

Critical Examination of Leslie Allan's Response to Alvin Plantinga's Freewill Defense against the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

Leslie Allan's response to the problem of evil is a direct reaction to Alvin Plantinga's freewill defense on the existence of evil. In providing solution to the problem of evil, Plantinga attributes evil to the consequences of free will. Some theist scholars like St. Augustine believes and upholds this view that evil does not exist independently, but that the lack of proper use of good by man creates evil in the world. Thus, God is perfectly good and evil is because of man's freewill. However, critics such as Leslie Allan argues that Plantinga's free will defense inadequately addresses natural evils, such as disasters, which are not solely attributable to human choices. While Plantinga's position could be considered to have answered other problems of evil in the world created by the theistic God, the question of the existence of natural evil remains unanswered. This paper critically examines Leslie Allan's critique of Plantinga's freewill defense. The paper employs historical and phenomenological research methodologies. Data are generated from secondary sources and analyzed with descriptive analytical style. The research recommends amongst other things that nature is not evil. Natural disasters can cause harm but cannot perform evil actions because they are not moral agents. Evils are consequences of the free choices of moral agents such as human beings. Nature is not a moral agent, therefore cannot perform evil. It is on this note that this work posits that Plantinga's free will cannot be faulted on the grounds of natural evil.

Keywords: Freewill, Moral Evil, Natural Evil, Problem of evil, Moral Agent

Introduction

Over the years, the problem of evil has undoubtedly become the greatest scholarly argument that threatens the belief in God who is said to be omniscient, omnibenevolent and omnipotent. Considering the amount of evil in the world today, it has become so difficult to prove the existence of a God that possesses this nature. This problem is yet to be solved even in the church, as people get more confused, irritated and bitter especially when evil befalls the righteous. The classical formation of this problem reads; if God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient, whence evil in the world? Yet, God seems to be silent about all this problem. The existence of evil leads to disbelief

in the existence of God. The American analytic Philosopher Alvin Plantinga attempted to resolve this problem with his theory of freewill defense. But according to Leslie Allan, Plantinga's freewill does not seek to explain natural evil. Allan further argues that Plantinga's freewill defense requires some counterfactual conditionals about free agents to be true. This paper critically examines Leslie Allan's critique of Plantinga's freewill defense.

Contextual Clarification on Evil (Moral and Natural)

Evil is moral badness, wickedness, malevolence etc. This is the misuse of good things.¹ Evil in the context of this research is man-made. Philosophically, evil is an intentional harm inflicted by a moral agent (someone capable of making moral choices and understanding the consequences of his action). What this means is that an act is considered evil when it is done with a deliberate intention to cause significant harm without moral justification. There seems to be two kinds of evil (moral and natural). Moral evil refers to those evil that emanated from human factors (imperfect actions). Examples of moral evils are vicious, unjust, cruel, wicked, misguided thoughts words or actions. Natural evil: These are the evils that are caused by nature. Examples of Natural evils are: disease, flood, earthquake, storm, drought, tornado, and such like.² However, most of these natural evils does not arise independently of human actions.

On natural evil, Alvin Plantinga argues that it is conceivable that some natural evils and some persons are so related that the persons would have produced less moral good if the evils had been absent.³ According to Plantinga, certain individuals creatively navigate hardship and suffering in a manner that ultimately adds value to the overall situation. On the other hand, Augustine attributes natural evil to the

free actions of nonhuman spirits such as Satan and his cohorts.⁴ By longstanding theological teachings, Satan is depicted as a formidable nonhuman entity who, alongside numerous other angels, predates the creation of humankind. Within the Augustinian tradition, it is maintained that Satan, in contrast to the majority of his angelic counterparts, defied God and has since been responsible for sowing discord that gives rise to natural calamities. As a result, Augustine contends that the occurrence of natural evil can be attributed to the volitional actions of nonhuman spirits.⁵ However, James Sennett examining Augustine's view opines that natural evil significantly resembles moral evil, like the latter, it is the result of the activity of significantly free persons.⁶ It can be inferred from this that moral and natural evil can be considered as specific instances of what we could broadly label as moral evil, which stems from the voluntary actions of personal beings, whether they are human or nonhuman spirits.

The presence of natural evil poses a challenge not only to the free will defense but to all free will-based explanations for the problem of evil. This is due to the difficulty in attributing natural evil to human misuse of free will in the same manner as moral evil.⁷

¹St. Augustine. *Confessions*, (translated by Afsaneh Nejati, second edition. Tehran, Payame Noor: 2006), p. 76

²J. Hick. *Pink on Faceless* (Madrese Journal: No. 2 translated by Jalal Tavaklian, 2005), p. 265

³ Alvin Plantinga. *God, Freedom and Evil*. (United States of America: Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan 49503, 1974), p. 58.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga. *God, Freedom and Evil*. (United States of America: Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Michigan 49503, 1974), p. 59.

⁵ James F. Sennett Ed. *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga*. (U.K; Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 65.

⁶ James F. Sennett Ed. *The Analytic Theist: An Alvin Plantinga*. (U.K; Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 65

⁷Jennifer Gillett. *Compatibilist Freedom and the Problem of Evil*. Tilburg University, 2018 Document

According to Gillett, the assumption that evil is a necessary consequence of human's free will is also problematic. He argues that this is particularly problematic in light of insights from modern evolutionary biology which make it clear that death and suffering existed in the natural world long before humans existed.⁸ He contends that if natural evil existed before humans, then any justification for natural evil cannot be based on the concept of human free will. This philosophy raises some questions. Can natural processes be considered evil? Not at all! Natural processes are procedures allowed by God through which the world operates. Since God is not evil, a process approved by God cannot be evil. It's important to distinguish between evil, natural disasters, and natural processes. Therefore, what poses a problem for the free will defense is natural evil, not the natural processes of life.

Natural evils are the evils that arise independently of human actions. They are caused by nature itself (natural disaster). Examples of Natural evils are: disease, flood, earthquake, storm, drought, tornado, tsunami and such like.⁹ Expatriating on natural evil, John Stackhouse argues that:

The earth itself throws up volcanoes and earthquakes. The atmosphere can be too hot or too cold for any life to thrive, too windy or too still, too wet or too dry. Plants and

animals act as parasites or predators, and species suffer from over- or under-population. Finally, the heavens themselves send down meteorites, solar flares, radiation, and other dangers. Some of these features of nature may not be evil in themselves. But sometimes they pose threats to living things that might well be classed as evil.¹⁰

Stackhouse discussed various phenomena, such as solar flares and radiation, without portraying them as inherently malevolent. He acknowledged that their impact on living organisms could be considered harmful. This illustrates the idea that nature itself cannot be inherently evil. So, what exactly is natural evil? According to Chad and James, natural evil encompasses the pain and suffering caused by natural processes, as opposed to moral evil, which involves the malevolent actions of morally responsible individuals. If natural evil truly exists, how can the prevalence of suffering due to natural causes not challenge the possibility, or at least the likelihood, of the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good God? This, in essence, is the problem of natural evil.¹¹ They classified natural evil to be any event that meets the following three conditions:

- (1) If the event causes serious physical or mental injury to a sentient creature resulting in severe pain or death;
- (2) If the event is not caused directly by a moral agent, and

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https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/28669892/Gillett Compatibilist 11 12 2018 , p. 65.		

⁸ Gillett, Jennifer. *Compatibilist Freedom and the Problem of Evil*. Tilburg University, 2018 Document Version Publisher's PDF [https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/28669892/Gillett Compatibilist 11 12 2018](https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/28669892/Gillett%20Compatibilist%2011%2012%202018), p. 65.

⁹ J. Hick. *Pink on Faceless* (Madrese Journal: No. 2 translated by Jalal Tavaklian, 2005), p. 265

¹⁰ John G. Stackhouse, Jr. *Can God Be Trusted? Faith and the Challenge of Evil*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 34.

¹¹ Chad Meister and James K. Dew JR. *God and Evil. The Case of God in a World filled with Pain*. (IVP Books, Intervarsity Press, Downers, Illinois. 2013), p. 55.

(3) If the event is not a case of "useful pain," that is, pain which is a positive indicator to a sentient creature of a possibly harmful condition.

For Chad and James;

...natural evil would include not only the natural disasters already mentioned but also animal suffering, such as a fawn being seriously burned in a lightning-caused forest fire and suffering great pain before dying.' It would also include events such as a tornado blowing down a tree, resulting in the death of a person, even if the tree should have been removed because of obvious rot. Contributory negligence of a human does not remove this event from the category of natural evil as I'm taking it here.¹²

The aforementioned viewpoint is supported by several other scholars. If human negligence does not exempt an event from being classified as natural evil, then it suggests that moral evil is encompassed within natural evil. In other words, evil should be regarded as such without differentiation. They also concur with Leslie Allan's assertion that while many have presented defenses in response to the issue of moral evil, only a few have tackled the problem of natural evil. For instance, Norman Geisler and Wilfried Corduan, in addressing natural evil, propose a theodicy stating that it is essential for God to allow physical evils as a condition through which He can bring about the best

possible world.¹³ The perspective presented in this statement depicts a natural process as inherently negative or evil. This assertion is problematic because the natural course of events cannot be inherently evil. Unless Norman and Wilfred are suggesting that God is evil, this is not a widely accepted viewpoint as God is typically regarded as inherently good.

Chad and James acknowledge the free will defense as proposed by Augustine as a standard defense against the problem of moral evil. They noted that in the Augustinian tradition, this free will theodicy is also used to explain the origin of natural evil. Augustine himself attributed most natural evil to Satan, who is seen as a free moral agent, and some other natural evils he attributed to divine retribution for wrongdoing in God's world. Thus, even natural evils are "broadly moral," as Alvin Plantinga says.¹⁴ However, in contrast to Augustine's position, Meister and Dew argue that Plantinga does not make this observation a feature of any sort of theodicy.¹⁵ According to them, Plantinga's view on evil is rather just a part of his defense of the claim that the reality of natural evil is compatible with the existence of God in the same way that the moral evil perpetrated by humans is compatible with the existence of God. Meister and co argue further that Plantinga's free will does not accept the assertion that most natural evils can be attributed to nonhuman free agents of

¹²Chad Meister and James K. Dew JR. *God and Evil. The Case of God in a World filled with Pain.* (IVP Books, Intervarsity Press, Downers, Illinois. 2013). p. 56

¹³ Norman L. Geisler and Winfried Corduan. *Philosophy of Religion.* (Wipe and Stock Publishers Eugene, Oregon, 2003). 36

¹⁴Chad Meister and James K. Dew JR. *God and Evil. The Case of God in a World filled with Pain.* (IVP Books, Intervarsity Press, Downers, Illinois. 2013), p. 78.

¹⁵Chad Meister and James K. Dew JR. *God and Evil. The Case of God in a World filled with Pain.* (IVP Books Intervarsity Press, Downers, Illinois. 2013),p. 78.

superhuman power, he only says that it is possible. Any theodicy that exonerates God from being the cause of evil, and supports the compatibility of God's existence and the existence of evil in the world is well accepted by Augustine and Plantinga. This is observed as their meeting point. God is good and cannot be the cause of evil.

However, James K. Beilby believes that natural evil (except for what can be attributed to God's punishment) is to be ascribed to the activity of beings that are free and rational but nonhuman.¹⁶ James acknowledges both nature and human as the basic causes of evil. The position of a good God is endangered because nature is involved. How would a good God be associated with evil? God should not be associated with evil. All that God created are perfectly good. If natural evil existed before humans existed, then it seems that the human misuse of free will cannot be responsible for its introduction.¹⁷ According to Gillett, although adopting an alternative approach such as process thought or dualism may provide a solution to some aspects of the problem of natural evil, it seems to do so at a high price by compromising God's omnipotence and sovereignty.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) views disasters as phenomena that are produced by human development choices. Disasters are a product of human decisions, thus a need for the inclusion of disaster risk reduction in people's daily

work and investment in resilience.¹⁸ Steve, Lee, and Ksenia posit that a disaster is a hazardous event that causes an unacceptably large number of fatalities and/or overwhelming property damage.¹⁹ According to them, the term natural disaster is a misnomer because in almost every instance, there are fundamental human-induced factors that turn natural hazards into disasters. Reviewing the earthquake that killed thousands of people and left about one million homeless at Haiti in the year 2010, Steve and his group argues that there is a distinction between the natural events and disaster as most naturally occurring events are not disaster.²⁰ They ascertain that it was not the earthquake that left the people homeless, but the badly built houses, government inefficiency and underlying corruption. Many disasters are not unexpected; they are predictable interactions between the physical environment, the built environment, and the communities that experience them. Thus, disasters result from natural hazards and social human vulnerabilities. Therefore, describing disaster as natural effectively separates many stakeholders from blame.

A paper presented during the United Nations Statics Division (UNSD) Workshop on Environment Statistics described a natural disaster as a situation or event, which overwhelms local capacity, necessitating

¹⁶ Alvin Plantinga. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. (New York: William B. Erdmann's Publishing Company, 1977), p. 669.

¹⁷ Jennifer Gillett. *Compatibilist Freedom and the Problem of Evil*. Tilburg University, 2018 Document Version Publisher's PDF
https://pure.uvt.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/28669892/Gillett_Compatibilist_11_12_2018p.84

¹⁸ United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). There are no natural disasters.
<https://www.preventionweb.net> July 23, 2020

¹⁹ Steve Puttick, Lee Bosher and Ksenia Chmutina. *Disasters are not natural*. Teaching Geography, Vol. 43. No. 3 (Aulumn 2018), pp. 118-120 (3 pages)
Published By: Geographical Association
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538739>

²⁰ Steve Puttick, Lee Bosher and Ksenia Chmutina. *Disasters are not natural*. Teaching Geography, Vol. 43. No. 3 (Aulumn 2018), pp. 118-120 (3 pages)
Published By: Geographical Association
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538739>. 4

a request to the national or international level for external assistance; an unforeseen and often sudden event that causes great damage, destruction and human suffering.²¹ A natural disaster is described as a major event caused by earth's natural processes that result in significant environmental harm and loss of life. In a simple term, a disaster is a sudden or unimaginable dangerous event that causes significant damage and casualty. A few examples of natural disaster are cyclones, volcanoes, earthquakes, floods, and landslides. Furthermore, natural disaster is defined as an event of nature, which overwhelms local resources and threatens the function and safety of the community.²² What this means is that natural disasters are complicated events within which people are subjected to a multitude of risks and dangers. A natural disaster is further described as an extreme event, caused by a natural phenomenon that has severe adverse impacts on human lives and livelihoods.²³ A natural disaster is characterized by the abnormal intensity of a natural agent (flood, mudslide, earthquake, avalanche, drought) when the usual measures to be taken to prevent this damage were not able to prevent their emergence.

Going forward, the term “disaster” derives from the Latin word “disaster”, a combination of two words “des” meaning “bad” and “aster” meaning “star”. Thus, the term disaster refers to “bad or evil star”.²⁴ The term can be used for personal tragedies also, as they may cause emotional and financial sufferings. Disasters, however, are the catastrophic events resulting in heavy losses in terms of human, animal and plant lives, injuries and disabilities and damage to property and environment. In contemporary academia, disasters are seen as the consequence of inappropriately managed risk. These risks are the product of hazards and vulnerability. Hazards that strike in areas with low vulnerability are not considered a disaster, as is the case in uninhabited regions. Disaster occurs when a hazard impacts on or strikes a vulnerable community with low capacity resulting in damages, loss and serious disruption of community functioning. The widespread human, material and environmental losses exceed the community's ability to cope using its resources. The World Health Organization (WHO) explains further that a disaster is a sudden ecological phenomenon of sufficient magnitude to require external assistance.

Recall that Wikipedia explains natural evil to be evil for which "no non-divine agent can be held morally responsible for its occurrence" and is chiefly derived from the operation of the laws of nature. In the context of this study, it is referred to as natural disaster. However, the term natural disaster has consequently been disputed in 1976 as a misnomer because the events simply are not hazards or disasters

²¹United Nations Statics Division (UNSD) Workshop on Environment Statistics (Abuja, 19-23 May 2008) [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/envpdf/UNSD_UNEP_ECOWAS%20Workshop/Session%2004-1%20Natural%20disasters%20\(UNSD\).pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/environment/envpdf/UNSD_UNEP_ECOWAS%20Workshop/Session%2004-1%20Natural%20disasters%20(UNSD).pdf)

²² Gerard March. *Natural Disasters and the Impacts on Health*. (The University of Western Ontario Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry Summer Student with ICLR – 2002), p. 7 <https://www.eird.org/isdrbiblio/PDF/Natural%20disasters%20and%20the%20impacts.pdf>

²³Thomas Glade. Classification of Natural Disasters. (University of Vienna; Encyclopedia of Natural Hazard, 2013), p. 78-82

²⁴ Lelisa Sena, Kifle Woldemichael, *Disaster Prevention and Preparedness*. (Ethiopian Public Health; Jimma University, 2006) p. 22

without human involvement.²⁵ This implies that human beings and properties must be affected for a disaster to have happened. Using the word 'natural' ignores the role that humans have in the disaster. It assumes that the event would happen anyway and there is little or nothing that humans can do to prevent it. The word 'natural' implies that a disaster or evil is not the function of a human being. Disasters or evils are events that occur when significant numbers of people are exposed to extreme events to which they are vulnerable, with resulting injury and loss of life, often combined with damage to property and livelihoods. Disasters, commonly leading to emergencies, occur in diverse situations in all parts of the world, in both sparsely populated rural and densely populated urban regions, as well as in situations involving natural and man-made hazards. In a nutshell, a disaster is an evil, calamitous, mishap, or catastrophic occurrence with destructive implications for life and properties. This sudden event could arise as a result of man-made causes, and normally brings about suffering to humanity, destruction of properties and degradation of the environment. An extreme weather condition that has the potential to threaten the safety of living beings and the land in general, comes under the class of disaster. This research will further discuss kinds of disasters and the influence of humans on them. Disasters may be broadly grouped into major and minor types depending upon their potential to cause damage to human life and property.²⁶

²⁵O'Keefe et al. *Disasters are not natural*.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538739>

²⁶A. Balsubramanian. Types of Disasters (Centre for Advanced Studies In Earth Science; University of Mysore Mysore-6, 2014),p. 1

Alvin Plantinga's Freewill

Plantinga's free will defense is a direct response to John Leslie Mackie's logical problem of evil which argues that it is logically impossible for God and evil to exist together. Plantinga argues that God allows evil since evil is a means towards a good end. He further upholds that it is logically impossible for God to create free persons and still determine their actions. Therefore, he attributed the problem of evil to the consequences of free will which is the source of good and evil.²⁷ God was indeed good to have created free beings who can commit acts of evil utilizing their free will. Nonetheless, their actions should not negate God's goodness in creating them free. The abuse of free will by man is a great evil, but it would have been a greater evil to have no free will.²⁸ This position is not far from the view of St. Augustine who believes that evil does not exist independently, but that the lack of proper use of good by man creates various evils in the world.²⁹ This view has gained more acceptances. More so because evil is a product of the actions of man. This position tactically exonerates God from being the ultimate cause of evil and at the same time does not deny the existence of God. It rather pointed out that God created man with the propensity to sin (with free will to choose).³⁰ The free will defense holds that God is an omniscient, all-powerful and perfectly good being, in all cases,

²⁷Alvin Plantinga. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. (New York: William B. Erdmann's Publishing Company, 1977), p. 9

²⁸ Jeffrey A. Wright. *Theodicy – The Problem of Evil: The Free Will defense, and its Strengths and Weaknesses* (unpublished, 4 March 2020),p. 6

²⁹Augustine and John Hick. *A Comparative Study of the Evil Problem in the Thought*.
<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354061213>

³⁰ St. Augustine. *The Problem of evil*.
<https://www.academia.edu/49041867>

and thus created the best possible world despite it containing evil. It begins by pointing out that God is not the cause of evil in the world; the abuse of human free will is.³¹ God certainly could have created beings with perfect morality, but a perfect being would not have free will in every moral scenario and therefore would be lacking in actual morality rather than determined morality. Plantinga, further argues that: The heart of the Freewill Defense is the claim that it is possible that God could not have created a universe containing moral good (or as much moral good as this world contains) without creating one that also contained moral evil. And if so, then it is possible that God has a good reason for creating a world containing evil.³²

Examination of Leslie Allan's Critique

The shortcoming of Plantinga's freewill defense according to Leslie Allan is that "it does not seek to explain natural evil."³³ Leslie further argues that Plantinga's freewill defense requires some counterfactual conditionals about free agents to be true.³⁴ Recall that we have discussed the two types of evil (moral evil and natural evil) earlier, Plantinga's freewill actually took care of moral evil and seem not to make any provision for natural evil. This, for Leslie is a weakness on the part of Plantinga.

This paper posits that Plantinga's defense should not be faulted on the basis of natural evil because human beings are directly and indirectly responsible for some

of these natural disasters. For instance, the flood that killed so many people and displaced others in Nigeria in recent times would have been avoided if the Federal Government had built the dam as agreed. Most of these natural disasters are caused by human carelessness and negligence, which is classified as moral evil. Human beings and their choices are part of nature. I therefore posit that Plantinga's free will defense is encompassing and all embracing. It has solutions to both moral and natural logical problem of evil embedded in it.

Disaster and Human Moral Responsibility

Major causes of natural disasters include: tectonic shifts, lunar activities, deforestation, air pressure, ocean currents, pollution, global warming, mining, seismic waves etc. Most of these disasters do indeed occur without any appreciable degree of warning. However, areas prone to be affected by these disasters could be identified and precautionary measures taken to avert the menace. Disaster management is the only way to mitigate the effects of all these hazards. India has efficiently handled the recent cyclones and reduced the effects to a bare minimum level. It was possible due to planning. With this development, India is better equipped to manage cyclones in future. The point is that natural evil (disaster) is embedded in moral evil, and does occur because of human negligence which is the result of man's free will. Even history shows that humans have caused some of the most devastating environmental events, from air pollution to oil spills and other forms of disasters. Earthquakes and tsunamis are not moral agents and cannot perform intentional actions. Therefore, they cannot be morally evil.

Although some natural disasters cannot be prevented, they are uncontrollable by people because of the

³¹ J.S. Feinberg. *Theodicy*. Edited by Walter A. Ellwell. *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Academic), no. 2nd (2001), p. 1184-1187.

³² Plantinga. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. 343.

³³ Leslie Allan. *Plantinga's Free Will Defense: Critical note*, URL 2015.

³⁴ https://www.academia.edu/41443866/Plantingas_Free_Will_Defence_Critical_Note, viewed on Thursday October 28, 2022.

natural factors that cause them. However, several strategies could be adopted to minimise their consequences. For example, planning for natural disasters, preventing them where possible, and reducing how they affect people. A disaster can be predicted through warning systems, and the difficulties it causes can be resolved with the aid of relief organisations. The deaths caused by natural disasters can potentially be avoided with careful planning. People should decide not to construct cities, for instance, around active volcanoes, earthquake zones, or floodplains. Now and then, individuals and communities are being affected by one form of disasters (evil) or the other, which frequently disrupt their mental health and well-being, economic and social development throughout the world. It is obvious that human moral responsibility has an influence on the disasters that are seen in the world today. There is often a human causal contribution to negative outcomes of disasters such as volcano eruptions, earthquakes, typhoons etc. In most cases of disasters moral responsibility is grounded in culpable negligence, including culpable failure to prevent the side-effects of human actions or omissions.

Considering whether human agents can be justifiably held morally responsible for the outcomes of natural disasters, one may be tempted to immediately answer in the negative because the very notion of a natural disaster seems to suggest that natural disasters are “natural” precisely because they are not man-made. This is a common view on the understanding of the meaning of a natural disaster which this study intends to differ a little and maintain that often there is a human causal contribution to negative outcomes of even such paradigmatic natural disasters. Natural disasters are not inherently evil. Vilijus Dranseika in his paper presentation on Moral Responsibility for

Natural Disasters suggests that although natural disasters are no longer understood, at least by most of the public, as justified responses by supernatural powers to human wickedness, natural disasters can still be seen as belonging to the domain of morality, albeit in a different sense. It is not divine punishments for human misdeeds, but as something that at least sometimes can be aggravated or alleviated by human choices.³⁵ Dranseika supported his view with the letter of Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Voltaire of 18 August, 1756, in which he discussed Voltaire's “Poem on the Lisbon Disaster, which states:

“It was hardly nature who assembled their twenty-thousand houses of six or seven stories. If the residents of this large city had been more evenly dispersed and less densely housed, the losses would have been fewer or perhaps none at all. Everyone would have fled at the first shock, and would have been seen two days later, twenty leagues away and as happy as if nothing had happened. For me, I see everywhere that the misfortunes nature imposes upon us are much less cruel than those that we please to add.”³⁶

According to Dranseika, Rousseau blamed the architectural design, the quality of the buildings, and the behaviour during the earthquake as part of a complex causal chain that resulted in the extreme devastation of Lisbon. In his closing remarks, he concluded that sometimes human beings can be morally responsible for the outcomes of natural disasters. He added that such responsibility ascriptions will most often be grounded in culpable

³⁵ Vilijus Dranseika. *Moral Responsibility for Natural disasters* (Human Affairs 26 (1): 2016), pp. 73-79

³⁶ Vilijus Dranseika. *Moral Responsibility for Natural disasters* (Human Affairs 26 (1): 2016), pp. 73-79.

negligence, including the culpable failure to prevent the side effects of our actions or omissions.

Another good example is the position that the mud volcanic eruption since 2006 in Indonesia was triggered by drilling for natural gas. More so, forest fires can be triggered by bonfires that were left without being properly extinguished. There may also be more indirect, perhaps probabilistic, human influences on natural events. Examples may be found in forecasts by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that climate change induced by human activity will lead to more frequent extreme weather events or claims by the Red Cross in their World Disaster Report that human-induced climate change will result in more frequent droughts, floods or malaria outbreaks.³⁷

Structuring causes include a set of initial conditions in which the disaster unfolds. Some of these conditions are man-made. For example, the high-rise buildings in Lisbon, mentioned by Rousseau, were a part of the complex conditions that shaped the outcomes of the earthquake. Sometimes the same set of human activities can be both triggering and structuring causes: imagine the deforestation of a slope that both increases the probability of a landslide being triggered and the degree of severity. It is important to note that there is increasing recognition and knowledge of aspects of the human causal influences on the processes involved in natural disasters. There is increasingly more scientific information on disaster risks. The public in at least some parts of the world are becoming more perceptive to the potential of human-caused environmental degradation and climate

change. Thus, human beings can justifiably be held responsible and culpable for the outcomes of a natural disaster. Most (perhaps all) cases of moral responsibility for the outcomes of natural disasters are either cases of culpable negligence or cases of responsibility for the unintended or unforeseen side effects of human actions or omissions. Another instance is the flood that killed so many people and displaced others in Nigeria in recent times which would have been avoided if the Federal Government had built the dam as agreed. Most of these natural disasters are caused by human carelessness and negligence, which is classified as moral evil. Therefore, this research concludes that sometimes human negligence, including the culpable failure to prevent the side-effects of our actions or omissions can be morally responsible for the outbreaks of disasters. On the strength of the above, Plantinga's free will defense should not be faulted based on natural evil because human beings are directly and indirectly responsible for some of these natural disasters. Furthermore, human beings and their choices are part of nature. Thus, all evils are moral in nature. Therefore, Plantinga's free will defense is encompassing and all-embracing. It has solutions to both moral and natural logical problem of evil embedded in it.

Evaluation

The following were discovered in the course of this work:

- i. God is separated from evil: God is simply good. While evil is the misuse of good things. St. Augustine in his definition of evil separated God from evil. He considers God to be a perfect being full of absolute goodness from which nothing but good

³⁷IPCC/ Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report, 20March 2023

- emanated and nothing evil can be attributed to Him.
- ii. Evil is as a result of human exercise of free will: In an attempt to reconcile the existence of God and evil, American analytic philosopher Alvin Plantinga developed free will defense as a logical argument against the logical problem of evil. Alvin Plantinga's free will defense goes as follows: "A world containing creatures that are significantly free (and freely perform better than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all".³⁸ Thus, Plantinga argues that the existence of God is logically compatible with the existence of evil. Therefore, he attributed the problem of evil to the consequences of free will which he believes to be the source of good and evil.
 - iii. Nature is not evil: No evil occurrence is natural. Natural processes are not evil unless they have human interventions and implications. God is good and did not create anything evil. Evils are consequences of the free choices of moral agents such as human beings. Natural evils are the result of actions or inactions of human beings that disrupt the natural order.
 - iv. Natural evil is embedded in moral evil: Disasters are events that occur when significant numbers of people are exposed to extreme events to which they are vulnerable, with resulting injury and loss of life, often combined with damage to property and

livelihoods. On this note, earthquake, tsunami etc. are not evil if they do not have human implications. This work upholds that an event is evil (disaster) only when it affects man. Recall that the word natural disaster was recognized as a misnomer.³⁹ More so, evil is an intentional act from a moral agent. Nature is not a moral agent, therefore cannot perform evil. It is on this note that this work posits that Plantinga's free will cannot be faulted on the ground of natural evil.

Conclusion

Leslie Allan faulted the position of Alvin Plantinga on free will defense on the ground that it did not address the issue of natural evil. This work posits that natural evil is embedded in moral evil and is taken care of in Alvin Plantinga's free will theodicy. This is because nature or natural processes cannot be said to be evil without human interventions. Nature is God's creation and not evil. Earthquakes and tsunamis are not moral agents, therefore cannot be morally evil. Hurricanes and rattle snakes can cause great harm but they cannot perform evil actions because they are not moral agents. Free will still remain the best solution to the problem of evil, and cannot be faulted on the basis of natural evil. Thus, the unanswered question emanating from Leslie Allan's critique of Plantinga's free will defense should not arise.

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³⁸Alvin Plantinga. *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Harper & Row, New York, 1974),p. 9

³⁹O'Keefe et al. *Disasters are not natural*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26538739>

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