

# **The Incompatibility between Free Will Theodicies and Religious Experience**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis suggests a novel problem for theists. This problem is that there is an incompatibility between free will theodicies and religious experience. Free will theodicies are responses to the problem of evil and religious experience is form of interaction between God and people. The free will theodicies that are discussed say that God gives us free will for two purposes. These purposes are to excuse God from direct responsibility for evil in the world and to act as a qualifying factor in who goes where when we die (i.e. either Heaven or Hell). Religious experience, it will be argued, usually, if not always, gives recipients of religious experience moral benefits. The giving of moral benefits in religious experience acts to undermine the second purpose we are said to have been given free will and hence generates the incompatibility between free will theodicies and religious experience.

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# Introduction

The subject of this thesis is ‘the incompatibility between free will theodicies and religious experience.’ The following is the argument I will be defending:

Premise 1: Free will theodicies say that God gives us free will to make morally significant decisions for two purposes.

Premise 2: Theists believe that God intervenes in the world through religious experiences.

Premise 3: God’s intervention in the world, through religious experiences, undermines a purpose for God giving us free will to make morally significant decisions.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is an incompatibility between free will theodicies and God’s intervention in the world through religious experiences.

This introduction will outline these premises, which relate to chapters in the thesis, and will also make some qualifying points that the reader should bear in mind whilst reading this thesis.

Premise (1) states that free will theodicies demand that we have free will to make morally significant decisions. In order to explain this, I describe why free will theodicies arise at all and this includes an explanation of the problem of evil. I also outline the free will defence, as this is another response to the problem of evil, and both free will theodicies that I discuss use the free will defence, in some form, as their core principle. The free will defence is also used in the cruder version of my argument which I outline in Chapter Three. All this shows why free will theodicies demand that we have free will to make morally significant decisions.

When I refer to 'free will theodicies' I am only referring to a specific type of free will theodicy. This type is that which I discuss in the next chapter. In short, both these theodicies entail the concept of Hell which, then, generates the incompatibility that I am proposing.

Premise (2) states that theists believe that God intervenes in the world, through religious experiences. When I talk of 'religious experience', this is a specific type of religious experience which I discuss in greater detail at the beginning of Chapter Two. This chapter will explain the different aspects of religious experience. For this account, I focus upon Caroline Davis' (1989) book *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*, which includes a chapter which focuses solely upon the different aspects of religious experience. Finally, I explain why theists should believe in religious experiences for both historical and Biblical reasons.

Premise (3) states that God's intervention in the world, through religious experiences, undermines a purpose for God giving people free will to make morally significant decisions. Before presenting this premise in Chapter Three, I will discuss what I call the 'precursory

argument,' this being a cruder version of my argument and is aimed at the free will *defence*. As will become clear in later chapters, if this cruder argument were successful against the free will defence then it would also be successful against the free will theodicies that I have outlined. The cruder argument replaces premise (3) with 'God's intervention in the world, through religious experience, undermines our free will in making morally significant decisions.' I show why this premise does not work before presenting my actual argument.

Unlike the previous two premises, this premise requires a substantial amount of defending and discussing of its motivations. I start by discussing the motivations for this premise, with these motivations being the moral benefits received from religious experiences and other use that free will has in free will theodicies, which is to be a deciding factor in who goes to Heaven or Hell.

A qualifying point must be made here concerning moral benefits. Religious experiences can also bestow *faith* benefits to its recipients. Faith benefits would allow people to come to believe, or believe more strongly, in God because of their religious experience. People may also be admitted into Heaven on the basis of being faithful towards God, according to classical theism. Throughout this thesis I will refer only moral benefits because faith benefits seem to be entailed within moral benefits, so there will be no need to reference them individually.<sup>1</sup>

In the conclusion I show that my argument leads to a dilemma for the classical theist, either they have to endorse free will theodicies or religious experiences, but they cannot uphold both views. I also discuss a third option, which is to tone down God's attributes, for example, making God less powerful than omnipotent, as this avoids the majority of the problems that theists face and I examine why this third option is undesirable for theists.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Tim Mawson for making me aware of this point.

Throughout this thesis I will only be discussing the God of classical theism, unless otherwise stated. The God of classical theism is said to be perfect. This perfection is usually cashed out in terms of: omnipotence, omniscience, and moral perfection. Those who believe that God lacks any of these attributes will not be affected by my argument, because my argument arises partly from the attributes of the God of classical theism (from here on I will refer to Him as simply 'God'). If God were lacking one of these attributes, it would be difficult to show that there was any incompatibility between the things that He is supposed, by theists, to do.

The reader should be aware that, following the free will theodicies that I discuss, *libertarian* free will is assumed to be true throughout. Libertarian free will says that people are the cause of their actions and this means that no antecedent conditions (genetics, upbringing, etc.) can affect our decisions. The theists that I discuss (Plantinga 1997, Davis 2001, Swinburne 1998) are all proponents of libertarian free will. Swinburne (1998) is clear that anything other than libertarian free will (for moral decisions) would be unacceptable because it would undermine the punishment or rewards that we would receive in the afterlife as God would have to bear *some* responsibility for what were supposed to be freely willed actions and decisions.

Libertarian free will allows people to be ultimately responsible because nothing influences those actions and decisions other than their own wills, so their actions and decisions can truly be said to come from each person and not as the result of something which they had no control over, like their genetics or upbringing. Whether persons have libertarian free will is a controversial subject in itself, though it is not within the scope of this thesis to discuss whether this position is plausible or not, so there will be no attempt here to question libertarian free will.

This final point is important in regards to Chapter Three where I offer an analogy in support of my argument. This analogy compares a teacher giving her students a test with God giving

people a test to see where they go in the afterlife. The playing field for the teacher remains level if we think of the students as being of similar intellectual ability. Similarly, libertarian free will allows the playing field for the test for entry into the afterlife to be level because it does not matter what our characters, upbringing or genes are like, because antecedent conditions such as these have no effect on our decisions, if libertarian free will is true; and we are assuming that libertarian free will is true, so this sort of objection will not be discussed.

# 1: Free Will Theodicies

In this chapter, I outline the two free will theodicies that are the target of my argument.

Before discussing these theodicies it is necessary to introduce the free will defence as both theodicies utilise the free will defence, in some form, as their core principle. Discussion of the free will defence and these free will theodicies will also include an outline of the problem of evil, because the problem of evil is the reason that free will defences and theodicies have been coined. To end the chapter, I justify why I have included the discussion on free will theodicies, whilst my argument seems to focus on the theistic notion of Hell, rather than on free will theodicies themselves.

I will use Alvin Plantinga's (1977) version of the free will defence as a model of the free will defence. It was coined to counter the logical problem of evil that regained popularity in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, before detailing the free will defence, I will need to explain the logical problem of evil.

The logical problem of evil says that there is an incompatibility between God's attributes. God is to be omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. The difficulty here for the theist, according to the proponent of the logical of problem evil, is to reconcile the existence of evil in the world with the apparent attributes of God, because God is responsible for everything in

the world; therefore, also responsible for evil. If God is morally perfect he should want to dispose of evil, so if there is evil in the world this implies that God cannot be omnipotent. If God is omnipotent, then he has the power to dispose of evil; so the presence of evil implies that God cannot be morally perfect. It is popular to put this argument into the following three propositions:

- 1) God is omnipotent
- 2) God is morally perfect
- 3) There is evil<sup>2</sup>

Theists may reply that these three propositions alone are not themselves incompatible. The proponent of the logical problem of evil is required to make assumptions about the nature of omnipotence and moral perfection. Mackie (2001) does just this when he suggests that we can comfortably assume that (i) omnipotence has no limits and (ii) that anything good will oppose evil. These two assumptions allow the proponent of the logical problem of evil to show that there is an incompatibility between God's attributes and the existence of evil in the world. So, either God does not exist or he does not have the attributes that He is claimed, by theists, to have.

The obvious strategy for theists, at this juncture, is to contest the assumptions that proponents of the logical problem of evil, like Mackie, make. Plantinga (1977) adopts this strategy. Firstly, he states that God's omnipotence is limited by what is logically possible. For example, God cannot make a round square or force a door to be both open and closed concurrently. These sorts of tasks are logically impossible and not even God, an omnipotent being, can undo the limits set by logic. So, we can comfortably replace assumption (i) with (i') omnipotence has no non-logical limits. This point is not of great relevance to my

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<sup>2</sup> This set of propositions comes from Mackie (2001)

argument, but it is related to Plantinga's strategy for refuting assumption (ii), which is related to my argument.

Plantinga uses the fact that God is restricted by logic to re-assess the logical problem of evil into the following three propositions:

- 1') An omnipotent and omniscient good being eliminates every evil that it can properly eliminate.
- 2') There are no nonlogical limits to what an omnipotent being can do.
- 3') If God is omniscient and omnipotent, then He can properly eliminate every evil state of affairs. (1977:21-23)

Plantinga accepts both (1') (2') as necessarily true, but he rejects (3') as being necessarily true. Plantinga's reason for rejecting (3') as necessarily true is that there might some good that can only result from an evil state of affairs; so if God were to eliminate every evil state of affairs he would also be eliminating the good state of affairs that would result from an evil state of affairs. This good state of affairs may be *so* good a state of affairs that its actualisation outweighs the evil produced by its antecedent and evil state of affairs.

Therefore, it is not *necessarily* true that God would eliminate *every* evil state of affairs, because He may have reasons to allow them to occur.

The following is Plantinga's outline of the free will defence<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>3</sup> Plantinga's definition of free will is the following: 'If a person is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain from performing it; no antecedent conditions and/or causal laws determine that he will perform the action, or that he won't.' (1977: 29) This definition, or at least something equivalent, is the accepted definition of both free will theodicies that will follow shortly and as I mentioned in the introduction I will be working with this definition and there will be no challenge to this assumption that people have libertarian free will, as this is not within the scope of my thesis.

A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all. Now God can create free creatures, but He can't *cause* or *determine* them to do only what is right. For if He does so, then they aren't significantly free after all; they do not do what is right *freely*. To create creatures capable of *moral good*, therefore, He must create creatures capable of moral evil; and He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. As it turned out, sadly enough, some of the free creatures God created went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil. The fact that free creatures sometimes go wrong, however, counts neither against God's omnipotence nor against His goodness; for He could have forestalled the occurrence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good. (1977: 30)

The free will defence allows theists to avoid God from being (directly) responsible for evil in the world, because moral evil is the result of human free will. This then shows that the following two propositions are compatible:

(1'') God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect

(3'') God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so

In conclusion, if we accept the free will defence, then we accept that God has good reasons for not eliminating all evil in the world because part of the evil in the world is caused by the free will of people in the world. It is a greater good to have freely willing people, than it is to have automata who do as they have been programmed to do.

The free will defence works with bare theism and for many theists this is not good enough. Some theists, namely the free will theodicians that I am about to discuss, think that the free will defence does not go far enough to explain away the problem of evil. There are perhaps two reasons why this is the case. The first reason is implied, though not explicitly stated by these free will theodicies, whilst the second reason is explicitly stated by both free will theodicians.

The first reason, which seems to be implied by these theodicies, is that there are problems raised by the *evidential* problem of evil. This form of the problem of evil states that either that there are pointless evil in the world or that there is too much evil in the world. The latter form appears to be of greater concern to both free will theodicians, because it challenges God's moral perfection if there is more evil than good overall in life.

The two free will theodicies that I am going to discuss come from Swinburne (1998) and Davis (2001). These two theodicies are evidently concerned with the latter form of the evidential problem of evil, but they also want their response to the problem of evil to include their wider religious beliefs, something which the free will defence does not rely on. I will now outline both these theodicies.

Davis' (2001) free will theodicy entails every aspect of Plantinga's free will defence and uses it as a foundation in which to construct a more 'complete' theodicy. Davis' reasoning in embracing all of the free will defence without alteration is that, he argues, the free will defence provides the most the accurate picture for the Christian theist, though he feels that the free will defence alone is not sufficient in order to respond the problem of evil and this is why Davis feels he should build upon the free will defence and coin his own free will theodicy.

Davis (2001: 89) notes that the free will defence has its roots in biblical scripture, which adds to its credibility as the foundation upon which ones constructs a theodicy.

Davis' free will theodicy expands on the free will defence by arguing that excessive evil in the world has its uses to God, and part of its use is to create the goodness we can expect in Heaven. Furthermore, in Heaven all evil will be overcome, so it will undo all the effects evil has had on life on Earth (Davis, 2001: 83-84).

Freedom plays a pivotal role in Davis' theodicy because it is the reason why there is moral evil (following the free will defence) and also because it aids in the selection process of who will spend eternity in Heaven with God and who will spend eternity in Hell without God.

Davis (2001: 87) contends that Hell is not the place of suffering that it is made out to be in medieval theology and Biblical metaphors, so this, apparently, avoids any possible objection from the 'problem of Hell', which questions why God would create a place of apparent pure suffering like Hell if he is truly so good. Davis (2001: 87) also reasons that God is required to damn people to Hell, otherwise others will not be able to go to Heaven. Davis does not describe Hell to be a particularly evil place, so he may avoid the problem of Hell, but it remains clear that those who go to Hell certainly are not as well off as those who go to Heaven, as Davis (2001: 87) says 'I believe they [the damned] will clearly understand what they have chosen to miss'. So it is better to go to Heaven than to go to Hell, regardless whether Hell is a place of torture and suffering.

In conclusion, we have seen that Davis' theodicy describes God's reasons for allowing moral evil, which is because of the greater good of free will; God can then use evil to bring about the greater good of the afterlife; and in the end all evil will be absolved in Heaven. Free will plays the dual role of a greater good and to decide who will go where when they die.

Richard Swinburne's (1998) free will theodicy is similar to Davis' (2001) theodicy in many ways, as he wants to include wider theistic beliefs in his response to the problem of evil. One of the main differences between these two theodicies is that Swinburne does not use

Plantinga's free will defence as his foundation as he rejects the concept of transworld depravity<sup>4</sup>. Swinburne's theodicy still builds upon a free will defence of sorts, it is just not Plantinga's.

Swinburne (1998) also wants a response to the problem of evil which includes his wider religious (i.e. Christian) beliefs. Swinburne (1998) has a comprehensive theodicy which deals with moral and natural evil, though I will only discuss how his theodicy deals with moral evil. Swinburne explains that there are four different goals of creation, which are 'beauty', 'thought and feeling', 'action', and 'worship.' Action and worship are particularly relevant to my argument.

Free will is the foundation of Swinburne's theodicy, as free will allows people to choose between doing good actions and doing bad actions, and it also gives people the choice of whether to worship God or not. Worshipping God as a freely made choice is far more significant than being programmed, like a robot, to worship God. Free will allows people to not only make moral choices but also religious choices.

Swinburne (1998: 118-122) is as explicit as Davis (2001) in his belief that the ultimate goal in the Christian tradition is a life after death in presence of God in Heaven. The concept of the afterlife plays an extremely important role in Swinburne's theodicy. Free will is again used as a deciding factor because what we freely choose to do in this life decides where we will go when we die. Free will is required in order to decide who will go to Heaven and who will go to Hell. Swinburne uses the afterlife in his theodicy to ensure that the 'package of life is overall a good one for each of us' (1998: 235). To Swinburne the afterlife is an insurance policy which ensures that each of us has a life which on the whole is a good one. Some of us may experience suffering and evils in this life, but we shall be compensated for this in the

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<sup>4</sup> Transworld depravity is not relevant to my thesis so I will not be discussing any more.

afterlife. Free will is pivotal in this compensation process because only those of us who maintain a life of morally good actions will receive this compensation. One might object that God has no right to put anyone through any evil. Swinburne's (1998: 224) response to this is that we must think of God as similar to a good parent or a carer. Good parents put their children through short-term harm for long-term good. For example, having a tooth removed might be painful for a child, but if it is not removed it might cause an infection in the mouth and cause more teeth to need to be removed later. In the same way according to Swinburne, God has the right to put us through short-term harm in this life because we will benefit from it later in the afterlife.

To sum up Swinburne's theodicy, God is excused from (direct) responsibility for moral evil in the world because free will is an important intrinsic good which allows the good goals of creation to occur. The only problem is that free will can be used to do evil and this can cause people to suffer. This suffering will be compensated in the end by the afterlife, so the complete package of existence is overall good. How we respond to suffering also enables God to know whether we are worthy of compensation or not, i.e. those who continue to live good lives and do good will be compensated, whereas those choose to lead bad lives and do evil will not be compensated.

The afterlife, consisting of Heaven and Hell, plays an important role in the argument that I am defending in this thesis. Both these theodicies include accounts of Heaven and Hell; thus these two theodicies entail the belief in the existence of Heaven and Hell. This entailment is important to bear in mind because the incompatibility that I am defending arises from invocation of the afterlife. In particular, it is the need to invoke Hell that causes problems for both these theodicies. Theodicies, like John Hick's soul-making theodicy, that do not entail the existence of Hell are not affected by the incompatibility I am suggesting in this thesis.

Swinburne (1998) and Davis (2001) think that they cannot do without Hell because without it there would not be any justice for those that do bad things and these people would not, apparently, want to spend eternity in the presence of God.

Although, Hell is entailed in the free will theodicies that I have outlined, it has been suggested to me that my argument does not rely on free will theodicies and could be constructed without reference to these theories. My first reply to this point was to say that my argument would, if it was targeted at Hell, would affect these theodicies anyway because they both entail Hell. This response takes me so far, but I feel I should offer further reasons to why there is a need to discuss these free will theodicies in detail.

I accept that such an argument could be coined, but it would lack plausibility if it did not discuss the points which are conveniently contained within the theories that I have previously discussed in this chapter. To show this, let's imagine that my argument is actually 'the incompatibility between Hell and religious experience.' I would be required, firstly, to explain the theistic importance of Hell. This would involve explaining that it is the opposite of Heaven and I would then have to explain what Heaven was, and how Heaven and Hell operate in theistic belief. Admittedly, this would be straightforward enough. Secondly, I would need to explain how people were admitted into Heaven Hell, because this is where the incompatibility is generated. The most popular choice, indeed I am not aware of any other method and cannot imagine how another method would work without being arbitrary, is to say that people are admitted to either Heaven or Hell on the basis of their *freely made morally significant choices*.

This is where I think this form of the argument would start to get messy, as it could be argued that a more accurate title for my thesis would be: 'The incompatibility between the entry into Heaven and Hell on the basis of freely made morally significant choices and religious

experiences.’ The picture being painted seems fair enough, but critics of my argument could start to undermine it by asking the following sort of thing. A critic might question why theists need to believe that they have free will if it causes the incompatibility this argument says it does. The critic could suggest that all theists need to do is reject the idea that people have free will and this would refute the argument being put forward. To defend this form of the argument, I would be forced to explain why free will is so important to theists. For one thing it allows theists to show that God is not responsible for evil in the world. Rejecting free will would also mean rejecting a very plausible response to the logical problem of evil. In other words, I would be invoking the free will defence to keep my argument plausible. I would have here the free will defence and the belief that God uses free will in order to decide who will be admitted to the different realms of the afterlife. This would have all the concepts which I have already shown to constituents of the free will theodicies previously outlined, because it would use the free will defence on top of another purpose in which we are given free will, which is to act as an admittance decider for the afterlife. The critic could even take recourse in a more extreme strategy and suggest that theists should reject the afterlife (of course I do not think any theists would agree with such an extreme strategy, but I do not think the critic would need to be a theist, so this avenue of argument would be feasible for him). To respond to this extreme strategy from the critic, I would need to explain the importance of the afterlife. This importance is that allows the balance of life to be overall good. The critic may then suggest that theist should simply rejecting Hell, but I have already said that the kind of theodicy which lacks Hell (i.e. John Hick’s soul-making theodicy) is immune to my argument, so this would be a dead end for the critic as some theists do this already and they are not the focus of my argument, whilst other theists, such as Swinburne (1998) and Davis (2001), are committed to there being a Hell and these theists are the focus of my argument. Hopefully, it will be clear to the reader that beginning my argument from this point would

bring me to same point in which the argument finds itself now, except in a rather haphazard fashion.

Using free will theodicies as the starting point of my argument seems, then, to be more logical thing to do because it is, firstly, neater and comprehensive, which allows my argument to avoid many obvious objections that the argument would face if it was constructed starting with the afterlife; secondly, it allows me to avoid the possibility of a critic saying that I am attacking a view that no one holds, because I start with views that people do hold.

Finally, it is worth noting that there is a diametric and intimate connection between the two purposes we are given free will. It is easy for the free will defender to invoke the purpose the free will defence has for free will because this does not require the secondary purpose that these free will theodicies have for free will. But, it would be difficult for a free will theodist to invoke the secondary purpose of free will without falling back on the primary purpose, because the secondary purpose spawns from the primary purpose as we saw earlier. Although it is possible to try and defend the secondary purpose independently this would lead to the problems that I have already described.

## 2: Religious Experience

In this chapter, I, firstly, define what I mean by ‘religious experience’; then, I outline the three pertinent aspects of religious experiences which bestow moral benefits on the recipients of religious experience; finally, I offer historical and biblical reasons to why religious experience is important to theism.

Religious experience is normally taken as a very broad term. To my understanding it can have two distinct, but related meanings. The first meaning is a type of non-supernatural experience that pertains in some way to religious beliefs, which can be referred to as *public* religious experience. For example, Swinburne (1991: 250) says that people who were alive two thousand years ago and who met Jesus would have had this type of religious experience, as they would have had an experience with a religious figure. Similarly, when people feel a sense of wonder when they admire the (apparent) design in nature, this also counts as a public religious experience, as it is not an experience which is targeted towards one specific person, but rather a general feeling that it open to anyone who is of a certain mind-view. The second type of religious experience, which I will be focusing upon, can be called *private* or *personal* religious experience. Throughout this thesis I refer to private or personal religious experience as ‘religious experience’ for the sake of simplicity.

Religious experiences are, then, interventions in the natural world by a supernatural being to a specific person. This thesis will assume that God is responsible, or at least sanctions, all true religious experiences. These religious experiences come with various aspects. I use certain of the aspects of religious experience outlined in Caroline Davis' (1989) book, *The Evidential Force of Religious Experience*. Davis, herself, catalogues six aspects of religious experience and these are, 'interpretative', 'quasi-sensory', 'revelatory, regenerative', 'numinous' and 'mystical'. The first two aspects are of little relevance to my thesis, so they will not be included in my definition of religious experience. The final four aspects of religious experiences make up my definition of religious experience that I will be used throughout this thesis. The four aspects, 'revelatory, regenerative', 'numinous' and 'mystical', entail *moral benefits*. The next chapter will go into greater detail concerning moral benefits, whilst this chapter will simply outline these aspects and give examples of their occurrence.

The first aspect I will outline is the revelatory aspect. The revelatory aspect, according to Davis (1989: 39) is when 'subjects may call sudden convictions, inspiration, revelation, enlightenment, 'the mystical vision', and flashes of insight.' This sort of experience can be when God gives the recipient of the religious experience information or instructions about what they must do or what will happen in the future at some point. The revelatory aspect then has an immediate epistemic benefit.

The second aspect is the 'regenerative' aspect. The regenerative aspect is when the recipient has

experiences of new hope, strength, comfort, peace, security, and joy, ...  
apparently brought about by a divine power, or accompanied by the sense  
of a divine presence; experiences of being guided, 'called', forgiven, and

‘saved’ usually by an external divine power, healing experiences; and apparently divinely aided increase in moral virtues and love for others; and the discovery of ‘meaning’ in life. (Davis, 1989: 44-45)

The regenerative aspect is likely give an immediate physiological and/or psychological benefit.

The third aspect is the ‘numinous aspect’. The numinous aspect may contain experiences of

(i) awe, dread, or terror before the numen, (ii) the sense of being completely overpowered in the presence of such majesty, (iii) an experience of intense, almost unbearable energy or urgency, (iv) the sense that the numen is “wholly other”, and (v) a fascination with or attraction to the numen, and rapture upon contact with it. (Davis, 1989: 48-49)

This aspect is likely to be present in most religious experiences, though it might not be in the experiences of those who have had previous religious experiences who are perhaps used to conversing with God.

The final aspect of religious experience, that Davis (1989) outlines, is the ‘mystical experiences’. She defines this as:

(i) the sense of having apprehended an ultimate reality; (ii) the sense of freedom from the limitations of time, space, and the individual ego; (iii) a sense of ‘oneness’; and (iv) bliss or serenity. (Davis, 1989: 54)

Although this could be considered an aspect in own right, the mystical experience is so close to the numinous experience that for my purposes I group both these aspects as one and the same. Indeed, it seems that the numinous and the mystical aspects are not very different and can be seen as two sides of the same coin. Both aspects deal with the experience of an

ultimate being or reality, but the numinous experience seems to cause the recipient primarily fear whereas the mystical experience causes the recipient primarily joy. When I discuss religious experiences in this next chapter I group numinous and mystical experiences together.

These three aspects are not mutually exclusive. The following example, in the words of the recipient, Stephen H. Bradley, shows that sometimes recipients of religious experience receive one or more of these aspects concurrently:

“At first, I began to feel my heart beat very quick all on a sudden, which made me at first think that perhaps something is going to ail me, though I was not alarmed, for I felt no pain. My heart increased in its beating, which soon convinced me that it was the Holy Spirit from the effect it had on me. I began to feel exceedingly happy and humble, and such a sense of unworthiness as I never felt before. I could not very well help speaking out, which I did, and said, Lord, I do not deserve this happiness, or words to that effect, while there was a stream (resembling air in feeling) came into my mouth and heart in a more sensible manner than that of drinking anything, which continued, as near as I could judge, five minutes or more, which appeared to be the cause of such a palpitation of my heart. It took complete possession of my soul, and I am certain that I desired the Lord, while in the midst of it, not to give me any more happiness, for it seemed as if I could not contain what I had got. My heart seemed as if it would burst, but it did not stop until I felt as if I was unutterably full of the love and grace of God. In the mean time while thus exercised, a thought arose in my mind, what can it mean? and all at once, as if to answer it, my memory became exceedingly clear, and it appeared to me just as if the New Testament was placed open before me, eighth chapter of Romans, and as light

as if some candle lighted was held for me to read these words: 'The Spirit helpeth our infirmities with groaning which cannot be uttered.' And all the time that my heart was a-beating, it made me groan like a person in distress, which was not very easy to stop, though I was in no pain at all, and my brother being in bed in another room came and opened the door, and asked me if I had got the toothache. I told him no, and that he might get to sleep. I tried to stop. I felt unwillingly to go to sleep myself, I was so happy, fearing I should lose it – thinking within myself 'My willing soul would stay, In such a frame as this.' And while I lay reflecting, after my heart stopped beating, feeling as if my soul was full of the Holy Spirit, I thought that perhaps there might be angels hovering round my bed. I felt just as if I wanted to converse with them, and finally I spoke, saying, 'O ye affectionate angels! how is it that ye can take so much interest in our own.' After this, with difficulty I got to sleep; and when I awoke in the morning my first thoughts were: What has become of my happiness? and, feeling a degree of it in my heart, I asked for more, which was given to me as quick as thought. I then got up to dress myself, and found to my surprise that I could but just stand. It appeared to me as if was a little heaven upon earth. My soul felt as completely raised above fears of death as of going to sleep; and like a bird in a cage, I had a desire, if it was the will of God, to get released from my body and to dwell with Christ, though willing to live to do good to others, and to warn sinners to repent. I went downstairs feeling as solemn as if I had lost all my friends, and thinking with myself, that I would not let me parents know it until I had first looked into it, at the eighth chapter of Romans, and every verse seemed to almost speak and to confirm it was the truly the Word of God, and as if my feelings correspond with the meaning of

the word. I then told my parents of it, and told them that I thought that they must see that when I spoke, that it was not my own voice, for it appeared so to me. My speech seemed entirely under the control of the Spirit within me; I do not mean that the words which I spoke were not my own, for they were. I thought that I was influenced similar to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (with the exception of having power to give it to others, and doing what they did). After breakfast I went round to converse with my neighbors [sic] on religion, which I could not have been hired to have done before this and at their request I prayed with them, though I had never prayed in public before.

“I now feel as if I had discharged my duty by telling the truth, and hope by the blessing of God, it may do some good to all who shall read it. He has fulfilled his promise in sending the Holy Spirit down into our hearts, or mine at least, and I now defy all the Deists and Atheists in the world to shake my faith in Christ.” (James, 1902: 191-193)

This religious experience contains all three aspects I have described. We see the ‘revelatory’ aspect as the recipient is told the truth of the Bible. The ‘regenerative’ aspect provides the recipient with renewed faith in God. And the ‘numinous/mystical’ comes in the form of the Holy Spirit, which threatens to cause fear in the recipient but then goes on to provide a wonderful feeling of bliss.

My claim now, which I expect to be uncontroversial, is that religious experiences are very important, if not crucial, to the foundation of Christianity.<sup>5</sup> My reasoning for this is that many of the events which are important to Christianity were in fact religious experiences. For

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<sup>5</sup> As well as other traditional monotheistic religions, like Judaism and Islam.

example, Moses' many encounters/conversations with God; Mary being told that she would bear the son of God and to call him Jesus; and St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus.

Historically there is evidence that these religions spawned from reports of miracles and religious experience. Mackie (1982: 187) says:

William James [author of *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*] thought that the religious experiences of individuals were the nucleus and root of all religion, and that all factual claims going beyond what such experiences themselves contain, all metaphysical theology, and all socially organized and institutionalized religion, are merely secondary outgrowths from this root.

Theologically there is also a great need for divine interventions. As Plantinga (2000: 285) says:

belief in the main lines of the gospel is produced in Christians by a special work of the Holy Spirit, not by belief-producing faculties and processes with which we were originally created. ... it doesn't follow, contrary to Hume's implicit suggestion, that there is anything irrational or contrary to reason in believing it, given the internal instigation of the Holy Spirit.

This quote shows that God's intervention in the world is integral to Christianity because the belief is the idea that the Holy Spirit does the work of God in the world via religious experience (or even miracles) at least some of the time. Whether one believes in the Holy Spirit is not of great importance because 'Holy Spirit' can just be substituted for God, as He is one and the same with God. What is certain is that religious experiences, as I have defined them, are an integral part of traditional Christianity.

One may question whether God needs to give people religious experiences in order to give them personal attention. For example, God may act like a rich uncle who, anonymously, helps his orphaned nephew throughout life, perhaps by providing him with money and chances that are not available to other children. The nephew should, hopefully, appreciate his mysterious benefactor, but it seems that despite the aid the uncle provides his nephew, the uncle would be neglecting his nephew of a far more important thing: love. Children, not just orphans, seek to form bonds and connect with people. Although the child may have his uncle's attention in a superficial sense, i.e. the uncle provides him with necessities and opportunities, the child would not have the kind of attention that he would desire, and this kind of attention, as already stated, is to be loved and to love another. When we transfer the analogy back to God, we see that people who do not receive religious experiences may still appreciate and 'love' God in a sense, but they will surely not be able to love God to the extent that somebody does who has received personal contact and confirmation of God's love for them. In the same way that a somebody may love their significant other, without confirmation that the significant other loves them back, the person may not feel as good or as in love as they would if it was the case that their significant other showed or told them that they love them.

## **3: The Incompatibility**

In this chapter, I, firstly, outline and discuss a precursory argument and then show that this precursory argument fails, because religious experiences do not undermine our free will since people are still free to reject or accept the moral benefits, which are entailed in the aspects of religious experience outlined in the previous chapter. Secondly, I outline and discuss the actual argument of my thesis. Finally, I consider the effects of my argument on the free will defence, despite it being resistant to the incompatibility itself.

### **Precursory Argument**

The precursory argument is the following:

- 1) The Free Will Defence says that we have free will to make morally significant decisions.
- 2) Theists believe that God intervenes in the world, through religious experiences.
- 3) God's intervention in the world, through religious experiences, undermines our free will.

- 4) Therefore, there is an incompatibility between the free will defence and God's intervention in the world, through religious experiences.

Premises (1) and (2) should be uncontroversial. We saw that in Chapter One, the free will defence said that a possible reason for their being evil in the world is that God gave us free will in order to make morally significant decisions ourselves, because this was a better than if we were programmed automata who only did what our programming told us to do. By giving us free will, God is excused from direct responsibility for evil in the world. Chapter Two explained why theists believe that God intervenes in the world through religious experiences, so again this should be an uncontroversial premise. Premise (3), on the other hand, is very controversial. Although I do not think this argument works, I will outline possible motivation for premise (3). This motivation is that religious experiences give their recipients moral benefits and this undermines free will. It should be noted that this will also be motivation for the third premise for my actual argument.

In Chapter Two I outlined the various aspects of religious experience and stated that these aspects were to be my definition of religious experience. These aspects were 'revelatory', 'regenerative', and 'numinous/mystical'. It is within these aspects that we will find the moral benefits that result from having a religious experience. There are two types of moral benefits that can be gained from religious experience and these are *indirect* and *direct* moral benefits. Direct moral benefits are when the religious experience contains something which pertains specifically towards morality. For example, when God revealed the Ten Commandments to Moses this religious experience would have contained direct moral benefits because the Ten Commandments are specific rules about how one should behave in order to be a morally good. Religious experiences with clear instructions on morality have direct moral benefits. Indirect moral benefits, on the other hand, do not relate so clearly to morality. For instance, in

the example described in Chapter Two, we can imagine the recipient only experiencing the Holy Spirit and this would provide an indirect moral benefit as this part of religious experience does not contain specific information about morality. This does still have some moral benefit, because they make the recipient of the religious experience aware of things which pertain towards their behaviour. This might include knowledge of life after death, i.e. that one will either go to Heaven or Hell, or of the existence of a supernatural sustainer and creator of the universe who will judge us upon death. This becomes an indirect moral benefit because it is knowledge that can influence how one acts in this life, though it is indirect because it does not tell the recipient exactly how they should act, rather the recipient is made aware that they must actively seek to be morally good if they wish to avoid damnation to Hell. Although I make this distinction between indirect and direct moral benefits, these are often intertwined in the aspects of religious which I now examine.

The 'revelatory' aspect of religious experience contains mostly direct moral benefits because it entails the recipient of this aspect of religious experience receiving important information from God, or another divine agent. Davis (1989: 40) says that this sort of experience has the following distinctive features:

- (i) they are usually sudden and of short duration, though the after-effects may last a lifetime (especially in the case of conversion experiences); (ii) they alleged new knowledge seems to the subject to have been acquired immediately rather than through reasoning or sense perception; (iii) the alleged new knowledge seems to the subject to have been 'poured into' or 'showered upon' him (metaphors abound) by an external agency; (iv) the 'revelations carry with them utter conviction, somehow even more than that which attaches to sense perception; and (v) the insights gained are often claimed to be impossible to put into words.

Part (iv) is going to be relevant to my argument because it seems that this shows that there must be *direct* moral benefits to this aspect of religious experience. I have already assumed that God either gives the religious experience or allows the religious experience to occur, so any information revealed to the recipient is going to have morally benefits. For instance, the recipient of the religious experience could have been given information on how to live a better life, or about the existence of the afterlife, or even confirmed the truth of any number of religious ideas that they had already considered or simply believed to be true. The benefits of this sort of information would be two-fold: if the recipient of the religious experience were given information about how to live their life, this would be a direct moral benefit, and this would also entail an indirect moral benefit. This indirect moral benefit would be knowing (or at least being far more certain that those who do not receive religious experiences) that there is an afterlife which consists of Heaven and Hell. The reason for this indirect moral benefit is that if God, or another divine agent, tells you something this suggests that there may be an afterlife and/or you will be judged for your actions in this life when you die. Davis (1989: 40-41) is keen to emphasise that those who have a religious experience with a revelatory aspect tend to have a feeling of certainty about the information that they have gained, so it is not a great leap to assume that those who have a revelatory aspect to their religious experience then go on to lead better lives. Recipients are still free to reject the moral benefits that they receive in their religious experience, but this still does not take away the fact that they have been given a moral benefit as the result of their religious experience.

The second aspect of religious experience that is going to have moral benefits is the 'regenerative' aspect. This has a combination of both direct and indirect moral benefits. This sort of experience, which has already been detailed in Chapter Two, gives the recipient, among other things, a renewed sense of faith and often the recipient is healed in some way. The recipient can receive both a physiological and a psychological benefit of the experience.

The recipients will also be aware that these benefits are the result of an external agency. If they did not think this, then it would not count as a religious experience as such. The moral benefits are not hard to find in this sort of experience. For example, if a recipient was lonely or felt generally unhappy prior to their religious experience and had been considering partaking in some immoral acts of one kind or another, in order to try and diminish their loneliness or to simply to make them feel better about themselves, then receiving a regenerative aspect in a religious experience would have an immediate effect. Simply feeling happy from a religious experience is a direct moral benefit because you are more likely to perform actions which are morally good if you feel you have been blessed in some manner. Those who are lonely may (though not necessarily) feel spiteful that they feel the way they do whereas others feel good. So, this would give a direct moral benefit as the recipient would be immediately in a happier state of mind and would be far more likely to spread the positive feelings that they have. They would no longer feel lonely and they would have a renewed faith in life and God, and this would help them behave in morally good way because they would not want to disappoint God. The indirect moral benefits are the same as with the revelatory aspect of religious experience, i.e. knowing that there is a God leads one to know that there is an afterlife, so they must behave in a morally good way or face the possibility of damnation to Hell.

The final aspect of religious experience that is going to have moral benefits is the 'numinous/mystical' aspect. This aspect differs from the previous two aspects because it seems to only offer indirect moral benefits. The 'numinous/mystical' aspect of religious experience is when the recipient becomes aware of a higher power and His almightiness (i.e. God), or becomes aware of an ultimate reality (i.e. Heaven). Becoming aware of God's existence may cause feelings of fear and anxiety and becoming aware of an ultimate reality may cause feelings of joy, bliss and ecstasy. The previous two aspects are likely to entail the

numinous/mystical aspect, though it may be possible to have a religious experience which only contains the numinous/mystical aspect. The indirect moral benefits from this aspect are the same as with the previous two aspects, i.e. God or the afterlife's reality causing the recipient to reconsider how they behave in this life as it will affect what happens to them when they die. This may cause a change of heart in the sinner and help him transform himself in to a better person or it may reassure the saint to continue down their righteous path.

I have described these three aspects separately to explain how each gives moral benefits to the recipient, though I must note that it seems unlikely that a religious experience would come with only one of these aspects though it is possible. If we look back at the example of Moses receive the Ten Commandments, we see that the focus here was upon the revelatory aspect, though he could have had some of regenerative aspect, as he may have found a renewed sense of hope because God was still guiding him. There would have certainly been the numinous aspect, but this would not have been so prominent, as Moses would have already had confirmed that God existed due to previous religious experiences. Of course, there may be those who only experience the numinous/mystical aspect, but this is enough for them to gain moral benefits their religious experience.

So, the motivation for premise (3) is that religious experience gives moral benefits and these moral benefits undermine our free will because if a person receives moral benefits then they are not completely free as they have been told or now have clearer idea how they should behave because of their religious experience.

It is clear that religious experiences bestow moral benefits upon its recipients, though it is not clear that receiving moral benefits undermines our free will. I now consider a scenario which shows why. Receiving moral benefits from a religious experience is no different from, for example, an ethics lecturer telling her students how they should behave. When the ethics

lecturer tells her students how they should behave, she is not undermining their free will because the students are still free to take her advice or to reject it. In the same way when God or another divine agent gives a religious experience, the recipient of the religious experience is still free to embrace or reject the moral benefits they are given. One could point out the disanalogies between the ethics lecturer and God to suggest that one would be more inclined to freely do what God says. This is because God is omnipotent, omniscient, morally perfect, and the creator and sustainer of the universe, whereas the ethics lecturer is only a finite human who could easily be wrong about what she says and a great many other things too. Although God might be far more convincing than an ethics lecturer, this does not entail that when God tells you something that you are no longer free to do or not do what He says. Moses, for example, could still have chosen to ignore the revelation that God gave him, but this would still not take away the fact that having this information revealed to him would give him direct moral benefits.

### **The Argument**

I have rejected what I call the precursor argument as God's intervention through religious experience does not undermine our free will. God's intervention, through religious experience undermines, rather, why we use free will, according to free will theodicies. The following is the argument that I am proposing and defending:

Premise 1: Free will theodicies say that God gives us free will to make morally significant decisions for two purposes.

Premise 2: Theists believe that God intervenes in the world through religious experiences.

Premise 3: God's intervention in the world, through religious experiences, undermines a purpose for God giving us free will to make morally significant decisions.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is an incompatibility between free will theodicies and God's intervention in the world through religious experiences.

Again, Premises (1) and (2) are uncontroversial. Premise (1) has changed its target from the free will defence to free will theodicies, the reason for which will become clear when I outline the second half of the motivation for premise (3) shortly. Premise (3) is the controversial premise once again, so I need to explain its motivations. The moral benefits gained from religious experiences are one half of the motivation, so I do not need to discuss this again. The second half of the motivation comes the second purpose that free will theodicies say we have free will. This second purpose is to act as a qualifying factor in who goes where when they die, i.e. those who are morally good go to Heaven and those who are morally evil go to Hell.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that free will theodicies are actually a type of greater good theodicy, because free will theodicies invoke free will as being a greater good than not having free will. I note this point in case readers feel that I am criticising points of a greater good theodicy rather than a free will theodicy.

<sup>7</sup> If a theodicy denies that there is such a place as Hell, then it is immune to my argument. One of the reasons that John Hick rejects the existence of Hell in his 'soul-making' theodicy is to avoid the so-called 'problem of Hell' which questions why God would create such an evil place if he was so good. Swinburne (1998) and Davis (2001) both agree that Hell is not the place of suffering as medieval theology describes it; rather it is a place where people simply live without God. Although Hell has been toned down considerable, it is still the case that Heaven is the significantly better place to be than Hell.

Both free will theodicies that I discussed in Chapter Two invoke the afterlife in order to ensure that possible evils in this life are outweighed by the goods of the afterlife. The redemption of evil in the afterlife ensures that evil states of affairs do not become dominant, because there will always be the good state of affairs in Heaven which outweighs all possible evil states of affairs. We saw already that both Davis (2001) and Swinburne (1998) utilise the afterlife in this manner. The free will defence, and consequently free will theodicies, have a primary purpose for free will. This primary purpose is to act as the intrinsic good which causes moral evil and allows God to avoid direct responsibility for moral evil in the world. Invocation of the afterlife means that free will takes on secondary role, which is to act as the deciding factor in who goes where when they die, i.e. the morally good will go to Heaven and the morally evil will go to Hell. So, according to free will theodicies, we have free will for these two purposes. These two purposes are of equal importance in a free will theodicy because they both do equally important tasks. The secondary purpose cannot be undermined by being treated as a less important purpose of free will because this would affect the redemption of evil in the afterlife which, according to both free will theodicies I have discussed, is essential for maintaining the dominance of good over evil, as both free will theodicies place as much emphasis on the redemption of evils in the afterlife as they do on the intrinsic goodness of free will and we must not forget that free will is vital in this redemption process occurring.

With free will theodicies placing such great emphasis on the idea that all evils shall be redeemed in the afterlife, it makes it quite difficult to fit an intervening and personal God into the picture, because if all evils are absolved in the afterlife then it's not clear why God should intervene in the world at all. Of course, God could intervene in morally insignificant ways, like causing a piece of paper to float above a tree. When we consider a personal God intervening, i.e. through religious experiences, which give moral benefits to its recipients, we

face the risk that this sort of intervention will undermine one of the purposes God, according to free will theodicies, has given us free will.

Premise (3) should now be well motivated. I am not arguing that God's intervention through religious experiences violates our free will, as did my precursory argument; rather my argument is that God's intervention through religious experience undermines a purpose for which we use free will. The two purposes of free will, according to the free will theodicies that I discussed earlier, are (i) an intrinsic good, which means that God is not responsible for moral evil<sup>8</sup> and (ii) to decide who goes to Heaven and Hell after death. God's interventions through religious experience give moral benefits to its recipients and this undermines *everybody's* use of free will for purpose (ii) because God would be giving some people direction on how to use their free will, i.e. what to do to be morally good, whereas others would have to decide for themselves.

In support of my argument I will offer the following analogy. Let us consider a teacher giving her students a test. Each student has the same chance of passing the test as they are all of a similar intellectual level. Students who receive good marks graduate and go on to have a life filled with well paid and satisfying jobs. Students who receive poor marks do not graduate and go on to have a life of low paying and unsatisfying jobs. If, whilst the test is being held, the teacher walks around the room whispering into the ears of selected students the answers to the test, this would undermine the entire purpose of the test because the test would not be fair. There is little point in holding a test if you are not going to actually examine the intellectual abilities of those you are testing. Whispering answers into student's ears will not

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<sup>8</sup> It is possible that somebody could construct a free will theodicy with just (i) if this said that this was the *actual* reason God allows evil, as Plantinga (1977: 28) says that what differentiates the free will defence from a free will theodicy is that the free will defence only gives the *possible* reason that God allows evil. The sort of theodicy is what I would call a 'bare theodicy' because it only works with bare theism. The sort of free will theodicies which are the target of my argument are what could be called 'wider theodicy' because it includes appeals to wider theism. A bare theodicy would be affected in the same way as the free will defence is by argument, so I will consider a bare theodicy to be in the same category of theory as the free will defence for my purposes, although they are technically different.

allow them to show their intellectual worth. Of course, those who are lucky enough to have answers whispered into their ears are under no obligation to use the answers that have been given to them by the teacher; so, it is not as if the teacher is predetermining who will pass. Regardless of this last point, the test has still be undermined because the purpose in which the test was set was to judge who was worthy of graduating and those students who have had answers whispered into their ears clearly have the advantage over those students who have not had answers whispered into their ears.

The scenario of the teacher conferring an advantage to certain of her students during the test is like the situation God finds himself in when He gives people religious experiences. Life, from a theistic viewpoint, can be likened to a test. And this test is to see where people go when they die. Good people go to Heaven. Bad people go to Hell. When God goes around the world giving people religious experiences, which entail moral benefits due the aspects outlined earlier, we see that that God is undermining the point of life on earth, which is to be a test to decide who goes to Heaven and who goes to Hell. We could question the purpose of giving people free will in order to see how they fare with moral decisions in life, if God already has in mind those persons he wants to go where in the afterlife, because he gives certain people religious experiences whilst does not give other religious experiences. Of course, people who are given religious experiences are still free to reject the moral benefits that they receive with their religious experiences, but this does not reconcile the fact that the test of life would have been undermined because those who receive religious experiences are privy to how they should act morally, and this gives them an advantage over everyone else who has to figure out for themselves how they should act morally.

A possible response here is that God will not generate any problems if He only gives those people, who are already leading morally good lives, religious experiences, as they would probably, if not certainly, have ended up in Heaven anyway. My first responses are twofold.

Firstly, it seems to be odd, and perhaps pointless, of God to give somebody a religious experience who is going to end up in Heaven anyway. Secondly, this response suggests that God only gives religious experiences to those who deserve them. This is not the case, according to classical theism and the literature on religious experiences. For example, conversion experiences are a major type of religious experience. James (1902: 217-258) outlines many of these conversion experiences resulting from religious experiences which contain the revelatory aspect. A famous biblical example of a conversion experience is of St. Paul on the road to Damascus. Paul, known then as Saul, was a persecutor of Christians before his religious experience, which caused him to convert to Christianity. To hold this response would require the denial of conversion experiences, something which seems to be too much to ask classical theists to do.

Another possible response is that the classical theist would say that God's giving religious experience is more analogous to the following scenario involving a teacher and her students. Rather than being on a level playing field at the start of the test, the students are at the same level at the start of the year. Then, throughout the year, the teacher offers extra revision classes to the students. Those who choose to come to those revision classes are likely to fare better at the test at the end of the year. In this scenario it is not the teacher's fault that students fail the test because extra revision classes were available to all. Analogously, God offers everyone who wants it, a religious experience, so it is not His fault if some people fail to take the offer of religious experience and, consequently, go to Hell.

Even if we suppose this analogy works, it would not matter because, as I said earlier, for my argument to work there only has to be one religious experience in which the level playing field, for entry into the afterlife, is disrupted. It would not matter that God offered everyone religious experience after He had given someone (perhaps someone undeserving), and not others, a religious experience, because this would still undermine the second purpose we are

given free will; and hence, generate the incompatibility between free will theodicies and religious experience.

Regardless, this analogy fails. God does not offer everybody religious experiences, like the teacher offers revision sessions to everybody in her class. The theist may reply that one needs to be religious in order for there to be a possibility of them receiving a religious experience. If we carried this over to the teacher revision session scenario, it would be like the teacher only telling a select group of her students that she was holding revision sessions for them. Not everybody in the world is religious and there are cultures in the world who have not entertained monotheistic religions and these people would be like the students who have not been told about the revision sessions.

Even if we were to assume that all students were made aware of the revision sessions. This would suggest that all theists receive religious experience, like all students who go to the revision sessions receive extra help. I think it is fair to assume that not all religious people have received religious experiences. Being religious is akin to turning up the revision sessions. A religious person not receiving religious experiences is like a student turning up to the revision class and not being helped to revise anything for the test. Obviously, it would be absurd to go to a revision class and not be helped in any way. Any half decent teacher should be able to hold a revision session in which she helps all her students revise for a test.

Conversion experiences also cause more problems for the theist, because in the teacher analogy it would be like the teacher whispering answers during the test in to the ears of students who did not even bother to turn up to the revision sessions. This not only undermines the test but also causes friction with the purpose of the revision sessions.

It has been suggested to me that the teacher analogy only supports my argument because we are inclined to believe certain things concerning the obligations of teachers and the holding of

tests. A different analogy has consequently been suggested to me and I will consider this now.<sup>9</sup>

There is a cook running a soup kitchen for the local homeless. This soup kitchen is open to everyone and everyone who enters will be fed. Some choose to remain outside. If we examine the analogy at this point we see that soup is being compared to religious experience and the soup kitchen to religion. We have already seen that to follow an analogy of this sort, one would have to hold that every religious person received a religious experience and, like I said earlier, this is not the case. Perhaps this analogy can be modified to say there is a finite amount of soup available; so, unfortunately, some people who come to the soup kitchen are going miss out on soup. If this is the case, it is not the cook's fault because he had limited supplies. I have more to say on this point in my general reply in a moment. So let's continue this analogy. Seeing these people outside the cook decides that he should help these ignorant homeless people in some way, so he puts on his jacket and grabs a pot full of soup. The cook walks around shoving a bowl of his award-winning soup into the hands of as many of the homeless as he has the capacity of feed. Some homeless people are in rapture at the smell of the soup and ecstatically pour it down their throats; others are less impressed and drop the soup on the floor and get on with their night. The cook looks round and sees everybody he could not feed. We are inclined to feel that the cook has not fallen short of any moral ideal, even though there are many wanting mouths left unfed.

The first problem this analogy faces is if one accepts the modification I offered and one must accept this for the analogy to remain plausible. This modification said that there was a limited quantity of soup in the soup kitchen. But why would the cook go outside to offer soup to the homeless outside when there are homeless inside who are starving and who actually turned up in order to get soup? The cook would clearly be acting unfairly. We see then that there is a

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<sup>9</sup> My thanks to Tim Mawson for this example.

large problem generated by non-religious people receiving religious experiences because it means God is overlooking already religious people who are waiting for such experiences.

The second problem with this analogy is that it works off our intuitions related to charity and people who try their best with limited supplies. This should not be a problem for God. He has all the supplies possible, so there are problems here if one tries to maintain that God is limited by anything (except logic, which is widely accepted, and this is not a question of logic anyway). God is more analogous to a cook who has counted how many homeless people there are and has made enough soup to shove a pot of his soup in each of their hands. Indeed, we could go further and say that the cook has an unlimited supply of soup, which would only be a fraction of God's power. If one tries to defend the notion that the cook can get round all of these people and then shove a bowl of soup into each of their hands, then one would be committed to saying that God gives everybody religious experiences. Again, this is clearly not the case.

Furthermore, soup kitchens are also *reactions* to homeless people starving on the streets. This would be more analogously with a god who came to our world after it was created and then set about helping people. This god is not the God of classical theism. The God of classical theism created the world; therefore he holds some responsibility for what it contains, though we have already established that free will means He is not responsible for moral evil, but he is still responsible for everything else. Of course such a God could still be charitable, but this does not take away from the fact that this God laid out all the rules for this world and the afterlife.

It should start to be becoming clear that the soup kitchen analogy breaks down at this point because the cook does not make the rules for the homeless; he only tries to help them survive. Survival in this analogy would like going to Heaven. The cook has not made the rules for

how a homeless person can survive; he has only tried to help them survive. Let's consider the teacher analogy once again. It seems clear that this is a better analogy than the soup kitchen analogy because the teacher is the one who sets the tests and decides what is going to be in the test. In the same way that God decides what is necessary for entry in Heaven and what will result in being sent to Hell. Both analogies make use of intuition pumps, but the teacher analogy does so in a far more acceptable manner because it is more analogous to the situation God is in with entry into the afterlife, whilst the soup kitchen analogy breaks down in many crucial places.

We see that God's intervention through religious experience would be just like the teacher analogy and so it would completely undermine an entire purpose we were given free will in the first place, i.e. to see who is worthy of going to Heaven and who should go to Hell.<sup>1011</sup>

Free will theodicies often claim that God cannot intervene too much because this would violate our free will, but it now seems clear that if free will theodicies are correct God cannot intervene through religious experiences because any such intervention serves to undermine the purpose everybody uses free will according to these theodicies. Therefore, it seems that (4) follows from (1), (2) and (3).

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<sup>10</sup> God interventions through religious experience may also affect the intrinsic goodness of free will because it suggests that free will is not as good as it is proclaimed to be if God must give some people moral benefits rather than let them use their free will as it was designed to be used, so it is possible that the purpose (i) would also be undermined by religious experiences.

<sup>11</sup> A possible argument which is related to this argument is that there seems to be some unfairness in God only giving religious experiences to some people and not to others. If God can influence some people through religious experiences, then why can He not influence everybody through religious experiences? It seems that if God is as he is traditionally described, then he should give everyone religious experiences. I am not going to consider this argument here, though I may in future.

## The Argument and the Free Will Defence

Noticeably, my precursory argument was aimed at the free will defence whereas my actual argument was aimed at free will theodicies. The reasoning for this is that I do not think that my argument works against the free will defence *per se*. In this section I will examine what effects my argument has on the free will defence and explain why the free will defence is immune to my argument. In order to this I shall explain what the differences between the free will defence and free will theodicies. I then describe where my argument leaves the free will defence, or to be more exact where it leaves those who are proponents of the free will defence.

So, the purpose of free will in the free will defence is only (i) which is, of course, used as one of the purposes of free will in both free will theodicies I examined, i.e. free will is a greater good so it is better to have free will than not to have free will, and free will results in there being evil in the world because it means we have a choice between doing good and evil, and some people chose to do evil. The free will theodicies that I consider take this purpose of free will and defend it from within a wider religious context. By 'wider religious context' I am referring to the wider beliefs in a given religion, in this case Christianity; for example, belief in the afterlife or the Trinity. This may seem like a minor difference at first, but it is really quite significant, because by placing this core principle in the wider religious context, theodicies have given free will a second purpose. Also, the free will theodicies that I examined both require its proponents to be Christians who maintain traditional Christian beliefs; of particular important is the belief in Hell which generates the incompatibility. And finally, free will theodicies wish to show the *actual* reasons why God allows evil and both theodicians utilise their religious beliefs in order to do this.

The free will defence is such a strong argument because one does not need to embrace either Christianity or a belief in life after death in order to be a proponent of the free will defence, i.e. the free will defence is a more general argument because it is independent of religion. It is conceivable that any monotheistic theodicy could use the free will defence as its core principle because of how general an argument it is. This generality gives the free will defence its strength over, at least, the two free will theodicies I have considered and, most likely, theodicies in general. Though this strength does not stop free will theodicians, like Swinburne (1998) and Davis (2001) from wanting something more, like I discussed earlier in Chapter One, to dispel the problem of evil.

The free will defence is immune to the force of my argument because it does not require its proponents to endorse the concept of the Hell. The free will defence is only possibly affected directly by the part of my argument which appealed the direct moral benefits from religious experience as this did not include any appeal to the afterlife. Sadly, this is not enough to use my argument to attack the free will defence in the same way that free will theodicies have been attacked. This is because the free will defence finds its immunity in the fact that the part of my argument which appealed to indirect moral benefits from religious experiences appealed to the concepts of wider theism, something which the free will defence has no requirement for its proponents to endorse. This means that the free will defence avoids a large and crucial segment of my argument and so garners its victory from this.

The free will defence may avoid my argument but only if we consider the free will defence without belief in Hell. The free will defence works so well because it shows that it is *rational* to believe in God because it is possible that He exists given the existence of evil. The implication being that it is rational to believe in things of which there is a possibility of existing. This is fair. But the free will defence only makes belief in God rational. It does not make rational a belief in any of the wider religious concepts, such as Hell. This has the

possibly devastating effect that the free will defence cannot be used *rationaly* by Christians, because Christians believe in wider religious concepts, including Hell, and this is what makes them Christians. Of course, Universalists, who reject the concept of Hell, could still use the free will defence because the incompatibility is generated from belief in Hell. The free will defence counters the logical problem of evil and as a result makes belief in God rational, but it does not make rational any other aspects of Christianity. For a Christian to believe in both their religious beliefs and the free will defence would result in a theory that resembles the free will theodicies which are the subject of my argument. So, if someone believed in both the free will theodicy and all the wider religious concepts, they would then be embracing a ‘kind-of’ free will theodicy, because it would be remarkable similar (if not the same) as the free will theodicies that are the subject of my thesis. The free will defence remains a strong argument as long as it is kept independent of the concept of Hell, but this is itself a problem for most theists as they want *all* their religious beliefs to be rational.

So, the precursory argument failed to show there was an incompatibility between the free will defence and religious experiences because it was clear that recipients of religious experiences were not having their free will violated when they received moral benefits as a result of those religious experiences. Then we saw how my actual argument showed there was an incompatibility between free will theodicies and religious experience because free will theodicies have two purposes for free will (as opposed the free will defence which has one purpose) and the second purpose (which was to decide who goes to Heaven and Hell after death) was undermined by God’s intervention through religious experiences. Finally it was shown that although the free will defence is not vulnerable to my actual argument (one needs to endorse a free will theodicy to be vulnerable) that my actual argument did make it difficult for theists endorse both the free will defence and their wider religious beliefs because this would amount to a kind-of theodicy which would then to be vulnerable to my argument.

## Conclusion

In this Chapter, I sum up my findings, discuss the implications for the theists affected by my argument and outline the options those theists have. The following is the argument that I have proposed and defended:

Premise 1: Free will theodicies say that God gives us free will to make morally significant decisions for two purposes.

Premise 2: Theists believe that God intervenes in the world through religious experiences.

Premise 3: God's intervention in the world, through religious experiences, undermines a purpose for God giving us free will to make morally significant decisions.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is an incompatibility between free will theodicies and God's intervention in the world through religious experiences.

Premises (1) and (2) remain relatively uncontroversial. Premise (3) was controversial and required substantial explication and defending, and was the subject of Chapter Three.

The conclusion leaves the theist in somewhat of a dilemma. The two horns of the dilemma are either accepting free will theodicies or accepting religious experiences. If theists were to accept the first horn of the dilemma, then this would have some benefits and many disadvantages. The principal benefit is that it allows the theist to respond to problem of evil, this being the most prevalent issue when it comes to rational belief in God. By embracing a free will theodicy, the theist can adequately explain why there is so much evil in the world. Free will theodicies also rationalise the belief in wider religious concepts, such as belief in the afterlife. Including the concept of Hell in their theodicies is important for both free will theodicians that I considered, so it must be something that is generally important to classical theists. The downside with accepting this horn of the dilemma is that to be a free will theodician you must reject that there are true religious experiences. Certainly people may have 'religious experiences' but these will not be experiences that result from the intervention of God or another divine agent who acts with God's permission, rather these must, presumably, only be hallucinations or tricks of the mind.

A good point here is that theists could simply embrace free will theodicies that do not embrace the concept of Hell. This is an acceptable route for the theist, but it would be like rejecting the free will theodicies that I have been the target of the incompatibility I have proposed. Therefore, this option would be accepting the horn of the dilemma. Also, rejecting Hell and embracing universalism, the view that everyone will, eventually, be redeemed in the kingdom of Heaven, can be considered to be a response to the problem of evil itself, as everyone ends up in Heaven; so, the balance of life is overall good for everyone and this means there is no need to consider free will theodicies whatsoever.

The second horn of the dilemma also has many benefits and disadvantages. Firstly, it will directly confirm the existence of God for those who have such experiences. Secondly, it will allow the belief in many of the important events that are described within religious texts, in

particular the Bible. The Bible is strewn with examples of religious experiences. Abraham, Moses, Noah, Mary, St Paul and the Apostles are among those who had religious experiences. Indeed, if we go wider than the Bible, many of the saints of Christianity and many ordinary Christians are said to have had religious experiences. Endorsing this horn of the dilemma allows all of these things to be believed to be true. Those who endorse the first horn must reject the truth of all of these experiences. This may not sit well with many religious people, though this only stands against the truth and acceptance of free will theodicies. The negative aspect with endorsing the religious experience horn of the dilemma is that it means, obviously, that you have to reject free will theodicies and everything that goes along with that. This opens up the problem of evil, in particular the evidential problem of evil but it may also reinvigorate the logical problem of evil. It may reinvigorate the logical problem of evil as the free will defence, which is used to refute logical problem of evil, only goes so far as to make belief in God rational, it does not make rational belief in other religious concepts, particularly Hell, and it is presumed that theists want it to be rational to believe in the Hell as well as just to believe in God. Theists could embrace both this horn of the dilemma and religious experience, but they would have to convert from classical theism to something different, like universalism, for instance.

It seems clear that, although this is certainly a dilemma, the scales are tipped in favour of the second horn, which is that of belief in religious experience. The scales are tipped because much of the history and root of religion stems from apparent religious experiences. Though there is a very good reason to reject this and opt for the first horn, i.e. to counter the problem of evil and maintain classical theistic beliefs, this does not seem to be the option that many theists will want to take because they will want to continue their belief in the existence of Hell. Free will theodicies are also just theories by philosophers and theologians, so they are

fallible because of their human creation. Religious experience, if true, comes straight from the divine realm, so it is not fallible, assuming they are true, like free will theodicies are.

Those who wish to accept neither of these horns are left with a more drastic option, though it is an option that very few theists will want to endorse. This is to tone down the attributes of God. As Swinburne (1998: 30) and Mackie (2001: 77) say the problem of evil only arises if we think of God as omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect. If we reject that God is an omni-being then we avoid the problem of evil and consequently the need for free will defences and free will theodicies. With free will theodicies out of the picture, there is no incompatibility with religious experience, so the dilemma never arises. This, of course, is a very unpopular option for the theist. There is also the problem that it might make belief in this new version of God irrational. Part of the rationality of believing in God is that he is a perfect being. There is plausibility in believing in a creator who has the 'omni' attributes that God is said to have, yet there is not the same plausibility for a toned down God. By comparison, belief in God may become as plausible as belief in mythical creatures like dragons, pixies, or unicorns. Theists certainly want God to be more plausible than mythical creatures, though this is a possibility if God's attributes are toned down.

It has come to my attention that there is a possible route for the classical theist to take in order to diminish the conclusion of my argument. This route is to argue that God can surely find a morally optimal way of balancing these two incompatible activities. If my argument is correct then this means that God cannot give both religious experiences and use free will as the admittance decider for the afterlife. But, so goes the proposed response, God can take this balancing option and find the best way to conduct both these beneficial things. So, God should be able to give some religious experiences whilst sometimes using free will as the admittance decider for the afterlife.

If God does use free will as the admittance decider for the afterlife, then this does not seem to be the sort of thing that He can use intermittently. This would be akin to a teacher walking round the room and not giving the test to various students. The whole point of the test was to test all the students and not just some of them. Of course, a teacher can excuse people from a test for various reasons, like illness or injury. God does not seem to have this liberty because he has given us *libertarian* free will, so we are all qualify for the test to see whether we should go to Heaven or go to Hell. Those without libertarian free will could, of course, be excused, but with the teacher analogy this would like not even needing to turn up for the test, rather than being at the test and not being given a test paper. It would seem odd for God, a perfect being, to decree that free will should only be used sometimes to decide if people are going to Heaven and Hell. This seems to be a rather indecisive move of a perfect being. More importantly, this sort of selective testing would undermine the point in testing people at all. If some people are not going to be tested, then why should anybody? All those viable for the test start on a level playing field, because we have libertarian free will, so there does not seem to any reason why some person's should be excused from the test. It seems that God would have to either have to use free will as the admittance decider for the afterlife or give religious experiences. If God is said to do both, this seems to undermine His position as a perfect being. The onus is on the classical theist to explain how God could do both things without undermining His position as an infallible being. Taking this route seems to be like taking the unpopular option of toning down God's attributes because there does not seem to be any way that a perfect being could do what is agreed to be incompatible.

In conclusion, we see that both horns of the dilemma are a consequence of the incompatibility of the type of free will theodicies that I discussed and religious experiences which gave moral benefits. The first horn seems to be the one which is destined to be rejected simply because it does not have the importance in religious belief that religious experience has. Which horn

should be accepted is something best left to the affected theists to decide themselves, though I would imagine it would be the second horn that they would accept; thus resulting in the rejection of these free will theodicies and the concept of Hell entailed within them.

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