseph Francis Kelly, *The Problem of Evil in the Western Tradition: From the Book of Job to Modern Genetics* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2002). For a detail exposition with an instructive appendices on the issue of fate, good and evil in Greek thought see William Chase Greene, *Moira: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1944). Further, for an overview of ancient Greek views of suffering and evil see also an essay in James Adam, *The Vitality of Platonism and Other Essays* (Cambridge: University Press, 1911), 190-212. And also from Part III of Chapter I in Radoslav A. Tsanoff, *The Nature of Evil* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 11-27. A contemporary systemic exposition of the problem of evil from Christian tradition remains the work of John Hick in, John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). See also Chapter II in Tsanoff, *The Nature of Evil*, 37-60. For a good modern discussion of the problem but from non-analytical trend see Hans Schwarz, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).

theology, evil has been treated as a recurring problem for the beholders of what they called 'theism', a term rather recently coined which reflects a philosophical conception of God that is intended to putatively represents the living religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[62]

Broadly speaking, the problem of evil pertains to the establishment of either apparent or real contradiction between the fact of evil occurrences on the one side and religious belief in perfect goodness and the power of God on the other side. Throughout history one can very generally identify three types of religious tendencies to resolve the contradiction, which has been summarized by John Hick (1922– 2012) as follows:

> "(1) There is the monism of the Vedanta teachings of Hinduism, according to which the phenomenal, with all its evils, is *maya*, or illusion… (2) There is the dualism exemplified dramatically in ancient Zoroastrianism, with its opposed good and evil deities, Ahura Mazdah and Angra Mainyu. A much less extreme dualism was propounded by Plato and is found in various forms in the finite deity doctrines of such modern Western philosophers as J. S. Mill. (3) There is the distinctive combination of monism and dualism, or of an ethical dualism set within an ultimate metaphysical monism (in the form of monotheism) that has been developed within Christianity and that

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[62] See the entry on 'theism' in VanArragon, *Key Terms in Philosophy of Religion*, 115-16. Compare also the same entry that is 'theism' and also 'God' in Honderich, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* 341-42. Relates also to the entry on 'evil, the problem of' in the same companion, 274.

represents the main contribution of Western thought to the subject."[63]

Within the Christian theological context, as in (3) above, St. Augustine's reconciliation of the ways of God to man remains an influential strand throughout the medieval period until the present day. Very simply put, according to Augustine, there is nothing, that is to say no event, no entity, no action in and of itself, evil. What is thought to be evil seems so by comparison to a presumed greater good. It is a lesser degree, i.e. a privation, of something that is deemed better. Well into modern times, philosophy no longer serves its queen, i.e. theology. With the rise of science completely changed how the West view the world, it taught people to consider problems first with reason and only later, or even worse, regardless of the authority of tradition. Following this transformation, of course, there are nuances in the modern discussion of the problem of evil.

The most relevant as well as the most oft-cited example of the classical statement of problematic evil for theism from modern literature is in David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, particularly in Part X. In the mouth of Philo, the skeptic while speaking to Cleanthes representing the Christian, Hume reiterates,

> "Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered.
> Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then
> is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then
> is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing?
> whence then is evil?"[64]

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[63] John Hick, "Evil, The Problem of," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* ed. Paul Edwards (New York Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc. & The Free Press, 1967), 137.

[64] Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* 108-09, 71n. See also Nelson Pike, ed. *God and Evil: Readings on the Theological Problem of Evil*, Contemporary Perspectives in Philosophy Series (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1964), 22-23.

Indeed, Hume's criticism echoes quite loudly to inspire many of twentieth-century philosophers of religion, especially in the contemporary Anglo-American analytic tradition, and has very much influenced their treatments of the problem as marshaling arguments.[65] As can be noticed in the next section, one of the related arduous issues involved in the discourse on the coherence of theism by the analytical philosophers of religion is the compatibility of the coexistence of theistic God and the fact of evil, and it is said that they have made "some significantly different or modern way of interpreting the problem or of providing some new contributions to the attempts to provide some response to the problem."[66]

While this overview endeavors to represent the map of their treatments of the problem in a detailed summary, we will not pretend to cover completely the luxurious discussion among them about this matter. For even if we were to delimit our survey tracing back up to merely the second half of the twentieth century, it would already be overwhelming data.[67] Rather, we will only reproduce the specimens of their representative articulations of the problem in terms of the already customary distinctive versions, that is to say only the paradigmatic arguments noticeable throughout their discourse development. We will then explore each version only in as much as to grasp the general bearing of what the argument wants to articulate and how it is framed.

With that being said, we will then restrict ourselves only to the well-noted major initiators and defenders of the argumentation. Among them, to name a few, are J. L.

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[65] See the discussion of Hume on evil in Pike, *God and Evil*, 86-87. Also see Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 235.

[66] Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 235.

[67] Sanders and Ridder, *Fifty Years of Philosophy of Religion*, 338-92.

Mackie (1917–1981),[68] William L. Rowe (1931–2015),[69] Alvin Plantinga (1932–)[70] and John Hick (1922– 2012).[71] This is so because, as one would have expected, to plunge into narrating the differences among them which are very much technical by means of their logical devices would involve too long a tale. Having said that, as they being analytic in their character of philosophizing, that task has also been exhausted by some of them and other scholars; to systematize the variant tracks of their argumentation, and we also have very much referred to these sources.[72]

Before moving on to investigate the arguments, it will be useful for us to familiarize ourselves with some of the usual key terms that will be repetitively encountered. The key terms are, principally related to their conception of God in terms of theism and their classification of evil. As for 'theism', it is often forgotten while in its abstract usage, that it in itself is not a living religion like Christianity, Judaism, and Islam respectively. However, the addressing of these religious adherents as 'the theist' usually overlooked this

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[68] J. L. Mackie was one of the twentieth century's great philosophical critics of theistic belief. He taught for many years at Oxford University. He is also known for his criticisms on the belief in miracles. See VanArragon, *Key Terms in Philosophy of Religion*, 135.

[69] William Rowe, was professor emeritus of philosophy at Purdue University who also a prominent name in the revival of the field of analytic philosophy of religion.

[70] Alvin Plantinga, is an important contemporary philosopher, one who deserves much credit for the revival of interest in philosophy of religion that took place in the Western academic world in the second half of the twentieth century. For more information see VanArragon, *Key Terms in Philosophy of Religion*, 137.

[71] John Hick, for many years a professor at Claremont Graduate School in California, other than the problem of evil his notable achievement includes developing and defending a highly influential version of pluralism according to which all major religions are legitimate responses to the same ultimate religious reality. See *ibid*., 130.

[72] Indeed, there are many rationales behind the distinction made as regards to the problem of evil. However, the distinction between the logical and the evidential is the most common one.

obvious fact, as if theism is like a living religion. Rather theism, as Peterson put it, "forms what we might call the basic conceptual foundation for several living religions…"[73], putatively of those we have mentioned above. Particularly Rowe, and perhaps other philosophers in the field also utilize it in a similar manner, called this derivation of the basic conceptual foundation as 'standard theism', which in turn can be understood in the forms of restricted or narrow, and expanded or broad sense. He explains the narrow and broad theism as follows,

> "By a 'theist' in the narrow sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, supremely good being who created the world. By 'theist' in the broad sense I mean someone who believes in the existence of some sort of divine being or divine reality. To be a theist in the narrow sense is also to be a theist in the broad sense, but one may be a theist in the broad sense – as was Paul Tillich – without believing that there is a supremely good, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal being who created the world."[74]

It is hard to tell whether Rowe's distinction is not at all arguable by others in as much as it is also hard to tell from their discourse, an agreeable conception of each attribute that they have ascribed to God as quoted above. Especially of those key attributes that concern us here, like omnipotent, omniscient, and perfect goodness.

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[73] Michael L. Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues* (Colorado: Westview Press, 1998), 8.

[74] William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 2.

In order for us not to embark on complex discussions on the attributes of God,[75] we deem it to be useful for us – as far as the abovementioned understanding of theism is concerned – to just follow some working definition of the key attributes which are omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolent. As for omnipotence, it generally refers to "God's ability to bring about any state of affairs that is logically consistent with his other essential attributes."[76] As to God being omniscient means, "that he knows all truths or knows all that is logically possible to know."[77] While God's perfect goodness indicates that he is "the source of moral norms (as in divine command ethics), or always acts either in accordance with moral norms or supererogatorily (i.e. beyond what is required by moral norms)."[78]

With regard to the term evil, the analytical philosophers of religion have no troublesome issue of defining it, perchance of following Hume, they routinely recognize 'evil' in terms of its extension rather than its comprehension.[79] Thus, they will provide examples of evil that will generally distinguished into either moral or natural evil. As stated by Plantinga, although he admits that the distinction is not very precise, "we must distinguish between *moral evil* and *natural evil*. The former is evil which results from free human action; natural evil is any other kind of evil."[80]

Provided all these, we are now in a better position to dwell into the contemporary discussion of problematizing of evil. It has become customary among them to distinguish

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[75] Each of these attributes has its own set of issues that deserve its own research respectively.

[76] Nick Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief: In Defence of William Rowe's Evidential Argument from Evil* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007), 20.

[77] *Ibid.*

[78] *Ibid.*

[79] Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*, 11.

[80] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 30.

between the logical and the evidential arguments.[81] It is our task now to further understand each of the arguments in the succeeding section and for our first visit then we turn to the logical problem.

a) Logical Argument from Evil

The most paradigmatic version of the logical problem is the one articulated by J. L. Mackie in his now classic article entitled *Evil and Omnipotence.*[82] In it Mackie positively affirms that by way of a more forceful articulation of the classical statement as quoted above, "it can be shown not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but they are positively irrational,…"[83] Following that, Mackie has also cautioned the theist that his burden has now been piled up on top of the issue pertaining to the rational proof of God's existence, which Mackie put as what cannot be proved, whereby now the theist also needs to be prepared to believe in "what can be *disproved* from other beliefs that he also holds."[84] Mackie then, as a result, advances his treatment of the problem of evil as "a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs: it is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action."[85]

Structurally, Mackie's article has three sections reflecting his three tasks and that are firstly, demonstrating the problem as having implicit contradiction, meaning to say by showing that God and evil cannot both be said to exist; secondly, he explains how the theist could adequately

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[81] Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 235-36, 2n.

[82] J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955). This classic article has been anthologized many times, however, our usage here is from Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 46-60. For more of its publication information see also note 2 in Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*.

[83] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 46.

[84] *Ibid.*, 46-47.

[85] *Ibid.*, 47.

resolve this contradiction by, so he suggests, modifying one of the constituent proposition of the problem for example by denying God's omnipotence or restricting its meaning and several other similar options; thirdly, he considers some other solutions to the problem of evil that he deems to be fallacious and elaborates why they are not cogent to him. For our purpose here, we will be concerned mainly with his first task, that is to say, his strategy in formulating the logical problem. As put forth by Mackie,

> "In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three."[86]

It would be helpful if we could illustrate back what Mackie was trying to assert and in so doing, we follow some of the usual ways that the other philosophers of religion have simply expressed in their reiteration of Mackie's articulation.[87] There is a set of propositions involving fundamental theistic beliefs that holding them together is said to be inconsistent and contains a contradiction. A more commonly adequate set is conveyed as follows:

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

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[86] *Ibid.*

[87] We have referred here particularly to such works like Peterson, *God and Evil: An Introduction to the Issues*., Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*. and William L. Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2007).

4. God is omniscient
5. Evil exists[88]

From **1** to **5** however, as Mackie has also admitted, "the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms 'good', 'evil' and 'omnipotent'."[89] Therefore, Mackie has then included two additional principles, "that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do."[90] So we now have additional statements:

6. Good thing always eliminates evil as far as they can, and
7. There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do

If one holds **1** to **4** as well as **6** and **7**, it then follows, as Mackie claims, "a good omnipotent [and omniscient] thing eliminates evil completely."[91] Say we represent these again as follows,

1 to **4** An omnipotent, wholly good and omniscient God exists

added by,

6 Good things always eliminate evil as far as it can
7 There are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do

implies,

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[88] Here, we initially reproduce the set of propositions from 1 to 5 based on the statement from Mackie as quoted above. However, following some other philosophers of religion, we readily add proposition 4 God is Omniscient for simplicity's sake.

[89] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," 47.

[90] *Ibid.*

[91] *Ibid.*

8 A good omnipotent [and omniscient] thing eliminates evil completely

Then, this also amounts to say: **9** Evil does not exist. Thus, in Mackie's own words although still implicitly, "a good omnipotent [and omniscient] thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible."[92] Or in other words, within a set of propositions that contains among others **5** (Evil exists) and the now-become-explicit **9** (Evil does not exist) is obviously not consistent enough to be held together.

The tacit strategy that has been advanced by Mackie here according to many philosophers of religion is an attempt to establish inconsistency. Borrowing an instructive explanation from William L. Rowe, he avers that,

> "When we have two statements which are not explicitly contradictory, and we want to establish that they are logically inconsistent, we do this by adding some further statement or statements to them and then deriving from the entire group (the original pairs and the additional statement or statements) a pair of statements that explicitly contradictory. Now the point that needs very careful attention is this: in order for this procedure to work, the statement or statements we add must be not just true but *necessarily* true… If, however the additional statement or statements used in order to deduce the explicitly contradictory statements are true, but not necessarily true, then although we may succeed in deducing explicitly contradictory statements, we will not have succeeded in showing that original pair of statements are logically inconsistent."[93]

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[92] *Ibid.*
[93] Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 114.

To be sure, this way of making a set of propositions to be inconsistent or contradictory involving some necessarily true additional statements or 'quasi-logical rules' as expressed by Mackie has first been analyzed eloquently by Alvin Plantinga.[94] He has carefully demonstrated the kind of inconsistency intended by this strategy from the kind of statements like in a set comprising **1** to **5** above, which neither contains clearly explicit nor formally contradictions. Instead, contains a contradiction that will only be apparent with the presence of statements from, to use his indication of the aforesaid necessarily true, the category of 'broadly logical necessity'.[95] For the theist then, as Plantinga has also done, the task at hand is to assess whether statements **6** and **7** as well as **8** above fall within that category. He has patiently analyzed each of these statements in a manner that still entertains its possibility to be necessarily true, but in the end, he has concluded that "no a theologian has produced even a plausible candidate for this role [necessarily true proposition], and it certainly is not easy to see what such a proposition might be."[96]

In the effort to verify the status of these additional statements, we must acknowledge that there are a number of considerations and attempted elaborations that are interesting to be demonstrated, which eventually lead to Plantinga's notable version of free-will defense.[97] Nevertheless, we will not reproduce them here, for this much is sufficient in order for us to capture the gist of the logical problem as well as how it has been formulated. From this brief account of the logical argument, we can

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[94] See for example Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967). and also Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*.

[95] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 12-16.

[96] *Ibid.*, 16-24.

[97] An example of a simplified demonstration that sketches the line of thought involves in considering the necessarily true statements can be seen in Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 238-242.

fairly gather its forcing point is to accentuate that, reminiscing Rowe's distinction before, the 'narrow theism' is internally inconsistent for having accepted a certain claim about God on the one hand while also a certain claim about evil on the other. Whether their extraction of some claim about God into philosophical notion as theism represented above is acceptable by those whom they intended is still very much arguable. However, we will later have a brief look at a stark theists' play along response as demonstrated by Plantinga's free-will defense in its proper section. But before that, we will first turn our attention to another paradigmatic articulation namely as the evidential argument.

b) *Evidential Argument from Evil*

In contrast to the logical problem which is very much a priori or deductive in its character, the evidential argument takes an a posteriori or inductive move. As stated by its own well-known proponent, William L. Rowe, "in developing the argument for atheism based on the existence of evil, it will be useful to focus on some particular evil that our world contains in considerable abundance." [98] This type of argument also has many versions, however, and the one that has widely been discussed can be found in Rowe's frequently-anthologized article *The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism.*[99] In fact, throughout Rowe's career, he had been persistent in refining his version of

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[98] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 2.

[99] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Variaties of Atheism". For more details about its appearance in various anthologies see Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief: In Defence of William Rowe's Evidential Argument from Evil*, 71, 10n. and also Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 255, 57n. As per our usage of the article, we read Chapter 1 from Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, 1-11.

evidential argument through his many writings.[100] With all due respect to the technical subtleties that he had put forward later on, it seems to us the affinities of his argument elsewhere still revolve around the one formulated in the aforementioned article.[101] In this research, nevertheless, that is to say in order to just grasp the essence of this type of argument from evil, it will be sufficient for us to mainly focus on that article without halting any selected appropriation from others if needed.

Before we proceed, it is interesting to first remark Rowe's critical statement about the failure of the logical approach to the problem of evil as an attempt to give rational support for holding atheism. Quiet crisply he said,

> "Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God. No one, I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim. Indeed, granted incompatibilism, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of the theistic God."[102]

With that unconvinced attitude to the ability of logical argument, Rowe in turn permits his effort to construct the problem of evil in evidential form, in which he said it is, "the view that the variety and profusion of evil in our world, although perhaps not logically inconsistent with the

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[100] See Chapter 2 of Trakakis's study, where he outlines in three phases the development of Rowe's thinking on the evidential argument stretching for nearly thirty years. Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief*, 47-70.

[101] *Ibid*., 70.

[102] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 10, 1n. The fairly compelling argument he has referred above alludes to the previously stated free-will defense advanced by Alvin Plantinga.

existence of theistic God, provides, nevertheless, *rational support* for atheism."[103]

Generally, we can say that Rowe's articulation of his argument involves two steps; firstly, deductive in structure, in which case, one of its premises is supported by; secondly, some inductive inferences that consequently make the argument to be called evidential. As for the deductive step, he has stated it initially as follows,

1 There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (also known as a *factual premise*).

2 An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (also known as a *theological premise*).

3 There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.[104]

Again, it will be useful if we can restate the argument in a more modest way. Following Rowe's own simplified version of the above deduction from his other writing[105], his deductive step can also be stated as corresponding to the above,

1a Probably, there are pointless evils.

2a If God exists, there are no pointless evils.

Therefore,

3a Probably, God does not exist.[106]

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[103] *Ibid.*

[104] *Ibid.*, 2.

[105] Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*.

[106] *Ibid.*, 120.

What he meant by 'pointless evil' is, similar to what he has compressed in **1** above, "an evil that God (if he exists) could have prevented without thereby losing an outweighing good or having to permit an evil equally bad or worse."[107] After holding this deduction as valid, the task remains for Rowe to ascertain that both his premises are true in order to ensure that his conclusion can be taken as true. He begins by explicating the basis of his second premise, **2** or **2a**, which has been aptly labeled by one of Rowe's commentators as 'theological premise' considering "it expresses a belief about what God as a perfectly good being would do under certain circumstances."[108] The first premise, **1** or **1a**, in turn is called a 'factual premise' for "it purports to state a fact about the world."[109]

Rowe defends the theological premise by determining what would be a necessary condition for theistic God *failing to prevent* an instance of intense human or animal suffering. He has then listed the possibility of that condition as the following, (the theistic God is designated as **OG** below and an instance of intense human or animal suffering, is designated as **s1**):

> "Either (i) there is some greater good, G, such that G is obtainable by OG only if OG permits s1, or (ii) there is some greater good, G, such that G is obtainable by OG only if OG permits either s1 or some evil equally bad or worse, or (iii) s1 is such that it is preventable by OG only if OG permits some evil equally bad or worse."[110]

Without going into further details of his rationalization, one can already discern how the above quoted frame of so-called necessary condition having been

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[107] *Ibid.*
[108] Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief*, 50.
[109] *Ibid.*, 51.
[110] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 3.

made to apply to theistic God's action is already succinctly encapsulated in **2** and also influencing the definition of pointless or gratuitous evil in **1**. Simply put, the point of the theological premise is to make a clear case of that; if God could prevent an instance of suffering but however allows it to happen, then either of the three conditions set up above must be obtained, which Rowe thought to be the case and thus, taking the premise as safely true. Indeed, he said that the theological premise "seems to express a belief that accords with our basic moral principles, principles shared by both theists and nontheists. If we are to fault the argument for atheism, therefore, it seems we must find some fault with its first premise." [111] Apparently, the theological premise as compared to the factual one is said to be the least controversial aspect of Rowe's argument.[112] Even Rowe himself had considerably paid much attention to his factual premise through revision and addition of evidence as compared to the theological one in his later works.[113]

As to the factual premise, in this article, Rowe offers his rational support to it by giving a possible case for an instance of intense suffering such as the following:

> "Suppose in some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering. So far as we can see, the fawn's intense suffering is pointless. For there does not appear to be any greater good such that the prevention of the fawn's suffering would

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[111] *Ibid.*, 4.
[112] See Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 255.; Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief*, 51.
[113] See for example his other article in Howard-Snyder, *The Evidential Argument from Evil*. For a good analysis of Rowe's development of argumentation see Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief*.

> require either the loss of that good or the occurrence of an evil equally bad or worse."[114]

If the above-quoted case is accepted to be an instance of pointless evil, then, as Rowe had also finally decided, his conclusion in **3** or **3a**, that is to say, probably, theistic God does not exist, can be taken as true. Of course, Rowe does not rest his case entirely on only an instance, as in the case of natural evil such as the fawn's suffering above.

In addition, Rowe in his later article has also borrowed an actual case of moral evil from an account by Bruce Russell about "a five-year-old girl in Flint, Michigan was severely beaten, raped and then strangled to death early on New Year's Day in 1986."[115] However, for us to make this section replete with many of his other cases or even his probabilistic calculation would not principally change the upshot of his main position very much and furthermore, that attention to rigorous informative and technical aspects is already beyond our scope of work.[116] From this explication, we can already adequately draw the basic thesis of Rowe. In contrast to Mackie's framing as a case of inconsistency, he aims at establishing a case of *plausibility* in thinking that a theistic God does not exist considering there *are* in our world an abundance of instances of terrible evil. Hence, his confidence in it is a *rational support* for atheism.

We have now arrived at a junction covering the main concern of this section that is to say by giving a detailed summary of each argument from evil against the theistic God. It is by no means exhaustive but proper to our concern here, and it is enough to provide a cursory sketch for us to understand how generally the analytical philosophers have treated the problem of evil. To further add to that sketch, it

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[114] Rowe, "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," 4.

[115] William L. Rowe, "Evil and Theodicy," *Philosophical Topics* 16(2) (1988), 120.

[116] For a good summary of Rowe's explanation involving cases and probability see Trakakis, *The God Beyond Belief*, 57-70.

is also helpful for us to at least have a complementary glance and overview of some major contemporary responses to the argument we have just explored.

c) Overview of Some Major Contemporary Responses

It is clear from the succeeding brief exposition that Mackie and Rowe are arguing for the non-theistic conclusion. Their framed arguments have consequently invoked some theists to have heard its calling of dialectical relevance. Surely, on the part of the Western theists, which usually represented by the adherents from the crucible of the Judaic-Christian conception of God, there is already a stock of accumulated responses since they themselves have been from its distant past aporetically affected by the problem of evil throughout their intellectual history. The nature of their traditional answers mostly centers around the *actual* 'why' is that God is said to have not done anything wrong while permitting evil in this world. This way of responding to the problem is called theodicy.

Apart from that, in contemporary times, the analytical philosophers of religion have developed another type of response that is called defense. Unlike theodicy, a defense attempts at giving a rejoinder to the argument formulated from evil against the existence of God without actually aiming to tell us the supposed why is God allowing evil.[117] Of course, there are also contemporary efforts in the project of providing a theodicy in terms of both revival and anew.[118] Here, we will only make to stand out an example of each, on defense and theodicy, even though not quite in the same account as before for it is quite laborious to provide a just detailed summary for highlighting our selection; the free-will defense of Alvin Plantinga and the soul-making theodicy of John Hick. [119] However, our

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[117] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 27-29.

[118] Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 263-71.

[119] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.; Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*; Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*.

selection of the representative sample from each type is simply to round off our survey in getting the general orientation of their discourse on this problem.

Generally speaking, any type of the aforesaid responses, either theodicy or defense, could complement the articulated arguments, both the logical and the evidential. For our synoptic purpose, we begin first with the already indicated Plantinga's version of free-will defense because it is the celebrated sample to correspond to the logical argument from evil. Later, our excursion is followed by John Hick's contemporary systematic revival and revitalization of St. Irenaeus's (130 –202) soul-making type of theodicy.[120] It will be made to account for the claim of the evidential argument, namely, that God has no morally sufficient reason to allow intense suffering.[121]

d) Alvin Plantinga's Free-Will Defense

If we recall what we have mentioned under the section on the logical argument, Mackie has divided his contentious article into three tasks, one of which is to explain some of the fallacious solutions to the problem.[122] Within that, he has listed four such solutions, one of which is to say that, "evil is due to human free will."[123] He then put forth against it a critical question as follows,

> "…if God has made men such that in their free choices, they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there

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[120] John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1990), 44.

[121] Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 124-128.

[122] Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence."

[123] *Ibid*., 55.

cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion."[124]

On top of his accusation of irrationality and disapproval of theism, Mackie's question above tries to highlight the inability of one of the most popular strategies taken by the theists, which is to therapeutically appeal through human free will. His objection is that it is within God's omnipotence to create a world comprised of free creatures like man, but with no evil. Since, if we follow through, there is evil in this world, then there is no perfectly good omnipotent and omniscient God as believed by the theists.

Alvin Plantinga, especially in two of his writings entitled *God and Other Minds* and *God, Freedom and Evil*, has responded quite convincingly to the logical argument in two stages. [125] After demonstrating that two supplementary principles introduced by Mackie before as in **6** and **7** as well as **8** do not meet the condition of necessarily true, he then proceeds to show how a set of propositions **1** to **5** can still possibly be held together as consistent. Thus, he takes his task in which procedure he called free-will defense as follows, "to show that a set *S* [in our context referring to a set of propositions **1** to **5**] is consistent, you think of a *possible state of affairs* (it needn't to *actually obtain*) which is such that if it were actual, then all of the members of *S* would be true."[126]

In other words, Plantinga seeks to produce a proposition containing a possible state of affairs, which spell out a justifying reason for God to allow evil, and thus can be added reconcilably into our set at hand. In doing so, Plantinga has creatively utilized and adapted some of the traditional answers pertaining to free will and possible

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[124] *Ibid.*, 56.
[125] Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*; Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*.
[126] Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, 25.

worlds into his logical mold. Cutting a long technical story short, with his assumption of incompatibilist notion of freedom, that is to say, "it is logically impossible for a person both to perform some act *freely* and to have been *caused* to perform that act,"[127] Plantinga's line of argument can be simply represented by following loosely the reiteration of Rowe in what follows,

If we recollect the propositions **1** to **4** from our previous set:

  1   God exists.
  2   God is omnipotent.
  3   God is wholly good.
  4   God is omniscient.

and add these propositions of the justifying reason:

  9   God, although omnipotent, cannot create a world in which there are free human creatures and no evil.
  10 A world with free human creatures and some evil is a better world than a world with no free human creatures.
  11 God creates the best world he can.[128]

therefore, it still follows that

  5   Evil exists.

From the above line of argument, we can discern that, quite the reverse to Mackie's formulation of the logical argument, the so-called internally inconsistent set of **1** to **5** has now been transformed into having consistency. Even though the free-will defense developed by Plantinga is not free from other critical considerations, it has nevertheless received wide acceptance and to some extent, it has been taken to undermine the logical argument for good.[129]

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[127] Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 117.
[128] *Ibid.*, 118.
[129] Harris, *Analytic Philosophy of Religion*, 246.

e) John Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy

A kind of theodicy that has fairly gained some currency in contemporary times is the one developed and defended by John Hick. In his influential work entitled *Evil and the God of Love*, he has elaborated two strands of narrative from within the Christian tradition namely Augustinian and Irenaean types of theodicy.[130] Their narratives are different and in distinguishing between the two, Hick asserts,

> "Whereas the Augustinian theology sees our perfection as lying in the distant past, in an original state long since forfeited by the primordial calamity of the fall, the Irenaean type of theology sees our perfection as lying before us in the future, at the end of a lengthy and arduous process of further creation through time."[131]

It is to the Irenaean perspective that Hick has aligned himself in adopting and adapting to formulate what he titled as 'A Theodicy for Today', which refers to the soul-making theodicy. [132] This type of theodicy assumes a certain understanding of man; regarding his creation, his situation and destiny. Following St. Irenaeus, Hick affirms a two-stage conception of the creation of man.[133] According to him,

> "In the first stage, human beings were brought into existence as intelligent animals endowed with the capacity for immense moral and spiritual development...In the second stage of their creation, which is now taking place, they are gradually being transformed through their

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[130] Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.
[131] Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 45.
[132] See Part IV of his work Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.
[133] Ibid., 253-261; Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 44-45.

own free responses from human animals into
'children of God'."[134]

Consequently, then, the world they inhabit must also
be conducive to such development and transformation to
obtain. In other words, the world, for Hick, considering
such understanding of human destiny, must be an
environment designed with some challenging situations in
order to promote God's plan of soul-making. It is the thrust
of this theodicy that for moral and spiritual growth to be
obtained on the part of man through his free choices, his
environment must include real suffering, hardships, failure,
disappointment, and defeat.

The previously discussed proponent of the evidential
argument, Rowe, has also later on assessed Hick's theodicy
in the manner to see its possible success to cast doubt on his
factual premise, i.e. **1** and **1a** above. [135] His analysis
ventured to see whether the good obtained from Hick's
theodicy can justify his cases of both natural and moral
evils such as his respective example of fawn's suffering and
brutally tortured and killed an innocent child. Simply put,
Rowe's conclusion is still negative, but since we are not
here in the position to decide on the truth of both positions,
we will end this section with his critical remarks on Hick's
theodicy,

> "It is simply unreasonable to believe that if the
> adult acted freely in brutally beating and killing
> that innocent child, his moral and spiritual
> would have been permanently frustrated had he
> been prevented from doing what he did. And it
> is also unreasonable to believe that permitting
> such an act is morally justified even if
> preventing it would somehow diminish the
> perpetrator's moral and spiritual odyssey. And

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[134] Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 44.
[135] Rowe, *Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction*, 124-28.

in the case of the fawn, it is simply unreasonable that preventing it...would so shake our confidence in the orderliness of nature that we would forsake our moral and spiritual development."[136]

Final Reflection

To recapitulate, in this contextualized introduction we have set to understand better the contemporary development in philosophical problematization of evil particularly as how it has been treated in the analytic philosophy of religion. In so doing, we have limited by 'contemporary time' to mainly refer to the latter half of the twentieth century because it is then, or to be exact in 1955, that the analytical conversation about religious truth in general and particularly on the problem of evil gain considerable momentum. This conversation later has grown and make the philosophy of religion sociologically a more visible discipline.

As to the problematization of evil that they formulated, while adapting our approach to just examine specimens of the analytical discourse, our exposition began with trying to understand some of their basic vocabularies involved in the articulation of the problem. We have exposed the manner in which they have been describing the key terms like theism, which is essential to their understanding of God and evil. It can be noticed that despite their consistent effort to be precise in their description of the terms, they in turn become very rigid in terms of their 'meaning' system. This leads to the tendency on their part to reduce the possible constellation of concepts surrounding a key term to remain one-directional. Hence, one can imagine the kind of fluidity in such mental dynamism when only thin concepts are available to be attended to. They become thin concepts because there is not much room, if any, to enrich the comprehension of an object of thought. In other words, a

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[136] *Ibid*., 127.

term is denied from its possible crystallization of meanings in terms of its semantic field within a supersystem of meaning.

It is then quite natural for the logical argument to be discovered and structurally developed under such rigid axiomatic treatment. One can grasp this by observing the interplay between Mackie and Plantinga in the respective specimens provided above. As to the difference between logical and evidential arguments, we have stated generally before that the logical one is *a priori* while the evidential is *a posteriori* or empirical. The logical argument is *a priori* because it does not depend upon an empirical inspection of the world. In the logical argument, reasoning alone tells us that the aforementioned propositions we have been examining cannot all be true. On the contrary, the evidential argument is empirical because only upon inspecting the world do, we see that much pain and suffering is pointless and unjustified. It is this gratuitousness that is then attempted to be proven scientifically. From this exposition, we can also better understand the explicit aspect of the analytically treated problem of evil in the sense of what each type of argument ultimately serves. The logical one is arguing that there *cannot* be a morally sufficient reason for God to permit suffering while the evidential one argues that it is *unlikely* that there is one.

Actually, on the part of the so-called theists, to respond does not only mean to, in different extents, directly answer the demand of the abovementioned problem. Both defense and theodicy if we can gather from the sample given are the attempts to directly answer or solve the problem. Both are the effects and the problematization is the cause. Rather the theists have another option which is to have a look at the problem, which is the cause, and in a penetrative manner try to question it first. At least, beginning to understand the underpinning causes of the very being of the problem. It is to the latter that we have aligned our contextualized

overview here. We have set the path of our endeavor from the beginning to consider the non-observable context of this God-evil coexistence issue. We have identified layers of context to this issue that in reverse towards its ultimate foundation can be arranged as: first, the mode of philosophizing religion in analytical trend, then, the modern mode of philosophizing which has a certain attitude towards religion, and finally these are all indicative of the Western worldview which as a system of thought affirms the primacy of philosophy rather that religion.

It is arranged as such for us better to adjudicate the relevance of the problem at least from a specific point of reference of the so-called theism, that is to say, particularly as a Muslim. This is important to render our proper attitude towards the problem, which does not necessarily mean to give a direct answer even to participate in it. Our setting in this contextualized introduction then, adversely to the neutrality claim of the analytical philosophers of religion, implies that the problem of evil even as they have treated it in logical masks is not neutral and objective.

As to it being not neutral, what we mean is that it reflects a certain worldview. That there is a certain consciousness which attending to the experience of evil particularly of suffering on the one hand, and to the experience of a certain conception of God on the other. That both the experiences in that certain consciousness appear in a conflicting manner while also desperate for reconciliation. That, in turn, reflects the very climate of that consciousness, comprising some essential elements that inherently cannot be put into consistency. In fact, all these are the nature of the Western worldview. Hence, what we mean by saying that the problematic interpretation of the relationship between evil and God is not neutral is that it is very much intrinsic to the experience and consciousness of Western man.

No doubt that the impulsive waves of secularization have through time heavily shaken their belief in God. Gradually, God has become a critical problem for their integral religion, Christianity. In conjunction with our issue, even though Christians can still hold true to their belief in the existence of God on whatever basis, they nevertheless need to confront the argumentation that is later marshaled in the name of evil. Previously, the existence of evil is not a challenge to the *existence* of God but more to His perfect goodness. However, even within the ambit of medieval *Weltanschauung* the issue of problematic coexistence between evil and God has already been indicated by St. Thomas Aquinas in its possibility as a case for atheism.[137]

The appearance of such a possibility before, ushered by the process of secularization, has now been actualized eloquently in contemporary times, especially in our case within the analytical philosophers of religion. And still doing so in the Western civilization itself. That process of secularization has affected many of the key terms and concepts that surround the discourse on God and evil, such as the concept of God, of Revelation, of His creation, of man and the psychology of the human soul, of knowledge, of religion, of freedom, of values and virtues, and happiness.

This process of secularization, consequently, is the one that has made manifest the contemporary currents of modernism and post-modernism. That is why the problem of evil has become a serious problem for the Western community. It is felt very critical and devastating especially on the part of the Christians as they are very much demanded to give answers and satisfying solutions on

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[137] Michael W. Hickson, "A Brief History of Problems of Evil," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*, ed. Justin P. McBrayer & Daniel Howard-Snyder (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), 9-11.

spiritual matters but in forced within the secular ground. Indeed, the emergence of some terminologies like theodicy and the problem of evil itself are actually reflecting the response of the secularized self, community, religion and civilization upon the demand which is also secular in nature.

At least this can be seen as an indication that we have pointed out before regarding one of the characteristics of Western civilization that is secularism. What it exerts is also very much related to the other pillars like humanism, dualism and tragedy. These four pillars that characterized the Western civilization have in turn colors many discussions of ontology, epistemology as well as axiology on their part.[138]

Again, to reaffirm, what we want to demonstrate from the above explication is that, the issue of problematic interpretation of the relationship between evil and God is born out of many circumstances that are related *specifically* to the Western civilization itself. Therefore, if someone from another religion and civilization attempts to directly answer that issue without the consciousness of its specificity, then, he might perhaps give a seemingly correct answer but indeed not commensurate to that of its reality. That is why this undertaking attempts to show that it is more meaningful if the efforts in giving answers to problems from other worldviews must be accompanied with certain consciousness pertaining to their roots in that respective worldview.

This is not to say that they are denying some similar aspects that are possibly detectable in relation to 'the problem of evil' between different worldviews. However, the acknowledgment of the similarities does not mean that we should ignore the essential differences that fundamentally contribute to the conception of such a

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[138] For more elaboration on the characteristics of Western worldview see al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*.

problem and its conceptual structure, including the aspect of language.

Not many are aware of the importance of language in as much as it has been treated in the Islamic civilization.[139] The awareness intended here is not limited to the phenomena of the 'linguistic turn' that has taken place in Western civilization. For what we mean by the awareness of the importance of language here refers to the clarity of a problem or a reality conceived by a civilization, which has been signified by a certain language especially some specific terminologies that the civilization has coined.

Even though in the twentieth century the awareness of language has been tremendous in Western civilization, they are still in the habit of naming many matters, especially the intellectual ones, of other civilizations with the terminologies that originated from theirs. Meanwhile, other civilization has had their own language and have referred to perhaps seemingly similar matters with different terminologies while discussing them. In the case of this study, for instance, the usage of terms like 'theism', 'the problem of evil' and 'theodicy' is a significant indication that someone has already been involved in the intellectual and religious tradition specific to the West. Our unconsciousness of this will cause us to be involved in severe confusion in particular involving the taking in of some external problems that are alien to our worldview. The consciousness about worldview also allows different people to access with further clarity the various subtleties contained in parts of a whole worldview and in turn enable one to do just to others as well as towards himself. In other words, 'theism', 'the problem of evil' or 'theodicy' is not neutral but already comprised of values that reflect a certain worldview and civilization.

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[139] Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for An Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999), 1-6.

Last but not least, the opinion that the problem of evil especially as treated by the analytical philosophers of religion is not neutral here defended has also found its proponents from some of the Western scholars themselves, such as Cottingham and Dupré. For instance, Cottingham while commencing his discussion on misfortune and suffering has stated that, "the philosophy of religion cannot function properly as an isolated specialism but sooner or later must inevitably concern itself with the grand synoptic question of what kind of 'worldview' or overall picture of reality we are to adopt." [140] Meanwhile, Dupré has also raised another complaint on the analytical tendency to discuss the problem of evil within the limits of logical argument, in which he says, " An essential factor to account for theodicy's failure is that it uses a *concept of religion* in which the believer will hardly recognize his or her own." [141]

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[140] John Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Human Approach* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 98.

[141] Louis Dupré, "Theodicy: The Case for a Theologically Inclusive Model of Philosophy," in *Prospects for Natural Theology*, ed. Eugene Thomas Long (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992), 400.

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