

# God and Horrendous Suffering

Edited By  
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## Advanced Endorsements

This volume contains many excellent, accessible essays on the problem of evil. If you want to get a sense of the scale of the problem, then this volume is a great place to start. John Loftus is exceptionally well qualified to produce such a book. Having followed his work for years—including his valuable Debunking Christianity blog—I know him to be not only a highly knowledgeable and careful thinker, but also someone who can bring philosophical issues and arguments to life.

—From the Foreword by Dr. Stephen Law,  
Editor of the Royal Institute of Philosophy Journal, *THINK*  
Author of *Believing Bullshit*

The most pressing challenge to belief in God today is undoubtedly the problem of pain. One only needs to read the provocative array of essays in this volume of leading atheists and other non-theists to see why this is such an ongoing problem for those of us who believe that God is real. Whatever one's beliefs or worldview, and whether one agrees or disagrees, I commend all seekers of truth to read and reflect on this significant work that John Loftus has so skillfully edited.

—Dr. Chad Meister,  
Professor of Philosophy at Bethel University  
Co-Editor of *The Cambridge Companion to the Problem of Evil*

Loftus has again produced a brilliant gallery of informed experts, now addressing the problem of evil from every angle, and with such power and depth that it shall be required reading for anyone promoting or opposing evil as a disproof of God.

—Dr. Richard Carrier,  
Author of *Jesus from Outer Space*  
and *Sense and Goodness without God*

John W. Loftus' previous book, *The Case Against Miracles*, is the final nail hammered into the coffin of magical miraculous beliefs. This book on horrendous suffering should permanently inter that coffin, and with it morally absurd reasoning in defense of religious faith.

—Dr. Peter Boghossian,  
Author of *A Manual for Creating Atheists*

For centuries upon centuries believers have wrestled with the existence of God given horrific suffering in this world. But the excuses they offer for God twist our moral sensibilities. They frame suffering as good, inexplicable, or inevitable, and absolve themselves of harms that they themselves inflict, or passively ignore. This book makes that impossible. In chapter after chapter, the excuses get shredded before a jury of rational jurors. As a result, God vanishes, leaving the blood-stained Church to face conviction alone.

—Dr. Valerie Tarico,  
Psychologist and Author of *Trusting Doubt*

If you still believe in God after reading this book, it's a miracle. The arguments in it against faith are so strong, that no logical reading would allow faith to stand up to them. But then, faith isn't logical.

—Linda LaScola,  
Psychotherapist and Co-Founder of *The Clergy Project*  
Co-Author of *Caught in the Pulpit*

I'm not sure there is anyone out there right now who articulates atheistic arguments as well as John Loftus does, and this book on horrendous suffering is no exception. In it Loftus has done a great job in marshaling a stellar group of scholars in offering one of the best attempts at criticizing the Christian faith in a more comprehensive way with regard to the problem of evil. Believers who hold to a theistic perspective should seriously—and more deeply—study the alternative perspectives and questions that this anthology poses for theism. They should especially be more mindful of these kinds of criticisms when speaking with people who do not believe like we do that the Christian God is so good.

—Dr. David Geisler,  
President of Norm Geisler International Ministries  
Co-Author of *Conversational Evangelism*

As a Christian apologist, I can say that there is no intellectual objection to Christianity more daunting than the problem of horrendous suffering. In this important new book, John Loftus has gathered a diverse collection of voices that seek to build a comprehensive, multi-pronged critique of Christianity based on this most difficult problem. No Christian apologist can afford to ignore it.

—Dr. Randal Rauser,  
Professor of Historical Theology at Taylor Seminary  
Co-Author of *God or Godless?*

One of our oldest myths is the tragic story of Job. Faithful to God, who had blessed him with a wonderful life, Job tried to understand why so many disasters suddenly befell him. One after the other, increasingly horrific tragedies destroyed Job's estates, his family, his health, his happiness. He cried out to God for an explanation. There was none. Job's lament has echoed across the millennia but no answer has ever come back. In this ambitious anthology, John Loftus and his colleagues argue the response to Job's lament can only be "God does not exist."

—Dr. Karl Giberson,  
Scholar-in-Residence in Science and Religion at Stonehill College  
Author of *The Wonder of the Universe* and *Saving Darwin*

John Loftus has a voluminous back catalogue of superb counter-apologetics books. This latest one on suffering is equally powerful, clearly and decisively showing that belief in God should not coexist with the huge gamut of pain and suffering in the world. From the thorn of horrendous pain Loftus fashions a spear, piercing theism's side from which certainty, belief and religious adherence should rationally gush forth. It presents ample evidence that classical theism is dead and buried, so in one hand, Loftus is holding a spear, and in the other, a spade.

—Jonathan MS Pearce,  
Publisher of Onus Books  
Author of *The Resurrection: A Critical Examination of the Easter Story*

In this book, Patterson's chapter had me imagining myself as a default future human, not yet assigned a sex or race or even historical era, and then seeing how any God who made such an assignment wouldn't abide by my own innate sense of fairness. Loftus's chapter on Calvinism exposes the book of Job as an outrageous horror story in a way I didn't really appreciate until now.

The clear-eyed explanations of the many writers Loftus has assembled would have forced me as a troubled Christian to confront some major issues with my faith. What a gift that would have been to bypass those difficult doubting years!

—Ed Suominen,  
Publisher of Tellectual Books  
Co-Author of *Evolving Out of Eden*

What's the collective word for sage? An encyclopedia of sages? Whatever it is, John Loftus has corralled one to create his latest anthology. This book is a wide-ranging and insightful look at the problem of evil, which is as relevant (and unanswered) a problem for Christianity as it has ever been.

—Bob Seidensticker,  
Writer at *Cross Examined*, a blog at [Patheos.com](http://Patheos.com)

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## Failed to Death: Misotheism and Childhood Torture

Darren M. Slade

Wenn es einen Gott gibt muß er mich um Verzeihung bitten.  
(If there is a God, he will have to beg my forgiveness)

—Wall carving from an anonymous prisoner  
at the Mauthausen concentration camp

Imagine this scenario: the chief of police for a local department is on foot patrol with several of his officers. These men are in uniform, carrying both a firearm and nightstick while wearing Kevlar body armor. As they turn toward an alley, the chief and his officers hear a woman screaming for help. In plain view, there is a man violently raping a woman in the alleyway. As the officers approach, the woman recognizes the chief as her own father and pleads with him to intervene; yet, standing only feet away, the chief and his officers do nothing. They simply stand there and watch as his daughter is viciously assaulted. The perpetrator interprets the police's inaction as a tacit approval of the rape and, therefore, believes the crime is justified. With no one intervening, the man continues to rape the woman.

Soon, a crowd of people approach the scene after hearing the woman's cries for help. They are astonished that the chief is doing nothing to intercede. The crowd asks the police to stop the attacker. Some even fall to their knees in prostration, begging the chief to help his own daughter. Still, despite everyone's appeals, the chief refuses to act. He and his fellow officers simply observe while doing nothing. Even more shocking, the police let the rapist walk away and avoid rendering any aid to the victim. As the crowd tends to the woman's wounds, someone asks why the police are letting the perpetrator go. The chief responds, "Don't worry. We'll hold him accountable and punish him years later from now. We're just keeping track of all his misdeeds at the moment."

Was it *immoral* for the chief of police and his officers to do nothing for the rape victim when they had the knowledge, authority, means, safety, and opportunity to intervene? According to Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the police's inaction was immoral because it violated the second

greatest commandment. In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus reiterates the command to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev. 19:18).<sup>1</sup> Jesus then elaborates with the Good Samaritan parable where a despised Samaritan intervenes to help someone in trouble, exemplifying precisely how a person demonstrates love for their neighbor (Luke 10:25–37; cf. Matt. 22:34–40/Mark 12:29–31).<sup>2</sup> Indeed, David Pao and Eckhard Schnabel note that the Levitical command to show compassion toward others builds on the Holiness Code’s *imitatio Dei* (imitation of god) as its underlying rationale (Lev. 19:2).<sup>3</sup>

Christopher Wright explains further, “The little details of behaviour commended [in Scripture] ... do indeed reflect the character of God himself. There is emphasis on the virtues of faithfulness, kindness, work, compassion, social justice, especially for the poor and oppressed, generosity, impartiality, truthfulness and integrity. All of these reflect the character and concerns of the LORD God.”<sup>4</sup> To love one’s neighbor is morally obligatory and is the same kind of “compassion” (σπλαγχνίζομαι—*splanchnizomai*) that god is said to show others.<sup>5</sup> Darrell Bock remarks, “Here is the essence of being a neighbor: having the sensitivity to see a need and act to meet it. Contextually, it also is a way to define love.”<sup>6</sup> Thus, according to Jesus, it would be immoral for *anyone* not to act on behalf of the crime victim.

Suppose the scenario was to continue when footage of the incident is broadcast on national news, prompting a public outcry against the police department. As outrage grows, the rape victim sues her father in civil court for exhibiting wanton and willful disregard of human rights and safety.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English Scripture quotations in this chapter derive from the English Standard Version (ESV) Bible.

<sup>2</sup> Boyon, *Luke 2*, 55–65. For reasons why the parable is a lesson on morality and should not be interpreted as a Christological or ecclesial allegory, see Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching*, 45–55.

<sup>3</sup> Pao and Schnabel, “Luke,” 320–21. John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton further remark about Lev. 19:18,

Following Peter’s appropriation in 1 Peter 1:15–16, this is often interpreted to read “be moral because I am moral” and invoked as the foundation of an ethical theory called *imitatio Dei*, in which being good consists of being the kind of person that God is and doing the things or kinds of things that God would do. The ensuing content of Leviticus 19–20, often called the holiness code, is then commonly interpreted as a list of commands that dictate God’s demands, usually suggesting that meeting all of the demands will conform the person’s character to God’s. (Walton and Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest*, 104)

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, 41.

<sup>5</sup> See Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mark 6:34; Luke 7:13; and 15:20.

<sup>6</sup> Bock, *Luke*, 1032.

<sup>7</sup> This scenario is similar to a mass shooting incident on February 14, 2018 when a gunman entered Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida and killed fourteen students and three staff members. Footage from the incident shows a School Resource Officer from the Broward County Sheriff’s Office remain outside of the building

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Imagine what a reasonable society's reaction would be to the following courtroom interaction between the chief of police and his daughter's attorney. Would moral outrage be justified over the chief's comments?

*Prosecutor*        Were you aware of what was happening to your daughter?

*Chief*                Yes, I was aware she was being raped.

*Prosecutor*        Did you hear her cries for help?

*Chief*                Yes.

*Prosecutor*        Did you refuse to intervene and refuse to arrest the perpetrator?

*Chief*                Yes, I refused and ordered my men to stand by, as well.

*Prosecutor*        Did you have the authority, means, and opportunity to intervene?

*Chief*                Yes.

*Prosecutor*        I'm confused. I presume you don't approve of raping women. Did you want to intervene?

*Chief*                I definitely don't approve of raping women; and yes, I wanted to intervene. I regularly promote justice and peace. In fact, I demand that people follow the law, and I hold them accountable when they don't.

*Prosecutor*        Then, can you tell me why you refused to intervene? Don't you love your own daughter enough to stop the rape?

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while the shooter was actively killing students inside the school. Afterwards, the public decried both the Sheriff's Office and the sheriff deputy for their inaction. The result was that Florida Governor, Ron DeSantis, suspended Sheriff Scott Israel for "incompetence and neglect of duty," stating further that "the massacre might never have happened had Broward had better leadership in the sheriff's department" (Li, "Sheriff Scott Israel Removed from Office"). The School Resource Officer was branded the "Coward of Broward" and later fired from the Sheriff's Office (Guthrie and Connor, "Parkland Officer Scot Peterson's Message to Families"). He was eventually charged with several counts of felony neglect of a child for his inaction that day. When the Florida Department of Law Enforcement conducted their investigation of the incident, they concluded, "There can be no excuse for his complete inaction and no question that his inaction cost lives" (Burch and Blinder, "Parkland Officer Who Stayed Outside").

- Chief* Of course I love my daughter, but I was confronted with a moral dilemma. The perpetrator was exercising his free will to rape women. If I intervened, I would be violating his right to act freely. For me, it was morally better to preserve the perpetrator's free will than it was to help someone in trouble, even if it was my own daughter.
- Prosecutor* I see. Because you believe in free will, that somehow precludes you from intervening in all cases?
- Chief* No, not in all cases. I've intervened to help people in the past. Besides, I routinely disciple others. Someone in the crowd should have intervened on my behalf.
- Prosecutor* But nobody did intervene on your behalf, did they? Perhaps you should not rely on the discipleship of impotent people to act in your stead, especially during times of crisis. Regardless, your past actions show you're not always concerned about preserving free will. Then why did you not make an exception in this case?
- Chief* I had two reasons. The first is that I believe suffering is a necessary part of maturity. My daughter's rape will ultimately make her a stronger person. I am confident that the rape was actually a blessing in disguise.
- Prosecutor* You're saying that it was *good* for your daughter to be raped? There was no other way for her to become a stronger woman than to be brutalized? What was your second reason for not intervening?
- Chief* That's easy. The rape is all part of my plan to bring ultimate love, justice, and peace to our community.
- Prosecutor* Your daughter's *rape* is part of a bigger plan for *peace*? Exactly how does rape fit into this glorious plan of yours?
- Chief* Unfortunately, I can't elaborate; it's far too complex and mysterious for you to understand.
- Prosecutor* Wait, so you have a master plan but you won't identify the details of that plan because it's a mystery?

*Chief*            You'll just have to trust that it was better for me not to intervene. I have a plan, and I promise I will make it up to everybody sometime in the future. Besides, I will have mercy on whomever I choose.

Would any person of good moral conscience accept these answers from the chief? Absolutely not! There would be overwhelming outrage at the moral bankruptcy on display; and yet, many apologists make these very same excuses for their deity's refusal to intervene in the cruelest atrocities. Religionists would hold other ethical agents accountable for their nonintervention, so why do they not hold their gods to the same standard?<sup>8</sup>

By utilizing real-world "Failed to Death" (FTD) examples of egregious human cruelty against children, the thesis of this chapter is that misotheists (those who scorn god for moral reasons) are justified in their refusal to worship any deity who exhibits a "depraved indifference" by refusing to intervene on behalf of victimized kids. Misotheists assert that if a god exists, then humanity is morally obligated to scorn that deity as demonstrated in three deductive quasi-syllogisms:<sup>9</sup>

*A*

1. All agents possessing the sufficient conditions for intervention are morally obligated to intervene (to stop a child from being tortured to death).
2. God is an agent possessing the sufficient conditions for intervention.
3. Therefore, god is morally obligated to intervene.

*B*

1. All morally-obligated agents who willfully refuse to intervene (to stop a child from being tortured to death) are moral monsters.
2. God is a morally-obligated agent who willfully refused to intervene.
3. Therefore, god is a moral monster.

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<sup>8</sup> The term "ethical agent" is not meant to describe a person's moral character but, rather, the ability to discern right from wrong and make ethical choices accordingly.

<sup>9</sup> In formal logic, these arguments would appear as such:

1. All *As* are *Bs*.
2. *x* is an *A*.
3. ∴ *x* is a *B*.

C

1. All moral monsters are deserving of humanity's scorn, not praise and worship.
2. God is a moral monster (per *B* above).
3. Therefore, god is deserving of humanity's scorn, not praise and worship.

Misotheism's ethical stance is primarily prescriptive (as opposed to descriptive or analytic) in arguing for how persons of good conscience *ought* to behave in certain circumstances. Unlike other works that deal with the problem of evil and suffering, this chapter's argument does not rely on counterfactuals or philosophical conjectures about the nature and prevalence of human suffering. Instead, it derives its argument from real-life examples of god refusing to intervene as innocent children are brutally tortured to death. The significance is in addressing the ethics of *non*intervention rather than just focusing solely on the immorality of aberrant behavior.

There are, of course, standard "solutions" to the problem of evil and suffering that employ philosophical discussions on free will, absolute goodness, or god and reality (e.g., god is not really omnipotent; suffering is an illusion; etc.). The problem with these theodicies is that they apply, at best, to abstract notions of suffering.<sup>10</sup> What this chapter argues is not abstract. In the case of vulnerable children, god really did fail them to death because he *refused* to help. The narrow focus of this chapter will hopefully encourage apologists to refrain from engaging in abstract debates that distract away from the faces of actual murdered children. The spotlight should remain squarely on the victims, not on theological arguments that minimize the victims' pain and untimely demise. Conjectural debates, while intellectually stimulating, are meaningless unless apologists can provide relevant rebuttals to the specific FTD cases below.<sup>11</sup>

### Failed to Death (FTD) Cases

The term "failed to death" (FTD) originated from a 2012 investigative series by *The Denver Post* and 9News that examined the murder of 175 children in Colorado who were beaten, starved, suffocated, frozen, or burned to death.<sup>12</sup> In seventy-two of those cases (41%), child protection caseworkers were aware

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<sup>10</sup> For an examination and refutation of the different "solutions" to the problem of evil, see McCloskey, "God and Evil," 203–24 and Weisberger, "The Argument from Evil," 166–81.

<sup>11</sup> LaFollette and May, "Suffer the Little Children," 361.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, Osher, and Steffen, "Failed to Death: Abused Children's Cries for Help Were Ignored"; JoJola and Larson, "Failed to Death." Only some of the FTD cases listed in this section are from the original 2012 investigative series.

of the abuse but did nothing to intervene. In one FTD instance, a 300-pound foster mother would sit on her 23-month-old toddler while ridiculing and starving the baby. That foster parent eventually threw the toddler head-first into a coffee table, killing her. A neighbor captured the mother's abuse on audio recording and submitted it to the authorities five months earlier. No one intervened. In another instance, one family had six physical abuse complaints against them before the mother covered her five children in gasoline and set them on fire.<sup>13</sup>

Chandler Grafner was a seven-year-old boy who weighed only thirty-four pounds at the time of his death from starvation and dehydration. Chandler's caregivers purposely starved him while locking him in a linen closet that was only thirty-five inches wide and eighteen inches high. He was forced to use the bathroom in a litter box. Child protective services were notified eight separate times about the abuse, but they failed to intervene.<sup>14</sup>

A four-year-old Colorado boy, Gabriel Trujillo, had been reported to authorities on multiple occasions for bruises, contusions, and cigarette burns; yet, no one conducted a thorough investigation. Eventually, his grandmother forced him to stand naked outside in the February cold as a form of punishment. He died three days later from the cumulative result of catastrophic head injuries. Judge Thomas Ensor told the grandmother, "Children the age of Gabriel are completely helpless. As a result, we as caretakers of children of tender years bear the highest responsibility."<sup>15</sup>

Emani Moss weighed only thirty-two pounds at the age of ten when she had been imprisoned in her room and deliberately starved to death by her stepmom. Emani endured years of physical and psychological torture, which had been reported to child protective services four separate times. Emani attempted to run away from home twice, choosing to sleep outside rather than go back home. Each time, the police found Emani and returned her back to her torturers. When her stepmother began the process of starving Emani to death, she would cook large meals and then show pictures of the food to Emani in order to torment her. Eventually, Emani became too weak to move, sleeping in her own urine and excrement for days. A lawsuit against the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services stated, "As a result of the negligence of DFCS and its agents, Emani suffered constant abuse and deprivation from 2008 until her untimely death."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that documenting some of these FTD cases is not meant to stigmatize or condemn the human caseworkers who failed to rescue these children. The child protection system itself is severely broken where caseworkers are often underpaid, overworked, and routinely suffer from compassion fatigue (factors that likely would not affect a supreme being). See Brown, Osher, and Steffen, "Failed to Death: 'System Was Set up to Fail.'"

<sup>14</sup> "Full Fatality Review Report on Chandler Grafner's Death."

<sup>15</sup> Robles, "Becky Trujillo Gets Maximum Sentence."

<sup>16</sup> Yeomans, "Grandmother of 10-Year-Old Starved and Left in Trash."



Thomas Valva was an eight-year-old autistic boy whose school made multiple reports to child services that he was always hungry and had bruises and cuts on his body. Eventually, his father forced Thomas to sleep overnight in a freezing garage without heat or blankets. Thomas died of hypothermia.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, seven-year-old Adrian Jones was tortured repeatedly with some of the most inhumane practices, including being left standing overnight neck-deep in the family's filthy swimming pool and being forced to exercise for hours without rest. In the end, he was confined to a shower stall where he starved to death as he screamed through a vent, "I'm going to die!" His torturers then fed his corpse to pigs. Records show that multiple agencies had documented evidence of the abuse, including Adrian's own testimony, but they did nothing to stop the brutality.<sup>18</sup>

Ten-year-old Anthony Avalos also had numerous bruises and burns on his body. Since the age of six, his mother had beaten and purposely starved him, oftentimes locking him in a room for hours without access to the bathroom. Caseworkers responded to thirteen different complaints between 2013 and 2016, but they did not remove Anthony from his abusers. In the last few days of his life, Anthony underwent extreme torture, including being held upside-down and dropped on his head, sprayed in the eyes, nose, and mouth with hot sauce, and forced to kneel on dry rice for hours at a time. He was extremely malnourished at the time of his death.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Gabriel Fernandez was eight years old when his naked body was beaten to death. Gabriel endured systematic torture for many years, including being forced to eat cat litter, feces, and his own vomit. Multiple bones had been broken numerous times, and he was routinely shot in the face and genitals with a BB gun. He was habitually pepper sprayed, burned with cigarettes, and forced to eat spoiled food. His mother and her boyfriend laughed at Gabriel while torturing him. Throughout the day and night, Gabriel was bound and gagged in a small cupboard. At the time of his death, he weighed only fifty-six pounds. At school, Gabriel asked his teachers for help, resulting in sixty separate complaints of abuse and neglect between 2003 and 2012; yet, no one did anything to intervene. Four caseworkers were criminally charged for not interceding on Gabriel's behalf, though the charges were eventually dropped. Numerous people knew about the torture, but nobody did anything, including (and most especially) god himself.<sup>20</sup>

In each of these FTD cases, the authorities had the ability to intervene, yet they did nothing. They were aware of the abuse, but they did nothing. They were warned the kids would die, but they did nothing. The

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<sup>17</sup> Blass, "Abuse, Cruelty and a System that Failed."

<sup>18</sup> Schmidt, "Boy, 7, was Tortured to Death and Fed to Pigs."

<sup>19</sup> "The Torture and Death of 10 Year Old Anthony Avalos."

<sup>20</sup> Gabriel Fernandez's story is the topic of a six-part series on Netflix entitled, *The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez*.

caseworkers could have stopped the gruesome torture and murder of vulnerable children, but they did *nothing*.

Apologists would have people believe that these horrendous crimes somehow have a beautiful purpose in god's divine plan; but when pressed for details, they are unable to provide specifics. They merely assert without evidence that "god must have good reason not to have intervened." This tactic is called wishful thinking; and as an argument, it is both logically and practically impossible to defend. The purpose of presenting these horrific details as concrete case studies is to capture the essence of misotheism's argument: that if a god does exist, he *willfully* refused to help those innocent children. God had two choices: intervene or not intervene. He consciously chose the latter, leading misotheists to conclude that he is a moral monster. Before elaborating on each of the syllogistic arguments, it is first necessary to define some of the postulations in the misotheist's moral position.

### **Definitions and Postulations**

#### Misotheism and God's Existence

The first term needing introduction is "misotheism," the hatred of god. While Bernard Schweizer distinguishes three categories of misotheism (agonistic, absolute, and political), the basis for all three is moral in nature. Misotheists view god (or a pantheon of gods) as sadistic because of the divine's recklessness and cruelty.<sup>21</sup> As an *ethical* argument, misotheism declares that a merciless and negligent deity (if one exists) deserves only contempt, not worship.

Misotheism, however, has a particular kind of "god" in mind.<sup>22</sup> Though it appears contradictory, misotheists are oftentimes atheists. Hence, Schweizer describes "absolute misotheism," which is an utter rejection of

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<sup>21</sup> Schweizer, *Hating God*, 1–24. Schweizer describes misotheism in this way, Although seemingly directed at the figure of God, misotheism reflects a passionate concern for the affairs of man....Simply put, misotheism is a response to suffering, injustice, and disorder in a troubled world. Misotheists feel that humanity is the subject of divine carelessness or sadism, and they question God's love for humanity....looking around them, misotheists cannot believe that slavery, pogroms, genocide, world wars, tsunamis, plagues, and a host of other natural and man-made disasters are compatible with the existence of a wise, compassionate, and all-knowing god. (p. 8, 22)

<sup>22</sup> Hereafter, for ease of reference, this chapter will simply use the masculine singular "god" to designate deities and divinities in general with the understanding that no specific god or divine gender is assumed to exist and that the arguments presented in this chapter would equally apply to most religious belief systems that involve a deity, regardless of whether that religious tradition is monotheistic, polytheistic, pantheistic, henotheistic, or something else entirely.

anything divine in the world.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, misotheism debates in a conditional sense as though god *does* exist simply for the sake of argument. This god does not need to be an omni-type deity (i.e., a god that is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, and omnibenevolent). Indeed, theists could worship an impotent, limited, and diabolical god (as in some process theologies), and the misotheist's moral argument would still stand. The only conditions necessary for their argument to succeed is that god would possess the knowledge, authority, means, safety, and opportunity to intervene (directly or indirectly) in human affairs, characteristics that are common to most of the world's religions.<sup>24</sup> If a god with these characteristics does exist, but he *refuses* to help vulnerable children in crisis, then humanity is justified in scorning this deity.<sup>25</sup> Traditionally, as Arthur Holmes comments, "We are speaking of the God of perfect love and perfect justice, who by his very nature sets all moral standards for others."<sup>26</sup>

### Sufficient Conditions for Intervention (SCI)

Integral to misotheism is the belief that certain agents are morally obligated to intervene on behalf of vulnerable people. As in the FTD case above, those "certain ethical agents" are anyone possessing the Sufficient Conditions for Intervention (SCI): knowledge, authority, means, safety, and opportunity. Any SCI agent *ought* to intervene (directly or indirectly) in order to stop a child from being tortured to death.<sup>27</sup> These specific conditions exemplify ideal

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<sup>23</sup> Schweizer, *Hating God*, 18–19. Schweizer further remarks about the secular nature of misotheism, "To be hostile to God means really to marshal the negative emotions of hatred toward an entity that is absolutely outside the human sphere, something intangible, not in a direct relationship with the hating person.... Thus, the most immediate effect of God-hatred is on the misotheist himself, for whom it serves a therapeutic function" (p. 8). Cf. Exline, Kaplan, and Grubbs, "Anger, Exit, and Assertion," 264–77.

<sup>24</sup> Of course, possessing the characteristics of knowledge, authority, means, safety, and opportunity to help an innocent child is not an exhaustive description of god, nor is it intended to be a minimal qualification for godhood. Nonetheless, most understandings and depictions of deity throughout the world involve these qualities, at the very least, including those based on the Hebrew or Christian Bible, the Qur'an, the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita, and many other religious texts.

<sup>25</sup> Without unnecessarily delving into the complications of describing "god," misotheists envision a living, supernatural agent who is also the theist's central object of worship. This ethical agent is not (solely) an abstract idea but, rather, an actual personality. Common to most notions of deity is an intelligence, influence, and power that surpasses (or is not constrained by) natural limitations.

<sup>26</sup> Holmes, *Ethics*, 78.

<sup>27</sup> It is important to highlight that these conditions are *sufficient* criteria to obligate intervention, meaning they are not the *minimal* conditions necessary to create a moral duty to intercede. They are neither exhaustive nor necessary for every situation.

circumstances where no prohibiting or constraining influences should reasonably prevent an SCI agent from intervening.

The first condition of *knowledge* is self-explanatory, though it signifies two principles equally: an awareness of the victim's situation and the practical know-how for attempting intervention. The next condition of *authority* represents an agent's power to enforce laws, although this condition is not morally necessary for intervention because non-sworn officers can and should intercede on behalf of others. However, any ethical agent who *does* have the authority to intervene is doubly obligated to do so because of their unique position of power (cf. Prov. 3:27–28).

Like knowledge, agents should also possess the *means* to intercede, such as resources or physical aptitude. It is unreasonable to expect a quadriplegic to stop someone's murder. Moreover, the condition of *safety* is a catch-all designation for multiple "equivalent need" limitations. For instance, agents are not obligated to intervene if it would put their safety at risk or if providing intervention would place them in equivalent or worse need of help.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, agents are not obligated if intervention would sacrifice something of comparable moral importance, such as the health and safety of another child.<sup>29</sup> Finally, the condition of *opportunity* represents circumstances that make it possible to intervene. Hence, it is unreasonable to expect agents to intervene if weather conditions prevent them from acting.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Moral Duty to Intervene**

The first misotheist quasi-syllogism states,

1. All agents possessing the sufficient conditions for intervention are morally obligated to intervene (to stop a child from being tortured to death).
2. God is an agent possessing the sufficient conditions for intervention.
3. Therefore, god is morally obligated to intervene.

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Agents could possess only *some* of these conditions and still have, depending on legal or other considerations, a moral obligation to intervene on behalf of vulnerable children.

<sup>28</sup> Howie, "World Hunger and a Moral Right to Subsistence," 445.

<sup>29</sup> Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," 229–43.

<sup>30</sup> Significantly, these SCI do not always necessitate the use of force against other persons, nor do they require a motive to intervene, either. There exists nonviolent tactics for preventing the death of a child. In the case of motive, moral obligations do not cease simply because someone is lazy or apathetic, as the following discussion on moral duties explains.

Implied here is that every agent who possesses the sufficient conditions to stop a child from being tortured to death is morally obligated to provide “humanitarian intervention,” which is a term often applied to nation-states who infringe upon another country’s sovereignty to aid in humanitarian crises.<sup>31</sup> The argument is that god is morally obligated to prioritize the well-being of a vulnerable child even if he infringes on the free will of the perpetrators.<sup>32</sup> Support for the first premise is twofold: the moral necessity of intervention and the immorality of nonintervention.

Premise 1(a):  
Moral Necessity of Intervention

Misotheists argue there exist certain situations that demand an intervention by any agent available because of a prerequisite belief in the sanctity and quality of life.<sup>33</sup> Had it not been for god refusing to intervene, those FTD children could have lived a full and healthy quality of life. This prerequisite principle is the empirical basis for every ethical system today, concluding that the lives of children are inherently valuable and warrant protection as an end unto itself.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, agents cannot act morally toward a dead person, making the intrinsic value of life a precondition for its own sake. Hence, ethical agents have a duty to preserve each other’s right to life.<sup>35</sup> Of course, theists are not likely to object to this premise. According to John Davis, “The Bible endorses the principle that human life is of far greater value than physical property or possessions. One human life or soul is more valuable in God’s sight than the entire physical world....In such an emergency, any reasonable person, if asked, would give permission for the destruction of property in order to save a life.”<sup>36</sup>

Significantly, misotheism does not insist that god would intervene in every human rights violation, social injustice, or instance of extreme suffering, but they do insist that god is morally obligated to intervene in some

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<sup>31</sup> Walzer, “The Argument about Humanitarian Intervention,” 175.

<sup>32</sup> This is assuming free will actually exists; cf. Ps. 33:10–11 and Prov. 19:21.

<sup>33</sup> This statement is not to suggest that misotheists necessarily prioritize human beings over other lifeforms or believe only in the sanctity and quality of human life. While there has been considerable debate over whether “sanctity of life” or “quality of life” ought to be the criterion for determining a person’s value, the debate becomes irrelevant since the FTD children above unquestionably possessed both (Singer, “Sanctity of Life or Quality of Life?,” 128–29).

<sup>34</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 449.

<sup>35</sup> Holmes, *Ethics*, 91. As J. P. Moreland and William Lane Craig explain, “We have a duty to preserve and protect human life whenever possible” (Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 436).

<sup>36</sup> Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 21.

circumstances, such as the FTD cases above. This insistence is because those cases are of such an acute degree above routine human misery that the shocking display of cruelty meted out on innocent children demands an immediate intervention by any agent available.<sup>37</sup> Nonintervention is simply not an option because the need is far too great. If an ethical agent can help these vulnerable children, then that agent has a responsibility to do so unless demonstrable evidence shows that such help would result in morally worse conditions.<sup>38</sup> And many apologists will likely concede that it is difficult (if not impossible) to prove that failure to intervene would result in worse conditions. As such, intervention in those FTD cases is a near absolute moral principle for any SCI agent. If an agent possesses the knowledge, authority, means, safety, and opportunity to stop a child from being tortured to death, then that agent is morally obligated to intervene in all conceivable situations of a similar nature.<sup>39</sup> Any conceivable exception to this near absolute rule would most likely involve altering the sufficient conditions for intervention, making the comparison between different scenarios moot.<sup>40</sup>

Hugh LaFollette and Larry May clarify that one reason why ethical agents have a moral obligation to intervene is because the FTD victims are paradigmatic examples of vulnerability and innocence.<sup>41</sup> As young children, they were incapable of defending themselves or caring for their own needs. They were dependent on others and had a reasonable expectation that people would provide for their care. Likewise, the victims were innocent because they did not warrant such abuse; they were neither causally nor morally deserving of torture.<sup>42</sup> When considering the prerequisite sanctity (or quality)

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<sup>37</sup> As Michael Walzer explains,

Now we are on the other side of the chasm. The stakes are too high, the suffering already too great. Perhaps there is no capacity to respond among the people directly at risk and no will to respond among their fellow citizens. The victims are weak and vulnerable; their enemies are cruel; their neighbors indifferent. The rest of us watch and are shocked. This is the occasion for intervention. (Walzer, "The Argument about Humanitarian Intervention," 175)

<sup>38</sup> Cf. LaFollette and May, "Suffer the Little Children," 359–70.

<sup>39</sup> See Thiroux, *Ethics*, 94.

<sup>40</sup> Ethicists will no doubt find some real-world exceptions to the principle that SCI agents are obligated to stop a child from being tortured to death. The problem with these conjectures is that they are not actual exceptions to the rule. For example, an apologist may insist that other children are not obligated to intervene in FTD cases; therefore, not all ethical agents are obligated to intervene. However, this would not be a similar scenario because one or more of the SCI criteria have been altered.

<sup>41</sup> LaFollette and May, "Suffer the Little Children," 360–61.

<sup>42</sup> According to the doctrine of original sin found in much of Christianity, every human being shares in the same hereditary guilt because of the fall of humanity. Unless some form of satisfaction has occurred, every child is liable to divine punishment since possessing a sin nature establishes them as guilty before god and potentially deserving of death. Ignoring a discussion on the moral rightness of this doctrine at present, it is still

of life in conjunction with the seriousness of the FTD cases, misotheists argue that an SCI agent is morally obligated to intervene to stop innocent and vulnerable children from being tortured to death.

### *Prima facie duty of beneficence*

In essence, misotheists argue that it is a *prima facie* obligation to protect vulnerable children from abuse.<sup>43</sup> William Ross explains that other things being equal, people have a “*prima facie* duty of beneficence” where ethical agents are obligated to help victims in need whenever and wherever possible. Naturally, multiple *prima facie* duties may occur simultaneously and conflict with each other. In that case, the weightier *prima facie* obligation will determine an agent’s duty proper.<sup>44</sup> If there is a conflict, then ethical agents are obligated to choose the higher moral law, which is likely whatever action preserves human life.<sup>45</sup> For Lester Kirkendall, the right choice is whatever promotes an overall sense of wellness and health.<sup>46</sup> In the FTD cases above, misotheists argue that there was no weightier *prima facie* duty than to intervene and help those vulnerable children.<sup>47</sup>

This duty of beneficence also conforms to “the social conferral of rights” criterion. Here, what is considered immoral becomes a fixed principle according to what would be preferred by impartial agents who have no personal gain in the outcome of the moral decision. The criterion asks, What would unbiased agents determine as the right course of action if they themselves did not know whether they would profit or suffer from their

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reasonable to conclude that those FTD victims did not warrant being *tortured* so profusely prior to their deaths. Moreover, it seems reasonable to argue that prolonging their lives would have been a much better alternative to letting them be murdered.

<sup>43</sup> See Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 21–22; Thiroux, *Ethics*, 458–59. A duty to defend the innocent is an overt belief among so-called “pro-life” groups in the United States, such as Roman Catholics and evangelical Christians, who often argue that they have a duty to defend the life of innocent unborn children. Ironically, their god does not appear to share this same sense of duty since his inaction gives tacit approval to abortion. Otherwise, if god believed an ethical agent had the duty to protect life, then he too would be bound by the same sense of duty (unless, of course, it is permissible to engage in special pleading).

<sup>44</sup> Ross, *The Right and the Good*, 18–48.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 97–115.

<sup>46</sup> Kirkendall, *Premarital Intercourse*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> It could be argued that god used these FTD cases to enact policy changes and other innovations that would help alleviate the suffering of other children in the future. Never mind the fact that there were already policies in place or the fact that policies are inherently limited in their efficacy. Both god and humans continue to fail because there are still children being needlessly tortured to death in the world right now. See Brown, Osher, and Steffen, “Failed to Death: ‘System Was Set up to Fail.’”

decision?<sup>48</sup> This social conferral of rights would determine that an SCI agent has the *prima facie* duty to stop a child from being tortured to death.

From an ethical naturalist perspective, intervening to save a vulnerable child's life is a principle that 1) most people would support; 2) objective observers would endorse; 3) most people would desire; 4) is what maximizes human happiness and stability; and 5) is what furthers human survival. Conversely, from an ethical *non*naturalist perspective, intervening to save a vulnerable child's life is a self-explanatory property of an objective moral fact.<sup>49</sup> Thus, David Baggett and Jerry Walls argue, "[C. S.] Lewis was right that at least *many* moral facts seem obvious indeed. It's wrong, for example, to torture innocent children for fun, and we plainly recognize it."<sup>50</sup> No doubt Baggett and Walls would recognize the immorality of an SCI agent doing nothing to help a child being tortured to death.

Premise 1(b):  
The Immorality of Nonintervention

The moral duty to intercede on behalf of vulnerable children is also supported by examining the immorality of nonintervention. According to misotheism, for an SCI agent to *refuse* intervention, despite having no prohibitions or constraints, is egregiously unethical. The wrongness of noninterventionist is demonstrated using Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, which identifies whether a decision is immoral based on the consequences of universalizing its precedent.<sup>51</sup> The Categorical Imperative asks how an ethical agent's inaction would shape society if it were emulated. When universalized, an agent's refusal to act would translate to the principle, "No person should intervene to stop a child from being tortured to death." From a consequentialist perspective, the repercussions would be quite deplorable.<sup>52</sup> In terms of virtue ethics, the question is whether society would be ethical if people were to refuse intervening on behalf of vulnerable children. All anyone needs as evidence for the immorality of nonintervention is to look at what happens when ethical agents do nothing to stop the heinous murder of children, such as when "Nazi Germany and its collaborators killed about 1.5

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<sup>48</sup> Brandt, "The Morality of Abortion," 503–26.

<sup>49</sup> For difficulties with the ethical nonnaturalist perspective, see Mackie, *Ethics*, 38–42.

<sup>50</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 9; italics in original.

<sup>51</sup> Paton, *The Categorical Imperative*.

<sup>52</sup> This Categorical Imperative is not the same as making a domino ("slippery slope") argument because it does not suggest that other immoral acts would then attempt to follow this one rule. Rather, the argument here is that society would degrade into immorality simply by adhering to a principle of nonintervention where people deliberately refuse to rescue children from their abusers.



million Jewish children and tens of thousands of Romani (Gypsy) children, 5,000–7,000 German children with physical and mental disabilities living in institutions.”<sup>53</sup> Deliberately refusing to intervene is what gave tacit approval to these killings.

Furthermore, Kant’s reversibility (or “Golden Rule”) criterion establishes that nonintervention is immoral by simply asking whether individuals would promote inaction if they were the ones being tortured to death.<sup>54</sup> If staunch defenders of god’s ethical character were being tortured (or knew of their own daughter being tortured), would they not want god to intervene? Would they not praise god if he came to their aid?<sup>55</sup>

It is apparent that “to intervene” is morally superior than “not to intervene,” even for a deity. For example, god intervening would be in his own self-interest since it would manifest his glory, love, integrity, and value for the sanctity of life, thereby eliciting more worship and praise from theists. Refusing to intervene on behalf of vulnerable children, on the other hand, demonstrates a lack of respect and concern for their welfare, as well as fosters suspicion and distrust in the deity’s claim to be loving and compassionate.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, choosing to intervene would be in the best interest of everybody else since it would increase the longevity and well-being of the victims, in addition to providing opportunities for the future creation of happiness, excellence, and harmony in the lives of everyone involved. Not intervening guarantees the exact opposite for the children and further increases pain and suffering for others.

Indeed, choosing intervention would not only produce beneficial consequences, but it would help minimize the negative aspects of these criminal acts while maximizing happiness for the greatest number of people.<sup>57</sup> From a social-functionalist viewpoint, ethics should not be selfish or short-sighted but, instead, ought to promote actions that better society and generate long-term benefits.<sup>58</sup> It should go without saying that everyone would benefit if no child was ever tortured to death ever again; thus, it is in everyone’s best

<sup>53</sup> *Holocaust Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Children During the Holocaust.”

<sup>54</sup> See also, Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, 86–136.

<sup>55</sup> The immorality of nonintervention calls to mind John Stuart Mill, who wrote, “Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing” (Quoted in Fitzpatrick, *Starting with Mill*, 155).

<sup>56</sup> Thiroux, *Ethics*, 36–43; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 442–49. The egoistic argument here must necessarily be presumptive since god’s reasoning is conveniently undiscernible and inaccessible for human inspection. The mysterious nature of god’s line of reasoning becomes even more convenient for apologists like John Hick and his “soul-making” theodicy.

<sup>57</sup> Thiroux, *Ethics*, 43–46; Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 449–58.

<sup>58</sup> Baumeister, *The Cultural Animal*; Hogan, “Moral Conduct and Moral Character,” 217–32.

self-interest for ethical agents to prevent the torture and murder of children wherever and whenever possible. In the FTD cases above, there is no obvious downside to god intervening.

*Religious (theonomous) morality*

The immorality of nonintervention is also self-evident to the majority of religionists. While there is no direct correlation between religious belief and the development of morality, the dominant faith traditions today do share a surprising number of ethical codes in common.<sup>59</sup> The world's major religions all have imperatives to help those in need, and religionists are more inclined to help others because of their religious affiliations.<sup>60</sup> One study found that when primed with religious language, theists (unlike their god) become more willing to assist an ailing person.<sup>61</sup> This ethical code is why many who rescued Jews from Nazi Germany attributed their intervention to religion.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, religionists are more likely to oppose abortion, suicide, and euthanasia because of a shared belief in the sanctity of human life.<sup>63</sup> Religious institutions generally have a strong opposition to parents physically *abusing* their children, though not necessarily an opposition to physically *disciplining* them. Indeed, religionists have a propensity toward *not* harming their own kids.<sup>64</sup>

In Judaism, one Hebrew proverb states, "Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, 'Behold, we did not know this,' does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?" (Prov. 24:11–12). Rowland Murphy comments, "The command to 'deliver' in v 11 is meant seriously. [Verse 12] A plea of ignorance, whether feigned or innocent, is dismissed.... Cowardice

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<sup>59</sup> Cobb, Ong, and Tate, "Reason-Based Evaluations of Wrongdoing," 259–76; Bruggeman and Hart, "Cheating, Lying, and Moral Reasoning," 340–44; Kohlberg, "Stages of Moral Development as a Basis for Moral Education," 23–92.

<sup>60</sup> Hood, Hill, and Spilka, *The Psychology of Religion*, 428–31; Coward, "Intolerance in the World's Religions," 419–31; Schwartz and Huismans, "Value Priorities and Religiosity in Four Western Religions," 88–107.

<sup>61</sup> Johnson et al., "Who Helps the Samaritan?," 217–31.

<sup>62</sup> Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*, esp. 155–57.

<sup>63</sup> Strickler and Danigelis, "Changing Frameworks in Attitudes Toward Abortion," 187–201; Domino and Miller, "Religiosity and Attitudes toward Suicide," 271–82; Shuman et al., "Attitudes of Registered Nurses Toward Euthanasia," 1–15.

<sup>64</sup> See the entire discussion in Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 139–94, esp. 180–81. As one seventeen-year longitudinal study found, children of regular church attenders were less likely to suffer from physical abuse than children of parents who did not attend church (Brown et al., "A Longitudinal Analysis of Risk Factors for Child Maltreatment," 1065–78). However, it should be noted that specifically *fundamentalist* traditions are associated with increased child abuse among Jews and Christians (Rossano, "The Moral Faculty," 186).

in the face of injustice is reprehensible.”<sup>65</sup> John Miller likewise remarks, “Lack of courage in helping another unjustly condemned to death should not be papered over with lame excuses, lest a similar fate befall the one looking on.”<sup>66</sup>

The same collection of proverbs asserts that people have a right to consideration by those in power, “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it” (3:27), explaining elsewhere that inaction is loathsome to Yahweh, “Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will himself call out and not be answered” (21:13). Finally, there is the Jewish principle of *pikuach nefesh*, which states that the preservation of life is paramount to all other moral considerations.<sup>67</sup> In fact, the Babylonian Talmud discusses specific cases where it is appropriate to break religious prescriptions for the sake of saving a life, many of which explicitly involve rescuing a vulnerable child from certain death (*B. Yoma* 84–85b). In Jewish thought, it would be immoral for an SCI agent to refuse intervention when a child is being tortured to death.

In Christianity, the moral principle is even more pronounced, most significantly in Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). Here, the lesson is obvious: “To be a neighbor is not a condition one inherits ... but a choice one makes to render the tangible assistance one is able to render to those in need of it.”<sup>68</sup> Most importantly, there are explicit condemnations of people who choose nonintervention:

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.... Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matt. 25:41–46)<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Murphy, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 22, *Proverbs*, 181.

<sup>66</sup> Miller, *Proverbs*, 236.

<sup>67</sup> See also, Jub. 50:12–13; 1 Macc. 2:32–38; and 2 Macc. 6:11.

<sup>68</sup> Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 323–24.

<sup>69</sup> There is much debate about whether to interpret Matt. 25:41–46 as a command for general humanitarian action or if it is purely about feeding and clothing Christ’s gospel missionaries (see Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 604–6). However, many commentators still argue for the passage’s universal humanitarian implications (see for example, Davies and Allison, *Matthew*). Even if this passage does not speak of helping those in need, there are plenty of other verses in the New Testament that do (cf. Rom. 13:8–10).

In this passage, there is a clear distinction between the cursed and the righteous based solely on whether a person refuses to act. The threat of eternal damnation forces Christians to take seriously the command to love their neighbors, just like the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus illustrates. Here, the Gospel of Luke 16:19–25 states:

There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish."

The rich man's guilt harkens back to the Hebrew Bible's demand for mercy and compassion on those in need (cf. Isa. 58:7). Failure to intervene on behalf of others is viewed as so immoral that it results in damnation.<sup>70</sup> This insistence on showing compassion is so paramount that it may also involve self-sacrifice if necessary (John 15:13; cf. 1 John 3:16). Evangelical ethicist, John Davis, concludes that Christians ought to follow Christ and allow themselves to suffer on behalf of others, even to the point of death.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, in Islam, there are Qur'ānic and Hadith traditions that prioritize saving those in need. For instance, *sūrah al-Mā'idah* 5:32 states, "Whosoever saves the life of one, it is as though he saved the life of mankind altogether."<sup>72</sup> For some Muslim commentators, this verse refers to saving people from physical death, such as drowning, and is a moral principle that extends beyond Jews to include the Muslim community, as well.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, *al-Nisā'* 4:75 states that fighting to alleviate the helpless and oppressed from their misery is an appropriate basis for intervention. Significantly, the mention of children in *al-Nisā'* is potentially a reference to Makkah idolaters torturing the kids of Muslim parents. When the vulnerable of Makkah begged Allāh for help, they emphasized the suffering of their children in order to receive a

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<sup>70</sup> Bovon, *Luke* 2, 478–88.

<sup>71</sup> Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> English translation appears in Nasr, ed., *The Study Quran*, 291.

<sup>73</sup> See for example, Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*.

quicker response.<sup>74</sup> Lastly, one Sunni Hadith from an-Nawawi relates, “Whosoever alleviates [the lot of] a needy person, Allah will alleviate [his lot] in this world and the next.”<sup>75</sup>

No doubt similar examples are found in the texts of other religions. What these examples indicate is that at least Yahweh, Christ, and Allāh personally think it is morally wrong for an SCI agent to refuse helping an innocent child in distress.<sup>76</sup> For misotheists, if these commands are ethical enough to establish a duty for human SCI agents, then they are ethical enough to establish the same duty for supernatural agents.

### Premise 2: God as an SCI Agent

It is unlikely that any significant number of religionists would dispute the first premise that an SCI agent has a moral duty to stop children from being tortured to death. What a theist might dispute, however, is the second premise that god is an agent possessing the sufficient conditions for intervention. Agents possess these conditions if they have the knowledge, authority, means, and opportunity to intervene (directly or indirectly) and if they could do so easily without risk to their reputation, safety, health, or future living circumstances. Michael Walzer states it succinctly: “In cases like these, anyone who can help should help...If there is no collective response, anyone can respond. If no one is acting, act.”<sup>77</sup> Just from a cost-benefit analysis alone, it is unfathomable to believe that humanity would be at a disadvantage had god simply chosen to help these vulnerable FTD children being tortured to death.

The argument here is not that god was *causally* obligated to intervene as if he created the wicked circumstances in the first place, although a case could be made elsewhere for that very assertion (cf. 1 Sam. 18:10; 2 Thess. 2:11–12).<sup>78</sup> What misotheists argue is that god had a *moral* obligation to intervene precisely because he met the sufficient conditions when no one else

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<sup>74</sup> Abu’l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *al-Kashshāf ‘an ghawāmiḍ ḥaqā’iq al-tanzīl wa ‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl*.

<sup>75</sup> Nawawī, *An-Nawawī’s Forty Hadith*, 77, #36.

<sup>76</sup> As William Lane Craig remarks, “Our moral duties are grounded in the commands of a holy and loving God...His nature expresses itself toward us in the form of moral commands which, issuing from the Good, become moral duties” (Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong, *God?*, 68–69). See also, Holmes, *Ethics*, 77.

<sup>77</sup> Walzer, “The Argument about Humanitarian Intervention,” 177–78.

<sup>78</sup> As LaFollette and May remark, “If we are the cause of harm, then we are responsible *to* the ‘victim’ because we are responsible *for* their condition. For instance, we assume biological parents have *some* responsibility *to* children because they are responsible *for* bringing them into the world” (LaFollette and May, “Suffer the Little Children,” 363; italics in original).

was willing or able to act in the FTD cases above. The victims had a reasonable expectation of care for their wellbeing by any SCI agent available. Indeed, agents of good moral conscience should agree that people have a responsibility to care for children in crisis.<sup>79</sup> As Peter Singer explains, “If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out. This will mean getting my clothes muddy, but this is insignificant, while the death of the child would presumably be a very bad thing.”<sup>80</sup>

It is undeniable that the kind of deity worshipped by most religionists today is an agent who possesses the sufficient conditions for intervention. God is still assumed to be smart enough, powerful enough, capable enough, and loving enough to stop horrific acts of childhood abuse. While certain circumstances may change the first premise to being only morally supererogatory, those same qualifying circumstances would not apply to god.<sup>81</sup> At no point is god asked too much of himself to intervene since he is a total Sovereign with infinitely more resources, intellectual competencies, opportunities, and potentialities for making any circumstance work in his (and everyone’s) favor. Certainly, god would not be sacrificing something of comparable moral importance because abstract (and perhaps unscientific) notions of free will, eschatology, and teleology are not more important than an innocent child’s life.

As a last resort, some apologists may follow John Hick, whose “soul-making” theodicy argues that the divine allows bad things to happen so as to produce sanctification and conformity to the *imago Dei*, as well as to increase the experiential rewards of a blissful afterlife.<sup>82</sup> Somehow, evil acts are ultimately redeemed through eschatology. Disturbingly, Hick’s theodicy amounts to saying that even the torture of little kids is actually a good thing because some people will benefit in the end. Moreover, Hick’s god is quite diabolically unimaginative since, apparently, he cannot conceive of a world where the process of “soul-making” still occurs apart from horrendous suffering. And of course, it is correct to wonder exactly whose soul is being sanctified in the FTD cases above. Can Hick demonstrate that those dead children are currently enjoying a blissful afterlife right now?<sup>83</sup>

Besides, for many religious traditions, god has already unilaterally intervened (or sent his angels and human emissaries to intervene) in far less

<sup>79</sup> LaFollette and May, “Suffer the Little Children,” 363–64.

<sup>80</sup> Singer, “Famine, Affluence, and Morality,” 231.

<sup>81</sup> Walzer, “The Argument about Humanitarian Intervention,” 178.

<sup>82</sup> See Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*.

<sup>83</sup> Even Hick himself recognizes that “so far as we can see, the soul-making process does in fact fail in our own world at least as often as it succeeds” (Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 336).

horrific circumstances on behalf of far less needy people in the past.<sup>84</sup> As such, it is not presumptuous, or an example of inverted theology, to expect god to intervene in far more extreme cases of human cruelty. An innovative and ingenious god could even figure out a way to stop children from being tortured *without* affecting the free will of others (cf. Ps. 33:10–11; Prov. 19:21). After all, even humans are capable of such ingenuity themselves. Nothing should be unrealistically too demanding for god (cf. Eph. 1:11); and even if it were laborious for him to intervene, some actions are still obligatory for those with the sufficient *responsibility* and *capacity* to act.<sup>85</sup> As soon as god knew that no human was going to help, he should have taken it upon himself to demonstrate compassion through intervention.

Misotheists are not misguided idealists or demanding unrealistic generosity for expecting an SCI agent to stop a child from being tortured to death. It is simply the right action to do regardless of whether the agent is natural or supernatural. It is no more unreasonable or unreflective to expect a positive response from god than it is to expect positive actions from any other ethical agent. Of course, it does not logically follow that god should have helped those vulnerable children simply because misotheists insist on it. Rather, there is an assumed universal imperative that applies to god and humanity equally: *all* SCI agents are morally obligated to help others in need (cf. Luke 10:25–37; 16:19–25). To claim that intervention is a moral good in this prescriptive sense is to assign a moral obligation to all SCI agents.<sup>86</sup> Jonathan Baron explains the significance of universal ethics,

Unlike other judgments about what someone should decide to do, moral judgments have a special character: They are impersonal. That is, they are meant to ignore the identity of the relevant people, so that they apply to anyone in the same situation. If it is wrong for me to steal a book from the library, then it is wrong for you, too, if you are in exactly the same situation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Readers may recall biblical stories about the translation of Enoch (Gen. 5:19–24); the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (19:15–29); the Plagues of Egypt (Exod. 7–12); the translation of Elijah (2 Kings 2:9–11); the saving of the Shunammite’s son (2 Kings 4:8–37); the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11); the miraculous healings of Peter’s shadow (vv. 12–16); the liberation of captive prisoners (vv. 17–42; 12:1–19); and the deliverance of Paul from angry mobs (14:1–28; 23:1–24).

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 29–49; Kagan, *Normative Ethics*, 153–77. If providing even the most basic minimal amount of aid to stop these children from being murdered is too demanding or taxing for god, then it would be right to question whether this deity is even worthy of human worship in the first place since humans have exercised far more assistance to needy children in other situations.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Hare, *The Language of Morals*; Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, 77.

<sup>87</sup> Baron, *Thinking and Deciding*, 389. See also, Hare, *Freedom and Reason*.

The implication is that if god demands SCI agents to intervene on behalf of others, then that same command equally applies to *all* ethical agents, including himself.<sup>88</sup>

*Divine nonexemption*

Misotheists view certain crises, like the FTD cases above, as having the “highest degree of incumbency,” meaning no weightier moral duty, exemption, or exception should override the duty to stop a child from being tortured to death.<sup>89</sup> Saying that god is exempt from these same moral obligations, or that god’s divine status somehow makes him immune from moral scrutiny, merely engages in special pleading. The Bible most famously does this type of question begging in the book of Job when the protagonist confronts the divine about his gratuitous suffering. God then gaslights Job by claiming he can do anything he wants (Job 38–41).<sup>90</sup> Kai Nielsen explains the irrationality of exempting god simply for being divine:

Since [God] ... is powerful enough, we might decide that it would be “the better part of valour” to obey him, but this decision would not at all entail that we *ought* to obey him. How do we know that this being is good, except by our own moral discernment? We could not discover that this being is good or just by discovering that he “laid the foundation of the world” or “created man in his image and likeness.” No information about the behavior patterns of this being would of itself tell us that he was good, righteous or just.<sup>91</sup>

Because theists *choose* to ascribe goodness to god, they can also ascribe immorality to him, too. God’s rights as Creator do not exclude him from ethical responsibility, nor do his prerogatives take moral precedence over the rights of those children. To claim otherwise is to demand that humans follow moral principles while failing to apply those same rules to god without satisfactory evidence to support such an exception. Apologists have no other reason to exempt their deity other than a personal interest in dogmatically asserting god’s absolute goodness.<sup>92</sup> It is neither self-evident nor logical to conclude that a being, by virtue of being divine, is therefore a species-specific class of exemption.

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<sup>88</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 415, 434.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 436.

<sup>90</sup> MacIntyre, “Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?,” 360–61.

<sup>91</sup> Nielsen, “Morality and the Will of God,” 252; italics in original.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Exline, Kaplan, and Grubbs, “Anger, Exit, and Assertion,” 264–77.



Moreover, appealing to Jesus' alteration of earlier biblical commands (cf. Matt. 5:21–48) is not proof that god, as divine Law Giver, is morally right to exempt himself from moral conduct. In addition to being a circular argument, it still does not logically follow that a supernatural agent is, somehow, a moral exemption. In misotheism, the concern is not whether god changes his mind but whether it is morally right for an SCI agent, like god, to refuse intervention in those FTD cases. Even theists who reject theological voluntarism or divine command theory must admit that defending god's nonintervention implicitly argues that the criterion for deciding morality relies on the capricious vagaries of his inconsistent behavior. Otherwise, as Jesus suggested, agents of good moral conscience *would* intervene to stop a child from being tortured to death.<sup>93</sup>

Baggett and Walls appear to concur that it is always wrong to choose child torture, even for god. "For if child torture for fun is necessarily and irremediably bad, as it surely seems to be, our account is not only that God never *will* command it, but that he *can't*."<sup>94</sup> For misotheists, however, god's nonintervention in the FTD cases is just as morally wrong. It is here that apologists engage in *ad hoc* rationalizations to rescue god from charges of immorality, a form of non-hermeneutical *theoprepēs* ("God-befitting").<sup>95</sup> If the discussion were about the inaction of human SCI agents, then there would be no rationalizing. Apologists would condemn them for immorality. Likewise, if god had chosen to rescue those children, they would praise him for doing so, believing the rescue to be moral, appropriate, and reasonable. When god does *not* act, then suddenly his refusal is rationalized away as being the better choice.

In summation, misotheists simply have more ground for believing that nonintervention is immoral than they do otherwise. The burden of proof is on the apologist who argues that nonintervention is somehow ethically superior. When considering the *prima facie* duty of beneficence and the immorality of nonintervention, it becomes apparent that any SCI agent refusing to help vulnerable children in crisis is a moral monster.

### The Inaction of Moral Monsters

The second misotheist quasi-syllogism states,

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<sup>93</sup> This special pleading is what Karl Barth rationalized as "holy mutability" where god is free to suspend his moral decrees and alter his relationship with humans at will (Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 496).

<sup>94</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 131; italics in original.

<sup>95</sup> See Slade, "*Hagioprepēs*: The Rationalizing of Saintly Sin and Atrocities," 565–98.

1. All morally-obligated agents who willfully refuse to intervene (to stop a child from being tortured to death) are moral monsters.
2. God is a morally-obligated agent who willfully refused to intervene.
3. Therefore, god is a moral monster.

The argument here is that to be in a position of privilege, like god, means that ethical agents have a responsibility to intervene on behalf of innocent and vulnerable children.<sup>96</sup> Willfully refusing to act in those FTD cases makes anyone, whether human or divine, so egregiously immoral that they qualify as a “moral monster.”

This argument is not about helping *all* children in *all* circumstances, which might lend itself to divine excess (i.e., god intervening *too* much). Rather, what misotheists argue is that god has exhibited a total deficiency of beneficence in the very cases where crisis intervention is not only warranted but is a *prima facie* duty for all SCI agents. God could have found an appropriate means by which to intervene in a sufficiently moderate way that would have avoided the extremes of doing too little or too much.<sup>97</sup> Unfortunately, in the FTD cases above, god willfully chose to do nothing at all, violating the principle of nonmaleficence.

Premise 1:  
Principle of Nonmaleficence

Misotheists are not simply denouncing *physical* or *natural* evil but, rather, *moral* evil—behaviors such as selfishness, cruelty, cowardice, indifference to suffering, and so on.<sup>98</sup> This condemnation derives from the principle of nonmaleficence, a corollary to the duty of beneficence.<sup>99</sup> Simply stated, nonmaleficence declares that agents “should always try to prevent and avoid doing badness or harm.”<sup>100</sup> If being ethical means performing right and good actions, then its converse is also true; agents of good moral conscience should also avoid making bad choices. As Moreland and Craig assert, “A virtuous person desires to see the good prosper and moral duty honored.”<sup>101</sup> As an ethical system, the principles of beneficence and nonmaleficence are *logically*

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<sup>96</sup> Shue, *Basic Rights*, 35–64, esp. 53.

<sup>97</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 146–64.

<sup>98</sup> McCloskey, “God and Evil,” 206–7.

<sup>99</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 436.

<sup>100</sup> Thiroux, *Ethics*, 163.

<sup>101</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 446.

prior to all other moral considerations.<sup>102</sup> While definitions of “good,” “bad,” “right,” and “wrong” differ according to various ethicists, it is an empirical fact that no ethical system currently exists today where an SCI agent is encouraged *not* to stop an innocent child from being tortured to death.<sup>103</sup> Jacques Thiroux explains, “When we speak of a moral person, life, or action, we mean a good person, a good life, and a right action; when we speak of an immoral person, life, or action, we mean a bad person, a bad life, and a wrong action.”<sup>104</sup>

Moreover, the category of “moral monster” does not require that an agent be the ultimate source of evil or injustice.<sup>105</sup> Rather, an ethical agent merely needs to have willfully abstained from acting despite possessing the sufficient conditions to do so. Naturally, this understanding of “moral monster” is not exhaustive (agents can be moral monsters for other reasons); but even from a theistic perspective, willfully declining to help those vulnerable FTD children exhibits a depraved moral character.

Jeffrey Stout describes the notion of “moral abominations” as “an especially serious violation of human rights, a particularly striking sign of disrespect for those who should never be treated as means only, or an act with unusually sweeping bad consequences.”<sup>106</sup> He goes on to list the more customary abominations, such as the sadistic murder of innocent children (i.e., abortion) and the Holocaust.<sup>107</sup> Any act that is egregiously loathsome and repulsive would count as an abomination, and any participant (even through omission) would become “the social equivalent of a monster—an object of abomination.”<sup>108</sup> For misotheists, if something like abortion is a moral abomination, then certainly the refusal to help a vulnerable child must also count as a moral abomination. Indeed, for an SCI agent to stand by and directly watch a child be tortured to death is quite monstrous. Even Baggett and Walls label children being tortured as “hideous.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> See Thiroux, *Ethics*, 163–64.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 20–21.

<sup>104</sup> Thiroux, *Ethics*, 164.

<sup>105</sup> Although, see 1 Kings 22:23; Job 2:10; 12:16; Isa. 45:7; Lam. 3:38; Ezek. 14:9; and Amos 3:6. Note also, Avalos, “Yahweh is a Moral Monster,” 209–36.

<sup>106</sup> Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, 146; see his entire discussion, pp. 145–62.

<sup>107</sup> In his stringent advocacy for objective morality, William Lane Craig uses the Holocaust as an example of something being objectively immoral even though many Nazis did not (and do not) believe it was wrong (Craig and Sinnott-Armstrong, *God?*, 17). Presumably, Craig believes the Holocaust was immoral because, among other things, it involved the unjust torture and murder of innocent children. Likewise, Craig presumably believes that Adolf Hitler and other high-ranking Nazi officials were moral monsters because of their indirect participation (and tacit approval) of the Holocaust, though some people like Adolf Hitler never tortured or murdered a single child.

<sup>108</sup> Stout, *Ethics After Babel*, 153.

<sup>109</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 74.

A cultural or ethical relativist might argue that the immorality of nonintervention may not be as universally condemned as suggested in misotheism. For instance, Louis Pojman documents the following (though he himself is not an ethical relativist):

Eskimos allow their elderly to die by starvation....The Nuer of East Africa throw deformed infants to the hippopotamus....the Ik in Northern Uganda have no sense of duty toward their children or parents. Some societies make it a duty for children to kill (sometimes strangle) their aging parents.<sup>110</sup>

However, these value judgments may not differ as much from misotheism as it first appears. No doubt these same societies still agree with the principle of nonmaleficence and would view the gratuitous torture and murder of their own innocent children as immoral. For most people groups, to choose nonintervention over saving the life of an innocent child is, indeed, abnormal, unethical, illegal (for many countries, at least), and evidence of extreme psychopathy regardless of their specific cultural sensibilities.<sup>111</sup>

Moreover, merely pointing out that different cultures have different mores does nothing in the way of prescribing what ethical agents *ought* to do about children being tortured to death. As Moreland and Craig argue, “Some acts are wrong regardless of social conventions....Thus an act (e.g., torturing babies for fun) can be wrong even if society says it is right, and an act can be right even if society says it is wrong. In fact, an act can be right or wrong even if society says nothing whatever about that act.”<sup>112</sup> In misotheism, the same statement is true when directed at deities. Some inactions are wrong regardless of god’s will or plan. Thus, an inaction (e.g., allowing innocent children to be tortured to death) can be wrong even if god says it is right, and an inaction can be right even if god says it is wrong. In fact, an inaction can be right or wrong even if god says nothing whatever about that inaction. In this sense, the positive act of “torturing babies for fun” has an equally egregious counterpart: pedicide through neglect.

### *Pedicide through neglect*

In the 1970s, a debate emerged about the practice of special-care nurseries allowing malformed babies to die from a lack of medical treatment. Though routine surgical operations could extend the child’s life (but not always

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<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 424–25.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Nielsen, “Why Should I Be Moral?,” 539–59.

<sup>112</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 429.

indefinitely or without continued suffering), the choice to let the children gradually deteriorate to death was based on the belief that certain kinds of handicaps and defects would not permit the infant to live a meaningful life.<sup>113</sup> Being a sanctioned practice of involuntary euthanasia, the moral dilemma was whether intervention ought still to be done for the newborns.<sup>114</sup>

Evangelical ethicist, John Davis, adamantly insists that it is an abomination for doctors to stand by and allow a deformed infant to die of starvation or suffocation.<sup>115</sup> While Davis condemns the doctors who permit “infanticide by neglect,” he never considers the fact that *god* is just as guilty as those pediatricians since he could have easily prevented or intervened to stop those children from dying. Instead, god withheld lifesaving medical care from those handicapped newborns just as he withheld lifesaving intervention in the FTD cases above. The difference, of course, is that in the FTD cases, the victims were not newborn infants with life-threatening malformations. Had god (or any SCI agent) intervened, those children would have continued to live meaningful lives. In the FTD cases, god’s neglect of moral duty resulted in horrific murder; and if god’s willful negligence of vulnerable children is morally permissible, then why should humans not also follow god’s “moral” example?

Premise 2:  
Principle of Consistency

The traditional belief for most theists is that god is either benevolent, compassionate, or both. Arthur Homes writes,

Caring, like love, entails deep feelings of sympathy and concern that move one to act....God too cares, but his caring comes from a love that is fuller than even a mother’s love....the paradigm for caring in a Christian ethic is the love of God. He is the perfect model for us as ethical agents....This God knows our pains and shares our sorrows; he suffers with us and for us. In a word, he cares.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Duff and Campbell, “Moral and Ethical Dilemmas in the Special-Care Nursery,” 890–94.

<sup>114</sup> Robertson, “Involuntary Euthanasia of Defective Newborns,” 213–69.

<sup>115</sup> Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 167–83. Davis goes on to write, “A medical practice informed by the spirit of Christ and love for the neighbor will see as its goal never to harm or choose death as a primary end, to cure whenever possible, and always to provide care and comfort to all patients, both in their living and in their dying” (p. 183). Misotheists are right to wonder why, then, god’s own decision-making process is not also informed by the spirit of Christ when faced with childhood torture.

<sup>116</sup> Holmes, *Ethics*, 126–27.

Suspiciously, however, when given an opportunity to reveal his love and compassion toward vulnerable children, god's "care" is noticeably absent. In fact, refusing to intervene demonstrates the exact opposite of someone who would be the "paradigm for caring" since it reveals no sense of concern for the well-being of others.<sup>117</sup> According to misotheists, if god truly cared, then he would have been moved enough with compassion to intervene.

The problem is not that god (if he exists) possesses the ethical integrity of a hypocrite, commanding love and compassion while exhibiting violence and cruelty.<sup>118</sup> Instead, the problem is with the apologists who make excuses for god's inaction. As theists, they do not practice a principle of consistency, which Moreland and Craig describe as applying the same moral judgments to all relevant ethical agents. "If some act *X* is judged right for some person *P*, then *X* is right for anyone relevantly similar to *P*."<sup>119</sup> Misotheism argues that it is morally inappropriate to exempt god from ethical scrutiny without justifiable cause. In the FTD cases above, if the refusal to intervene is judged wrong for human agents, then the refusal to intervene is wrong for *all* SCI agents, including god.<sup>120</sup>

By willfully declining to act on behalf of the abused FTD children, god violated most ethical systems currently in practice; and he did so without any overt remorse or reparations. Psychologically, there are five foundations to every ethical system.<sup>121</sup> Not surprisingly, god violated all five foundations, including 1) showing a lack of concern for the suffering of others; 2) a lack of concern for the unfair treatment of innocents; 3) a lack of self-sacrifice for his creation; 4) a lack of respect for social order and the ethical rules he himself established; and 5) a lack of concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of those children. These violations make him a moral monster. As H. J. McCloskey explains,

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<sup>117</sup> See the discussions in Willard, "Cultural Scripts for Mothering," 225–43 and Held, *Feminist Morality*.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. 1 Sam. 18:10; 1 Kings 22:23; 2 Chron. 18:21; and Ezek. 14:9. While this chapter addresses only god's deplorable *inaction* in specific FTD cases, there is a case to be made for rejecting the god of Jews, Christians, and Muslims for his deplorable *actions* in human history as narrated in their Scriptures. See Nelson-Pallmeyer, *Is Religion Killing Us?*; Avalos, "Yahweh is a Moral Monster," 209–36.

<sup>119</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 463.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre who writes, "The concept of justice which we use in speaking of God is therefore an analogically and historically ordered concept, which in some of its uses is no different from those in which it is applied by human beings to each other and in others very different indeed, although not so different as not to preserve the core unity of the concept" (MacIntyre, "Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?," 369).

<sup>121</sup> Haidt and Selin Kesebir, "Morality," 797–832.

In attributing such behavior to God ... theists are, I suggest, attributing to God immoral behaviour of a serious kind—of a kind we should all unhesitatingly condemn in a fellow human being...anyone who today advocated, or even allowed where he could prevent it, the occurrence of evil and the sacrifice of the many—even as a result of their own freely chosen actions—for the sake of the higher virtue of the few, would be condemned as an immoralist.<sup>122</sup>

Misotheists ask, Why is it immoral for humans to refuse helping innocent children but *not* immoral with the so-called “perfect model for us as ethical agents”? What makes god’s refusal to help especially depraved is that his inaction had harmed those innocent FTD children in unimaginably terrible ways. The suffering they endured before dying was egregious, gratuitous, and intolerable, yet apologists still declare god a “perfect model” of compassion for them to emulate.

Likewise, for apologists to claim that god’s love “is fuller than even a mother’s love” is plainly absurd. What loving mother would not spare her helpless child from needless trauma and suffering wherever possible? No loving mother (or deity) would *refuse* to rescue their child when they *could* rescue them.<sup>123</sup> To claim that a noninterventionist god is like a *loving* mother is a contradiction in terms.

### *Incoherence of nonintervention*

When confronted with these FTD cases, apologists often defend god’s inaction by arguing that nonintervention must have been a morally superior choice to that of intervening. In misotheism, however, there is no weightier *prima facie* duty than the obligation of an SCI agent to intervene on behalf of abused children. To suggest otherwise is a contradiction of morality itself.<sup>124</sup> Moreland and Craig explain, “Much of the point of morality is to preserve the dignity, welfare, and richness of human life.”<sup>125</sup> Likewise, as Davis points out, “All human life is sacred to God who made it.”<sup>126</sup> If true, then a divine SCI agent cannot claim to value the sanctity (or quality) of life while

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<sup>122</sup> McCloskey, “God and Evil,” 221.

<sup>123</sup> Schellenberg, “Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism,” 290–91.

<sup>124</sup> Indeed, even those theists who would define “evil” as a privation of good inadvertently support the misotheist’s argument. The divine’s lack of intervention—his absence—was a privation of good and, thus, an act of moral evil.

<sup>125</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 415.

<sup>126</sup> Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 183.

simultaneously refuse to preserve life in crisis situations that demand immediate intervention.<sup>127</sup>

For some apologists, the weightier moral duty is to preserve the free will of the perpetrators involved, though these same apologists also often believe that god has intervened in the past (and thwarted people's free will in the process). However, if preserving free will is morally superior to stopping the torture and murder of a child, then (in accordance with the principle of consistency) it would be equally superior for humans to refuse intervening, as well. In such a case, there could be no duty of beneficence in ethics.<sup>128</sup> Herein lies another contradiction. Apologists argue that since god is truly "good," then his refusal to help those children must have been an act of divine goodness. Indeed, god would be morally obligated *not* to intervene if it meant adding more goodness to the universe. By claiming that god's inaction is somehow morally superior, theists are saying that more real-world good exists in the universe *because* god let those children be tortured to death than what would have been the case if god had stopped their murder. The problem is immediately apparent. If nonintervention is a moral good, then humans ought to defy the parable of the Good Samaritan more often by hoping for (and praising) god's continued nonintervention in other cases of childhood suffering. In fact, it would be humanity's moral obligation to increase the total good in the universe by allowing more children to be tortured to death since god's refusal to intercede is somehow the morally superior choice to make.<sup>129</sup> Misotheism, of course, believes the exact opposite: if god exists, then humanity has a reasonable expectation for him to behave at least as morally conscientious as his own creation.

Simply stated, humanity either has a moral obligation to prevent children from being tortured to death or they do not. If people do not intervene in these cases, then (statistically-speaking) god is likely not to intervene, either. Thus, god's nonintervention would, once again, enhance the so-called "goodness" in the universe, making humanity morally obligated to emulate his inaction and refuse intervening on behalf of vulnerable children in order to promote god's continued refusal (cf. Rom. 3:1–8).<sup>130</sup> Based on this logic, parents could torture and murder their children so as to provide god more opportunities for nonintervention, thereby elevating more goodness in the

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<sup>127</sup> Thiroux, *Ethics*, 92–93, 162–63. As Thiroux remarks, "There can be no human beings, moral or immoral, if there is no human life; there can be no discussion of morality, a setting up of codes, or even concern about what is or is not moral if there are no live human beings around" (p. 92).

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Wendling, "Education in a Liberal Society," 151–53.

<sup>129</sup> McCloskey, "God and Evil," 215.

<sup>130</sup> This statement is not meant to indicate a causal relationship between humanity's inaction and god's inaction as though humanity refusing to help therefore leads to god refusing to intervene, as well.



universe. If people *do* intervene to stop a child from being murdered in cases where god would have refused, then they would be making a lesser moral choice.<sup>131</sup> This contradiction is akin to the so-called “reformer’s dilemma” in that theists quite possibly act against the will and moral judgment of god whenever they help someone in need.<sup>132</sup> If it is morally wrong for god to do something, then it would be equally wrong for his creation to act, as well. The reverse is also true. If it is morally necessary for humans to intervene on behalf of vulnerable children, then it would be morally necessary for god to intervene, also.<sup>133</sup> As Baggett and Walls explain, “If I valued child torture for fun, that wouldn’t make it a valuable activity in any morally significant sense.”<sup>134</sup>

Any moral theory that suggests an SCI agent does not have any moral obligations, or that an agent can give tacit approval to the immorality of others, is surely in trouble. Moreland and Craig write, “Any view that even allows for the logical possibility that child molestation and a host of other immoral acts could be morally justified has a wrong conception of value.”<sup>135</sup> Baggett and Walls concur and remark that it is exceedingly irrational, if not impossible, to believe that god would command people to torture kids for fun.<sup>136</sup> Somehow, though, *permitting* the torture of kids without intervention is deemed a moral necessity for no other reason than that god is speciously given a pass from following his own rules of ethics.

Baggett and Walls write further, “God can’t, for instance, issue a command for us to torture children; but he may well be acting in accord with moral perfection when he, say, allows death to take place in a fallen world.”<sup>137</sup> This apologetic argument is an example of minimizing and rationalizing away god’s immoral inaction.<sup>138</sup> It attempts to compare two unrelated subjects: Deity commanding the torture of children and god allowing death as a natural part of life. The former is obviously immoral, but the latter is not. Misotheists are outraged specifically because an SCI agent presided over and then refused to intervene as innocent children were tortured to death. God *willfully* abandoned his moral duty of beneficence, contradicted his own moral

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<sup>131</sup> As Emil Brunner once wrote, “The Good consists in always doing what God wills at any particular moment” (Brunner, *The Divine Imperative*, 83).

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 428.

<sup>133</sup> McCloskey, “God and Evil,” 215.

<sup>134</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 26.

<sup>135</sup> Moreland and Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, 451.

<sup>136</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 77.

<sup>137</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 135.

<sup>138</sup> Readers may note that Baggett and Walls did not have the courage to claim it was also part of god’s moral perfection to stand by and directly *watch* the torture of young kids while he refused to do anything about it.

commands, mocked the principle of nonmaleficence, and engaged in pedicide through neglect. Misotheists rightly question how refusing to help vulnerable children could be part of god's "moral perfection." If it was morally right for god to refuse helping those kids, then why would he command others to intervene in his stead?

### *Tacitly approving murder*

Claiming that god simply *allowed* evildoers to act of their own accord (but did not directly *cause* their behavior) is actually evidence in favor of misotheism because it indicates that god gives tacit approval for the torture and murder of children. The theological concept is "concursum," which states that god provides the continuing divine support for all secondary human actions (whether those actions are free, contingent, or necessary). In order for people to torture children to death, god must still be in accord with those actions because all contingent creatures depend upon god for their very existence. During these acts of child abuse, the self-subsistent being of god is directly and immanently involved in those acts (*immediatio suppositi*) as he lends the effective and operative power necessary for his creation to carry out their crimes against children (*immediatio virtutis*). God willfully sustained the actions of those perpetrators as they continued their abuse.

Theologians argue that these grotesque murders are done *kata synchōrēsin* (κατὰ συγχώρησιν), by permission, of the permissive will of god in order for him to effect his *opus alienum* ("alien work") in and through human cruelty. Here, god's alien work purposely defies goodness and justice, but it is done for the sake of his penultimate purposes. Allowing children to be tortured to death is an act of god's providence whereby he supports human actions and then directs them toward an ordained end. For misotheists, the prolonged torture and murder of little children is far too gratuitous and, thus, unnecessary for a wise Sovereign to need (or passively accept) from his contingent creatures.<sup>139</sup> God has merely subordinated clear moral principles to facilitate Machiavellian ends. The innocent FTD children were tortured to death, and god deliberately refused to stop the abuse when he could have chosen otherwise. A deity who is not moral enough to intercede on behalf of vulnerable children is not a deity worth worshipping.

## **Scorning Moral Monsters**

The final misotheist quasi-syllogism states,

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<sup>139</sup> The doctrine of concursum and divine providence is accepted whether the theologian holds to theological determinism, foreordination, congruism, *scientia media*, molinism, or any other system relating to divine and human freedom.

1. All moral monsters are deserving of humanity's scorn, not praise and worship.
2. God is a moral monster.
3. Therefore, god is deserving of humanity's scorn, not praise and worship.

The final argument for misotheism is a moral judgment, not an evaluative-religious one. It asserts that if god exists, then there is nothing incoherent about him being a wicked deity who deceives his followers about his own goodness (cf. 1 Kings 22:23; Isa. 45:7; Ezek. 14:9). As such, misotheists urge people to use their critical thinking skills and moral judgments about whether such a deity is, indeed, worthy of worship.<sup>140</sup> Nielsen explains that it is unintelligible to decide the morality of an action based on god's will alone because humans must still employ their own logically independent criteria to discern right from wrong. Theists can only determine that god is "good" if they already know how to decide what constitutes goodness apart from deity.<sup>141</sup> If humans can determine what constitutes good and bad on their own, then they can make a moral judgment about god's own actions apart from dogmatic indoctrination.

In the FTD cases above, the determination is fairly simple: either helping those innocent children is morally right *or* god himself is not inherently good because he gave tacit approval to their torture. The misotheist argument here is not a denial of god's ability to prioritize his own will in routine circumstances. The argument is that in those FTD cases, god elevated his own sense of self to a point that it became physically destructive, socially dangerous, and ethically macabre.<sup>142</sup> To argue that god has no moral obligation to his own creation is to describe an ethical "wanton" (someone who acts only to satisfy their own desires with no sense of moral duty), which is hardly "the perfect model for us as ethical agents."

However, ethics involves more than simply establishing a personal code of conduct. It often involves informing *others* about how they should act.<sup>143</sup> For example, theists may identify god as the ground of all morality and, therefore, fully expect him to issue commandments. The same is true for human beings, who are within their rights to decree how other ethical agents should behave, even if that other agent is a god. Indeed, throughout history,

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<sup>140</sup> Nielsen, "Morality and the Will of God," 250–52.

<sup>141</sup> Nielsen, "Morality and the Will of God," 241–57.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Baumeister and Exline, "Virtue, Personality, and Social Relations," 1165–94. As Holmes writes, "The human rights doctrine, by insisting on the *equal* rights of *all* persons, disallows 'me-first' extremes....And, because rights imply obligations, we are morally bound together in a morally supportive society" (Holmes, *Ethics*, 86; italics in original).

<sup>143</sup> Baron, *Thinking and Deciding*, 390.

pagans, Jews, and Christians have decried the immorality of other deities and used their moral judgments to refuse worshipping (or believing in) those other gods.<sup>144</sup> Today, some Christian apologists even decry the immorality of other religions as reason to deny their deity's existence.<sup>145</sup> The point is that if a religionist's god were any other being (e.g., a human being or another deity), then each religionist would recognize the need to scorn that being as a moral monster.

*Failure to protect laws*

If god were a human being, then he would likely be charged with multiple human rights violations. In misotheism, vulnerable children under god's care have "basic rights" to subsistence and physical security. Alan Gewirth argues that children have the right to certain necessary preconditions for living that must be respected by all ethical agents.<sup>146</sup> In this sense, as John Howie explains, subsistence and physical security are "basic" because no other rights are possible if these two needs are not met first.<sup>147</sup> Possessing these inalienable rights requires both negative and positive action from other ethical agents. Negative actions include the principle of nonmaleficence while positive actions include providing the structure or support system necessary to live out those rights. By refusing to intervene when he was the only one capable of doing so, god violated the basic rights of those children. The FTD victims *would have had* subsistence had god chosen to intervene. Those vulnerable children *would have had* physical security had god only chosen to exercise his duties as Creator and Sustainer of life. As William Aiken remarks, those children had "the right to be saved from preventable death."<sup>148</sup> Holmes further concludes, "To abuse a person, to violate her rights, is to disrespect God and depreciate his image in her. It is in effect an act of blasphemy, for the sanctity of persons reflects the sanctity of God."<sup>149</sup>

Furthermore, willful neglect that leads to a child's death may constitute any number of crimes, including murder, involuntary manslaughter, conspiracy to commit murder, and child abuse. In fact, something as basic as the refusal of a parent to give their child medical attention, which then results in death, could be considered homicide by omission.<sup>150</sup> By definition, child

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<sup>144</sup> See Edwards et al., eds., *Apologetics in the Roman Empire*; Grant, *Greek Apologists of the Second Century*; and Engberg, Jacobsen, and Ulrich, eds., *In Defence of Christianity*.

<sup>145</sup> For example, Geisler and Saleeb, *Answering Islam*, 318–29.

<sup>146</sup> Gewirth, *Human Rights*, 4, 18–19.

<sup>147</sup> Howie, "World Hunger and a Moral Right to Subsistence," 442–45.

<sup>148</sup> Aiken, "The Right to Be Saved from Starvation," 86.

<sup>149</sup> Holmes, *Ethics*, 89–90.

<sup>150</sup> Robertson, "Involuntary Euthanasia of Defective Newborns," 213–69.

abuse and neglect has occurred if an agent has failed to protect the child victim from their abuser, as stated in the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS).<sup>151</sup> Significantly, every state in the United States has “failure to protect” laws where caregivers can be criminally charged for not taking reasonable action to prevent a child from witnessing or experiencing abuse, including a failure to report the abuse to authorities.<sup>152</sup> What these laws suggest is that SCI caretakers are legally and morally responsible for protecting children against abuse.<sup>153</sup>

Suggestively, a 2014 BuzzFeed News Investigation found seventy-three cases of women sentenced to at least ten years in prison for failing to protect their children from abusive partners.<sup>154</sup> In Ohio for example, if god were a human being, he would be charged with first-degree felony in “Permitting Child Abuse,” which states, “No parent, guardian, custodian, or person having custody of a child ... shall cause serious physical harm to the child, or the death of the child, as a proximate result of permitting the child to be abused, [or] to be tortured.”<sup>155</sup> At the very least, god could have reported the perpetrators to the authorities as required of social workers, teachers, counselors, and (in some states) clergy members.<sup>156</sup> But he did not even do that much. For misotheists, the real issue is not whether god is a hypocrite but, instead, whether humanity has an ethical duty to scorn him for his repeated immoral inaction. As a moral position, misotheism believes it is unethical to praise and worship such monsters.

### *Underdeveloped morality*

Significantly, the majority of people in one study (96%) believe that public intervention is necessary in domestic violence situations if the victim has been injured. The main reason given is to protect children who may be directly or

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<sup>151</sup> Petersen, Joseph, and Feit, eds., *New Directions in Child Abuse and Neglect Research*, 2–3.

<sup>152</sup> Fugate, “Who’s Failing Whom?,” 278–279

<sup>153</sup> See also, Perkins and Barry, “Should Failure to Protect Laws Include Physical and Emotional Sibling Violence?,” 206–9.

<sup>154</sup> Campbell, “These Mothers Were Sentenced.” It must be noted that in many cases, the women were also being abused, leading to the complaint that these laws sometimes punish the victims themselves. For prosecutors of these cases, however, the intent is to send a clear message that parents have a duty to protect their own children (Campbell, “He Beat Her”). Does god not have the same duty toward his own creation?

<sup>155</sup> Ohio Revised Code, “2903.15 Permitting Child Abuse.”

<sup>156</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect*.

indirectly involved.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, mothers who remain romantically involved with a male partner who has sexually abused her children are often ostracized and judged harshly for not providing the necessary support to their own kids.<sup>158</sup> The point of this data is that people generally have an instinctual desire to see children protected from harm.

However, religionists have made the moral assertion that their deity is perfectly “good” and, thus, worthy of worship, thereby making the felt need to protect children out of alignment with their god. For theists to judge god as good, they must adhere to some independent moral criterion by which they can evaluate the deity’s actions, which (when independently studied) suggests that humans are more concerned for the well-being of vulnerable children than god is. Claiming that god is “good” simply because he is god provides no significant claim about the content of morality itself nor does it show an alignment with basic human morality and the protection of kids.<sup>159</sup>

For the misotheist, a proper code of ethics takes precedence over dogma or blind devotion to a Sovereign; and no being deserves worship simply because of their divine status. As Nielsen clarifies, “Without a prior conception of God as good or his commands as right, God would have no more claim on our obedience than Hitler or Stalin.”<sup>160</sup> It would be immoral to worship an immoral deity, something that even Christian apologists emphasize. Baggett and Walls remark, “We don’t want nor could we in good conscience worship a God who commands the torture of innocents for fun.”<sup>161</sup> Their objection ironically exemplifies misotheism’s moral position, as well: Misotheists do not want nor could they in good conscience worship a god who gives tacit approval to the torture of innocents for fun and then willfully denies a *prima facie* duty to intervene on behalf of vulnerable children. Louise Antony explains further,

Commitment to the well-being of one’s children is the *normative ground* for one’s authority over them....The legitimacy of parental authority derives from, and is contingent upon, the parent’s fulfilling this role to a reasonably high degree....I thus reject the view that a parent has a *natural* right to control her children, that children owe their parents loyalty and obedience simply because their parents are causally responsible for the

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<sup>157</sup> See Barnett, Miller-Perrin, and Perrin, *Family Violence Across the Lifespan*, 7. Cf. Nabi and Horner, “Victims with Voices,” 237–53.

<sup>158</sup> See Alaggia, “Cultural and Religious Influences,” 41–60.

<sup>159</sup> Nielsen, “Morality and the Will of God,” 250; MacIntyre, “Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?,” 359–66. As Le Poidevin remarks, “If ascribing goodness to something just means that God wills it, then the assertion that God is good becomes the curious and morally empty assertion that God wills that he be as he is” (Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, 75).

<sup>160</sup> Nielsen, “Morality and the Will of God,” 257n5.

<sup>161</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 80.

children's existence....abusive or negligent parents forfeit legitimate authority over their children.<sup>162</sup>

Christian philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, similarly argues that only a just deity warrants human devotion.<sup>163</sup> Part of MacIntyre's criteria is never inflicting undeserved harm beyond what is needed to serve justice or for the demonstration of mercy. MacIntyre rightly identifies the irrationality of those who assert that god cannot possibly be unjust because he is inherently just. This type of circular reasoning does not suffice for misotheists, though MacIntyre goes on to commit the same question-begging fallacy himself when he asserts that god deserves obedience simply because the Bible says so (and theists ought to take the Bible seriously because god says so).<sup>164</sup>

Misotheists would argue that MacIntyre himself does not adhere to his own arguments. By divine providence and concursus, god has consciously supported and repeatedly permitted the infliction of undeserved harm beyond what was needed to serve justice or demonstrate mercy. As H. J. McCloskey writes, "Much pain and suffering ... has no morally uplifting effects upon others, and cannot by virtue of the examples chosen have such effects on the sufferers."<sup>165</sup> If god were any other person, then theists would have no problem condemning his deliberate inaction as depraved when intervention was so clearly the morally superior choice for him to make.

Baggett and Walls dogmatically, and simplistically, assert that god did *not* act immorally because, simply stated, it would logically lead to a contradiction in their beliefs about god. Thus, they attempt to rationalize the contradiction away:

Suppose that God told us to torture children for fun. What larger story could we tell to make sense of the resulting suffering? What feature of God's goodness would lead to a command like this? What proposition,

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<sup>162</sup> Antony, "Does God Love Us?," 31; italics in original.

<sup>163</sup> MacIntyre, "Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?," 359–71. MacIntyre further remarks,

It is when, and only when, effective power is wielded so that the ends of justice are served by the exercise of power, that authority is justly ascribed to whomsoever it is who wields that power. And the ends of justice are only served when power is exercised in accordance with and by means of a duly promulgated law. So it is only insofar as the commands of just authority are themselves just, that is, are in accord with the justice expressed in justly promulgated law, that the utterance of commands imposes any obligation. (pp. 363–64)

<sup>164</sup> MacIntyre remarks, "It is from the *Book of Job* that we have to learn, as I said earlier, that our creator owes us nothing and that we owe Him everything....God, it turns out, cannot be truly judged of by something external to his Word, but that is because natural justice recognized by natural reason is itself divinely uttered and authorized [in Scripture]" (MacIntyre, "Which God Ought We to Obey and Why?," 368, 370).

<sup>165</sup> McCloskey, "God and Evil," 215.

consistent with an impeccable God, is thought possibly true that would entail such a command? Needless to say, we seem hard-pressed to provide any such thing. The best explanation of our inability to do so is that there is none, and thus that this is something impossible, in the broadly logical sense, and not merely difficult, to reconcile with an impeccable God.<sup>166</sup>

For misotheists, Baggett and Walls fail to uphold the obvious explanation: They are hard-pressed to identify a feature of god's goodness because that goodness is missing altogether. What misotheism suggests is that if god exists, he does not possess the same moral maturity as his own creation. As a member of the support group, Recovering from Religion, once stated to this author, "I cannot worship a god who is less moral than me."

The problem is that even humans recognize the immorality of nonintervention when a child is being tortured to death; yet, devout religionists will attempt gaslighting others into believing that god's inaction was somehow a moral good. The fact is that humans who have intervened in the past, such as rescuing Jews from Nazi death camps, acted more heroically and more ethically than god has done in the FTD cases above because mature humans are inclined to choose altruism over egoism.<sup>167</sup> The implication, of course, is that god himself does not possess a mature moral conscience if his own creation is willing to risk more than he is willing to do in similar situations. As a direct result of god's negligence, those innocent children suffered constant abuse and deprivation. What is worse is that god was not moved enough by their suffering to act on their behalf, making him a morally immature monster who is unworthy of worship.<sup>168</sup>

### Conclusion

If god exists but did not have the moral integrity to intervene in horrific circumstances like the FDT cases, then he is simply not worthy of praise and worship. The very fact that theologians and apologists often employ rationalizations to mask their deity's immorality suggests that their initial reaction to the FTD cases is one of disgust and heartache.<sup>169</sup> The efforts of apologists to undermine an appropriate moral response to the situation would be meaningless unless they recognized the obvious implications: That SCI

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<sup>166</sup> Baggett and Walls, *Good God*, 135.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. Kohlberg, *Essays on Moral Development*; Oliner and Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality*; Snarey, "Cross-Cultural Universality of Social-Moral Development," 202–32; Sprague, "Moral Sense," 5:385–87; and Templeton, "Expanding Circle Morality."

<sup>168</sup> Le Poidevin, *Arguing for Atheism*, 91–99.

<sup>169</sup> Slade, "*Hagioprepēs*: The Rationalizing of Sainly Sin and Atrocities," 565–



agents of good moral conscience would have intervened to help those kids, and yet their god did nothing. As such, they must engage in all types of moral gymnastics and tortured logic to show why it was appropriate for god to constrain a sympathetic response to these children.<sup>170</sup> While the apologist may be able to justify *some* human misery, there is no evidence to suggest that the FTD cases above did anything but contribute to the universe's surplus of suffering with no compensating good.<sup>171</sup> The critical thinker is forced to conclude either that refusing to help a tortured child is a moral good or that their god acted immorally and is, thus, a moral monster. What the critical thinker cannot do is claim that god willfully permitted the torture of children and yet somehow retains his ethical integrity.

Finally, most theists today define their deity as a person of pure love and compassion. For them, if someone does not fit this definition, then that being could not properly be labelled "god." Of course, despite several equivocation problems with this definition, the concept of "god" does not actually require the existence of a perfectly moral agent.<sup>172</sup> Regardless, if this definition were true, then misotheists are justified in presuming that *no* god exists because, in fact, no supernatural being has yet to demonstrate the kind of love and compassion necessary for receiving the title "god." Thus, many misotheists simply opt for atheism as the most reasonable worldview.

Moreover, god's hiddenness during times of extreme crisis lends itself toward an atheistic conclusion. Presume that some of those children cried out for god's help; and yet, he did not answer their prayers while they endured years of torment. The deafening silence of god's inaction makes it evident that a loving, compassionate deity never existed in the first place.<sup>173</sup> A cruel and negligent deity may exist, but not a *loving* and *compassionate* one. J. L. Schellenberg uses the analogy of a small child abandoned in the rain forest screaming for a parent to help and rightly concludes, "What we *can't* say is that a *loving* mother would in circumstances like these be hidden from her child *if she could help it.*"<sup>174</sup> For misotheists, if children in crisis cannot count on god to intervene on their behalf when no one else is able or willing to do so, then that god might as well not exist at all. The results would be the same either way.

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<sup>170</sup> See for example, the numerous sections in Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster?* and Bergmann, Murray, and Rea, eds., *Divine Evil?*

<sup>171</sup> See McCloskey, "God and Evil," 212–13.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. Nielsen, "Morality and the Will of God," 252–54.

<sup>173</sup> Although, a specifically macabre and horrid deity may still have existed who would, likewise, not be worthy of worship.

<sup>174</sup> Schellenberg, "Divine Hiddenness Justifies Atheism," 290; italics in original.

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