

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE WORLDVIEWS OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM  
AND CALVINISTIC CHRISTIANITY AND THEIR HANDLINGS OF  
SUFFERING AND EVIL AS REPRESENTED BY WALPOLA  
RAHULA AND JOHN FEINBERG RESPECTIVELY

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This thesis is dedicated to Jesus Christ  
for whose name I study and write

## ABSTRACT

Issues of suffering or evil strike at the heart of all religious traditions. Comparing the different ways they are dealt with deepens our understanding of the core doctrines of each religious tradition. The thesis question that is addressed is, *How do the ontological perspectives of Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity, as expressed in the writings of Walpola Rahula and John Feinberg respectively, relate to the treatments of the problems of suffering/evil in the two religious traditions?* In dealing with this question, special attention is given to Feinberg's and Rahula's views of the religious ultimate, the human person, and the origin of suffering/evil.

The thesis is developed in three stages. First, ontologies of each religious tradition are summarized to provide a context for a discussion of problems of suffering and evil to take place. Second, the particular ways Feinberg and Rahula state and resolve problems of suffering or evil are presented. Finally, a comparative analysis of the two radically different views is offered.

Calvinistic Christianity holds the concepts of the ontologically real God and enduring human souls. Theravada Buddhism rests its doctrines in the experience of its founder, Gotama Buddha who taught the Four Noble Truths as core doctrines of Buddhism. Traditional problems of evil for Christianity are concerned with an apparent contradiction between the omnipotent and omnibenevolent God and evil, while problems of suffering in Theravada Buddhism are concerned with eliminating the experience of suffering for the believer.

Walpola Rahula holds to the Four Noble Truths that life is suffering, desire is the cause of suffering, *nirvana* is the cessation of suffering, and the Middle Way or Noble Eightfold Path is the way out of suffering.

John Feinberg holds that considering the nature of humans God created, how sin arises through desire, and possible ways God can prevent or eliminate evil, it is logically consistent to believe in the omnipotent and omnibenevolent God in the face of evil.

In conclusion, irreconcilable differences are noted between the two religious traditions. Nevertheless, four points of contact are offered to encourage effective interreligious dialogue.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World*, John Bowker explores the issue of suffering and evil in the major world religions. He observes that one must specify the problem of evil of which one is speaking "because there is no single, definable 'problem-of-suffering' which appears in all religions in the same form."<sup>1</sup> Even within one single religious tradition there is no single problem of evil. There are different problems for each of the different types of evil. Referring to his book Bowker says, "Thus one of the purposes of this study is to explore in what ways and for what reasons suffering became problematical in each religion, and also to show what responses to suffering have been proposed or advocated."<sup>2</sup> It will be evident later as we discuss specific issues that when one is not clear as to which problem of evil one is discussing, much confusion can arise. For example, there is a logical problem of evil where evil seems to contradict the religious system's doctrine of God; but, there can also be an evidential problem of evil where evil challenges the probable veracity of its doctrines, e.g., the existence of God. In this evidential category, "evil in our world offers strong evidence against the probability that there is a God."<sup>3</sup> These are two categories of problems by which outsiders may challenge a religious tradition's doctrinal claims. Of course, there are cases where a believer suffers exceedingly and wonders about the reliability of one's faith; this subjective struggle may be classified as a religious problem of evil.<sup>4</sup>

These three types of problems are specifically relevant to theistic systems. Non-theistic religious traditions face different types of problems of suffering. The problems that will be compared in this study are radically different in nature; rather than comparing apples and oranges, it may seem like apples are being compared to orangutans! After a brief overview of various issues relevant to problems of suffering and evil, providing a context for fruitful discussion, I will compare the views of John Feinberg and Walpola Rahula in more detail, draw some conclusions, and present some points of contact that could help us gain a deeper knowledge of the two religious traditions.

### Statement of Thesis

The thesis question may be stated as follows: *How do the ontological perspectives of Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity, as expressed in the writings of Walpola Rahula and John Feinberg respectively, relate to the treatments of the problems of suffering/evil in the two religious traditions?* In dealing with this question, special attention will be given to Feinberg's and Rahula's views of the religious ultimate, the human person, and the origin of suffering/evil. The subject of study here is the comparison between Calvinistic Christianity and Theravada Buddhism with respect to their approaches to the problems of suffering and evil. The study will take three stages. First, the ontologies of each religious tradition will be introduced to provide some context for the ensuing discussion. Second, the classic problems of suffering and evil as each religious tradition perceives them will be stated, along with the ways in which Feinberg and Rahula resolve them. Classic problems refer to the types of problems that most commonly are associated with the religious tradition; for instance, the logical problem of evil most popularly represents the Calvinistic Christian struggle with evil, while the problem for Theravada Buddhism calls for a search for and discovery of attaining *nirvana*. Third, their treatments of the problems will be discussed and compared with each other, yielding more discussion on some of the points of contact between the two religious traditions.

The purpose of this thesis is not to make a judgment as to which religious tradition better resolves the problems of evil and therefore is more probably true; nor is it to examine historically how each has or could have contributed to the doctrinal development of the other. And, it is not merely to note their obvious differences. The purpose of this thesis is to see what, if any, points of contact and perspectives the two religious traditions share that would make evangelistic dialogue more effective.

Thus, the broader purpose of this thesis consists of something more than simply comparing the two ways Feinberg and Rahula view the problems and resolutions of suffering and evil within their respective religious traditions. It is ultimately to understand more deeply the two religious traditions through such a comparative

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<sup>1</sup>John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>3</sup>John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 17.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 15-17.

study, not to mention the prerequisite of a deeper understanding of the two worldviews in order to have a more fruitful comparison. A significant portion of this thesis will be devoted to understanding the two worldviews represented by Feinberg and Rahula. We will continue Bowker's exploration on this subject of comparing the problem of suffering/evil in various religious traditions by studying in depth two specific systems of thought he did not explore-- Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

### Significance of the Topic

Whether or not one believes in God, or denies even the existence of a human self, suffering is universally recognized and perceived as something with which one must reckon. It overshadows the life of every human, and is an important subject of teaching in the major religious traditions of the world. Studying how each religious tradition approaches the subject can illuminate the human predicament. A comparative study of the two religious traditions of Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity through representations of Rahula and Feinberg can contribute to a wider understanding of how the human predicament is perceived.

Suffering and evil are universal phenomena that immediately grab the attention of those concerned with issues of religion and human existence. A discussion of the two ways problems of suffering and evil are approached requires at least an introductory level of understanding of their different metaphysics and ontologies. It provides a wide field of common ground on which the human predicament can be discussed, and on which various religious worldviews may be compared. One may deny it, embrace it, or simply tolerate it; but, it is the sort of experience that adherents of different religious traditions can use as a common basis for dialogue. Thus, besides having a better understanding of the human predicament, one will be able to see how one's unique religious worldview provides a context in which problems of suffering and evil can be conceived and resolved. One would also be equipped to be a more effective representative of one's religious tradition in the missiological context of other religious traditions.

Aware of some hesitation among evangelicals to join a growing trend of interreligious dialogue, Harold Netland observes that "there is no general agreement today on just what is meant by dialogue."<sup>6</sup> Dialogue in its generic sense may simply denote an exchange of ideas or opinions between two or more persons. The subject matter may vary from the mundane, such as the weather, to the sacred, such as the origin and destiny of humankind. The form of a dialogue may vary between friendly and adversarial, cooperative and competitive, and so on. Netland cites Eric Sharpe's distinction of "four major kinds of dialogue: discursive dialogue, human dialogue, secular dialogue, and interior dialogue."<sup>7</sup> Discursive dialogue is one whose primary goal is to learn about the other religion. Human dialogue is not as concerned with objective knowledge of the other religion as it is with the subjective experience of it. Secular dialogue is focused on the socio-cultural issues of our world, such as economy and justice, rather than the esoteric metaphysical claims of different religions. Interior dialogue has a mystical tone in its emphasis on spiritual experience over conceptualization or doctrinal discourse. Discursive dialogue is closest to the type that is of interest in this thesis.

Bowker states, "Thus what a religion has to say about suffering reveals, in many ways more than anything else, what it believes the nature and purpose of existence to be."<sup>8</sup> The common experience of suffering and evil provides a useful reference point from which to compare different religious traditions. Through such a comparison one may more clearly see their irreconcilable differences but at the same time come to a deeper understanding of how those very differences can be communicated in terms more comprehensible to members of another religious tradition. It is not completely satisfactory simply to see that two religious traditions such as Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity are irreconcilably different. It is my hope that through this comparative study of how Theravada Buddhism, as represented by Rahula, and Calvinistic Christianity, as represented by John Feinberg, struggle with suffering and evil we will come to possess a more illuminating knowledge that will aid in evangelistic dialogue between the two religious traditions. As Stephen Neill observed,

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<sup>5</sup>Bowker does summarize the free will defense of Augustine which represents a popular "Calvinistic" treatment. But such a defense is inconsistent with the compatibilistic view of freedom held by the writer of this thesis. Feinberg presents a view that is consistent with compatibilism. Bowker also examines the Mahayana tradition in some depth; some of his discussion may be a good contrast with ours on the Theravada tradition.

<sup>6</sup>Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 285.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 285-286, citing Eric J. Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions*, ed. John H. Hick (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 77-95.

<sup>8</sup>Bowker, 2.

Among our neighbours from other races and cultures, there will be a small minority who have studied the Christian faith in detail, have compared it with the inheritance that they have received in their own tradition, and have found no reason to change their ancient religion for another. This does not mean that Christian witness is not to be borne; but it must be borne with circumspection, and with a deep regard for the feelings of those who have not accepted the Christian faith.<sup>9</sup>

Understanding Theravada Buddhism at a deeper level will help the Calvinistic Christian to present the Gospel message in a more persuasive way for the simple reason that knowing one's audience is critical for effective communication. It is my intention to carry on in the future personal dialogues with Theravada Buddhists of South East Asia concerning the truths of the Christian Gospel.

#### Limitations of the Study

Research for this thesis will be limited to two primary sources of Feinberg and Rahula, respectively, *The Many Faces of Evil*, and *What the Buddha Taught*. Moreover, focus will be on Feinberg's discussion of the logical problem of moral evil and Rahula's discussion of how one can eliminate human suffering entirely through attaining *nirvana*. Other writers will be consulted for supporting ideas.

As a monk who studied Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Walpola Rahula is an apt representative of Theravada Buddhism. He was a respected representative of Theravada Buddhism in such academic institutions as University of Paris and Northwestern University. *What the Buddha Taught* is considered a classic for students interested in Theravada Buddhism and will prove to be very useful in helping us to understand the religious tradition.

I had the opportunity of studying under John S. Feinberg as my professor in Trinity International University. His insistence on the inappropriateness of Calvinistic thinkers who embrace compatibilistic free will to rely on the traditional free will defense as a theodicy made a strong impact on my own study on the subject of the problems of evil, and fostered challenges for a deeper investigation on the subject as a fellow Calvinist who had been relying on the free will defenses of such Calvinistic thinkers as St. Augustine and Alvin Plantinga. As a widely recognized Calvinistic scholar, Feinberg's views represent a clear example of how one holding to a Calvinistic Christianity could view the problems of evil. At the same time, his clear stance against a reliance on the free will defense as a Calvinist sets him apart as a unique contributor to this subject.

I do not pretend to have a neutral or objective perspective on this comparative study. Feinberg represents a basic world view with which I personally identify, while Rahula represents a very different one. My approach will not be disguised as an objective scientific inquiry; rather, my subjective preference for Feinberg's position may be recognized and admitted as the discussion progresses. A recognized subjective perspective on the part of the researcher should be more fruitful than a hidden one.

#### Overview of Chapter Contents

In this chapter, I have stated the thesis and the three stages of its development. In the following I will give an overview of the rest of the chapters of this thesis.

In chapter two, the first stage of this thesis, a concise summary of the worldviews of Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity will be given. Walpola Rahula's book, *What the Buddha Taught*, is an excellent summary of Theravada Buddhism. My primary source for John Feinberg's view, *The Many Faces of Evil*, discusses various problems of evil from a Calvinistic Christian perspective. Some other standard theological texts will be consulted to outline a basic worldview of Calvinistic Christianity. An overview of the basic worldviews and various problems of suffering and evil will provide a context from which to springboard our specific study of comparing the two approaches by Rahula and Feinberg to a problem of suffering or evil in their respective fields.

In chapter three, the basic problem of suffering as perceived by Rahula will be summarized. We will see how the intricate ontology of Theravada Buddhism perceives the human predicament of suffering. The problem for the Theravada Buddhist is not so much a need to reconcile the evil in our world with the goodness of some Theravada god, since Theravada Buddhism is a rigorously atheistic system of thought; but, it is a personal need to face and overcome the phenomenal experience of suffering. Rahula offers the basic Theravada Buddhist solution in accord with the Noble Truth of the Path which teaches the Noble Eightfold

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<sup>9</sup>Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1984), 13.

Path through which one can overcome the problem of suffering. This chapter comprises the second stage of the thesis with respect to Theravada Buddhism.

In chapter four, the logical problem of moral evil and its resolution according to Feinberg will be presented. Special attention will be focused on his understanding of divine sovereignty and human freedom as well as human desire. The classic problem of evil for Christianity represents an apparent contradiction between its theology and the existence of evil in the world. It asks how an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God can allow evil to be present in the world. The challenge is that the existence of evil in our world proves that such a God cannot exist. Feinberg's response to this challenge for his theology will be offered. This chapter covers the second stage of the thesis with respect to Calvinistic Christianity.

In the last chapter, the third and final stage of this thesis, a comparative analysis of the two views of Rahula and Feinberg will be offered where major similarities and dissimilarities will be discussed. Points of contact will be offered as conceptual bridges with which dialogue can be improved between the two religious traditions. This is the key chapter of this thesis which seeks to formulate further understanding as a result of the comparative study.

## CHAPTER 2 PROBLEMS OF SUFFERING/EVIL IN RELIGIONS

### Basic Worldviews of the Two Religious Traditions

The particular ways in which issues of suffering and evil are perceived in Buddhism and Christianity arise from their particular ontologies or systems of world view; thus, the various ways they are resolved depend on the precise formulations of the problem of evil one is discussing.

Since this problem arises within a theological system, it will take the particular shape of the system in which it arises. Of course, each system has its own peculiar understanding of human freedom, ethics, and metaphysics. Consequently, in the process of handling the problem of evil, one is confronted with such questions as how his system synthesizes its understanding of human freedom with its understanding of God's sovereignty.<sup>10</sup>

Let us briefly introduce the basic worldviews of Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity.

#### Theravada Buddhism

Buddhism is radically different from Christianity. Founded by Gautama Buddha, Buddhism has developed into a diverse group of schools. Theravada Buddhism is known as the earlier and more orthodox form of Buddhism which teaches salvation through one's own efforts; it is strong in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Cambodia. As Grace Burford remarks,

The Theravada is the oldest known school of Buddhism, describing itself as not only the earliest but also the most conservative of the schools, the one that preserves unchanged the words (*vada*) of the Buddha as remembered and codified shortly after his death in the sixth century B.C.E. by his immediate disciples, the elders (*theras*). For the strictly orthodox Theravada believer, there is no such thing as doctrinal development within the Theravada canonical texts. In this view, the Pali scriptures record the very words of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*), the fully enlightened one, whose teachings required no improvement or alteration.<sup>11</sup>

Older schools of Buddhism such as the Theravada are also called Hinayana Buddhism ("Lesser Vehicle") by some outsiders, especially the Mahayanists, but "Theravada" ("The Way of the Elders") is the term that shows more respect for the orthodox Buddhist school. Still, the term Hinayana is indicative of the more difficult and narrower way prescribed for individuals to attain salvation (or, to realize *nirvana*<sup>12</sup>).

Mahayana Buddhism ("Greater Vehicle") developed a couple centuries later and encompasses major forms of Buddhism in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. It appealed to a wider group of people with its adaptive nature and offer of salvation with the help of previous Buddhas. Mahayana Buddhism teaches that there are "a great, even an unnumerable, company of supernatural beings who hear prayers and come actively to people's aid."<sup>13</sup> As Bowker observes, "It was out of contemplation of the life and of the motives of the Buddha in going out of his way to help others that Mahayana Buddhism came to articulate a major development in connection with suffering, the Bodhisattva ideal."<sup>14</sup> Developed in response partly to Theravada Buddhism's exclusive concern for realizing *nirvana* for oneself, this bodhisattva ideal is a contribution of Mahayana Buddhism to the problem of suffering in Buddhism where the infinite merits of the great enlightened beings are made available to the common folks. For the Mahayana Buddhists, these supernatural beings have a higher spiritual value than the personal teachings of the historical Buddha. As Noss quotes Edward Conze:

To the Christian and agnostic historian, only the human Buddha is real, and the spiritual and magical Buddhas are to him nothing but fictions. The perspective of the believer is quite different. The Buddha-

<sup>10</sup>John Feinberg, "Evil, Problem of," (in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 385-388. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 386.

<sup>11</sup>Grace G. Burford, "Theravada Buddhist Soteriology and the Paradox of Desire" in *Paths to Liberation*, eds. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, 37-61. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 38.

<sup>12</sup>*Nirvana* means "cooled" or "quenched," the unconditioned state of liberation, release from the cycle of rebirth-redeath. David S. and John B. Noss, *A History of the World's Religions*, Eight Edition (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 177.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>14</sup>John Bowker, *Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 259. In Mahayana Buddhism, *Bodhisattva* refers to an enlightened one who suspends the moment of his own final release and attainment of salvation in order to assist those who are weighed down in bondage (Bowker, 231).

nature and the Buddha's 'glorious body' [his bodhisattva body] stand out most clearly, and the Buddha's human body and historical existence appear like a few rags thrown over his spiritual glory.<sup>15</sup> For Theravada Buddhism, however, the testimony of the Buddha is an essential part of legitimizing its doctrines. An overview of the life of the founder must be presented before laying out some of the important concepts of the worldview of the orthodox form of Buddhism.

The Buddha was Prince Siddhattha Gotama (Sanskrit, Siddhartha Gautama) born around the middle of the sixth century B.C. Tradition holds that he married in his late teens, and in his late twenties, when he had a son, Rahula, he renounced the comforts of home to don the yellow robe and realize salvation from the problems of mortal existence, being greatly disturbed by the suffering of this world.<sup>16</sup> The famous story of "the Four Passing Sights" explains how the young prince was motivated to search for release from suffering.

Siddhattha's father was warned by soothsayers that his son might renounce the comforts of his home to become a homeless monk, unless he is prevented from taking such a step in which case he would become emperor of all India. The father did his best to keep his young son from witnessing the problems of life, viz., age, disease, and death, that draw so many people to religion. He made sure that whenever his son travelled out of their castles only healthy young men and women would be visible. The young prince grew up not knowing these sad facts about human life in this world.

One day, as he was out of his home, one of the gods suddenly appeared by the road in the form of a very weak and frail old man. This was the first sight. Later, the god appeared as a very diseased man; this was the second sight. The third sight records how the prince witnessed a dead man being carried along to a funeral pyre. These three sightings taught the young Siddhatta that life was filled with problems of old age, disease, and death; and, he no longer had any peace of mind. When he finally saw a serene ascetic in a yellow robe, in the fourth sight, he learned from the monk how one can free oneself from the suffering of this world. At last, the young Siddhatta renounced the comforts of his home and ventured to the homeless lifestyle. It was after six years of struggle that he attained salvation by realizing *nirvana*.

For six years, Gotama had followed the way of the ascetics to the extreme, nearing the point of death, but concluded that he needed to find another path to Enlightenment. He sat down at the foot of a tree to meditate, and it suddenly dawned on him that he was unable to realize *nirvana* due to desire. He understood that desire was the cause of suffering and that it must be eliminated before suffering can be eliminated. The Hindu scriptures taught that desire was the cause of *karma* (a person's actions), and that it kept the person tied to the world in an endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth.<sup>17</sup> But, Gotama did not care so much about the metaphysical aspect as he did about the psychological struggle of desire by which one experienced suffering and pain. From this experience, the Buddha felt no more desire, either positive or negative; he was no longer satisfied or dissatisfied but experienced only equanimity. He had attained salvation, realized *nirvana*!

After realizing salvation, he went back to his former ascetic companions and urged them to avoid the two extremes of asceticism and self indulgence and to follow the Middle Path. Bowker offers a translated copy of the Buddha's first sermon:

Thus have I heard. The Blessed One was once living in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Baranasi. There he addressed the group of five bhikkhus:<sup>18</sup>

'Bhikkhus, these two extremes ought not to be practised by one who has gone forth from the household of life. What are the two? There is devotion to the indulgence of sense-pleasures, which is low, common, the way of ordinary people, unworthy and unprofitable; and there is devotion to self-mortification, which is painful, unworthy and unprofitable.

Avoiding both these extremes, the Tathagata (Perfected One) has realized the Middle Path: it gives vision, it gives knowledge, and it leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.<sup>19</sup> And what is the Middle...? It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely, right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration. This is the Middle Path

<sup>15</sup>Noss, 197, citing Edward Conze, *Buddhism, Its Essence and Development* (Philosophical Library, 1954), 38. Available as Harper Torchbooks paperback.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 159-166. Noss provides good background information about the Buddhist founder.

<sup>17</sup>*Samsara* is the Hindu term that describes this endless cycle of suffering.

<sup>18</sup>*Bhikkhu* literally means "one who begs for food", and is the word used to describe Buddhist monks.

<sup>19</sup>*Nibbana* is the Pali form of the Sanskrit *nirvana*. Pali translations will be used in this thesis unless otherwise noted. *Nirvana* and *karma* (Sanskrit form of the Pali *kamma*) will be used simply because they are more commonly recognized in the English language. Although the classical Sanskrit, the language of the Aryans, was dominant, the local dialect Pali is believed to be the original language in which Buddha's teachings were recorded (Noss, 158).

realized by the Tathagata, which gives vision, which gives knowledge, and which leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment, to Nibbana.

The Noble Truth of suffering is this: Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; dissociation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering—in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering.

The Noble Truth of the origin of suffering is this: It is this thirst (craving) which produces re-existence and re-becoming, bound up with passionate greed. It finds fresh delight now here and now there namely, thirst for sense-pleasures; thirst for existence and becoming; and thirst for non-existence (self-annihilation).

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering is this: It is the complete cessation of that very thirst, giving up, renouncing it, emancipating oneself from it, detaching oneself from it.

The Noble Truth of the Path leading to the Cessation of suffering is this: It is simply the Noble Eightfold Path, namely right view; right thought; right speech; right action; right livelihood; right effort; right mindfulness; right concentration.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the Four Noble Truths came to be the basis of the orthodox Buddhist doctrine. By following this basic set of doctrines, one will eventually attain salvation from the suffering of the world, never to be reborn; one will escape from the endless cycle of suffering, of birth, death, and rebirth.

The Buddha taught for one practical purpose: to help others realize *nirvana*. In doing so, he assumed the current worldview of his culture, but avoided philosophical debates concerning its details. He made no attempts to clarify the details of metaphysical concepts; in fact, he shunned such concerns as a waste of time. As Walpola Rahula states, “The Buddha was not interested in discussing unnecessary metaphysical questions which are purely speculative and which create imaginary problems.”<sup>21</sup> The popular parable of the poison arrow is a good example.<sup>22</sup> If we see a man with a poison arrow should we ponder on the origin and quality of the arrow, or should we not care more to pull it out? While we waste time discussing the nature of the arrow and the identity of the victim, the man will die. We should be more practical and just pull the arrow out. Instead of metaphysical arguments, the personal testimony of Gotama Buddha is the basis on which the Theravada doctrines are accepted as true. As Christmas Humphreys puts it:

The Buddha's Enlightenment is therefore the womb, the heart and *raison d'être* of Buddhism. It is the criterion of all Buddhist teaching that it conduces or does not conduce to the achievement of Enlightenment.<sup>23</sup>

Bowker also discusses this foundational part of Theravada Buddhism:

The question inevitably arises whether or not this is wishful thinking. The experience of *dukkha* is common, the experience of *nirvana* is not: what guarantee is there that *nirvana* is in fact realisable? For the Buddhist, the basic answer is found in the life of the Buddha himself: because he attained *nirvana* he knew what he was talking about. The fact that others have also realised *nirvana* is important confirmation, but essentially the ‘pledge’ of *nirvana* lies in the fact that the Buddha attained it. The experience of the cessation of suffering was, to him, as real as the experience of suffering, and that gave to his teaching a glowing eloquence.<sup>24</sup>

What, then, are some of the important concepts of the worldview assumed by Theravada Buddhism?

First of all, it is atheistic; it does not teach the existence of God, personal or impersonal. If God is believed to exist, it would be considered an illusion which keeps the believer ensnared in the endless cycle of suffering. Walpola Rahula declares confidently, “Man is his own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, there can be no sin, for there is no supernatural being whose decrees can be transgressed and offended. There is no supernatural good or evil being in Theravada Buddhist

<sup>20</sup>Bowker, 238-239. The passage is from the *Dhammacakkappavattana-sutta*, “The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Truth”: *Samyutta-nikaya* Ivi. II (translated by Walpola Rahula).

<sup>21</sup>Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove, 1974), 12.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 14. We note here that while the Buddha is recorded as rejecting metaphysical questions, he himself assumed a basic metaphysical understanding of the Theravada doctrines and concepts.

<sup>23</sup>Christmas Humphreys, *Buddhism* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1951), 16.

<sup>24</sup>Bowker, 254.

<sup>25</sup>Rahula, 1.

teaching. In the level of ultimate truth, there is no such thing as “evil” in Buddhism. It would be better to speak of a problem of suffering rather than evil, unless evil is taken to refer to the general badness or unpleasantness of suffering.

Besides its obviously atheistic worldview, there are four concepts that are critical in understanding Theravada Buddhism.<sup>26</sup> First, the First Noble Truth denies the existence of a soul or any enduring self. Through the teaching of the five aggregates, it analyzes the five forces that interact and give the illusion of the self. This is a difficult concept to understand, but it is absolutely critical for Buddhism. A false belief in the existence of the self is the basis of desire which causes suffering. Even the desire to find salvation for oneself binds one in the endless cycle of suffering.

Individuals are referred to as such only when one speaks according to the conventional truth of this world, which is actually illusory and false in the ultimate sense; in speaking according to ultimate truth, no individual self is recognized. So, these different levels of truth must be kept in mind when reading the Buddha’s teachings. This denial of the existence of a soul or any enduring self is also taught through the doctrine of conditioned genesis. The doctrine of conditioned genesis teaches the absolute relativity of everything.<sup>27</sup> Thus, there is no ultimate ontological distinction between individuals or between good and evil. “Evil” in Buddhism means “bad” in general, and does not represent some personal agent or offense such as the Devil or sin in Christianity.

Thus, in Theravada Buddhism, there is no logical problem of evil. What seems to be good or evil according to conventional truth is not so distinguished in the level of ultimate truth. There is no problem of evil as in Christianity which must ask questions of justice because in Buddhism everything (good or bad) is already perfectly fair according to the law of *karma*. The only problem of suffering is that which the Buddha experienced as a common experience for all humanity and sought to eliminate it.

The uninitiated reader may wonder why Buddhism would be concerned to teach liberation to people who are not actually individuals. Buddhism acknowledges the real psychological experience of suffering among people. And, it praises the Buddha’s compassion in helping others realize salvation by teaching them the Middle Path. The compassion of the Buddha along with his wisdom in knowing reality as it actually is, then, motivated his teaching to fellow humans.

Second, the Second Noble Truth discusses *karma* as the ontological principle that regulates rebirth. It produces a fixed consequence of one’s actions for the present or future life.<sup>28</sup> One accumulates good *karma* when one does good, bad *karma* when one does bad; and the condition of one’s rebirth will be determined by the goodness or badness of one’s *karma*. Although it basically means action, as a technical Buddhist term *karma* refers specifically to volitional action. As long as one acts in desire, good or bad, one is under the force of *karma* by which one is kept in the cycle of suffering, albeit good *karma* causes one to be reborn as a better human, closer to realizing *nirvana*. It is when one relinquishes all desire, and eventually extinguishes all *karma*, that one realizes *nirvana* and escapes from the endless cycle of suffering.

Third, the Third Noble Truth teaches *nirvana* as the ultimate reality. *Nirvana* is the goal for Theravada Buddhism. It is that from which, when one realizes it, one can see things as they really are, undistracted by illusions of our suffering world, and begin to exhaust one’s *karma* in order to escape from the endless cycle of suffering. What exactly is it? It cannot be described adequately with human language because it belongs to the level of ultimate truth which is beyond phenomenal language. It is when one extinguishes all desire, thirst, and craving that one realizes *nirvana*, and is freed from the endless cycle of suffering.

Fourth, the Fourth Noble Truth teaches the Noble Eightfold Path which are eight categories (grouped further into three broad categories) which was the subject of most of the Buddha’s 45 years of teaching.<sup>29</sup> They show the areas through which one must work in order to realize *nirvana*. While Theravada Buddhism denies the existence of God and enduring human souls, Calvinistic Christianity asserts a radically different worldview.

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<sup>26</sup>A more detailed discussion will be presented in the next chapter.

<sup>27</sup>“Dependent origination” is another name for the same doctrine.

<sup>28</sup>Noss, 177.

<sup>29</sup>Rahula, 45.

### Calvinistic Christianity

Named after John Calvin (1509-1564), and identified by Reformed and Presbyterian churches, Calvinism may be said to be one of the first systematic representations of Reformation thought.<sup>30</sup> Calvinistic Christianity is known most popularly for its emphasis on divine sovereignty but it also emphasizes the Bible, human responsibility, and the church as God's covenant people. The acronym TULIP roughly illustrates five points of Calvinism. TULIP stands for Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Irresistible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints. Many Calvinists do not actually uphold all five points represented by TULIP. For instance, John Feinberg does not hold to the doctrine of Limited Atonement. But we will briefly review these five points below as a basic introduction before discussing in chapter four select ideas of John Feinberg's Calvinist theology.

Total Depravity refers to "the unmeritoriousness of man before God because of the corruption of original sin."<sup>31</sup> It is not so much a matter of human ability as it is the pollution of human nature due to original sin, so that human relationship with God is broken and cannot be restored by anything humans do. This doctrine does not claim that humans are exhaustively evil and do not or are unable to perform any action that is not sinful. It teaches the complete extent of the corruption of fallen humans in their entire being which excludes them from a positive relationship with God regardless of what good acts they perform. Thus humans cannot save themselves.

Unconditional Election is the idea that God, even before creation, chose certain souls for salvation singularly according to His sovereign will and with no outside influence, even in the actions of the elect foreseen by God. The significance of this doctrine follows from the doctrine of Total Depravity which views humans in an irrecoverable fallen state, in need of divine election for salvation. Implied in this doctrine of election is the concept of reprobation that those who are not so elected for salvation remain in their destiny of condemnation. Fred Klooster states six principles of election.<sup>32</sup> First, election is God's sovereign and eternal decree that is unaffected by creation or anything creatures do. Second, God's eternal decree of election presupposes the fallen nature of the human race. Third, election is in Christ, involving a rescue of the elect from sin and guilt and reception of the gracious gift of salvation. Fourth, election includes both the elect's salvation and the means to that end whereby the elect is called, justified, and glorified. Fifth, election is personal and particular. Sixth, the ultimate goal of election is the glory and praise of God through the blessed salvation of the elect.

Limited Atonement is asserted to be a logical deduction of the doctrine of Unconditional Election and points out that Christ's sacrifice on the cross was intended exclusively for the elect, even if it was sufficient for every individual. This point is probably the most controversial of the five points of Calvinism and many Calvinists reject it. Walter Elwell points out that even Calvin himself in some of his writings taught that "all the sins of the world have been expiated" by Christ's blood.<sup>33</sup> Due to the likelihood of much misunderstanding, Wayne Grudem restricts the issue to the question, "Did Christ pay for the sins of all unbelievers who will be eternally condemned, and did he pay for their sins fully and completely on the cross?"<sup>34</sup> He answers in the negative, although he heartily agrees that Christ's death is sufficient for everyone's sins and that the "free offer of the gospel can rightly be made to every person ever born."<sup>35</sup> The issue is restricted simply to the question of what actual price Christ paid through the Atonement, and other concerns regarding God's intention and love for the world or the sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice to make atonement for the sin of the whole world are well taken but considered irrelevant to the proper doctrine of Limited Atonement. This doctrine is deduced from the conviction that God's sovereign will of salvation is unconditional and cannot be frustrated by humans. Thus, anyone's sin Christ actually paid the penalty for is necessarily saved. And if Christ's sacrifice actually covers the sin of everyone, everyone must be saved, which is false. Against this line of reasoning many others point

<sup>30</sup>William S. Reid, "Calvinism" (in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell, 186-188. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 186.

<sup>31</sup>Charles C. Ryrie, "Depravity, Total" (in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell, 186-188. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 312.

<sup>32</sup>Fred H. Klooster, "Elect, Election" (in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell, 348-349. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 348-349.

<sup>33</sup>Walter A. Elwell, "Atonement, Extent of the" (in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell, 98-100. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 99.

<sup>34</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 601.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 597.

out the clear biblical teaching that Christ died for everyone including (or especially!) sinners, and that many are not saved because they do not believe, not because Christ did not die for them.

Irresistible Grace describes the inevitable positive response of the elect when the Holy Spirit extends His internal call for faith and repentance.<sup>36</sup> It is based on the teaching of the efficacious grace which means that God's grace and will is certain to be fulfilled and humans or anything else cannot prevent it. With respect to salvation, one whose sins have been atoned for by the sacrifice of Christ cannot resist the call of God for repentance and belief in His redemption in Christ. The elect who has been regenerated will certainly respond positively to God's call to salvation. Grudem insists that it is a misunderstanding to assume that the person in such a situation is in any way constrained or affected against one's free will to respond to God's call.<sup>37</sup>

Perseverance of the Saints teaches that by God's providence the elect will continue in the faith until the last day when their salvation is consummated. Augustine marked a clear signal for this teaching early on, against some precedence for denying postbaptismal repentance. As R. E. O. White summarizes, "Electing, effectual grace includes not only the call to salvation, the impulse of faith to respond, the inspiring of a good will, but also the *donum perseverantiae*, the gift of enduring to the end."<sup>38</sup> Perseverance of the elect is as certain as God's eternal election. Admittedly unfalsifiable, since those who do stop persevering at any point in life demonstrate that they are not the elect, and those who are persevering demonstrate evidence of their salvation only by their persevering, this doctrine nevertheless asserts the consistency of Calvinism with respect to divine sovereignty in applying God's redemptive will for the elect from the beginning till the end.

#### Basic Approaches to the Problems of Suffering/Evil in Christianity and Buddhism

Problems of evil are typically seen as a Christian problem in Western culture. It is usually posed as an apparent contradiction between the theological doctrine of an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God and the painful reality of evil in our world. Such problems are presented as challenges to the legitimation of the Christian faith. In this form, they are not a subject of great controversy or dialogue in Buddhism; in fact, Buddhists may point to it to expose a serious weakness in the Christian dogma. Theodicy is a term that describes the subject area which is concerned with defending the goodness and justice of God against evil in our world. The term, which is a compound of the two Greek words for God (*theos*) and justice (*dike*), may have been coined by Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716).<sup>39</sup> Strictly speaking, it is an area of study that concerns theistic religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Since it concerns the question of the justice of God, it would not apply to religions such as Theravada Buddhism which does not recognize God as the ultimate reality, but rather holds *nirvana* as the ultimate reality. But a broader definition of theodicy is sometimes used to describe any explanation of suffering.

Whether or not one retains the narrower definition of theodicy and restricts its application to theistic religions, the reality of suffering is a major concern for all religions. Buddhism is a religion that struggles with suffering at every level of its doctrinal expression. The problem of suffering is its point of departure and arrival; for Buddhism, suffering is not just an area of concern, it is the primary issue and its cessation is the goal. While Christianity approaches the problems of evil in our world with the justice of God in mind, Buddhism approaches them with the simple intention of overcoming suffering and rebirth.

#### Problem of Evil in Buddhism

What constitutes a problem of evil according to Buddhism? Referring to Christianity and Buddhism Masao Abe states, "The problem of evil in both traditions involves the contradiction, or apparent contradiction, between belief in the actuality of evil in the world and the religious belief in the goodness and power of the Ultimate."<sup>40</sup> The Buddhist purpose in tackling the issue of suffering, however, is not so much to resolve the apparent contradiction as it is to personally overcome suffering in one's life. Buddhism is not concerned with

<sup>36</sup>There is an external call which both the elect and the non-elect can freely resist. Only the grace offered through the internal call of the Holy Spirit to the elect is irresistible, and the elect must eventually accept the external call which carries the irresistible internal call.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 700.

<sup>38</sup>R. E. O. White, "Perseverance" (in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed., Walter A. Elwell, 844-845. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 845.

<sup>39</sup>Ronald M. Green, "Theodicy," (in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade. New York: Macmillan, 1987), 14:431. Theodicy is an attempt to explain how in fact God is justified in the face of evil in our world; but, a defense refers to a more modest attempt of describing only a possible state of affairs where God may be justified amidst evil.

<sup>40</sup>Masao Abe, "The Problem of Evil in Christianity and Buddhism" in *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation*, eds. P. Ingram and F. Streng (1986), 143. Abe represents Zen Buddhism which is very similar to Theravada Buddhism.

problems of evil in an effort to defend its internal coherence. Rather, it regards the elimination of the causes of suffering as the objective of Buddhist practice. While, some concern for internal consistency of Buddhism is expressed, it is not perceived to be as critical as it is in Christianity.<sup>41</sup> We will not concern ourselves with a discussion of how problems of inconsistencies are addressed in Buddhism. We will focus on its core doctrines because they themselves are primarily concerned with the problem of suffering and how to overcome it.

The doctrine of *karma* provides the rule for the problem of suffering in Buddhism. It is believed that "suffering derives from the operation of the automatic law of moral retribution known as *karman* working in conjunction with a process of reincarnation."<sup>42</sup> Every deed and thought is submitted under the rule of *karma*; cooperating with the doctrine of reincarnation, there is retributive consequence for everything and for every life one goes through. So, if an apparently innocent baby is suffering horribly, it can be explained by the bad *karma* it had accumulated in its previous life. If one is suffering unjustly at the hands of a big bully, one can feel the assurance of knowing that that bully will suffer according to the law of *karma* in the next life if not sooner; of course, one should at the same time realize that one is suffering due to one's own bad *karma*. Thus the doctrine of *karma* provides the basis for an easy theodicy in its broad sense; there is no problem, because every instance of suffering is accounted for by the absolute doctrine of *karma*. There is no such thing as innocent suffering. There is no God whose justice is in question. Everything is utterly fair. Buddhists do not beat their breasts in anger at some personal God who is supposed to be responsible for their suffering, no matter how horrible it appears. Neither do they look for some fault in the creation for the present suffering. Creation is not a concept entertained by Buddhism as it is in Christianity; the universe exists in a beginningless and endless cycle of time, not from a certain beginning, as recorded in Genesis. Suffering in the world as we see it is accepted as an unfortunate but simple reality.

The major problem of suffering for Buddhism is not the apparent contradiction of its core doctrines; it is the basic existential problem of how humans can deal with the painful realities of suffering. This is the problem which the Buddha faced head on and resolved by realizing *nirvana*. The problem for Buddhism is how humankind can escape from suffering by realizing *nirvana*; as such, it forms the legitimizing basis for the religion itself. We shall see in the next chapter how Theravada Buddhism, as represented by Rahula, approaches and resolves this problem of suffering.

#### Problems of Evil in Christianity

In Christianity, problems of evil have become a serious subject of study. True, it may be said that the Christian gospel is concerned primarily with suffering and offers eternal life in heaven as an answer to its problem. But, its doctrine of a personal God as the Creator and Judge of the universe adds a major dimension to the existential problem of suffering. While the gospel is concerned with the salvation of sinners by God's grace, problems of evil are discussed to expose or resolve apparent contradictions between the reality of evil in our world and God who is supposed to be omnibenevolent and omnipotent. The tension of the problems of evil in Christianity is felt through an apparent contradiction between the theological understanding of the omnipotent and omnibenevolent God with the reality of evil in our world. Millar Erickson reviews four basic ways in which this apparent contradiction has been handled.<sup>43</sup>

One way has been to deny God's omnipotence, so that evil can be seen to arise from a force out of God's control. Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism are two systems of thought that relied on forms of dualism to express this denial; so, God is not seen as an omnipotent deity but only one of two supreme powers that represent good and evil respectively. Edgar S. Brightman (known as a spokesman for personalism) and Charles Hartshorne (Process Theology) are recent examples of this strategy.

A second way to resolve the apparent contradiction is "to modify the idea of God's goodness."<sup>44</sup> According to Erickson, Gordon Clark emphasizes divine omnipotence to such a degree that God is said to be the ultimate cause of everything, including evil, although he insists that God does not sin when He causes

<sup>41</sup>For example, see Jonathan S. Walters, "The Buddha's Bad Karma: A Problem in the History of Theravada Buddhism" in *Numen* (June, 1990), 70-95. Walters ponders how the Buddha's suffering may invalidate his teaching on realizing *nirvana*. Did the Buddha suffer because of his bad *karma*? If so, how did he realize *nirvana*? Also, Burford examines desire as a Buddhist object of both denunciation and necessity. See Grace G. Burford, "Theravada Buddhist Soteriology and the Paradox of Desire." In *Paths to Liberation*, eds. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, 37-61. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.

<sup>42</sup>Green, 439. *Karma* and *karman* are identical terms.

<sup>43</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 413-423.

<sup>44</sup>Erickson, 417.

humans to sin, nor is He responsible for sin. One example cited in support of this view is the passage of 2 Chronicles 18:20-22 which records God as having caused prophets to lie. The moral laws God gave to humans do not apply to God Himself in the same way. While Clark does not deny sin as sin or evil as evil, he emphasizes that whatever is caused by God is good in an ultimate sense.

A third way to deal with the apparent contradiction has been to deny the reality of suffering and evil in our world, so that there is no need to reconcile whatever we perceive as evil with the perfectly good and powerful God. Spinoza and Mary Baker Eddy of Christian Science are two thinkers who held this approach. Eddy held that matter is not real, only God is real; matter is unreal and temporary while spirit is real and eternal. Spinoza held to the view of monism where only one substance exists and everything we witness is just a mode or attribute of that one substance. Thus, evil or what is perceived as evil does not exist in reality.

Finally, the fourth way to deal with this apparent contradiction is by seeking to explain how the apparent contradiction is just that-- only apparent. Those who did not want to deny any of the divine attributes nor the reality of evil sought to explain the apparent contradiction of the doctrine of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God in the painful face of evil in our world.

Alvin Plantinga offered possible explanation of evil by what is well known as the free will defense.<sup>45</sup> The free will defense affirms God's will in giving humans the freedom to make certain choices, good or bad. As Plantinga puts it, "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all."<sup>46</sup> Yet, the world that God created is still good because of the value attributed to human freedom, regardless of its consequences. The free will defense assumes an incompatibilistic view of human freedom which God could not have bestowed on humans without making it possible for humans to choose evil as free moral agents. An incompatibilistic or libertarian notion of freedom asserts that for freedom to be true freedom the moral agent must not be causally inclined to choose one or the other in a given set of circumstances. Compatibilism, on the other hand, accepts that even in cases where causally deterministic conditions apply, as long as they are not constraining forces, the moral agent can be said to wield genuine freedom. The free will defense holds to a nonconsequentialist account of ethics.

John Hick offered a soul building theodicy following in the tradition of Irenaeus. Irenaeus viewed the creation of man as unfinished in that while humans are made in the image of God, they are still in the process of becoming in the likeness of God. Hick held to a consequentialist account of ethics where the judgment of good and evil depends on the consequence of an action. If human soul building is God's primary purpose of creation, then, we should not assume, as Hume did, that He should create a world for us to enjoy maximum pleasure and minimum pain. As Hick states,

But if we are right in supposing that God's purpose for man is to lead him from human *Bios*, or the biological life of man, to that quality of *Zoe*, or the personal life of eternal worth, which we see in Christ, then the question that we have to ask is not, Is this the kind of world that anal-powerful and infinitely loving being would create as an environment for his human pets? Or, Is the architecture of the world the most pleasant and convenient possible? The question that we have to ask is rather, Is this the kind of world that God might make as an environment in which moral beings may be fashioned, through their own free insights and responses, into 'children of God'?<sup>47</sup>

Thus, for John Hick, the suffering and evil in this world is a justified means to a good end, namely, the building up of human souls. Such are possible resolutions for those who hold to an incompatibilistic view of human freedom. But, what explanation can be given by Calvinists who hold that divine sovereignty is compatible with human freedom? We will examine Feinberg's defense in chapter four in response to this question.

There are many different problems of evil, and when these problems are categorized in the numerous systems of thought in Christianity, one can behold a tremendous number of problems that need to be distinguished from each other in discussions of problems of evil in Christianity. While the logical problems of evil in Christianity deal with the apparent contradiction of a perfectly good and powerful God coexisting with evil, Feinberg maintains clear distinctions between the various problems. As he summarizes,

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<sup>45</sup>John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 55-77. As Feinberg observes, "In the contemporary literature, no one has done more to develop and defend the free will defense than Alvin Plantinga" (63).

<sup>46</sup>Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 30.

<sup>47</sup>John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper Collins, 1977), 257.

Throughout this book I have argued that there is no such thing as *the* problem of evil. That is so in several significant respects. For one thing, different kinds of problems can arise for theism on the basis of evil. Some problems arise in a logical form and others in an evidential form. Moreover, there are problems of moral evil and natural evil, problems about the quantity of evil, problems about the intensity of evil, and problems about the apparent gratuitousness of much evil. Each of these problems can be posed as a logical or evidential problem. Further, just as with the logical problem, the evidential problems must be kept distinct and handled individually.<sup>48</sup>

The logical form of the problem of evil is traditionally stated in terms of a trilemma: 1) God is omnipotent; 2) God is omnibenevolent; 3) There is evil in the world. The three propositions are a trilemma because any two of them can be declared true with logical consistency while it appears self-contradictory to assert all three of them at once. This apparent self-contradiction is the logical form of the problem of evil for theism; to answer this charge of contradiction, theists must offer either a possible way for the three propositions to be declared internally consistent, or what they take to be the actual explanation as to why the three propositions are together consistent. The former demonstration of a possible way to resolve the apparent contradiction would be a defense; the latter assertion of what actually is the case is called a theodicy.<sup>49</sup> While both are valid responses to the challenge of the problem of evil, only the latter claims to describe what actually is the case; the former has a more modest claim of stating only what is possibly the case. So, if an atheist makes a challenge that the biblical God cannot exist because of the evil in the world, a defense will state how it is possible that such a God can exist, while a theodicy will attempt to explain how it actually is the case that such a God in fact exists. Either defense or theodicy is a sufficient resolution to logical problems of evil in Christianity. Feinberg's response takes the form of a defense.

Feinberg defends theism against atheistic attacks on grounds of the problems of evil by tenaciously insisting on the clarification of the type of problem and evil one is discussing. He also reminds us that all the different problems of evil are multiplied by all the different systems of religious thought to produce an even greater number of problems of evil.<sup>50</sup> He is quick to point out conflation of different problems which tend to produce misleading and unfounded conclusions. When an atheist makes the claim that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God would not allow all the evil we find in the world, for example, Feinberg will quickly ask for a clarification of which God the atheist has in mind when one makes such an accusation. It may turn out that the God conceived by the atheist is quite different than the God conceived in Feinberg's Calvinistic thought. By consistently keeping the distinctions clearly in mind, Feinberg categorizes the various problems of evil in manageable and understandable portions; and, he offers his solutions to each of the many problems of evil. While we cannot review all his solutions in this thesis, it is instructive to learn that maintaining clear distinctions is extremely helpful in discussing the complicated issue of the many problems of evil. We will study his view in more depth in chapter four, after studying the ontology of Theravada Buddhism and how it perceives and resolves the problem of suffering.

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<sup>48</sup>Feinberg, 285.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 19. Feinberg clarifies that the terms are not consistently distinguished in such a way by everybody; in this paper they will be so distinguished.

<sup>50</sup>Even those naively thought of as a single religion can have numerous systems of thought. For example, consider the countless theological systems in Christianity; and some are reluctant even to consider Buddhism as one religion. All these different systems of religious thought perceive each problem of evil in their own unique way.

CHAPTER 3  
THE ONTOLOGY OF THERAVADA BUDDHISM  
AS REPRESENTED BY WALPOLA RAHULA

In *What the Buddha Taught*, Walpola Rahula lays out the basic Theravada Buddhist ontology. As Rahula presents Theravada Buddhism, the whole discussion revolves around the problem of suffering, not exactly in the sense of bringing emotional comfort to the believer (religious problem), nor in a logical form, nor in an evidential form, but in an effort to invite the seeker personally to experience salvation and to be liberated from the endless cycle of suffering or *dukkha*. Rahula's discussion does fit closest to the category of the religious problem considering its subjective and existential struggle with suffering, but its atheistic viewpoint defies a clear category of problems of evil developed by Western theistic systems. Theravada Buddhism is inherently a religious tradition of suffering, founded on suffering and having an ultimate goal of eliminating suffering. The core doctrines, then, are primarily concerned with the problem of suffering. Its worldview is built explicitly and essentially with the phenomenal reality of suffering in view. My purpose here is not to critique the Buddhist doctrines, but simply to understand them as they are presented so that we may better understand how problems of suffering and evil would be viewed from this perspective. There are four core principles in Theravada Buddhism referred to as the Four Noble Truths. A discussion of these four principles will include key concepts such as suffering (*dukkha*), the doctrine of no-soul, the Five Aggregates, Conditioned Genesis, karma, death, and *nirvana*, which can explain how Theravada Buddhism might perceive and solve the problem of suffering.

The First Noble Truth

The Noble Truth of Suffering teaches that life is to be defined in terms of suffering (*dukkha*).<sup>51</sup> It not only consists of suffering but is exclusively an experience of suffering. A misunderstanding of the term *dukkha* often leaves the outsider with the impression that Theravada Buddhism is a very pessimistic religious tradition.<sup>52</sup> Although in daily usage *dukkha* refers to suffering, pain, and other negative conditions, as a technical term in the First Noble Truth its deeper and more philosophical definition must be recognized. Beyond the superficial ideas of pain and suffering, concepts such as imperfection, impermanence, and insubstantiality are also included in the term *dukkha* as used in the Four Noble Truths. Even various forms of happiness are included in this term because they would be considered to be imperfect. If any form of happiness is presented as perfect, then it could still be impermanent and hence be included in the term *dukkha*. Common experiences of happiness are not permanent even if they may be extremely enjoyable; change through passage of time can bring about sadness (i.e., in death), and that is *dukkha*. *Dukkha* is a complex term, but it is a most critical term in understanding the Four Noble Truths. We can see now how life in its entirety can be asserted to be an experience of "suffering."

To explain the term *dukkha* further, Rahula lays out its three aspects. It can refer to the ordinary experience of suffering, one produced by change, or conditioned states. The first aspect of ordinary suffering refers to all physical and mental pain, and includes the common experiences of birth, aging, sickness, death, interaction with unpleasant people and environments, not getting one's wishes, and any other form of physical or mental suffering. The second aspect of suffering occurs when some change brings about the end of a happy feeling. More than the superficial experience of suffering through change, it is a deep recognition and submissive acceptance of the world as being impermanent. It may also be described, in the words of Steven Collins, as "a proper seriousness in the face of impermanence and death."<sup>53</sup>

The third form of *dukkha* is just the way we are-- conditioned by impermanent and changing forces. This form of suffering lies precisely in the illusion that there is an enduring self or soul. Although the common experience of the first two aspects of suffering makes it easy for outsiders to identify with the First Noble Truth, this third aspect of *dukkha* is not easy to grasp. But it "is the most important philosophical aspect of the First Noble Truth, and it requires some analytical explanation of what we consider as a 'being', as an

<sup>51</sup>Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove, 1974), 16.

<sup>52</sup>Rahula leaves the term *dukkha* untranslated because of an inadequate term in English. "Unsatisfactoriness" is sometimes used, but in this thesis "suffering" will be used as a translation, if only the reader will keep in mind that it is translating *dukkha* when used in the special Buddhist context.

<sup>53</sup>Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1982), 191.

'individual', or as 'I.'<sup>54</sup> At the level of ultimate truth, existence of an enduring self is vehemently denied, and the Doctrine of No-Soul illustrates this unique concept in Theravada Buddhism.

#### The Doctrine of No-Soul

Theravada Buddhism denies the existence of a permanent, ontologically real soul or enduring self behind the phenomenal experience of personhood. It sees the false idea of an enduring, substantial self as the root of all evil. "It is the source of all the troubles in the world from personal conflicts to wars between nations."<sup>55</sup> This illusion of the self leads to selfish desires, cravings, pride, hatred and other impure thoughts and problems. The doctrine of no-soul is an uncommon one in the history of religious thought. Other religious traditions or philosophies are concerned with the self; but, Theravada Buddhism is concerned with the postulate that there is no self. Since this concept of the no-self is so important in the discussion of problems of suffering and evil, more discussion will be devoted for it.

It is easy to see how the idea of the self can lead to selfish desires and evils. Humans have deeply rooted psychological ideas of self-protection and self-preservation. Rahula explains that humans have created God for self-protection and the idea of an eternal soul for self-preservation. "According to Buddhism, our ideas of God and Soul are false and empty. Though highly developed as theories, they are all the same extremely subtle mental projections, garbed in an intricate metaphysical and philosophical phraseology."<sup>56</sup> And because these ideas are so deeply ingrained in humans, they do all they can to cling to these two false ideas for their psychological comfort. Theravada Buddhism seeks to liberate all humans by striking at the very root of such ignorance that holds us captive in the endless cycle of *dukkha*. We can see that the idea of the self can lead to selfish evils; but, how is it readily seen that the idea of the self is a false one?

To answer this question Paul Griffiths presents the classic discussion between Nagasena, a Buddhist monk, and King Milinda, an Indian monarch, where they discuss this concept of the no-soul using a chariot as an example.

[Nagasena addresses Milinda]:

"Now, did you come on foot or in a conveyance?"

"I, revered sir, did not come on foot, I came in a chariot."

"If you, sire, came by chariot, show me the chariot. Is the pole the chariot, sire?"

"O no, revered sir."

"Is the axle the chariot?"

"O no, revered sir."

"Are the wheels the chariot?"

"O no, revered sir."

"Is the body of the chariot the chariot ... is the flag-staff of the chariot the chariot ... is the yoke the chariot ... are the reins the chariot ... is the goad the chariot?"

"O no, revered sir."

"But then, sire, is the chariot the pole, the axle, the wheels, the body of the chariot, the flag-staff of the chariot, the yoke, the reins, the goad?"

"O no, revered sir."

"But then, sire, is there a chariot apart from the pole, the axle, the wheels, the body of the chariot, the flag-staff of the chariot, the yoke, the reins, the goad?"

"O no, revered sir."

"Though I, sire, am asking you repeatedly, I do not see the chariot. Chariot is only a sound, sire.

For what here is the chariot? You, sire, are speaking an untruth, a lying word. There is no chariot."<sup>57</sup> Just as no single component of the chariot defines the chariot, nor the sum of its components, nor something other than its components, so also no single component of the self defines a self, nor the sum of its different components, nor something other than its components. By use of such analogies, the doctrine of no-soul is asserted as a critical foundation for Theravada Buddhism.

<sup>54</sup>Rahula, 20.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>57</sup>Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 87-88. This story is recorded in the *Milinda Panha*.

Rahula seems to anticipate the question as to why and how Buddhists continue to speak in terms of personal pronouns such as "I" and "you." He distinguishes between conventional truth and ultimate truth, where the former represents the conventions of the world and the latter that which is actually real. By the conventions of this world, one can use its common terms without being accused of ignorance or deception; but, when one is discussing matters of ultimate truth, one should assert the falsity of the idea of the self. Masao Abe helps clarify this distinction between levels of truth, where even good and evil are seen differently in different levels of truth and reality. At the lower or conventional level, good and evil are opposites; at the level of ultimate reality, where the interdependence of everything to something else in existence and extinction is realized, not only individuals but also good and evil lose their distinction.<sup>58</sup> Thus, even though Theravada Buddhism at the conventional level recognizes the polarity of good and evil and operates on a consequentialist ethic, at the level of ultimate reality where good and evil lose their perception, there is no ethics.

Likewise, one may properly speak of an individual at the level of conventional truth, but not so at the level of ultimate truth since no enduring self exists. The teaching of the Five Aggregates describes that which is conventionally referred to as the self as simply the appearance of the five impersonal forces or energies displayed through the human life form.

### The Five Aggregates

The teaching of the Five Aggregates describes analytically that which is presumed to be the self in conventional reality.<sup>59</sup> It teaches that the "I" or "being" is simply a combination of constantly changing physical and mental energies. They are analyzed into five categories. First, there is the Aggregate of Matter which includes the whole realm of matter. Also included in this category are the five physical sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and the mind along with their corresponding objects (visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and ideas or concepts of the mind).<sup>60</sup> Griffiths points out that this category "embraces those events whose presence gives both me and observers other than myself the impression that I possess (or, on a physicalist reading, simply am) a three-dimensional physical entity enduring through time."<sup>61</sup>

Second, the Aggregate of Sensations includes all kinds of sensations (pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral) we experience through physical and mental contact with the external world. The sensations are categorized according to the five physical sense organs and the mind which interact with the external world in receiving various senses. Pleasurable sensations such as those resulting from a compliment and painful sensations such as those resulting from an insult are all momentary and impermanent. Experiencing these sensations can give one the feeling that one is an enduring self.

Third, the Aggregate of Perceptions analogously correspond to the Aggregate of Sensations where the six sense organs (including the mind) through perceptions recognize their corresponding objects in the world. Through our interaction with all kinds of matter and sensations in this world, we develop various perceptions or concepts (e.g., man, friend, pleasure, red, etc.) to label different experiences and construct a manageable world to live in, to hold on to the illusion of an enduring self in an enduring world.

The Aggregate of Mental Formations forms the fourth group of Aggregates which includes all volitional activities, good or evil. It is volition that defines the popularly used word *karma*. Unlike sensations and perceptions, one's volition moves the body, speech, and mind to act. The six faculties provide the six channels through which one's volition can find action and in turn produce good or bad *karma*.<sup>62</sup> Needless to say, it is question-begging to assert at this point that recognizing volitional actions assumes an enduring self with the capacity for free choice. As Griffiths puts it, "It would be more accurate to say that volitions are a species of mental events phenomenologically distinguishable from other mental events and not fully determined by those events that are their causal predecessors."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata" (in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, eds. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives, 3-65. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990), 32.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-23.

<sup>60</sup>Rahula makes it clear that Theravada Buddhism does not admit spiritual realities when it teaches the faculty of the mind (*manas*). The mind senses nonphysical ideas that cannot be sensed by the five physical organs; but admitting nonphysical realities such as ideas does not entail the acknowledgement of spiritual realities. These ideas are actually produced and conditioned by physical sensations. So, the mind is just another organ that senses ideas and thoughts, and no spiritual realities or sense organs for them are admitted here.

<sup>61</sup>Griffiths, 90.

<sup>62</sup>We will discuss *karma* in more detail later.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, 91.

Finally, the Aggregate of Consciousness refers to being conscious of (or apprehending) an object. It has the six sense organs as its basis and their corresponding experiences (such as sound or smell) as its objects. For example, visual consciousness has as its basis the eye and the visible form as its object. Like the previous four aggregates, the Aggregate of Consciousness takes on six forms that correspond to the six sense organs. Being conscious of an object is not the same as perceiving it; one could be conscious (aware) of a visible object without perceiving it. It is not some enduring self which experiences the consciousness because consciousness arises out of conditions made up by one of the six faculties and their corresponding phenomena. Just as fire is named according to the material which forms its basis (such as wood or straw), so also consciousness is named according to one of the six faculties which forms its basis.<sup>64</sup> The experience of consciousness does not point to the existence of a self but merely to its conditions that are its bases and without which it does not exist.

Thus, these five aggregates describe the constantly changing forces which give the illusion of an enduring self. Griffiths summarizes the teaching of the Five Aggregates.

The streams of events included within these five aggregates are all that there is: any personal proper name refers to these and to these alone. There is nothing that underlies them or possesses them, no agent or thinker other than actions or thoughts, and certainly no enduring substance of which these aggregates are accidental and changing attributes. The analysis of the person into five streams of events is, in Buddhist eyes, an exhaustive analysis.<sup>65</sup>

One can see how the teaching of the Five Aggregates supports the doctrine of the no-self (*anatta*).<sup>66</sup> This doctrine helps us to understand more deeply the term *dukkha* and its third aspect. According to Theravada Buddhism "there is no permanent, unchanging spirit which can be considered 'Self,' 'Soul,' or 'Ego,' as opposed to matter, and that consciousness (*vimana*) should not be taken as 'spirit' in opposition to matter."<sup>67</sup> The Five Aggregates explain away phenomena to which ordinary people point in a futile attempt to establish the reality of the self. This teaching shows that the assumption of the self is an illusion; it "is only a convenient name or a label given to the combination of these five groups. They are all impermanent, all constantly changing."<sup>68</sup> Like a river that is constantly flowing without a moment or instant when it stops, like a flame that appears to be still but never remains the same, so are the world and the Five Aggregates constantly changing and impermanent even though they may give the illusion of permanence and identity. There is no permanent self under these fluctuating aggregates. As opposed to the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*, there is no thinker behind the thinking, or a sufferer behind the suffering.<sup>69</sup>

We can see why the Buddha makes a definitional link between *dukkha* and the five aggregates.<sup>70</sup> The third form of *dukkha* precisely is this illusion of the self out of which follow all other forms of suffering. It is when one falsely believes the Five Aggregates to be an enduring self that one continues to suffer. The Five Aggregates themselves are *dukkha*! As will be evident later, it is only by recognizing the Five Aggregates as they are-- five impersonal and distinct forces that only give an appearance of a self-- that one can commence the way out of *dukkha*. This doctrine of the no-soul that is known through the analytical method of the teaching of the Five Aggregates can also be known through the synthetic method of the doctrine of Conditioned Genesis.

#### Conditioned Genesis

The doctrine of conditioned genesis (also known as dependent origination) is what Rahula calls the Buddhist theory of relativity.<sup>71</sup> It teaches that nothing in this world is absolute; everything is related to something else in its existence and extinction. This principle of interdependence is explained in a twelve step formula. Let me quote Rahula's presentation (without the Pali originals):

1. Through ignorance are conditioned volitional actions or karma-formations.
2. Through volitional actions is conditioned consciousness.
3. Through consciousness are conditioned mental and physical phenomena.

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<sup>64</sup>Rahula, 24.

<sup>65</sup>Griffiths, 92.

<sup>66</sup>Rahula, 25-28. The doctrine of the no-soul will be discussed in more detail later.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 20, 25.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 53.

4. Through mental and physical phenomena are conditioned the six faculties (i.e., five physical sense-organs and mind).
5. Through the six faculties is conditioned (sensorial and mental) contact.
6. Through (sensorial and mental) contact is conditioned sensation.
7. Through sensation is conditioned desire, 'thirst'.
8. Through desire ('thirst') is conditioned clinging.
9. Through clinging is conditioned the process of becoming.
10. Through the process of becoming is conditioned birth.
11. Through birth are conditioned (12) decay, death, lamentation, pain, etc.<sup>72</sup>

It is through this twelve link circle of conditioned genesis that life continues to become, in *dukkha*, in an endless cycle. This cycle must be thought of as a circle, not as a linear chain with a beginning and an end. Each step is conditioned by as well as conditions the other steps. It is an endless cycle, not a linear process with a beginning or an end. This process must be reversed if we want to stop this endless cycle. The twelve step order remains the same; what is reversed is the order within each step. So, if the Buddhist starts at the first step and ceases to be ignorant in order to cease volitional activities and karma-formations, one should continue on down the twelve steps until, finally, death and pain cease when birth is ceased. The doctrine of conditioned genesis through these twelve steps shows that that which is commonly called the self, soul, ego, or "I" is only an illusion. The apparent self is shown to be a synthetic network of interdependent phenomena which should be recognized as the illusion that it is.

Rahula declares that even if one may freely proclaim one's belief in a self and accuse the Buddha of being mistaken in his teaching, one should never try, as some recent scholars have done, "to smuggle the idea of self into the teaching of the Buddha, quite contrary to the spirit of Buddhism."<sup>73</sup> Rahula cites numerous Buddhist texts to demonstrate that the Buddha makes it quite clear that there categorically and absolutely is no self or permanent soul in existence.<sup>74</sup> Rahula ends with the following comment about the doctrine of no-soul. He states,

According to the Buddha's teaching, it is as wrong to hold the opinion 'I have no self' (which is the annihilationist theory) as to hold the opinion 'I have self' (which is the eternalist theory), because both are fetters, both arising out of the false idea 'I AM'. The correct position with regard to the question of *Anatta* is not to take hold of any opinions or views, but to try to see things objectively as they are without mental projections, to see that what we call 'I', or 'being', is only a combination of physical and mental aggregates, which are working together interdependently in a flux of momentary change within the law of cause and effect, and that there is nothing permanent, everlasting, unchanging and eternal in the whole of existence."<sup>75</sup>

It is better to go beyond such issues and to see things as they really are, to see that that which is called the self is really a combination of the Five Aggregates that are in a constant flux of change. Rahula does not explain further as to how seeing things as they really are is contrary to holding the opinion that there is no self; perhaps, it is a refusal to use metaphysical category at all, in speaking at the level of ultimate truth.<sup>76</sup>

By showing the relativity and interdependence of everything, including apparent individuals and the distinction between good and evil, the doctrine of conditioned genesis also shows the fallacy of the idea of libertarian free will in Western thought. Combined with the teaching of the Five Aggregates which expose the fallacy of the soul or any enduring self, Theravada Buddhism rejects the idea of a free will. It is not that Rahula admits fatalism in his religious system; but, he rejects the idea of a will that is free from all conditions and causes. Our choices are absolutely conditioned according to the doctrine of conditioned genesis; Rahula declares, "Not only is so-called free will not free, but even the very idea of Free Will is not free from conditions."<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 53-54.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 55-65.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>76</sup>Remember the teaching of the Noble Eightfold Path; the first category, Right Understanding, is seeing reality as it actually is, stripped of illusory metaphysical labels. Calvinists would not use the word "luck" when speaking at a theological level because God is believed to be completely sovereign over the universe so that there would be no room for chance, so to speak.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid., 55.

The First Noble Truth of *dukkha* must be clearly understood before we can see its cause, cessation and the way leading to its cessation. Without being pessimistic or optimistic Theravada Buddhism "is realistic, for it takes a realistic view of life and of the world."<sup>78</sup> Griffiths observes, "The Buddhist rejection of the Self ... is thus intended primarily as a corrective to the occurrence of passion based upon a false view of the nature of the human person."<sup>79</sup> It shows objectively the world as it is, and shows the way to perfect happiness. As Rahula explains,

One physician may gravely exaggerate an illness and give up hope altogether. Another may ignorantly declare that there is no illness and that no treatment is necessary, thus deceiving the patient with a false consolation. You may call the first one pessimistic and the second optimistic. Both are equally dangerous. But a third physician diagnoses the symptoms correctly, understands the cause and the nature of the illness, sees clearly that it can be cured, and courageously administers a course of treatment, thus saving his patient. The Buddha is like the last physician. He is the wise and scientific doctor for the ills of the world.<sup>80</sup>

### The Second Noble Truth

The Noble Truth of the Arising of Suffering teaches about the cause of *dukkha*. Suffering arises from *tanha* (a thirst, desire, greed, or craving) that manifests itself in various ways.<sup>81</sup> In speaking of the cause of suffering, one is referring not to an ultimate but to an immediate cause. According to the teaching of conditioned genesis, there is no beginning of time where there was no suffering or thirst, the cause of suffering. All things are seen to be relative and inter-dependent to one another; therefore, thirst is the most tangible but only one of the many interrelated causes in an endless cycle of causes. There are three types of thirst: 1) for sense-pleasures, 2) for existence, 3) and for non-existence. These three all produce rebirth and keep one in the endless cycle of suffering (*samsara*). Although other factors can be cited as causing suffering, thirst is always given first place. This 'thirst' has as its center the false idea of self arising out of ignorance. Everything, from personal quarrels to epic wars, arises out of this selfish thirst. It is easy enough to understand that our selfish desires and thirst produce a great quantity of suffering; but, it is not so obvious how one's thirst produces rebirth and keeps one in the endless cycle of suffering. In order to discuss this teaching more deeply we must turn to a discussion of *karma*.

### Karma

Rahula begins to describe the basis of the theory of *karma* as follows: "There are four Nutriments (*ahara*) in the sense of 'cause' or 'condition' necessary for the existence and continuity of beings: (1) ordinary material food (*kabalinkarahara*), (2) contact of our sense-organs (including mind) with the external world (*phassahara*), (3) consciousness (*vinnanahara*) and (4) mental volition or will (*manosancetanahara*)."<sup>82</sup> The fourth Nutriment, mental volition or will, refers to the will to exist. It is the thirst that is categorized in three types, and it is the same as volition which defines *karma* as mentioned above. "Thirst", "volition", "mental volition" and "karma" all refer to the desire to exist (or not to exist), the will to be more and more. *Karma* is that which causes and keeps one in the endless cycle of suffering. This desire to exist that causes suffering is analyzed as the Aggregate of Mental Formations which is one of the five forces that are mistakenly believed to be the self and result in suffering; thus, we see that the immediate cause of suffering is found within suffering itself.

We must therefore clearly and carefully mark and remember that the cause, the germ, of the arising of *dukkha* is within *dukkha* itself, and not outside; and we must equally well remember that the cause, the germ, of the cessation of *dukkha*, of the destruction of *dukkha*, is also within *dukkha* itself, and not outside."<sup>83</sup>

So, suffering has within itself the cause and cure of suffering.<sup>84</sup> Even though the word *karma* has a root form with a general meaning of action, as a technical Buddhist term it means only volitional action. And, contrary to

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>79</sup>Griffiths, 93.

<sup>80</sup>Rahula, 17.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 30.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>84</sup>We should remember that suffering (*dukkha*) is defined by the Five Aggregates.

popular usage it must not be used to denote the result of karma.<sup>85</sup> Its result should be described specifically as a result or fruit of karma, and *karma* as a word should be used to describe only the volitional act itself, not its result.

As a volitional act, karma can be good or bad depending on whether the volition was good or bad; accordingly, its effects can be good or bad depending on whether the karma was good or bad. But whether good or bad, karma keeps one bound within the endless cycle of suffering, albeit in a correspondingly good or bad (pleasant or unpleasant) direction. Good and bad are relative terms that are both within this cycle and out of which one cannot escape as long as one is in the illusion that one has an existing self outside the Five Aggregates. Only if one is free from the false idea of an enduring self can one act and not accumulate karma; only then can one eventually escape from the cycle of rebirth.<sup>86</sup>

Rahula makes a distinction between the theory of karma and the theme of moral justice or reward and punishment. The latter is based on a worldview of a God who judges what is right and wrong.<sup>87</sup> The theory of karma is not a spiritual or theological principle. It is a natural law about cause and effect: good volition produces good effects and bad volition produces bad effects. There is no supreme justice that personally enforces this law; rather, by virtue of its own natural law, its force is executed. It is easy to understand this distinction, but in order to see how this effect is carried over death into the next life let us examine the Buddhist understanding of death.

#### Death

Death simply "is the total non-functioning of the physical body."<sup>88</sup> The five physical senses would cease to function with the death of the physical body, but the mental faculty of volition, the will to exist, is a tremendous force that continues through death, producing rebirth. One may wonder what exactly, if there is no self, continues through death and is reborn. Understanding the Buddhist perspective on this life can help us understand better how people can be said to continue their existence after death.

That which we conveniently label as the self is a combination of the Five Aggregates, as we have seen above. These five forces are constantly changing without a moment to spare; it can be said that they constantly die and are born. Each moment what we call the self dies and is reborn. If we can see how even in this life we die and are born without ever having some abstract self that passes on as a constant existence, then we should be able to understand that the five forces can continue on after the non-functioning of the physical body without having a substantial, enduring self that is permanent. It is not correct to say that mental volition, the Fourth Aggregate, is the self because all five forces combined together receive the pedestrian label "self" in Theravada Buddhism. With such a perspective on this life, it can seem reasonable to think that people continue their existence after death without having a permanent self or soul.

The five forces or energies do not die with the physical body but take on another life. It is not that some permanent soul substance passes from one moment of life to the next. There is no transmigration here. It is an existence that changes every moment, is born and dies, and yet can be labeled as the same existence. For example, a flame that burns for a period of time by convention can be said to be the same flame all throughout the period; yet, in no two moments is it comprised of the same individual components (e.g., electrons). It is neither the same flame nor is it another.<sup>89</sup> Consider a baby that grows to adulthood. The adult is not the same as the baby was years ago; but neither is the adult a different person. Likewise, a person who dies and is reborn is neither the same nor another person. The person is part of an endless cycle of births, deaths, and rebirths. There is only a thought-moment between life and death that bridges the two lives. No radical break in Theravada Buddhism is made between death and the next life in this endless cycle (*samsara*) which had no beginning. This cycle of births and deaths continue as long as there is this thirst and volition to exist, to become. Only when one sees the reality, truth, or *nirvana*, is this thirst to exist cut off and the cycle stopped.

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<sup>85</sup>As people sometimes say, seriously or not, to explain one's misfortune, "He must have a bad karma." It should be said, rather, "He must have *had* bad karma to experience such misfortune in the present."

<sup>86</sup>One finds a basis of ethics in that good karma still has the value of causing one to be reborn as a better person, closer to being an arahant; thus, presumably, the likelihood of realizing nirvana is increased.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 34.

### The Third Noble Truth

The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering teaches that there is liberation and freedom from the endless cycle of suffering, from *dukkha*, which is *nirvana*.<sup>90</sup> This cessation is made possible when one completely rids oneself of volition or thirst to exist and to re-exist. The way to rid oneself of this volition is prescribed by the Fourth Noble Truth. The Third Noble Truth focuses more on the teaching of *nirvana*.

#### Nirvana

What is *nirvana*? Rahula asserts that although many pages have contributed to the confusion regarding this term, "The only reasonable reply to give to the question is that it can never be answered completely and satisfactorily in words, because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality which is *nirvana*."<sup>91</sup> Collins agrees, "So much energy has been expended on trying to give a coherent rational elucidation of the concept of [*nirvana*], to so little point: as far as the individual practitioner of Buddhism is concerned, this [*nirvana*] is completely beyond rational elucidation, and must simply be taken on trust."<sup>92</sup> Such an ultimate reality does not fit neatly into the categories of mundane human experience, and it cannot be adequately defined by words. Rahula gives an illustration of a fish struggling to understand the tortoise telling how it returned to water after traveling on solid land. The fish has categories only of swimming in a liquid environment; concepts like dry land and walking are absolutely foreign to the vocabulary of the fish. The point being made here is that *nirvana* is so wonderful and superhuman of an experience that words normally used to describe commonly known experiences cannot represent it adequately.

Since words cannot positively capture the concept of *nirvana*, Rahula offers a negative description of it, in terms of what it is not. *Nirvana* is: extinction of thirst (*tanhakkhaya*), uncompound or unconditioned (*asamkhata*), absence of desire (*viraga*), cessation (*nirodha*), blowing out or extinction (*nibbana*)<sup>93</sup>. It is the extinction of all desire, positive and negative; it is detachment and denying completely the very thirst for existence and snapping out of the illusion of the self, of *dukkha*. *Nirvana* is the cessation of *dukkha*. No sense-objects are to be found. There are no births, changes, or conditioning. It is in this *nirvana* that one finds escape from this illusory world.

Rahula observes that such negative descriptions of *nirvana* has led to a popular misimpression of its being negative. He denies the negative misunderstanding that *nirvana* is an expression of self-annihilation. There is no self that can be annihilated. If anything, it is only the false idea of the self, the illusion, that is annihilated. Although *nirvana* is described in negative terms, it is neither negative nor positive. Both are terms that are relative to each other and find meaning in relation to each other. It affirms neither existence nor annihilation. *Nirvana* is the ultimate reality which is beyond the relative realm of duality, and it is described negatively only because of the inadequacy of human language. But, how can *nirvana* be understood as ultimate reality?

Rahula summarizes the teaching of the Buddha, "A man is composed of six elements: solidity, fluidity, heat, motion, space and consciousness."<sup>94</sup> None of these six elements is the self. Various consciousness and sensations appear and disappear. When the man understands these truths, his mind can become detached and discover a pure equanimity; then he can direct his mind to attain any spiritual state. He can focus on "the Sphere of Infinite Consciousness . . . on the Sphere of Nothingness . . . or on the Sphere of Neither-perception nor Non-perception and develop a mind conforming thereto."<sup>95</sup> Then he does not cling to anything in this world because he no longer wills existence or non-existence; therefore, he is no longer anxious but is completely calmed (extinguished in desire) and can declare, "Finished is birth, lived is pure life, what should be done is done, nothing more is left to be done."<sup>96</sup> Any sensation, pleasant or unpleasant, is felt but fully recognized to be impermanent; so, it does not bind him and is not experienced with passion or desire. Such a man who recognizes the extinction of *dukkha* is endowed with absolute wisdom, the ultimate reality which is *nirvana*, reality as opposed to unreality. The ultimate reality of the non-existence of a self is *nirvana*. The

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid.

<sup>92</sup>Collins, 84.

<sup>93</sup>Sanskrit, *nirvana*.

<sup>94</sup>Rahula, 38.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 38-39 (ellipses his).

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 39.

ultimate reality is that nothing in the world is absolute; everything is relative and impermanent. *Nirvana* as the extinction of desire and volition is to recognize this ultimate reality of the complete relativity of everything.

As ultimate reality, *nirvana* is its own end. There is nothing after *nirvana*, nor should there be. *Nirvana* does not serve some purpose, it is its own purpose; otherwise, it would not be ultimate! *Nirvana* is not some esoteric existence or state into which one enters. Popular images of the Buddha's "entering" *nirvana* are incorrect. Neither the Buddha nor anyone else enters some place after death. The whole point of *nirvana* is the realization that there is no existence of the self. With this realization follows the phenomenal extinction of everything, i.e., the five aggregates, which is *dukkha*.<sup>97</sup> So, to speak of *nirvana* as some heavenly place to which one enters (if one was good) is meaningless in a Buddhist context. Still, annihilation is not affirmed. If one wonders what happened to the Buddha or anyone after death who realized *nirvana*, the answer is that we do not know. Because concepts like birth and death are associated with *dukkha*, we cannot with our limited experience and language begin to contemplate what happens in *nirvana* when those very categories of existence are extinguished. So, we cannot even assert that the Buddha died or is reborn; it is most accurate simply to state that he has realized *nirvana*. An Arahant, someone who realized *nirvana*, may be compared to an extinguished flame; we must be careful to note that that which is extinguished is the "being" of the arahant, not *nirvana*.

Admittedly, it is difficult to understand basic Buddhist concepts like *nirvana*. Understanding it is even more difficult when one puts it together with the other basic concepts. An obvious question one may have is, "If there is no Self, no *Atman*, who realizes *nirvana*?"<sup>98</sup> There is no external entity that brings about the realization of *nirvana*. Just as there is no external thinker that thinks or sufferer that suffers, but it is the thought that thinks and the suffering that suffers, so also, the realization of *nirvana* is brought about from within the five aggregates out of which *nirvana* is realized. It is the realization itself that realizes!

As we discussed earlier in the arising of *dukkha*, its cause as well as its cessation is within *dukkha* itself, not outside. It is within the five aggregates, within ourselves, that the cessation of *dukkha*, *nirvana*, lies. No abstract soul or external being can bring about *nirvana* for us because it is within ourselves, the five aggregates, that is our make up, that the realization of *nirvana* lies. Through wisdom we must come to see the reality of the world.

One final point on *nirvana* before moving on: *Nirvana* is not only beyond duality and relativity, it is also beyond cause and effect. So one should be careful not to perceive it as an effect of some cause. If it were an effect, it would be produced and conditioned which precisely it is not. It is not an effect of deep meditation of the ultimate reality. Reality is not an effect; it simply is. *Nirvana* simply is. For instance, the mountain is not an effect of a path leading up to it. The path does lead up to it, but the mountain simply exists on its own right. Likewise, *nirvana* is not an effect but simply is, just as reality simply is. The Fourth Noble Truth teaches the path that leads to the realization of *nirvana*.

#### The Fourth Noble Truth

The Noble Truth of the Path teaches the way leading to the cessation of *dukkha*. Also known as the Middle Path, the Noble Eightfold Path describes eight categories that were the subject of most of Buddha's 45 years of teaching.<sup>99</sup> They are: 1) Right Understanding, 2) Right Thought, 3) Right Speech, 4) Right Action, 5) Right Livelihood, 6) Right Effort, 7) Right Mindfulness, and 8) Right Concentration.<sup>100</sup> These eight categories are not designed to be mastered one after another; rather, they are to be practiced more or less simultaneously because they are all linked together and the development of one category helps other categories to be developed.

#### The Noble Eightfold Path

These eight categories can be grouped into three broader categories; they are designed to perfect the three fundamentals of Buddhist training and discipline. They are Ethical Conduct, Mental Discipline, and Wisdom.

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<sup>97</sup>Strictly speaking, there never was anything to be extinguished; rather, the phrase "extinction of everything" describes the experiential perspective of the one realizing *nirvana*.

<sup>98</sup>Rahula, 42.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 45.

<sup>100</sup>"Right" should be taken to mean "correct" with reference to ultimate reality, rather than "morally good" with reference to some personal standard of a god.

Under the category of Ethical Conduct are Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood, three of the eight categories of the Middle Path. The Ethical Conduct "is built on the vast conception of universal love and compassion for all living beings, on which the Buddha's teaching is based."<sup>101</sup> Basically, it is intended to promote happiness and harmony for both the individual and society. Through the three of the eight categories of the Middle Path, it prescribes in more detail specific ways to be ethically good. This ethical propriety is considered to be a vital prerequisite for higher spiritual attainments.

Under the category of Mental Discipline are three more categories from the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. For mental discipline one needs to make an effort to prevent and get rid of evil or unwholesome states of mind while producing and developing good or wholesome states of mind. One also needs to be mindful and aware with regard to all the activities of the person, physical and mental. Anyone who has seen the Buddhism section in a bookstore knows that a great deal of literature has been written on various techniques of meditation. The activities of the body, sensations, activities of the mind, and various ideas or thoughts of the mind are all objects of mindfulness. Rahula himself devotes an entire chapter of his book to the subject of meditation.

Besides Right Effort and Right Mindfulness, one needs to be able to concentrate well for strong mental development. Through proper concentration one can go up the four stages of trance (*Dhyana*). One first replaces negative emotions with positive ones of happiness and joy, then intellectual activities are suppressed with tranquillity and singularity of mind, and thirdly even the positive emotion of joy, "which is an active sensation, also disappears, while the disposition of happiness still remains in addition to mindful equanimity."<sup>102</sup> Fourthly, only pure equanimity and awareness remain and even the disposition of happiness (or unhappiness) disappears. In these three categories of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration, then, one develops the mental category to realize *nirvana*.

Under the category of Wisdom are the two remaining categories of the Middle Path: Right Thought and Right Understanding. Right Thought refers to selfless thoughts of detachment as well as of love and non-violence extended to all beings. Right Understanding is knowing the world as it really is, in accordance with the Four Noble Truths. But one must be clear as to which type of knowledge one needs in order to know truly the Four Noble Truths. It is not mere intellectual grasping of a subject with certain facts. It is a deep understanding that may be "called 'penetration' (*pativedha*), seeing a thing in its true nature, without name and label."<sup>103</sup> This sort of knowledge is possible only when the mind is purged of all impurities and developed completely through proper meditation. The Noble Eightfold Path is one to be practiced and developed by each person. Instead of faith, prayer or worship, Theravada Buddhism through the Four Noble Truths seeks to bring about the true understanding of ultimate reality for the believer, to see the world as it really is, without illusions, that is, to realize *nirvana*.

According to Rahula, the problem of suffering for Theravada Buddhism is a subjective conflict with the phenomenal experience of suffering through the illusion of *dukkha*. It is not so much a need for a theoretical reconciliation of the experience of suffering and evil with the alleged existence of some personal deity whose nature promises only pleasant experiences. In response to this problem, Rahula offers the basic Theravada Buddhist solution in accord with the Noble Truth of the Path which teaches the Noble Eightfold Path through which one can face and overcome the phenomenal experience of suffering.

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., 49.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

CHAPTER 4  
THE LOGICAL PROBLEM OF MORAL EVIL AND FEINBERG'S DEFENSE  
IN CALVINISTIC CHRISTIANITY

In *The Many Faces of Evil*, John Feinberg answers the challenge posed by J. L. Mackie that the logical problem of evil is unresolvable in all forms of theism that understand God to be omnibenevolent and omnipotent. Mackie was referring to the logical problem as articulated by David Hume, "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?"<sup>104</sup> As Feinberg explains,

Some years ago J. L. Mackie wrote about this problem in his article "Evil and Omnipotence." He claimed that though the traditional arguments for God's existence do not work, theists can accept the criticisms against those arguments and still maintain that God's existence can be known in some nonrational way. However, Mackie argued that there is a far more devastating objection to theism. All forms of theism, he argued, that hold that God is omnipotent and benevolent succumb before the Epicurean trilemma stated in the portion cited from Hume.<sup>105</sup>

He focuses on the problem raised in the context of his own Calvinistic theology and offers a defense for it. An examination of the logical problem of evil as it arises in Feinberg's system can greatly increase one's understanding of the basic Calvinistic doctrines. In this chapter, we will examine Feinberg's treatment of the logical problem of moral evil in his form of Calvinistic Christian theology.

As relevant background, let me put forth Feinberg's theology, describing its concept of God. The presentation of his theology will be limited to those aspects that are directly pertinent to the discussion of the logical problem of moral evil. Relevant doctrines like omnipotence and omnibenevolence will not be spelled out at this point; but they will be defined in more detail later in the context of Feinberg's specific defense. After his relevant theology is presented, the problem of evil that will be addressed in this chapter will be formulated and his resolution summarized.

Feinberg's Theological Position

Feinberg positions himself theologically between the extremes of theonomy and Leibnizian Rationalism. Theonomy holds that the "only necessity and the only law in this universe is God's will."<sup>106</sup> There are no laws that are rationally necessary or inherent in the structure of this world. It puts God's will absolutely over logic; if God chose to do so, he could alter even the rules of logic. The universe in all its aspects is ruled simply by God's will. Ethical norms are those that God chooses and then reveals by His Word. According to this system, God may even reveal to us that He is beyond good and evil.<sup>107</sup> Problems of evil can undermine this system if God revealed that He Himself is subject to His moral laws and then acted contrary to one of them, or if He revealed things which contradict other things He revealed.

Leibnizian Rationalism, on the other hand, puts logic over God's will. Order and logic inherent in things necessitate the way they are to such an extent that even God has to submit to them.

In a Leibnizian universe God exists by logical necessity, for His nature is such that it is impossible for Him not to exist. The primary activity of this God is to pick the best world out of an infinite number of contingent possible worlds. In addition, Leibniz's God always operates according to the principle of sufficient reason in whatever He does.<sup>108</sup>

The nature of God and His actions are all necessitated by the principle of sufficient reason which requires a reason for one thing and not another to be the case. In theonomy, because God's will is prior to logic, He made a logically free decision as to what sort of world He was going to create, and what acts He will perform thereafter. But according to Leibniz, logic is prior even to God; therefore, by the principle of sufficient reason, God must do what is rationally calculated to be the best. By "best," or "good" and "evil," Leibniz is writing in metaphysical terms, not moral ones. As Feinberg explains, "A metaphysically best world, then, is a world that

<sup>104</sup>John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 13, citing David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part X of *The Empiricists* (Garden City: Anchor Books/Doubleday, 1974), 490.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 23. This discussion on Feinberg's theological position is summarized from his chapters 2-3, and part of chapter 4, pages 23-55.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., 35.

incorporates the greatest number and variety of existing things compossible."<sup>109</sup> Because logic dictates God's actions, we do not need God's revelation to learn about Him or His world; we can discover such truths by reason alone.

We can see from the above discussion, then, that by the principle of sufficient reason God must have had a rationally satisfying reason for creating this and not another world. Leibniz asserts that the sufficient reason for creating this world is that this one is the best of all possible worlds. If God did not create the best of all possible worlds, then He is guilty of committing moral evil, because God should have and could have chosen a better world, but did not. The problem of evil for Leibniz can be resolved by showing that it is not the case that God created a world less than the best possible one.

Taking a mediating position between the two metaphysical systems outlined above, Modified Rationalism states that there is a reason for God to choose certain actions. In contrast to the theonomist idea that God's will is absolutely prior to any reason or logic, it holds that God does not act arbitrarily or without reason; thus, for example, God's choice of creation is not arbitrary or without reason. And, unlike the idea of the best possible world that God was morally obligated to create in Leibnizian Rationalism, "it holds that there is no *best* possible world."<sup>110</sup> In fact, because God Himself is perfectly self-sufficient, He was not logically or morally obligated to create at all. Since He did choose to create, obviously, it is sufficient to show that God created one of the many good possible worlds. "Good" and "evil" in this discussion of Modified Rationalist worlds are defined in moral terms, not metaphysical ones. A problem of evil arises as to whether this world is one of the good possible worlds. In response, the Modified Rationalist must demonstrate that "the evil in our world is not incompatible with the view that our world is one of those good possible worlds God could have chosen."<sup>111</sup> All that is necessary for Modified Rationalism is to show that the world God created is *a* good possible world.

John Feinberg identifies his theological position with Modified Rationalism. Furthermore, he holds a nonconsequentialist account of ethics. One's position on ethics plays a central role in one's approach to the problem and the resolution of the problems of evil; it sets the standards by which one can determine what is evil, and how a moral agent (i.e., God) can be judged to be good or evil. Thus, a consequentialist account of ethics judges an act to be right or wrong based on its results (consequences). Consequentialists will be satisfied when they demonstrate that the evil in this world may result in some later good, regardless of whether or not the world as created is inherently good; they would attempt to justify God for the evil means by pointing to the good end.

On the contrary, a nonconsequentialist account of ethics judges an act to be right or wrong based on something other than the result of the act; so, something else in this world besides good consequences of evil satisfies the Modified Rationalist claim that God created a world that is a good possible world. So, nonconsequentialists cannot be satisfied merely by seeing that the evil in our world will result in some future good; they must seek another solution to problems of evil.

Feinberg holds that "what makes an act good or evil is not its consequences, but God's prescription about it."<sup>112</sup> He labels his ethical theory an example of a Modified Divine Command theory that fits what Frankena describes as metaphysical moralism, because ethical judgments are actually statements based on metaphysical or theological facts.<sup>113</sup> Yet, he cautions against identifying his position with theonomy by adding that while an act is right because God prescribes it, His prescriptions in turn are not arbitrary but reflect His character or nature. Epistemologically, both theonomy and Feinberg state that that which is right and wrong is conveyed through God's revelation, although Feinberg would add that we can figure out what ethical norms are by reason with some revelation. Metaphysically, Feinberg believes that God's moral laws have their basis in the nature of God; so, for example, God commands us not to lie because truth is part of His nature. But, theonomists may believe that moral decrees are simply declared by God without reference to His moral character or anything else, although there are some who would make reference to God's character. Feinberg certainly believes in divine revelation but not to the exclusion of reason as theonomists do. One might expect Feinberg to establish a free will defense as a Modified Rationalist who holds a nonconsequentialist account of ethics; but, his

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 41.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 54.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 125.

deterministic understanding of free will (compatibilism) that fits his Calvinistic theology prevents him from relying on such a defense.

#### Select Ideas of Feinberg's Calvinist Theology

The aspects of Calvinist Theology which factor into Feinberg's approach to the logical problem of moral evil are his understanding of divine sovereignty and human freedom. These are two doctrines that are notorious for being difficult to understand in relation to each other. God endowed humans with free will so that we are capable of making moral decisions and have responsibility for those decisions; yet, God's omnipotence also implies His sovereignty over those very choices. The importance of such an understanding of the two doctrines surfaces in Feinberg's notion of free will.

John Feinberg affirms both divine sovereignty where God causally determines our choices, and at the same time, human responsibility for exercising our free will. Compatibilism describes the relationship of human freedom and divine sovereignty where the genuine freedom of human choices is asserted to be compatible with nonconstraining causal determinations decreed by God in His sovereignty. This soft deterministic notion of free will sees no contradiction in holding that one's choices can be causally determined and yet still be free. Not all Calvinists embrace compatibilism. As Feinberg notes, "Unfortunately, some Calvinists, because of their understanding of God's sovereignty, have denied that humans are free."<sup>114</sup> Against such hard determinism, however, they continue to affirm moral responsibility for humans in order to conform to the teachings of Bible. The concept of paradox is used to shield this puzzling belief against further rational inquiry. One of the key distinguishing elements of Calvinism as represented by Feinberg is that divine sovereignty is compatible with genuine human freedom.

Feinberg labels his position as "a moderately Calvinistic model for synthesizing the concepts of divine control and human freedom."<sup>115</sup> He utilizes a deterministic notion of human freedom to show how it can be compatible with divine control. To clarify these issues, Feinberg defines several terms. Indeterminism is the view that a person's act is free if it is not causally determined. So, given the same exact set of conditions, the person could have decided to commit a different act.<sup>116</sup> Specifically, it does not maintain that there are no causal conditions whatever on a person's decision; that would be unrealistic to argue. Rather, it says that a person's act is free if there is no cause or set of causes that is *sufficient* to determine the person's decision to do a certain act. Moreover, just because there is no cause that determines the will, it does not mean that the indeterministic free choice is arbitrary or a result of random chance. Furthermore, while indeterminism denies that there is anything that causes the *person* to do his free acts, still it is the person who is the cause of his own actions.<sup>117</sup>

Determinism, on the other hand, "states that for everything that ever happens there are conditions such that, given them, nothing else could happen."<sup>118</sup> Every decision one makes, even free decisions, is *sufficiently* influenced by causal conditions to guarantee that the person chooses the act one chooses. After explaining these broad definitions of determinism and indeterminism, Feinberg specifies the sort of determinism which he endorses.

First, his form of determinism is not to be confused with determinism in the natural sciences. His form functions in the realm of human sciences. The sort of determinism in the realm of natural sciences holds that given the relevant information on the nature of things, calculated with the physical laws, one can predict the future of those things. The realm of human behavior, on the other hand, is more complex, and it is not dubious that general laws governing human behavior could be formulated. Feinberg cautions against a prejudice against his form of determinism in the human sciences because of our objection to determinism in the natural sciences.

<sup>114</sup>John Feinberg, "God Ordains All Things" (in Predestination and Free Will, eds., D. Basinger and R. Basinger, 19-43. Downers Grove: IVP, 1986), 24.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 20. For this definition Feinberg cites Laurence A. BonJour, "Determinism, Libertarianism, and Agent Causation," (in Southern Journal of Philosophy, 14, 1976), 147.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 20-1. For these corrections of misconceptions about indeterminism Feinberg cites Thomas B. Talbott, "Indeterminism and Chance Occurrences"(in Personalist, 60, 1979), 254.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 21, citing Richard Taylor, "Determinism," The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 2:359.

Second, his form of determinism is not fatalism. A form of determinism would be fatalism "if it claims that there is an inherent necessity in the way things are so that they could not be any other way."<sup>119</sup> For example, a person wearing glasses from this perspective would be seen as someone whose very created nature is such that that person has to wear glasses, and the very idea of one's not wearing glasses would be unacceptable; there would be no possible world in which he did not wear glasses. Such a perspective can also apply to God so that His creation of this world would be necessary with no other option that He could have entertained. That is a fatalistic view that Feinberg denies.

Third, his form of determinism is not hard determinism which rules out freedom altogether. A moral agent cannot be held responsible for one's action if freedom is not recognized to be an element of it. Some assume that all forms of determinism submit our actions to God's constraining causes that leave us no choice but to act according to God's decree. Alvin Plantinga seems to assume this hard determinism when he waves off the notion of compatibilism with respect to human freedom and divine sovereignty, "One might as well claim that being in jail doesn't really limit one's freedom on the grounds that if one were *not* in jail, he'd be free to come and go as he pleased."<sup>120</sup> Feinberg rejects this form of hard determinism which employs constraining forces to describe a moral agent's being determined to perform a certain action.

Finally, he relates his form of determinism with human freedom by defining a sort of free action which is causally determined. He asserts that those indeterminists (and some determinists) who argue that casual determinism by definition rules out free human action are guilty of begging the question because they assume that only their definition of freedom is admissible. And he does not identify with those Calvinists who deny human free will on the basis of the doctrine of divine sovereignty; they still uphold moral responsibility simply because the Bible says so, and conclude that this whole issue is a paradox that one must accept as true. Feinberg defines his notion of deterministic freedom by distinguishing two kinds of causes. There are constraining causes that force the person to act against one's wishes. But, there are also nonconstraining causes that are sufficient to bring the person to make a certain choice without forcing that person to act contrary to one's wish or desire. So, an action is not free if it is caused by constraining factors, but is free if caused by nonconstraining factors that were *sufficient* to bring the person to act as he did.

Feinberg illustrates this sort of freedom with a scenario of his causing a student to leave the classroom. Although he could apply a constraining cause to have the student moved out of the room, such as physically lifting him up and away, or by pointing a gun to his head, he could, instead, persuade the student using reason (not threats) to leave the room. For example, if Feinberg explained to the student that there was a man outside the room handing out money to needy students, his reasoning would likely persuade the student to leave without constraining the student to do so. Although the student freely chose to leave, Feinberg's reasoning was sufficient in causing the student's choice. As for God, He wills all things, and knows which causes are sufficient to bring us to do what He wills without constraining us, even if He may not limit His persuasive efforts to reason.<sup>121</sup> He can guarantee such results, because He decrees not only certain future goals but also the means to such goals. Such an infinite scope of divine sovereignty does not preclude human freedom in the sense defined above by John Feinberg.

This compatibilistic or deterministic notion of free will is important to keep in mind, because the traditional free will defense employs an incompatibilistic notion of free will; therefore, a theologian like Feinberg who holds a compatibilistic notion of free will cannot appeal to the free will defense. While the notion of free will can be debated extensively, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss it in any more depth. Suffice it to say simply that Feinberg's theology incorporates the compatibilistic notion of free will outlined above.<sup>122</sup>

### The Logical Problem of Moral Evil and Its Resolution for

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<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>120</sup> Alvin C. Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 32. For Plantinga's further discussion on this subject see Plantinga, *God and Other Minds*, pp. 132-135.

<sup>121</sup> Of course not all events are a result of our choice. The act of creation was not a matter of our choice, and Jonah's trip to Nineveh was not entirely by choice either. But the point here is that there are regular instances of free human actions that are causally determined by God or other things with sufficient but nonconstraining factors.

<sup>122</sup> The interested reader may browse through *Predestination and Free Will*, where John Feinberg, Norman Geisler, Bruce Reichenbach and Clark Pinnock present their views in individual chapters each of which is followed by a critique from the other three writers.

Feinberg's Calvinist Theology

Feinberg's defense will show that despite the obvious moral evil in our world, by showing that God cannot remove it without logical contradiction or other problems arising, He can still be conceived as both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. So, the reality of moral evil need not prove an internal contradiction in Feinberg's theological system. But he makes some preliminary clarifications concerning God's omnipotence and moral responsibility.

Feinberg qualifies divine omnipotence by pointing out that God cannot perform acts that are against His nature or logically contradictory. For example, He cannot draw a square circle. If God simply wants to remove evil, Feinberg admits, He appears to be able to do so with His omnipotence; but, "if He has other goal(s) He wants to accomplish in our world (and [Feinberg] will argue that He does), the achievement of those goals may conflict with removing evil."<sup>123</sup> So, if He cannot logically accomplish both His goals and the removing of evil, then He is not morally obligated to do so. Feinberg notes that clarifying the concept of divine omnipotence thusly is a basic strategy to other theodicies and defenses. The free will defender admits that if all God wanted to accomplish was the elimination of evil, He has the power to do so; but, He cannot at the same time offer incompatibilistic free will to humans which would prevent Him from guaranteeing the elimination of evil. Likewise, Feinberg seeks to demonstrate how the omnipotent God cannot eliminate evil without also eliminating His other goals.

If it can be shown that God cannot create a world which would accomplish His goal(s) without evil, and that it is a good world (which would satisfy the Modified Rationalist system), then it can be seen that God is not morally responsible for not removing the evil in the world. This appeals to a commonly held ethical principle that one is not morally responsible for failing to do that which one could not have done or for doing that which one could not fail to do.<sup>124</sup> Qualifying omnipotence in the way described above, showing the logical contradiction of having a world with some particular good but without evil, and noting the ethical principle aforementioned forestalls the simplistic accusations that an omnipotent God should have been able to remove evil if He exists, or that the God who created our world is less than omnibenevolent, less than omnipotent, or simply nonexistent.

Feinberg's defense has three stages. In the first stage, Feinberg presents his understanding of human nature.<sup>125</sup> According to him, God created humans with the capacity for reason, emotions, free will (compatibilistic), desires, intentions, and the capacity for bodily movement. Second, God also intended for humans to function in a world suited for them, a world with the laws of nature we experience, a world He intended not to destroy once He created it. Third, God created individuals who would not have the same characteristics to such an extent that they would stereotype each other; that is, every individual possesses a unique set of characteristics. Fourth, unlike the infinite God, we are limited metaphysically and morally. Humans as created did not have to commit evil, but they did not possess the moral perfection of the eternal Creator. Feinberg notes that all of these characteristics survived the fall of the human race recorded in Genesis; without denying the negative effects of the fall on our nature and world, Feinberg insists that the fundamental characteristics remain. Feinberg also holds the ontological reality of an eternal soul in humans. His understanding of God's omnipotence and omniscience enables him to conclude that human nature and the world we observe apart from the evil in it are in accord with God's intentions. This discussion of human nature is important, because Feinberg asserts that humans as created are the good God intended, the good which makes it logically impossible for God to remove evil in this world without also removing that good.

In the second stage of his defense, Feinberg discusses how sin arises. As a compatibilist, he does not point to human free will as the source of evil; incompatibilists could do so because according to them God cannot control human free decisions. Of course, it takes a will to choose evil, but underneath the will is the desire upon which the inclination to sin is conceived. He quotes James 1:13-15 to show that human desire, and not our free will, is the ultimate source of moral evil.

When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.

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<sup>123</sup>Feinberg, *Many Faces*, 125.

<sup>124</sup>*Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>125</sup>*Ibid.*, 126.

Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death (James 1:13-15).

He quickly reminds us that desires in themselves are not evil, nor do they commit evil. But when one desires what God forbids, the problem arises. The individual is tempted and forms an intention to succumb to the desire. If one falls to the temptation, one wills to fulfill one's evil intention and then does the evil action. Besides desire, emotion, reason, will and body also play a part in this process of committing evil. Nevertheless, one's desire is the ultimate source of evil. We are not tempted by God but by our own desires. Even if the Devil himself tempts us, barring instances when constraining causes determine our choice, we alone are responsible for making the moral decisions that we make. As Feinberg puts it,

No one will be able to stand before God on judgment day and successfully plead innocence for sinning because "the Devil made him do it." God won't buy that excuse, because He knows the problem stems ultimately from us, and He knows we have the capacity to resist the temptation.<sup>126</sup>

In response to Carl Henry's complaint that Feinberg ignored the Satanic entrance of evil to our world, he specifies that he aims not to explain the historical introduction of sin into our world but the general process by which humans (including Adam and Eve before the fall) come to commit evil acts. They have their root in our desires and when our desire for some sinful object tempts us, if we fall to the temptation, we make a decision (determined by nonconstraining causes) to have it. After that, it is simply a matter of expressing that evil decision through bodily movements or whatever may be necessary.

One may wonder at this point whether or not God can be blamed for evil because it was His creation of the human desires through which we commit evil. But, Feinberg insists that the created desires in and of themselves are not evil nor do they commit evil; that which God has created is very good. And, James makes it clear that God does not tempt anyone. If God is not to be blamed for the human desires that give rise to evil actions and the desires themselves are not evil, then where do the necessary and sufficient conditions for desiring evil come from?

They come from the world around us which contains many objects that can inflame the human desire. An object may not be evil (e.g., another man's wife) but can be out of ethical bounds of the moral agent. Any of the objects in the circumstances of our world can be part of the necessary and sufficient conditions for desiring evil. As Feinberg concludes,

To sum up, then, as to how an evil action comes to be, an individual has certain basic desires or needs that are not evil in themselves. He initially does not purpose to sate those desires in a way that disobeys ethical norms. However, a desirable object comes before him, and he is attracted to it. He forms the intention to have it, even though acquiring it is prohibited by moral precept. Then, when allurements become strong enough, he wills to acquire the thing he intends to have. Then bodily movement (whatever it might be) to carry out the decision occurs. Once the action is performed, it is public knowledge that the law has been broken. As to the willing of the action, I hold that it is done compatibilistically, for there are causally sufficient nonsubsequent conditions that decisively incline without constraining the agent to choose what he does. Some of the conditions surrounding the decision may involve God's bringing about the state of affairs in which the decision is made. However, temptation to evil and the actual willing of evil stem not from God but from man.<sup>127</sup>

The question now narrows down to, "Can God rearrange the world and its objects to ensure that we never choose evil?" We are now ready to discuss Feinberg's next category of arguments.

In the third and final stage of his defense, keeping in mind how humans come to commit evil acts, and considering how God decrees nonconstraining causes that can causally determine human choices, Feinberg considers various ways that God might go about removing or preventing such moral evil.<sup>128</sup> He anticipates the question as to why, given compatibilism, God does not cause humans to choose good always. His aim here is to demonstrate that for God to remove or prevent moral evil in our world He would have to

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<sup>126</sup>Ibid., 129-30.

<sup>127</sup>Ibid., 128-129.

<sup>128</sup>There are special instances when God directly acts through unmediated intervention to causally determine our actions. But more often is the case where He works through other creatures or natural events to determine our actions and accomplish His will.

contradict His intentions to create human beings and the world as He has, cause us to wonder if He has one or more of the attributes ascribed to Him, and/or do something that we would not expect nor desire Him to do, because it would produce greater evil than already exists.<sup>129</sup>

The logical problem of moral evil for this theology can be resolved when it is seen that God, as conceived in Feinberg's theological system, is not guilty of having created a world with evil, because He cannot remove it without creating one or more of those problems.

Feinberg contemplates and rejects nine possible ways God might remove or prevent evil, given his understanding of human nature and the way sin arises. First, God could arrange the world so that "His compatibilistically free creatures are causally determined to have desires only for the good and to choose only good without being constrained at all."<sup>130</sup> That is, God can set up the world in such a way where, without improving our fundamental capacities, we humans would not be confronted with evil temptations. But, arranging such a state of affairs may not be feasible. As Feinberg explains,

God did not create us with a positive inclination toward sin, but even Adam in ideal surroundings and circumstances did sin. According to biblical teaching, the race inherited from Adam a sin nature that positively disposes us toward evil. In light of that sin nature, it is not at all clear that a minimal rearranging of events, actions, and circumstances would achieve the goal of getting us to do good without being constrained.<sup>131</sup>

It would be simple enough if humans had a natural inclination to do good, but it takes a lot of rearranging to get even one person to choose good consistently. Imagine the exponential increase in the volume of rearrangements if all the other people were also causally determined to choose good all the time. Just to causally determine one person to choose good can involve rearranging the circumstances of other people involved in one's state of affairs, but rearranging the state of affairs in other people could in turn involve such a rearrangement in the lives of still a third group of people that would be exponentially larger than the second group, and so on, *ad infinitum*, until the billions of people in our planet are interconnected in an endless cycle of causal determinism.

Because of the potential intersections of many individual lives, such an attempt to causally determine the entire human population always to choose good may not be possible without constraining many of them. Feinberg asserts, "The fact is that we really do not know what we are asking when we ask for God to rearrange circumstances."<sup>132</sup> It is not clear that God can bring about such a state of affairs without changing human nature or the world. And, even if God leaves intact our human nature but changes the world, it is not clear that that world would be better than our world as it is today. It may be a world that is a lot worse than it is good; such a world may contradict God's goal of creating the good world that He did. Feinberg questions the wisdom of a God who would go through such trouble to cause us to choose good. Why not just make different creatures (e.g., superhumans) at the outset?

Second, God can eliminate moral evil by eliminating humans, but only at the expense of contradicting His intention to create them in the first place. Such a solution would not attract many of us.

Third, God can eliminate all objects of desire so that we cannot be tempted to commit evil. But, the objects of desire include much of our world including the human body, and like the previous solution this one would contradict God's intention of creating humans and a world in which they can live and function.

Fourth, God can eliminate human desires so that the root of our committing evil is destroyed.<sup>133</sup> Again, such a solution contradicts God's intention of creating humans with desires as part of their nature. Also, without desires we would not act even to survive; we would be mere robots with no inborn desire to live, and the human race would soon be extinct. All these solutions simply contradict God's intention of creating the human race. But, there is another solution that may seem more promising.

Fifth, God can let us have our desires but keep them from being aroused past the point where they would lead us to commit an evil act. We would still have our desires, but they would be neutralized or negated once they increased to the point of leading us to sin. God could do this by creating humans with a limited capacity

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<sup>129</sup>Ibid., 130.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid.

<sup>131</sup>Ibid.

<sup>132</sup>Ibid.

<sup>133</sup>This would correspond somewhat to the Theravada Buddhist solution of targeting the root of suffering for its solution.

for desires so that they never become a source of evil for us. The main objection Feinberg expresses for this option is that we would no longer be mere humans but superhumans, and, like the above options, this one would contradict God's intention of creating us with the human nature that we have now. We would always have to suppress our desires when we see them growing too strong, and we would have to be able to recognize constantly when they grow too strong; these are not normal human characteristics.

Another objection Feinberg raises against this option is that it produces too much stereotypes among humans and contradicts God's will for creating individuals. Feinberg is not arguing that everyone will desire exactly identical things, but the limits of all humans' desires will have to be the same in order to prevent anyone from desiring something forbidden to the point of committing a sin.

Moreover, if one's desire is eliminated or changed every time it gets too strong, our world would not be the world we live in today; also, plans will be changed without notice. Countless activities all over the world will constantly be interrupted and changed. Feinberg comments that such a different world is not clearly better than ours.

Sixth, God can leave our desires alone but check our intentions based on those desires to make sure that they are not evil. God could then eliminate or limit those intentions much like the way He could with our desires as described above. But the same problems with checking our desires would apply with this option.

Seventh, God can check our willing so that evil willing would be eliminated or blocked. Again, Feinberg applies the same objections discussed with the fifth and sixth options above.

Eighth, He may check our bodily movements whenever they were about to make the evil act public. But the same problems as those discussed in regard to willing, intention and desire apply. None of the above eight options are acceptable, given God's intention of creating humans to function in this world.

Finally, the ninth option is that God could intervene miraculously to prevent evil in our world. But, if God were to stop one's desire, intention, willing or bodily movements every time they approached evil, life would be very different. If we imagine exactly how God could check our bodily movements every time we were going to commit an evil act, it is likely that God would intervene by paralyzing people before or as they try to do the evil act. We cannot even imagine how He could check our desires, intentions, or acts of willing. Would God have to make us forget our desires, or knock us unconscious? Feinberg observes, "The picture one gets is of a whole world of people who fall in and out of consciousness and undergo periodic spells of amnesia."<sup>134</sup> Since people are not always aware that they are going to commit an evil act, some of these divine interventions would come as a surprise. We might even lose the motivation to think, feel and act, out of fear that God might stop us from doing anything we might want to do. Not only does this sort of world contradict God's intention of creating the world that He has, but it is not clearly better or even as good as the present world.

Feinberg questions the wisdom of a God in creating humans in the way that He did if He would then go through so much trouble in checking our inner and outer actions. He comments that he has applied these nine possibilities only to voluntary evil actions; consider how much more ludicrous these solutions can appear if they are also applied to all involuntary and reflex actions that produce evil. As He concludes,

The upshot of this discussion about what God would have to do to remove moral evil is that God *cannot* remove it without (1) contradicting His desires to make the kind of creature and world He has made, (2) causing us to doubt the accuracy of ascribing to Him certain attributes like wisdom, or (3) producing a world we would not want and would consider more evil than our present world.<sup>135</sup>

Now, all Feinberg needs to show as a Modified Rationalist is that this world with humans and evil is a good world. One may concede the possibility that God could have created a better world with superhumans who freely choose to do good always. Nevertheless, it is required for a Modified Rationalist only to show that the world God created is *a* good world. He does not need to demonstrate that this world is the best possible world but only one of the good possible worlds God could have created. He does not even have to demonstrate that a world with humans and evil is better than one with no humans and no evil. (To consider a higher value for a world with no humans than one with humans would be meaningless and self-defeating for us humans!) Feinberg refers to several biblical passages to affirm the goodness of human creation. Genesis 1:26-27 describes humans as created in the image of God. God's high approval of creation after creating humans is

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<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 134.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid., 135.

recorded in Genesis 1:31, "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning-- the sixth day." Psalm 8:5-8 "speaks of God crowning man with glory and honor and giving him dominion over the other parts of His creation."<sup>136</sup> Thus, Feinberg recognizes a value of the highest order to human beings. So, this world with humans is a good world.

In his defense, Feinberg has shown that God, as conceived in his theology, does not fall prey to the trilemma stated at the beginning. His omnipotence and omnibenevolence *can* be squared with the evil in our world. Divine omnipotence does not include the power to actualize contradictions. And, one cannot assume moral responsibility for that which one does not have the ability to do or not to do. Once God is so acquitted, His omnibenevolence can be accepted.

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., 136.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Great differences exist between Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity as Rahula and Feinberg present them. But comparing the different aspects of the perspectives of the problems of suffering and evil can lead to a greater understanding of both views. In this final chapter a comparative summary and analysis of the two views of Rahula and Feinberg will be offered, with a discussion of some critical dissimilarities. Then, some points of contact will be presented as conceptual bridges on which dialogue may be improved between the two religious traditions. The focus in this chapter will be on how a Calvinistic Christian can communicate one's religious beliefs to the Theravada Buddhist, rather than *vice-versa*.

### Summary

John Feinberg carefully defines his theological position as Modified Rationalism, a mediating position between theonomy and Leibnizian Rationalism. He believes that God as the religious ultimate is not arbitrary in His decrees nor is He completely submitted under the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason. Thus, as a Modified Rationalist, in order to defend his system of thought against the logical problem of moral evil, Feinberg sought only to show how it is possible that the world God created is *a* good world. Feinberg accepts compatibilism as the view of the free will; and thus he could not follow the free will defense of Plantinga. Also, he is a nonconsequentialist when it comes to the type of ethics he holds; so, he cannot perceive something as good merely by the ends or consequences to which it leads.

With such a theological view clarified, he approached the specifically logical problem of moral evil in three steps: 1) by clarifying his understanding of humans (possessing ontologically real and enduring souls), 2) by citing James 1:13-15 to show how sin arises from human desire and 3) by considering nine possible ways God could go about removing or preventing moral evil in our world. With these three steps he has shown that God, though being omnipotent and omni-benevolent, cannot remove or prevent moral evil in our world without contradicting one or more of His goals in creating humans and the world that He has, making us wonder if He has all of the attributes ascribed to Him, or doing something that would produce greater evil in our world. Thus, he showed how it could be logically consistent for an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God to create a world with the evil we find in our world. Furthermore, holding to a nonconsequentialist account of ethics, and given that God intended to create the humans that He did, Feinberg demonstrated that the evil in our world does not make this a bad world.

Walpola Rahula layed out the four basic doctrines of his atheistic Theravada Buddhism as an approach to the problem of suffering. The First Noble Truth teaches that life is defined in terms of suffering (*dukkha*), which encompasses not merely our unpleasant experiences but everything else that is imperfect, impermanent, and insubstantial. The doctrine of the no-soul (*anatta*) expressed that there is no separate, enduring self or soul. With the teaching of the five aggregates, he clarified how our human existence perceived as an individual self is itself *dukkha*. Conditioned genesis (or dependent origination) teaches the twelve-link chain which supports the doctrine of the no-self and shows the absolute relativity of everything, including good and evil. The Second Noble Truth teaches that *tanha* (thirst, desire, craving) is the cause of suffering (*dukkha*). He also presented the doctrine of *karma* as the ontological principle of steadfast cause and effect that regulates rebirth; it is the law of *karma* that keeps one in the endless cycle of suffering, death, and rebirth (*samsara*), even good *karma* will cause one to be bound in this cycle of suffering. It is not the standard of some personal deity who judges individuals; rather, it is just like any natural law of science under which all are submitted. The Third Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering presented *nirvana* (the religious ultimate) as salvation in which one is released from the endless cycle of suffering, after one exhausts all *karma* from oneself. The Fourth Noble Truth of the Path prescribed three broad categories (broken down further into eight categories) of Ethical Conduct, Mental Discipline, and Wisdom, through which one must work to realize *nirvana*.<sup>137</sup>

The above summary describes the worldviews of the two religious traditions and sets the stage for an analysis of their differences. Just how deeply rooted and mutually exclusive these differences are will be apparent in the following analysis.

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<sup>137</sup>The Noble Eightfold Path describes these eight categories: 1) Right Understanding, 2) Right Thought, 3) Right Speech, 4) Right Action, 5) Right Livelihood, 6) Right Effort, 7) Right Mindfulness, 8) Right Concentration.

### Comparative Analysis

Serious differences exist between Buddhism and Christianity in general, and Rahula's Theravada Buddhism and Feinberg's Calvinistic Christianity in particular. The nature of the religious ultimate must be the most obvious difference. Calvinistic Christianity believes in a personal God as the religious ultimate while Theravada Buddhism is atheistic and holds to the concept of *nirvana* as the religious ultimate. In Calvinistic Christianity God relates personally to humans from creation to eternal salvation or judgment. God is worshipped for His goodness and power by believers; He may also be hated by disappointed believers. His ontologically real personhood stands in the center of Christianity and any discussion of its doctrinal issues. In Theravada Buddhism, *nirvana* is far from worshipped or hated by anyone personally. It is not a personal entity and cannot even be described positively in human language. In negative terms, it is the extinction of all desire and illusion of phenomenal reality including the five aggregates which are *dukkha*. It does not act as a person does, and it cannot be judged as a moral agent. *Nirvana* does not pose a problem of suffering in Theravada Buddhism but only a wonderful way out of this endless cycle of suffering as testified by Gotama Buddha.

So, in discussing such an issue as suffering or evil, the Calvinistic God may be called upon to explain the existence of suffering for His believers, and may be the target of human judgment in being held accountable for the evil in this world as its Creator. But no Theravada Buddhist has reasons to consider calling upon *nirvana* for anything, least of all with a demand for an explanation for some problem. Not holding to the concept of a personal God relieves Theravada Buddhism of a burden to resolve any personal tension between the religious ultimate and the believers; rather than seek help from or blame some superior being, Theravada Buddhists take the phenomenon of suffering as a given and simply follow the path to *nirvana* pointed out by Gotama Buddha. Theravada Buddhism may point to the logical problem of moral evil in Calvinistic Christianity to question the logical feasibility of a belief in the existence of an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God. Calvinistic Christianity must be prepared to show how it is logically consistent to hold the belief that such a biblical God exists amidst the evil in our world. Feinberg presented one such demonstration as we discussed above in chapter four.

While Calvinistic Christianity is pressured to give an explanation of how an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God can exist in this world of suffering, Theravada Buddhism simply points to the way traversed by Gotama Buddha as he realized *nirvana* to those seeking refuge from suffering. Since the concept of *nirvana* is not logically deduced or delivered by divine revelation but simply accepted as true from the testimony of Gotama Buddha, it remains safe from any direct challenge outsiders may pose with respect to its salvific function for believers who seek to escape from the endless cycle of suffering. Thus, *nirvana* is not subject to ontological challenges posed by problems of suffering and evil as is the concept of the omnibenevolent and omnipotent God of Calvinistic Christianity.

The nature of the human being presents a second major difference between Rahula's Theravada Buddhism and Feinberg's Calvinistic Christianity. Calvinistic Christianity perceives human beings (with eternal souls) to be ontologically real and proclaimed as good in God's sight. This basic belief is why Feinberg considered only how God could remove or prevent evil without eliminating or changing human nature in accordance with His goals of creation, and having considered nine possible ways concluded that God cannot remove evil without contradicting His intention to create human beings. Contrasted very sharply against the concept of enduring human souls is the Theravada Buddhist doctrine of the no-soul that denies precisely the existence of any enduring soul; moreover, the illusion of an enduring self or soul is the ground of all desire which is the cause of suffering. The psychological experience of suffering, however, is recognized. So, while Calvinistic Christianity is concerned with the relationship between God and the human believer in reconciling the omnibenevolent and omnipotent God with the evil in the world, Theravada Buddhism attempts to deliver the psychological self out of suffering by exposing the illusion of an enduring self which is the ground of all desire that causes suffering in the first place.

While the concept of an impersonal *nirvana* was easily shielded from direct challenges of problems of suffering for Theravada Buddhism, its doctrine of no-soul can make discussions of suffering more complex. If there is no enduring self recognized in Theravada Buddhism, one may wonder why anyone should be concerned with suffering at all, especially when its reality is denied. The standard response that asserts the reality of suffering without the sufferer does not answer the question of why anyone should be concerned when there is no enduring self that can be helped by anyone's concern; nor does asserting that it is the realization that realizes provide a more satisfactory rationale for any ethical concern. Admittedly, this point appears to be question-begging by presupposing the reality of an enduring self, even though the Buddhist position can also be

said to beg the question by assuming the doctrine of the no-soul. But, Theravada Buddhism can be called to explain the ethical significance of compassion or concern in the absence of moral agents at the ultimate level of reality.

The distinction of reality between the conventional and the ultimate only has the effect of partially redirecting the question to a lower conventional level where the practice of labelling enduring personalities is recognized, and the brunt of this question is still focused on the realm of ultimate reality where there is no enduring personality that will be helped by realizing *nirvana*. We may wonder if the existential legitimation of the whole process of attaining *nirvana* lies in the ontological significance of the realm of conventional reality wherein exists suffering. But while the phenomena of conventional reality are recognized, their very illusion at the ultimate level of reality is precisely what is presupposed; that is, the whole dichotomy of reality between that of conventional reality and ultimate reality which is used to explain the psychological experience of an enduring self while denying its ontological existence appears to stand on a self-contradictory ground. While more discussion on this point may be desired, including some response from other Theravada Buddhist thinkers, it suffices for the purpose of this thesis merely to outline some of the complexities that arise due to the Theravada Buddhist doctrine of no-soul.

The nature of the origin of suffering and evil is the third and most interesting difference between Calvinistic Christianity and Theravada Buddhism. Unlike the above two differences though, the nature of the origin of suffering and evil as perceived in the two religious traditions has some similarities. Both Feinberg and Rahula point to human desire as the source of suffering. However, what they mean by desire is not the same. Feinberg sees human desire as a part of God's good creation which could be used for moral evil by humans with enduring souls when they crave a forbidden object strongly. Rahula sees desire as a more complex force than a simple appetite for a particular object. He posits it as a fundamental thirst for existence (or nonexistence) which keeps one in the endless cycle of suffering, of births and rebirths, and prevents the liberating realization of *nirvana*, even though there is no enduring soul that desires. This limited but interesting similarity will be discussed in more depth below as a point of contact between the two traditions.

How can more effective dialogue take place when it seems that at every ontological point there are irreconcilable differences? We will examine in this last section what points of contact exist between the two religious systems that can form bridges of dialogue between the two religious traditions. Having discussed the logical problem of moral evil in Feinberg's Calvinistic Christianity and the problem of suffering in Rahula's Theravada Buddhism, having seen their respective resolutions, and having seen some of the critical concepts that factor into each of the discussions, we can now proceed to consider what points of contact can be used to bridge the dialogue more effectively.

#### Points of contact

The differences between Feinberg's Calvinistic Christianity and Rahula's Theravada Buddhism are daunting enough that no strong point of contact is in sight. Yet, with the hope of using even one hint of similarity to help the Theravada Buddhist understand the Christian Gospel better and to consider changing one's view on other related concepts, let us see what few concepts there are that can serve to act as a communication bridge even to some minute degree between the two very different religious traditions. Having a clear knowledge of some points of contact may help us to begin with the more easily understandable concepts on which further dialogue can take place. These concepts will not carry an interreligious dialogue very far before irreconcilable differences arise. But, recognizing even the limited similarities along with the radical differences in the points of contact may encourage adherents of the two religious traditions to understand each other more adequately. I would like to present four possible points of contact between Feinberg's Calvinistic Christianity and Rahula's Theravada Buddhism.

One point of contact is the positing of desire as the source of evil (for Feinberg) or suffering (for Rahula). Theravada Buddhism teaches us to rid ourselves of desire which is suffering itself while Calvinistic Christianity embraces it as a good part of the God-given human nature. In Calvinistic Christianity one is encouraged to overcome evil desires with good choices. In Theravada Buddhism one is encouraged to overcome desire (period) by seeing ultimate reality as it is-- without an enduring soul or its desire. Since desire produces *karma* which binds one in the endless cycle of suffering, it is obvious why anyone wishing to attain *nirvana* would want to do without desire. Calvinistic Christianity can also admit that human desire often causes suffering. But, there is an alternative response to it; the existence of God who created humans as He did gives us hope that

desire is not inherently bad. And the ontological reality of an enduring self precludes the option of negating desire that is an inherent part of the human nature. Although human desires can cause moral evil, Feinberg adds that God gave us the capacity to resist temptation. God did not give us irresistible desires so that we could not choose but to sin.<sup>138</sup>

While Theravada Buddhism seeks to eliminate that which causes suffering, Calvinistic Christianity seeks to control it so that it can be used to bring more fulfillment in one's life as God designed it. Instead of trying to eliminate desire along with suffering, a Christian can ask, is it not possible (and more hopeful) that one can keep the good God-given desire and still overcome suffering in eternal life, as the Christian gospel promises? Eliminating desire would be akin to trying to surgically remove our sensory nerves because they can channel pain; doing so would also prevent one from experiencing pleasure. For a religious tradition that affirms the goodness of the enduring human soul and its desire, attempting to extinguish all desire based on a denial of the eternal soul would be akin to throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Feinberg's resolution to the logical problem of moral evil at the same time posits human desire as a cause and affirms it as God's good creation; and, for a Buddhist who is trying to rid oneself of the illusion of the self, Feinberg's resolution may have the appeal that is not unlike having one's cake and eating it too. Although the concept of desire is radically different in the two traditions, its function as the source of evil may provide a point of contact in encouraging interreligious dialogues on the problems of suffering and evil between Calvinistic Christianity and Theravada Buddhism.

A second point of contact is the invitation of salvation or liberation in something that lies beyond this world of phenomena.<sup>139</sup> Both Theravada Buddhism and Calvinistic Christianity look beyond this world for their salvation message. The former upholds *nirvana* as the ultimate reality by asserting that only from such a pure vantage point can one overcome the problems of suffering and evil. The latter points to heaven as the place where those who are saved will reside with God. So, although humans are in the world presently, their potential destiny is beyond this world; the heavenly destiny is not actualized until the human accepts the gospel message of Christ.

If both share a perspective beyond this world for their salvation and also for their resolution to problems of suffering and evil that appear to be contradictions from the perspective of this phenomenological world, then both may be able to share the question of how one can go about understanding the nature of whatever it is that is beyond this world. The Buddhist source of belief is the testimony of Gotama Buddha; the Christian source of knowledge is the Old Testament and the testimony of the first disciples as recorded in the Bible.<sup>140</sup> This may be as far as one can go with this point of contact.

However, it is helpful to clarify that those religious ultimates that believers may assume also have historical origins of revelation, whether by testimony or another historical event. Dialogue would be difficult if this point was not clarified, and religious ultimates were simply assumed; as long as these assumptions are not clarified, discussion of all other related concepts would not profit much. The existence of God is a central and unavoidable issue in any meaningful dialogue between Christians and Buddhists. But, exposing the assumptions of the religious ultimates can open the way to a discussion of more manageable topics such as the reliability of Gotama Buddha's recorded testimony, or the early Christian disciples' lives and testimonies, the resurrection event of Christ, and so on. Although both religious traditions point to some ultimate reality beyond that of our observed phenomenal world, a closer examination may reveal intermediate steps of historical events and documents that could bring about a more verifiable method of assessing the existence of such ultimate realities beyond our perceived world.<sup>141</sup>

A third point of contact is the clear human responsibility for suffering in both religious traditions. Rahula's Theravada Buddhism clearly sets the human as being responsible for one's own destiny and even origin (due to the accumulated *karma* throughout one's past lives). There is no God who can provide personal favors in Theravada Buddhism; only the human is responsible for oneself. In Feinberg's Calvinistic

<sup>138</sup>John Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 130.

<sup>139</sup>This point of contact is important and is a fundamental concept in the Theravada Buddhist problem and resolution of the problem of suffering even though it does not formally arise from the problem of evil in Christianity.

<sup>140</sup>The Christian could also add that the Holy Spirit convicts one of the veracity of one's faith in Christ; however, that belongs more to the category of simple proclamation than to interreligious dialogue.

<sup>141</sup>The resurrection of Jesus Christ is one heavily documented event that can establish historical reliability of the gospel message, and it can help a skeptic come to terms with the implications of such an event.

Christianity, humans sin out of their own evil desire; and, they suffer for it. By showing from James 1:13-15 that human desire and not free will is the source of moral evil, and by demonstrating that God could not have extracted evil from this world without contradicting one or more of His good goals in creation, he avoids blaming God for human sin. Humans alone are responsible for their sins.

From the Christian perspective, the tone of the first half of the Gospel message can be expected to be well received by the Buddhists. They should have no problem in understanding that they are completely responsible for their predicament. While many liberal members of the Christian community in the traditionally Christian countries are rejecting the sinfulness of humans, sometimes transferring the fault of the sinner to one's socio-psychological background and environment, we find in Rahula's presentation of Theravada Buddhism a clear teaching that pits humans as being solely responsible for their unfortunate spiritual condition.

From the Buddhist perspective, Feinberg's Calvinistic Christianity is not a cop out religious tradition which transfers human responsibility of sin to God. They may get such an impression from the more liberal Christians who tend to separate human sin from human responsibility, but the sort of evangelical Christianity Feinberg represents as a Calvinist approaches the human responsibility of sin with utter seriousness. Buddhists can listen to the Christian presentation of the human predicament with a shared understanding of human responsibility at least on a surface level, even if its basis is very different. The two religious traditions share in common the moral responsibility of humans for their own suffering.

A fourth point of contact is the understanding of human freedom as not being libertarian. The Theravada doctrine of conditioned genesis shows that everything is caused by something. Rahula presents the doctrine of conditioned genesis to express the entirety of existence as relative, conditioned and interdependent; human will alone cannot be considered to be free from the twelve-link chain of causation. His point is not that humans are not responsible for suffering or their own *karma*; rather, his point is that such a concept as free will "is basically connected with the ideas of God, Soul, justice, reward and punishment."<sup>142</sup> His admission of its being connected to these theistic concepts is very encouraging. The compatibilist notion of free will is not too dissimilar from Rahula's notion of human will.<sup>143</sup>

While Christians holding to an incompatibilist notion of freedom have another dissimilar concept with the Theravada Buddhists, compatibilists can use their idea of human freedom as an additional point of contact with which to dialogue with Theravada Buddhists. Compatibilists can offer Buddhists a concept of free will which is not libertarian, but is causally "conditioned" by divine sovereignty. Theravada Buddhists may not have to struggle as much in accepting the idea of compatibilism. Once this point of contact is accepted as such, we are one step closer to communicating the Calvinistic doctrines of the relationship between God and human and theological issues concerning the personal relationship, including eternal salvation and punishment.

There is a lot more to learn about the two religious traditions. Even the points of contact could be discussed in more depth; however, a modest amount has been achieved in this thesis by introducing points of contact that can serve as conceptual bridges in a dialogue between Calvinistic Christianity and Theravada Buddhism as represented by John Feinberg and Walpola Rahula respectively, albeit they reveal more differences than similarities. Further research on Theravada metaphysics may shed light on more possibilities of such conceptual bridges. Although Gotama Buddha shunned metaphysical discussions, he clearly held to some kind of worldview; and, some of its concepts have been explored in this study with reference to Calvinistic ontology. While Gotama Buddha shunned certain controversial issues of his day, he taught others as core doctrines of Theravada Buddhism. Further study as to which metaphysical issues were avoided, assumed, or taught may lead to a more indepth comparison with a Calvinistic worldview.

#### Missiological Implications

Despite some of the points of contact introduced above, evangelistic communication to Theravada Buddhists will not be an easy task for Calvinistic Christians. The differences between the two traditions in their ontology are radical enough that no one would attempt to unify them; at most, a few concepts might be presented as points of contact. Christians may rest assured that one's coming to believe in the message of Christian salvation is ultimately the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit grounded on the objective work of Jesus Christ at Calvary 2,000 years ago. The role of the Holy Spirit, however, should not in any way diminish

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<sup>142</sup>Walpola Rahula, What the Buddha Taught (New York: Grove, 1974), 55.

<sup>143</sup>Of course, Rahula does not hold the notion that human freedom is compatible with God's sovereignty!

the responsibility of the Christian. Barring impossible tasks such as ironing out the radical differences between Calvinistic Christianity and Theravada Buddhism, we are called to proclaim the gospel message.

How we may communicate the Gospel message more clearly to Theravada Buddhists is a task that may be improved from a comparative study of the two religious traditions with the potential for interreligious dialogue in view. But in addition to being critically aware of the different ontologies of the two traditions, one would be better prepared to be aware of some issues in interreligious dialogue. There has been for good reasons some hesitation among evangelicals to join the growing trend of interreligious dialogue. One observes in the core of interreligious activity a set of relativistic and pluralistic assumptions that preclude the possibility of objective truth or an exclusive belief in one set of truths about God, humanity, and salvation that legitimates evangelism or missions. Thus, while raising the thumb to interreligious dialogue gives one the appearance of an open mind that is valued in this society on the one hand, associating with a group that appears to reject the fundamental principles of objective truth and the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the one and only Son of God can make an exclusivist evangelical feel like compromising his principles on the other.

Netland distinguishes between formal dialogue and informal dialogue.<sup>144</sup> Formal dialogue refers to an organized proceeding of representatives of various religious traditions committed to agreed-upon objectives. Informal dialogue is when adherents of different religions gather in an informal surrounding to discuss certain issues with respect to their religious views. Netland proposes four reasons for evangelical participation in informal dialogue with adherents of different religions.<sup>145</sup> First, Jesus and Paul demonstrated the model of informal dialogue in their evangelistic encounters. They did not merely preach at nonbelievers, but they also listened and conversed with them. Second, informal dialogue can be an opportunity for a demonstration of respect for the member of another religion as a fellow human being. The Christian's love for the nonbeliever must not be compromised even while real differences are recognized, just as one is taught to love the sinner and hate the sin in our Christian tradition. Third, informal dialogue is necessary for effective evangelism. We can communicate better when we understand the context of another religious tradition, which we can only accomplish by conversing with adherents of the other religious tradition. Fourth, informal dialogue can set an example of humility and courtesy for adherents of other religious traditions. Only when we prove our willingness to listen and learn can we expect the other party to be open to our message.

In addition to the above reasons for evangelical participation in informal dialogue, Netland cites David Hesselgrave who suggests five types of interreligious dialogue (formal dialogue) in which evangelicals should participate.<sup>146</sup> One type of formal dialogue evangelicals should join is on the topic of the very nature of interreligious dialogue. Another type of formal dialogue that we should participate in is one that is concerned with preserving freedom of religious worship and expression. The third type of formal interreligious dialogue that we should support is one that seeks to provide physical and social needs. The fourth type of formal dialogue is one seeking to diminish or eliminate religious bigotry. Finally, evangelicals should participate in the type of dialogue which seeks to understand the differences or similarities in doctrinal beliefs between various religious traditions.

The sort of interreligious dialogue anticipated in this thesis is that which seeks to understand the ontological beliefs of Theravada Buddhism in order to communicate the Calvinistic Christian theology more effectively in a formal or informal setting. It fits somewhat closely with Eric Sharpe's category of discursive dialogue (as discussed above in chapter 1), although it runs more deep with the personal motive of evangelism based on the principle of objective truth, uniqueness, and exclusivity of the Christian salvation offered in the name of Jesus Christ. With the conviction of objective truth based on the Bible, it is a stronger form of dialogue than mere discourse and, in addition to exchange of doctrinal concepts, includes apologetics by which the different religious views may be examined critically.

Paul Griffiths in his *An Apology for Apologetics* introduces the NOIA principle (the necessity of interreligious apologetics). He states,

If representative intellectuals belonging to some specific religious community come to judge at a particular time that some or all of their own doctrine-expressing sentences are incompatible with some

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<sup>144</sup>Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 295-296.

<sup>145</sup>*Ibid.*, 297-299.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibid.*, 299-301, citing David J. Hesselgrave, "Interreligious Dialogue—Biblical and Contemporary Perspectives," in *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation NO. 1*, ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 235-237.

alien religious claim(s), then they should feel obliged to engage in both positive and negative apologetics vis-à-vis these alien religious claim(s) and their promulgators.<sup>147</sup>

He writes harshly against the recent inclination to limit interreligious dialogue to mere understanding and describes its results as “intellectual pacifiers for the immature: pleasant to suck on but not very nourishing.”<sup>148</sup> Griffiths’ NOIA principle is in step with our evangelistic mandate and the Lord’s Great Commission. As long as we claim an objective truth in the exclusive salvation message of Jesus Christ, we must include apologetics in our interreligious dialogue. As an exclusivist, however, the evangelical Christian would be wise to demonstrate humility, respect, and love for the nonbeliever in such evangelistic encounters.

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<sup>147</sup>Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 3.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, xii.

## GLOSSARY

Anatta. the unreality of the self; no atman

Arahant. an enlightened Buddhist monk.

Atman. the essence of consciousness, the soul; ultimately the subjective component of *brahman*.

Bodhisattva. “enlightened essence,” a future Buddha, one who merits Nirvana but lingers to help others.

Brahman. in Vedic literature a mana-like magical potency especially associated with sacred utterances and prayer. In later philosophical works it is the ultimate ground of all forms and phenomena.

Buddha. “awakened,” title applied to Gautama after his enlightenment and later to others deemed to have achieved perfect illumination.

Conditioned genesis (dependent origination). a twelve-linked chain of causes and effects which begins with ignorance and ends in death. The experience of suffering is explained by this chain of interdependent causation, and the elimination of suffering can be achieved by reversing the direction of the chain.

Dukkha. “sorrow,” the suffering inherent in the impermanence of the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Hinayana. “Lesser Vehicle” (less-inclusive way), the name applied by Mahayanists to the older schools of Buddhism (who today refer to themselves as Theravadins).

Karma (Pali: kamma). “deeds,” “works,” the principle of inexorable cause and effect.

Mahayana. “Great Vehicle,” generic name assumed by sects arising in India since the second century after the Buddha’s parinirvana. Extant today in China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

Moksha. release, liberation from the cycle of *samsara*.

Nirvana (Pali: nibbana). “cooled” or “quenched,” the unconditioned state of liberation, release from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Samsara. sequence of change, impermanence, the cycle of rebirth-redeath that afflicts every living being until release (*moksha*).

Sunyata. “emptiness,” the Void, an equivalent to Nirvana, reality stripped of all attributes experienced in *samsara*.

Tanha. “thirst,” desire or craving, the impetus to clinging and becoming—and thus the cause of rebirth.

Theravada. “the way of the elders,” one of the Hinayana schools of Sri Lanka; adherents today use the name to refer generally to the tradition of Pali Buddhism extant in Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia.

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