“But God was not in the earthquake:”[1]

Theodicy in biblical and contemporary religious responses to natural disasters

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[1] Taken from 1 Kings 19:11

Abstract:

In this essay, I analyze the way that natural disasters, specifically earthquakes and hurricanes, have been depicted in ancient and contemporary times. There is a contrast between the richness of the theological responses in antiquity and the weakness of theological reflection among moderns. In order to understand the reasons behind this diversity in views, I examine texts from the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and the biblical period writers Philo of Alexandria and Josephus Flavius. These texts provide a broad spectrum of examples from both early Jewish and Christian theists. I then look at documents from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the Union for Reform Judaism, and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism to get examples from contemporary Jewish and Christian traditions, as well as different branches of Christianity. Through the study of these texts, I begin to uncover the themes that run throughout both time periods as well as the meanings people assigned to the disasters that begin to evolve in the contemporary faiths. God plays a role in modern disaster response, but in a position of addressing social concerns rather than divine justice, the primary concern for the ancient writers. I examine the causes behind this shift in viewpoints and what it means for contemporary theists to abdicate from seeing the divine role in natural disasters.

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Introduction

When speaking of natural disasters, “the 'natural' and the 'human' are so inextricably bound together in almost all disaster situations, especially when viewed in an enlarged time and space framework, that disasters cannot be understood to be 'natural' in any straightforward way.”[2] Chaos is an inevitable occurrence after a natural disaster due to the intersection of humans and natural hazards. The disaster occurs when the hazard presents a threat to people and their property.[3] In this essay I examine earthquakes and hurricanes and how people of faith understand and respond to the suffering that occurs in the aftermath of these kinds of events. In the ancient world, disasters would create destruction that provoked theological reflection unburdened by preconceived notions of God’s precise nature. In this way, ancient peoples thoughtfully struggled to come to terms with all of the social, physical and economic destruction wrought by disaster. For theists during this time, disasters were everything from evidence of divine retribution to God’s will to eradicate evil to awesome evidence of God’s very existence. Without any scientific knowledge of natural hazards, people attempted to explain the suffering and chaos and simple natural reality that occurred by invoking divine action.

In contemporary times, disasters still create immense amounts of destruction and chaos but we have the benefit of some degree of prediction and recovery plans. This is not to say that disasters do any less harm today than they did thousands of years ago, but science and technology lend some advantages to mitigation and recovery. This is especially true in more economically developed countries, although urban environments tend not to fare as well under some disaster situations. Contemporary theists, meanwhile, have an interesting task when coming to terms with the impact of the aftermath of natural disasters. For those who accept a scientific understanding of disasters, explaining God has seemed to become less important. Addressing how to respond to the disaster has become the more primary concern. It seems as though for modern theists, God plays less of a role in

[2] Piers Blaikie, et al, *At Risk: Natural Hazards, People's Vulnerability, and Disasters,* (London: Routledge, 1994), 6.
[3] Robin Torrence and John Grattan, “The Archeology of Disasters: Past and Future Trends,” in *Natural Disasters and Cultural Change*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 5-6.

the event itself, and becomes merely a prod for believers to help the victims and provide assistance in the months after.[4] In this thesis, I argue that the reason for this contrast—between the richness of theological responses to disaster in antiquity and the weakness of the theological reflection among moderns—has largely to do with the introduction in modernity of a narrowed view of God's justice through Leibniz's definition of theodicy, itself a product of the scientific worldview.

Methodology

This paper begins with an overview of the impacts natural disasters can have on societies, physically, socially and economically, in both ancient and modern times. I focus on a few well-studied earthquakes from the eighth-century B.C.E, second-century B.C.E. and first century C.E. in Israel to explain how the inhabitants of that region would have been impacted by the events.[5] I then discuss the current research on natural hazards and disasters and their impacts on modern societies.

The next section covers the idea of theodicy, starting with a history of the academic idea as coined by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz as well as a background of theodicy from early Jewish and Christian texts.[6] I will also discuss how theodicy functions in contemporary religious traditions. This will lead into my original research where I analyze passages from early Jewish and Christian texts that contain references to earthquakes. I discuss the context of these passages and the significance of the way these early writers portray earthquakes. These examples are also a small sample of the broader analysis I did with early Jewish and Christian texts that best represent my argument.

For my analysis of contemporary religions I chose to focus on religious groups who accept scientific knowledge and the use of technology. By situating my analysis within religious

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[4] In this paper I acknowledge the existence of God and I recognize that God, especially in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is a divine being without human form. For the sake of clarity and brevity, I assign God male pronouns, with the understanding that this is an inaccurate representation.

[5] In this paper, I use the terms Israel, Judah and Levant somewhat interchangeably. Typically, when I use Israel I am referring to the modern political state, unless it is in the context of the Kingdom of Israel between the 11th and 8th centuries B.C.E. Judah refers to the Southern Kingdom, surrounding modern-day Jerusalem, which existed between 9th and 6th centuries. The Levant is a region which now encompasses modern-day Israel, Palestine, Syria, Jordan, Cyprus, Hatay Province and some parts of Turkey, Iraq and the Sinai Peninsula.

[6] D.K. Chester "The Theodicy of Natural Disasters," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 51 (1998): 485.

communities who believe in the scientific method, I am able to make an argument that is more applicable to a broader cross-section of the U.S. population. Also, examining religious communities who are unsure about the role of science and technology in their faith would have given me very little difference from the biblical analysis. These groups would have based their understanding of natural disasters solidly in scripture. A number of Christian and Jewish bodies eliminated themselves because they are still wrestling with their views on science and technology and it would not make sense to analyze theists who are just now embracing modern scientific thought.

I read mission statements and statements of belief for a multitude of groups before settling on the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America (PCUSA), the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ). These groups represent two branches of Christianity and two branches of Judaism. They also have relatively large numbers of congregants and so they provide a decent sample of modern religions in the United States. Reform and Conservative Jews make up the vast majority of Jews in America. Reform Jews represent 0.7%, while Conservative represent 0.5% of the adults in the U.S.[7] Mainline Protestant Churches comprise about 18.1% of the U.S. adult population. Within that category, the ELCA represents 1.4% and the Presbyterian Church represents 0.8%. These two churches are the second and third largest mainline Protestant churches in the United States.[8]

I focused on the belief statements and resolutions regarding science and technology and statements on natural disasters made by these four religious traditions. I used the statements on science and technology to gain an understanding about how they incorporate such views into their religious doctrine. I decided to open my analysis up to statements on both hurricanes and

[7] The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey,* Washington D.C.: The Pew Forum on Religious and Public Life, 2008.

[8] Pew Forum, *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey.*

Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, “U.S. Religion Census 2010: Summary Findings,” *2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study,* Lenexa, KS: Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, 2012.

earthquakes because I was limited to the documents posted on their websites. With this data I was able to gather enough examples for a sufficient and balanced analysis.

I then present my synthesis of the above evidence in order to conclude how contemporary theists understand and respond to hurricanes and earthquakes in light of their acceptance of scientific knowledge as compared to how biblical period writers wrestled with theodicy in the aftermath of earthquakes. I will explain how the responses have changed due to the religious groups' incorporation of science and technology into their beliefs as well as a shift in the understanding of theodicy. This will enable me to make some broader conclusions about the changes in beliefs and the nuanced views contemporary theists have today.

The Societal Impacts of Natural Disasters

Ancient Evidence

Eighth-century B.C.E Israel and Judah experienced a particularly unusual earthquake that made its way into biblical period writings. From these writings and the geologic record, I can create a picture of the response this type of event would have had on the residents of the region.[9] This earthquake is mentioned in the writings of the prophet Amos during this time period.[10] The prophet Zechariah mentions the earthquake 200 years later in his writing. The historian Josephus makes a reference to the event 800 years after it happened. The significance of this earthquake must have been extraordinary for it to still be discussed centuries later. One scholar stated that in his review of the earthquake history of Jerusalem that this event "was one of the strongest earthquakes ever to shake the city of Jerusalem."[11]

This earthquake was strong enough to crack Solomon's Temple, an architectural marvel for

[9] Steven A. Austin, Gordon W. Franz, and Eric G. Frost, "Amos's Earthquake: An Extraordinary Middle East Seismic Event," *International Geology Review* 42 (2000): 657.
[10] Yeroshua Gitay, "Amos," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsey Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 295.
[11] Austin, "Amos's Earthquake," 657.

its day, and cause a landslide in Jerusalem.[12] Archaeological evidence corroborates this statement, with evidence of masonry destruction from displaced stones to bowed or leaning walls and collapsed sections of walls in between standing sections.[13] Some even argue that this earthquake was one part of a series of social, political and geological calamities that lead to the complete upheaval of the kingdom of Judah.[14]

Through seismic theophany imagery, Amos' earthquake was ingrained into the literary prophetic tradition.[15] Theophany is divine manifestation, so in the case of seismic theophany, the divine is manifested in an earthquake.[16] The social, political and economic catastrophes around the time of the earthquake left a significant impression on the audience of prophetic literature. Later generations were inspired by the work of Amos and would continue to expand upon his perspective of eschatological motifs.[17] Amos' eschatological motifs are characterized by the presence of the "Day of the Lord," a particular, yet undetermined point in the future where God will punish the wicked, allowing for the triumph of justice.[18] While the physical destruction of an earthquake of this magnitude would have been devastating, the literary impact it made has been just as significant. Amos inspired a generation of prophets with his description and motifs of the end of the world, instigated by this one magnificent seismic event.[19]

An earthquake this large would have had enormous physical impacts. If it struck while people were indoors, between sundown and sunrise, there would have been more deaths and injuries than if it had struck during the day while more people were working outside. In some villages, house walls would have been linked together, leading to the flattening of entire villages. Nuclear and

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[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid, 669.
[14] Ibid, 668.
[15] Ibid, 669.
[16] Ora Lipschitz, S. David Sperling, Shimon Gibson, and Harry Freedman, "Mount Sinai," *Encyclopedia Judaica* eds. Michael Barenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 627.
[17] Austin, "Amos's Earthquake," 668-669.
[18] Jacob Licht, "Day of the Lord," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* Ed Michael Barenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 494.
Austin, "Amos's Earthquake," 669.
[19] Austin, "Amos's Earthquake," 669.

extended families would have been decimated by this event. The health impacts also would have been serious. Common injuries would have included head and back injuries, leg fractures, broken ribs, limb fractures, clavicle fractures, spinal damage, cuts, bruises, lacerations and burns. The elderly were about three times more likely to suffer injury than young people and women would have been at risk twice as much as men. Those working in agricultural fields would have been in the safest place, depending on how close they were to the epicenter. The safety of those working indoors would have depended on the structural integrity of the buildings and the use of oil lamps near combustible materials such as straw, hay or thatching.[20]

People would have faced numerous challenges after the earthquake. Rebuilding houses requires time and resources, which many villagers would not have had. Water is a limited resource in the Levant and the earthquake could have damaged cisterns and water collection, especially if it affected springs in areas with settlements nearby. Wells could have been similarly impacted by the quake. The shock of going through an earthquake of this magnitude would have been temporarily postponed while the survivors worked together to search for others, create temporary shelter and find food and water. As the aftermath wore on, the poor would become frustrated with the class divides in society and seeing the administrative elites' access to food, water and housing and their own lack of it.[21]

In the New Testament, the Gospel of Matthew reports an earthquake that supposedly occurred around Jerusalem on the day of Jesus' crucifixion.[22] Scholars are unsure about the historical accuracy of this event because dating the year that Jesus died is difficult. In any case, there are a few earthquakes seismologists have assigned to the region that occurred in 33 C.E. and any of them could be the likely candidate for the crucifixion earthquake. Thus, we are left with three possibilities. First, the earthquake Matthew reported more or less occurred as he conveys it. Second, Matthew describes an earthquake that occurred during that time period but before or after the crucifixion.

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[20] Ryan Nathaniel Roberts, "Terra Terror: An Interdisciplinary Study of Earthquakes in Ancient Near Eastern Texts and the Hebrew Bible" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2012).

[21] Roberts, "Terra Terror."

[22] Jefferson B. Williams, Markus J. Schwab and A. Brauer, "An early first-century earthquake in the Dead Sea," *International Geology Review* 54 (2012): 1219.

Third, Matthew describes an earthquake for dramatic effect and the earthquakes from the geologic record during that time are not currently found in extant literature.[23] While these options are not particularly satisfying, it is nonetheless important that Matthew included an earthquake in his gospel. Even if it didn't actually occur on the day Jesus was crucified its mere inclusion shows the significance earthquakes held in the public memory of Matthew's audience. They understood the chaos and drama the earthquake would have inspired at that time.

Har Megiddo, also known as Armageddon, is a modest mound in the Jezreel Plain in Israel. In the bible it is a strategic place due to the number of battles that occurred there as well as the symbolism it holds as the future location of the Apocalypse, as described by John in the Book of Revelation.[24] Until the Romans built an elaborate road, the topographic gap at Megiddo, called the Nahal Iron Pass, was the only route that allowed chariots going from Damascus to Egypt to pass through the Carmel-Gilboa mountain range. Megiddo thus controlled the course of trade as well as the path of armies.[25] While the bible describes several battles happening at the site of Megiddo, archaeological excavation uncovers three destruction layers that do not match conflicts present in the historical record. The evidence points to several earthquakes that occurred between 1500-1000 B.C.E.[26] Megiddo is located on a major fault line, the Carmel-Gilboa fault system and is in close proximity to the Dead Sea fault system. The topography created by these faults puts Megiddo in a favorable location but also contributed to its destruction. Both of these fault systems are capable of high magnitude earthquakes, 6 to 6.5 and 7.5 or greater on the Richter scale, respectively.[27] Even though Har Megiddo had a prominent location, the seismicity of the region contributed to its ultimate downfall. The repeated destruction proved too much and eventually it was no longer rebuilt. It is not surprising, then, that the site became associated in the literary tradition with massive destruction quite apart from its strategic location. The literary evidence suggests an acute awareness

[23] Williams, et al, "An early first-century earthquake," 1225-1226.

[24] Amos Nur and Hagai Ron, "Armageddon's Earthquakes," *International Geology Review* 39 (1997): 533. See pages 20-21 for my analysis of this passage, Rev 16:18.

[25] Amos Nur and Hagai Ron, "Earthquake! Inspiration for Armageddon," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 23 (1997): 50.

[26] Nur and Ron, "Earthquake!" 50.

[27] Nur and Ron, "Armageddon's Earthquakes," 534-535.

of the physical reality made apparent by geologic and archaeological evidence.

Contemporary Evidence

The most simplified definition I have come across in literature regarding natural disasters today is "the existence of damage to individuals or their property."[28] My definition will be more nuanced than this one, "A natural hazard is an extreme natural phenomenon that threatens human lives, activities or property, or the environment of life. Natural disasters are the destructive consequence of extreme natural hazards..."[29] This understanding of natural disasters helps to situate this project in the intersection of natural phenomena and human vulnerability.

David Alexander explains that hazardous situations occur when the physical or environmental forces are stronger than the human systems, and thus the negative impact becomes unavoidable. He goes on to say that, "In this respect, natural hazards are defined not only by the natural forces that induce them, but also by the vulnerability of human systems."[30] Vulnerability is an important concept in understanding natural disasters. It can be defined as the "exposure to risk and an inability to avoid or absorb potential harm."[31] It also comes in many forms, physical, social and human. Human vulnerability is a combination of physical and social vulnerability.[32]

Vulnerability relates to who is most impacted when a disaster strikes a community. Typically the poor and disenfranchised will end up suffering more, because they don't have the resources to prepare or recover from disasters. In a similar vein, the wealthier countries and communities have more resources dedicated to responding to and recovering from disasters.[33]

Vulnerability does not stop with humans. Nature can be just as vulnerable to disasters.

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[28] Torrence and Grattan, "The Archeology of Disasters," 5-6.

[29] David Alexander. "Natural Disasters," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. William A. Darity, Jr (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2008), 432.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Mark Pelling, *Vulnerability of Cities: Natural Disasters and Social Resilience,* (Sterling, VA: Earthscan Publications, 2003), 5.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Lynn Berry, "Disasters," *Encyclopedia of Environment and Society,* ed. Paul Robbins, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 463.

Ecological losses due to disasters, such as wildlife loss or habitat destruction, are often difficult to quantify. Certain types of disasters, such as periodic floods or fires are necessary for a healthy ecosystem but the natural capacity of ecosystems to withstand these disruptions can be diminished by human actions. Damage by humans to forests, hillsides, and other areas can exacerbate the impact of the hazard, by decreasing the ability of the area to be resilient to the destruction of the disaster.[34]

Location also plays a role in the risk a city faces from natural hazards. Only 22 of the world's largest cities are unexposed to geological hazards. Also, 86 of the 100 largest cities in developing countries are threatened by geological hazards.[35] Indeed, one scholar estimated in 1994 that by the year 2000 half of the urban dwellers in the world's 50 largest cities would be within 200km (124.274mi) of faults that are known to produce earthquakes of Richter magnitude 7 or more.[36] The significance of this lies in the fact that less developed countries have fewer resources to rebuild and to employ strategies to reduce losses prior to seismic events.[37] This leads into a disaster cycle. An ideal disaster cycle would be on-going disaster preparedness interrupted by a disaster warning and then an actual disaster event. In the immediate aftermath emergency services would be followed by the restoration of basic services and then reconstruction. Reconstruction work would ideally be linked to mitigation and more preparedness activities. Urban settings complicate this model as well as the capability of a country or community to follow this strategy. Vulnerable individuals and groups could be further exposed to hazards.[38] More and more people are moving to urban centers today, further increasing the vulnerability of populations to natural hazards and being caught in the disaster cycle. Of note as well is the distinction between disaster relief in urban versus rural settings and rich versus poor nations.

Disasters frequently have severe economic impacts. Scholars measure the economic impact by calculating the number of casualties and the expense of rebuilding property and infrastructure. There are also intangible social costs that cannot be calculated into the economic impact of the disaster.

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Pelling, *Vulnerability of Cities*, 22.
[36] Ibid, 24.
[37] Ibid, 21.
[38] Ibid, 13-14.

This includes the disruption caused to the society by the exodus of those evacuated from the region or the competition for the limited resources available in the aftermath.[39]

Science and technology do not yet have the ability "...to predict the timing, magnitude, and social distribution of the risk associated with most natural...hazards over both the long and the short term."[40] This makes disasters an equalizer. Even though socioeconomic status can dictate a communities' or individuals' response, natural disasters are indiscriminate. Especially in terms of earthquakes, disasters "come suddenly and without specific causal explanation."[41]

Recent scholarship has found that there are "discernible upward trends in the number of people directly affected by natural disasters (at least 250 million a year) and the cost of disasters (well in excess of US $100 billion a year), although improved protection has had some effect in stemming the rise in mortality."[42] Some of this can be attributed to the rise of populations in cities as well as to other environmental factors.[43]

Alexander claims that:

> The relentless rise in global population, polarization of wealth between rich and poor, marginalization of vulnerable communities, and the prevalence of about twenty-five complex humanitarian emergencies have all contributed to the increasing toll of natural disasters. So has the increasing complexity and interdependence of modern society, and so, no doubt, will global warming and climate change, as more extreme, if not more frequent, meteorological phenomena are likely to occur.[44]

Even with modern science and technology, hazards still become complex and catastrophic events when they come into contact with human populations. All of these features that Alexander mentioned mean that because of climate change, modern-day disasters are likely to increase in frequency and intensity and thus will have greater impacts on the affected populations.

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[39] Berry, "Disasters," 463.
[40] Risa I. Palm, *Natural Hazards,* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 26.
[41] Warren Calhoun Robertson, "Drought, Famine, Plague and Pestilence" (PhD diss., Drew University, 2007).
[42] Alexander, "Natural Disasters, 433-434.
[43] Pelling, *Vulnerability of Cities,* 19-20.
[44] Alexander, "Natural Disasters," 433.

Two natural disasters that reflect the dynamics just overviewed and that I will return to in my analysis of contemporary evidence are the 2010 Haiti Earthquake and Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The earthquake in Haiti occurred on January 12, 2010. The earthquake shook the island nation for 35 seconds and made it one of the deadliest disasters in the world. Around 316,000 people perished and one in seven became homeless. In the first week after the earthquake, private US citizens contributed $275 million to large non-governmental organizations like the Red Cross. As a comparison one week after the earthquake in Japan in 2011, the contributions totaled approximately $87 million. Haiti was already a country struggling with underdevelopment and economic policies that intensified social inequality and exclusion, and thus was in desperate need of global support.[45] Even before the earthquake, Haiti was a humanitarian disaster. The poor majority in the country lacked access to clean water, sanitation, housing, jobs, education and health care. The event exposed these social ills but assessments have shown that little has changed.[46]

I also looked at reports written after Hurricane Sandy, which made landfall in the Atlantic Seaboard of the United States on October 29, 2012.[47] The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has a rating system from 0 to 6 for storm surge and wave destruction potential. Sandy was ranked a 5.8, the highest measured, for pure kinetic energy.[48] The storm was actually designated a post-tropical cyclone by this time and caused more than 200 deaths in seven countries, with 132 of those occurring on the mainland U.S. The estimated cost post-Sandy is approximately $71 billion for New York and New Jersey and $360 million for Connecticut. During the cyclone, 8.51 million homes were without power in 16 states and Washington, D.C.[49]

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[45] Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales, "Introduction," in *Tectonic Shifts: Haiti since the Earthquake*, by Mark Schuller and Pablo Morales (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2012), 1-2.

[46] Ibid, 6.

[47] Andy Newman, "City Room: Hurricane Katrina vs. Hurricane Sandy," *New York Times*, November 27, 2012, http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/hurricane-sandy-vs-hurricane-katrina/.

[48] Associated Press, "Superstorm Sandy Deaths, Damage and Magnitude: What We Know One Month Later," Huff Post-Green November 29, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/11/29/superstorm-hurricane-sandy-deaths-2012_n_2209217.html.

49 Newman, "City Room."

Theodicies

The word theodicy is derived from two Greek words, *theos*, meaning "god" and, *dike,* meaning "justice." The basic translation of theodicy would convey that it is divine justice but it is much more than that. Theodicy, as it has been defined since the 18th century, attempts to understand the existence of human suffering in conjunction with the belief in a God who is both all-good and all-powerful. Thus there are two alternatives that the sufferers are left with: first, God is all-good but not all-powerful enough to end the suffering or second, God is all-powerful enough to end the suffering but is not good enough to want to do so.[50]

The philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz first coined the term and modern construct of theodicy in 1710.[51] Leibniz postulated that there is a God, the creator, who is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good. This God must have selected the best world from among infinite possibilities when creating this world. In the world that this omnipotent creator has made, there could be the expectation of evil not existing. Leibniz hypothesizes then that since we know that there is a God and we also know that there is evil, then the two must in fact be compatible. A perfect God must have created an imperfect universe since both actually do exist.[52]

The question of God's justice and natural disasters, however, did not originate with Leibniz.[53] That question has existed for thousands of years. It is a popular theme in texts from many religions but is prominent in the Judeo-Christian tradition.[54] Notably, though, unlike Leibniz, thinkers of antiquity were not burdened with the insistence that God is equally good and just *and* immeasurably so. This will prove to be a critical difference between the latter group and the former figure and his successors.

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[50] Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine, *The Meaning of the Bible: What the Jewish Scriptures and Christian Old Testament Can Teach Us,* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 439-440.

[51] Chester, "The Theodicy of Natural Disasters," 485.

[52] Diogenes Allen, introduction to *Theodicy* by Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, (Canada: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1966), vii.

[53] Chester, The Theodicy of Natural Disasters, 486

[54] Chester, David K., and Angus M. Duncan, "Responding to Disasters Within the Christian Tradition, with Reference to Volcanic Eruptions and Earthquakes," *Religion* 40 (2010): 85.

In this section I will lay out different examples of responses to earthquakes in early Jewish and Christian texts that demonstrate their broad fascination with God's justice. Then I will discuss four contemporary Jewish and Christian religious bodies and how they understand hurricanes and earthquakes today, given their acceptance of scientific knowledge and their tacit acceptance of Leibniz's definition of theodicy. I start this exploration by delving into the ancient evidence that is presented in the chronological order most widely accepted by biblical scholars.

Ancient Evidence

Modern scholarship has split the book of Isaiah into three divisions, chapters 1-39, 40-55 and 56-66. Each of these sections was most likely written in slightly different time periods, and can even be further broken down into smaller compilations.[55] Many scholars of Isaiah believe that both the Pentateuch and the book of Isaiah were written during the Persian period of the Second Temple from the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E. Scholars believe that a group of religious and intellectual elite wrote and compiled these books.[56]

The first section, chapters 1-12 from First Isaiah, center around the story of the prophet Isaiah's encounter with Ahaz, the King of Judah, at the time of Tiglathpileser III, the King of Assyria, around 734 B.C.E. King Tiglathpileser III, was building up an imperial army and Israel and Syria wanted Judah to join in fighting off the Assyrian empire. King Ahaz asked Isaiah what he should do. Isaiah thought that Ahaz should trust in God but, as this book shows, he feels that kings have become recalcitrant and unfaithful. These chapters are representative of eighth century prophetic protest, focusing on imperial powers. This critique was applied to both the Babylonians and Assyrians. The Babylonians moved into Judah after the collapse of the Assyrian empire and destroyed

[55] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 82.
[56] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 73.

the Kingdom of Judah. The story of the rise and fall of the Assyrian empire, though, dominates the entirety of First Isaiah.[57]

Isaiah 5:25 is a part of the "Song of the Vineyard." In this story, Isaiah likens the nation to a vineyard. God planted a vineyard and expected greatness to come out of it. Instead the vineyard yielded nothing but bitterness and so God destroyed the vineyard. Isaiah 5:25 is a continuation of that image of destruction.

> Therefore the anger of the Lord
> was kindled against his people,
> and he stretched out his hand against
> them and struck them;
> the mountains quaked,
> and their corpses were like refuse
> in the streets.
> For all this his anger has not turned away,
> and his hand is outstretched still.
> (Is 5:25)[58]

This passage represents a clear allusion to an earthquake and the anger of God who is prepared to dole out punishment.[59] This is one of five stanzas of a poem on divine anger, ending with the same two line refrain: "Yet his anger did not abate, still his hand was outstretched" (Blenkinsopp translation). It may be a "comment on the spiritual obtuseness manifested, according to Isaiah, in the failed mission of 734 B.C.E."[60] This earthquake may be referring to actual earthquakes that occurred during the reigns of King Uzziah in Judah (ca. 783-742) and Jeroboam II in Israel (ca. 786-746). Isaiah is trying to convey the message that the King did not learn his lesson the first time around and should expect another disaster. They are being too proud instead of humble and grateful for their God.[61]

Jeremiah is the largest book of the three Major Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. The book

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[57] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 171-172.

[58] For the biblical passages I use the translation from The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

[59] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 217.

[60] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 173-174.

[61] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, 218.

records Jeremiah's life as a prophet, starting as a boy in 627 B.C.E. The end of the book is set in Egypt a few years after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. where Jeremiah and others were taken. Because of the abundance of material on Jeremiah, he has the most complete profile of any Hebrew prophet.[62] The book of Jeremiah is really a "book of books." The written form is a compilation of a few scribes who shared in the process of writing.[63] Jeremiah's purpose was to be a prophet to the nations.[64] He was writing during a time of prosperity for the land of Judah and he shared the hope of many that Judah would seize the opportunity to renew its commitment to the Judean faith.[65]

This passage from Jeremiah is part of an oracle that focuses on judgment and tearful confessions. Judah is hoping for peace but so far there is none in the face of an enemy to the North and the upcoming horrors attached to them.[66]

> The snorting of their horses is heard
> from Dan;
> at the sound of the neighing of their
> stallions
> the whole land quakes.
> They come and devour the land and all
> that fills it,
> the city and those who live in it.
> (Jer 8:16)

In this verse, Jeremiah is using metaphor to describe how the people of Jerusalem are stuck awaiting their fate of destruction. He refers specifically to their fears that are giving rise to hopelessness because of the situation they are in. The land quaking appears to be a result of the land of Judah's

[62] Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 57.
[63] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 100.
[64] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 108.
[65] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 114.
[66] Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20, 519.

dire straits.[67] Jeremiah clearly associates the power of the Babylonian empire—the enemy in the North—with the natural disaster of an earthquake. God animates both equally.

In chapter ten of Jeremiah we find a series of liturgies. These serve the purpose of celebrating God, who rules the world and is the redeemer of Israel.

> But the Lord is the true God;
> he is the living God and the everlasting King.
> At his wrath the earth quakes,
> and the nations cannot endure his indignation.
> (Jer 10:10)

This passage contrasts with other religions who do not have an all-powerful God and who worship idols. The author is pointing out that other religions are empty and their idols are nothing. This verse shows that God is living as compared to the inert idols, and the earth quakes because of God's fury. The signs of heavens show nothing. Nations are afraid of what the signs may show because they are unable to handle God's anger when it comes to the earth. This confirms the above where the Babylonian empire's power is equated with an earthquake.[68]

The book of the minor prophet Joel from the Hebrew Bible tells a story about a people from the Judean countryside who witness an unprecedented disaster. They recover from the catastrophe through effective collective action and through assistance by God. Throughout the book as well, foreign powers are singled out for divine judgment.[69] The book of Joel may have been written during the late fifth century B.C.E., but the evidence is inconclusive.[70] The book marks a turning point between prophecy and apocalyptic, thus putting it later than the classic eighth-century prophets but before the full-fledged genre of apocalypse. It is best described as prophetic eschatology.[71]

There is one section in particular that describes an earthquake. Joel writes:

> The earth quakes before them,
> the heavens tremble.

[67] Lundbom, Jeremiah 1-20, 527.
[68] Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1-20*, 577.
[69] James L. Crenshaw, *Joel* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 12.
[70] Crenshaw, *Joel*, 23.
[71] Crenshaw, *Joel*, 25.

The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.
(Joel 2:10)

In this verse the cosmos joins the attack on Judah, causing an earthquake that reaches to the heavenly realm. This description is part of Joel's exclamation of the power of God. Divine intervention by a majestic and powerful God can help to alleviate the helplessness people are feeling—even though currently God is leading the army. Joel claims that even now, when things are at their worst, turning back to God can offer hope out of a bad situation. Joel understands that God's anger is only momentary because generally God is compassionate, kind, patient, infinitely loyal and forgiving. He does not seem to think that God will stay angry, although he cannot be certain.[72]

Isaiah 56-66, or Third Isaiah, was written around the fifth-fourth centuries B.C.E. This book is a reflection and elaboration of authoritative prophetic teachings, especially of Second Isaiah. In these chapters, the author updated and reinterpreted themes and beliefs to their particular time period. In this case, Third Isaiah comments on life during the Persian period from the late sixth to the mid-fifth century B.C.E., as well as the effects of restoration back to their homeland after the Babylonian exile. The author reflects the disappointment of certain classes in the quality of the restoration.[73]

The author of Isaiah 56-66 takes a point of view that has been characterized as eschatological and apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature is typically supposed to follow a specific set of characteristics, but there are times where these limitations seem quite arbitrary. Thus, Isaiah 56-66 does not follow the definition of the apocalyptic genre but it is oriented toward to the future. There is an expectation of a discontinuity in the historical process. These chapters are best described as prophetic eschatology with elements that later serve as material for apocalypses.[74]

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[72] Crenshaw, *Joel*, 16-17.
[73] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 77.
[74] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 88-89.

In Isaiah 64:1-3, the author writes a prayer that is a passionate appeal to God to show his hand and set aside the angry silence that may be leading to further sinning.[75]

> O that you would tear open the
> heavens and come down,
> so that the mountains would quake at your presence—
> as when fire kindles brushwood
> and the fire causes water to boil—
> to make your name known to your adversaries,
> so that nations might tremble at your presence-
> When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,
> you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.
> (Is 64:1-3)

These verses are a plea for God to break though the heavens and intervene in earthly matters. It is a request for the Sinai theophany, the all-consuming fire and earthquake, to be repeated. For these few lines the author sets aside the complaints of the rest of the chapters to praise God and say that God will meet those halfway who are prepared to wait. The author of Third Isaiah celebrates how God can make the mountains quake and do acts that are incomparable to anything else.[76] It is interesting to note how Third Isaiah uses the tradition of his predecessors, the texts analyzed previously, that saw disaster as God's tool against Israel to turn it against the foes—to make the "new age."

The Dead Sea Scrolls are a collection of texts that were found in caves near the archaeological site of Qumran. Scholars have dated the materials as belonging to the period of the fourth century B.C.E. to the first century B.C.E. The supposed authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Essenes, thought they possessed the sole interpretation of the Bible and were at odds with a group known as the Pharisees. The Pharisees, considered to be the forefathers of modern Judaism, emerged around 165-160 B.C.E.[77] The Essenes felt the Pharisees and other groups were practicing a corrupt form of Judaism.[78]

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[75] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 257.
[76] Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66*, 264.
[77] Menahem Mansoor, "Pharisees," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA: 2007), 30.
[78] Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Dead Sea Scrolls," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan

The passage that I focus on is called *4Q169 Nahum Pesher*.[79] This is a commentary on the book of Nahum and is thought to be about the downfall of the Pharisees, by illustrating how God can get angry and use nature as a way to punish the wicked. The quote says, "The mountains quake in front of him and the hillocks shake, the earth rises in front of him and before him the world and all that lives in it. Before his wrath who can endure?" (4Q169). This is a classic illustration of divine control of nature as a form of disciplining those who have sinned. In this passage, the author exegetically paints a picture of an impending final judgment against all enemies of God and God's community. The author understands God's power over nature to be a symbol of God intervening against political enemies, much like the author of Third Isaiah.[80]

Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish thinker and writer, most known for synthesizing Jewish religious ideas with Greek philosophy. He was alive from about 20 B.C.E. to 50 C.E.[81] Philo was from a wealthy family, which allowed him to lead a leisurely and scholarly life.[82] He was a scriptural exegete, bridging the gap between the disparate traditions of Jewish religion and Greek philosophy. The surviving writings of Philo are divided into three groups: historical or apologetic, philosophical, and exegetical.[83] We are only concerned with Philo's philosophical works, particularly *On the Eternity of the World* and *On Providence*.[84]

In *On the Eternity of the World,* Philo deals with the incorruptibility of the world with very

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Reference USA: 2005), 2234.

[79] 4Q169 denotes that the scroll was found in Cave 4 at the site Qumran for which the Q represents. Pesher is a type of commentary found in the Dead Sea Scrolls where the author applies the biblical text to the contemporary setting. This is the pesher for the book of Nahum, one of the twelve minor prophets.
Devorah Dimant. "Pesher," in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA: 2005), 7063.

[80] Shani Berrin, "Pesher Nahum," in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, eds. Lawrence Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 653-654.

[81] David Winston, "Philo Judaeus,"in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA: 2005), 7105.

[82] Daniel R. Schwartz, "Philo, His Family, and His Times," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed Adam Kamesar, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 11.

[83] Winston, "Philo Judaeus," 7105.

[84] James R. Royse, "The Works of Philo," in *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, ed. Adam Kamesar, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 55.

little reference to Jewish thought or the Bible.[85] In this book Philo attempts to reason through scientific thought in order to understand what happened to the lost island of Atlantis:

> And the island of Atalantes which was greater than Africa and Asia, as Plato says in the Timaeus, in one day and night was overwhelmed beneath the sea in consequence of an extraordinary earthquake and inundation and suddenly disappeared, becoming sea, not indeed navigable, but full of gulfs and eddies. (Etern 141)[86]

As a philosopher, Philo was concerned with explaining how the world worked within the tradition of Greek cosmology. This passage represents his attempt to explain what happened when the island of Atlantis disappeared. It is highly likely that there is an actual geologic explanation for the island's disappearance. Scientists believe a large volcanic eruption in Santorini, Greece in 1628 B.C.E created such a huge caldera that the resulting tsunami may have in fact covered the island of Atlantis so it appeared to completely be erased from the face of the earth.[87]

On Providence is focused on the idea of divine providence. Philo is primarily is concerned with the cosmos, its creation and governance, and theodicy. Philo is working out ideas about why there are natural disasters that cause death and destruction.[88]

> And why should we wonder if God employs the agency of tyrants to get rid of wickedness when widely diffused over cities, and countries, and nations? For he very often uses other ministers, and himself brings about the same end by his own resources, inflicting upon the nation famine, or pestilence, or earthquakes, or any other heaven-sent calamity, by which great and numerous multitudes perish every day, and by which a great portion of the habitable world is made desolate, on account of his care for the preservation of virtue.
> (Prov 2:41)

In this passage, Philo explains how God uses his power to outright eliminate wickedness. This goes beyond God merely punishing those who have sinned to God logically using nature to eliminate sinners all together. Philo takes the idea of retributive justice from the book of Deuteronomy, where

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[85] Ibid.

[86] My translations of Philo are taken from C.D. Yonge, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993).

[87] Timothy M. Kusky, “Introduction,” *Geologic Hazards: A Sourcebook,* by Timothy Kusky (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003), 3-5. See Kusky for explanation of the parting of the Red Sea and the lost island of Atlantis.

[88] Royse, “The Works of Philo,” 57.

God punishes human beings who have sinned, and takes it one step further in order to understand why natural disasters cover large areas and cause numerous deaths at one time.

In the same chapter a few verses later, Philo explains the Stoic cosmological idea that natural processes are sometimes just natural and not divinely inspired.

> ...and earthquakes, and pestilences, and the fall of thunderbolts, and things of that kind, are said indeed to be sent by God, but, in reality, they are not so, for God is absolutely not the cause of any evil whatever of any kind, but the natural changes of the elements produce these effects, not as circumstances which guide nature, but as those which are followed by necessary results, and which do themselves follow naturally upon their antecedent causes.
> (Prov 2:53)

In this passage, Philo understands that there are times when nature is solely taking its course. In this natural course of events innocent people must die. In order to rectify his belief in divine revelation, Philo maintains that God sets in motion this natural course of events that end up causing the collateral damage of innocent human deaths.

In neither of these passages by Philo, is God acting specifically from an evil place. God is able to continue to be all-good and all-powerful, and escapes being targeted as not being good or not being powerful. The complexity of Philo's arguments begins to hint at the dilemma of theists face when struggling with ideas of theodicy, full-blown, that is, reconciling and all-good and all-just God with apparently innocent suffering. Philo's solution is just one example of coming to terms with these ideas.

Flavius Josephus, also known as Joseph ben Matthias, is the single most important historian of the Jewish people from the first century C.E. He lived at an interesting time, spanning the period leading up to the revolt against Rome, the war and the years immediately after when Judaism was reestablishing itself. His many works on the war, Jewish history, and an apologetic tract relied heavily on earlier sources and thus must be considered in light of these appropriations.[89]

[89] Harold W. Atridge, "Chapter Five: Josephus and His Works," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period,* ed. Michael E. Stone (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, PA, 1984), 185.

Josephus wrote an account of the Jewish revolt against Rome and its suppression by Roman forces between 66 and 73 C.E. He wrote seven books while he was a dependent of the Flavian dynasty. This relationship significantly influenced the point of view in the book. It was most likely written between 75 and 79 C.E. with the help of literary assistants. Book 4, which I am concerned with, highlights the final stages of the campaign at Galilee, the internal situation of Jerusalem in the throes of revolution and other revolutionary activity in Judea, as well as important events in Rome between the years 68-69. Josephus writes "…for there broke out a prodigious storm in the night, with the utmost violence, and very strong winds, with the largest showers of rain, with continual lightnings, terrible thunderings, and amazing concussions and bellowings of the earth, that was in an earthquake" (War 4.4.5.286).[90] This passage focuses on a particular earthquake that most likely occurred. Because Josephus draws on a variety of other sources by other writers, this event has been corroborated by other texts and there is no reason to believe that this is not a historical event.[91] This is an instance where the earthquake is just an earthquake, without any connection to divine activity.

The last text to be treated within the chronological framework is the Book of Revelation. Revelation is an apocalyptic book in the New Testament written in the first century C.E. It depicts mysterious images and visions that chart the course of history to its end as well as the future of both the world and humanity.[92] The language present throughout the book is unquestionably apocalyptic, in its use of metaphors, numbers and the visions recounted.[93] While scholars agree that many elements in Revelation are apocalyptic they conclude that the elements are not developed enough to be considered part of the genre of apocalypse literature.[94]

I focus on chapter 16 of Revelation where the author, John, writes: "And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a violent earthquake, such as had not occurred since people were upon the earth, so violent was that earthquake" (Rev 16:18). In this verse, God is

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[90] My translations of Josephus are taken from William Whiston, *The Works of Flavius Josephus* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1857).
[91] Atridge, "Josephus and His Works," 192-194.
[92] Jurgen Roloff, *Revelation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 3.
[93] Roloff, 5-6.
[94] Roloff, 7.

demonstrating his power and establishing his dominion over his adversaries. The earthquake is not the only tool God uses to exercise his dominance. He also uses thunder and the convulsion of the cosmos. These symbols are representative of Revelation's apocalyptic elements.

The Psalter is a collection of 150 prayers, songs and poems. It represents a long history of faith and prayer. The book was put together by groups of collectors over many years, combining and editing parts of other psalters until this one came into existence between 200 and 150 B.C.E. Scholars think that the first partial psalter may have originated in the late preexilic period.[95] Because the Psalter is a collection, it is nearly impossible to date when the different parts were written and thus there is only a range for when the book took its current form, so I treat it outside of the chronological framework. The first 90 psalms focus on lament and from then on the focus is praise through Psalm 150.[96]

Psalm 68 is a part of the exilic collection from Psalms 52-68 that expanded into the Davidic Psalter because it was edited to a "Davidized" form. The beginning and end of the expanded collection, Psalms 51 and 72, both refer to David. The psalms in this section were "Davidized" through the addition of the superscription "Of David," which was often appended with biographical information about David's life.[97] Psalm 68 verse 8 is as follows: "the earth quaked, the heavens poured down rain at the presence of God, the God of Sinai, at the presence of God, the God of Israel" (Ps 68:8). This part of the passage is characterized by its description of a theophany; it's a prayerful address to God.[98] It shows the power of God over the natural world. God is not causing the quaking; the earth is quaking in awe of the divine power. This line fits in well with the rest of Psalm 68, which interprets an eschatological direction toward the end of the world and the final judgment. The psalm presents a God who is the creator, the father of the poor, the guide of Israel's history, the King in the Jerusalem and the judge of the world.[99]

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[95] The preexilic period refers to the time before the Babylonian exile, which took place in the 6th century B.C.E.
[96] Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 1.
[97] Hossfeld, *Psalms 2*, 3.
[98] Hossfeld, *Psalms 2*, 3.
[99] Hossfeld, *Psalms 2*, 3.

Within the above passages, three basic patterns emerge about how the ancient authors reacted to earthquakes. The majority of texts I analyzed fell into the category of divinely controlled earthquakes: Philo's On Providence 2:41, Dead Sea Scrolls: 4Q169 Nahum Pesher, Isaiah 5:25, Jeremiah 8:16, Joel 2:10 and Revelation 16:18. In these instances, God takes a controlling position and uses his power in order to punish or eliminate the wicked, or otherwise make some sort of statement to the people. The second pattern represents completely natural earthquakes found in Philo's On the Eternity of the World 141 and On Providence 2:53 as well as Josephus' War 4:286. Lastly, there are a few instances where the earth trembles or quakes in the presence of the divine. These examples are found in Isaiah 64:1-3, Jeremiah 10:10 and Psalms 68:8. The emergence of these pattern shows that God could play different roles, or be completely uninvolved, in natural disasters during the biblical period. Notably, no one of these assumes the terms for the divine being inspired by Leibniz—recall that the there is a distinction between the theodicy contemporary theists' wrestle with, the one proposed by Leibniz, and the dilemma of the ancients who did not have to contend with the all-good and all-knowing God.

Contemporary Evidence

The contemporary theists I analyzed abdicate from responding to God's involvement in the natural disasters and in my analysis I will explain why. Based on the theological background of each group I was able to discern God's role in their disaster response. The responses ranged widely, from God providing a sense of hope to taking a background position to the theme of social justice.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Theological Background

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America is grounded in the teachings of Martin Luther, now known as Lutheranism. Lutheran theology is based around a systematic and rational interpretation of the doctrines of sin, law and grace. Note that Evangelical in this sense is not the

same as the fundamental Evangelical Christians who are prominent in America. This theology is grounded in the notion that God declared humankind righteous just by faith in Christ, which itself is given by God to human beings. This trust in Christ restores the believer's relationship with God, because there is no need to have to trust in one's own efforts. There is no longer a need to worry about God's justice. Believers are now free to help their neighbors, as all of life is viewed as a thanksgiving for what God did in Christ.[100]

The ELCA's theological beliefs are central to how the church views science and technology and their response to current events. Their belief in God is centered on God's engagement in the continuing creation of the world. As the ELCA's statement on Human Sexuality conveys,

> We believe that God also provides insights to us through reason, imagination, the social and physical sciences, cultural understanding, and the creative arts (Philippians 4:8). One reason Lutherans have engaged so deeply in education and research is that we believe God works through such means to guide us in reading Scripture and in understanding how we will live in a world of continuing complexity and change.[101]

The ELCA recognizes the importance that science and technology play in today's world and the power that arises from such fields. They have said that this power "...presents human beings with choices and responsibilities for which human beings are accountable to God."[102] Lutheran theology directs members of the ELCA to continually engage with the world around them and embrace new developments in the fields of science and technology.

The church separates the field of science from theology, "The sciences, by definition, do not constitute understandings (or imply judgments) about God. There is no inherent conflict between scientific findings and the understanding of God as creator, redeemer and sanctifier."[103] Alongside their embrace of science, the ELCA uses the Holy Scriptures as a guide through contemporary

[100] Eric W. Gritsch, "Lutheranism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* ed. Lindsay Jones. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5538-5539.
[101] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *A Social Statement on Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust,* (ELCA Churchwide Assembly, 2009), 10.
[102] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility,* (ELCA Churchwide Assembly, 2011), 1.
[103] *Genetics, Faith and Responsibility,* 2.

challenges and how to live out their relationship to God, to each other and to the rest of creation.[104] Thus as Lutherans, they embrace science and technology, as well as stress the importance of helping those in need. These ideas have become the central tenet of the ELCA response to natural disasters.

Response to Natural Disasters

One quote that represents the ELCA's comprehensive response to natural disasters is from the third situation report published on their website about Hurricane Sandy on January 11, 2013:

> In the months since the initial impact of Sandy, much progress has been made and many individuals and communities have stepped forward as leaders within their local responses. Along with them many across the country and around the world have been moved to support this work. Within our work these acts are continual signs of the Spirit active among us that no disaster could ever overcome.[105]

For the Lutherans, immediate responses to disasters are just as important as staying to provide ongoing assistance long after the initial event.[106] They aim to provide monetary assistance, food, shelter and other supplies as well as technical support for as long as the region needs their help.[107]

This kind of "comprehensive support plan" appears to be due to the Lutheran Church's desire to be a source of strength for those in need and provide the kind of structural assistance that is so necessary after disasters like hurricanes and earthquakes.[108] The ELCA Disaster Response continues to provide aid and volunteers to ensure the rehabilitation of needy communities in need in the future. For example in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake the ELCA was involved in activities including,

> ...food security and livelihood through farming and cash-for-work programs, ongoing water and sanitation activities, community shelters, education and school assistance, psychosocial activities direct to individuals and training of civil society

[104] Ibid, 5.
[105] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Hurricane Sandy Situation Report 3," January 11, 2013.
[106] "How We Work," Evangelical Lutheran Church in America- Lutheran Disaster Response, http://www.elca.org/Our-Faith-In-Action/Responding-to-the-World/Lutheran-Disaster-Response/How-We-Work.aspx.
[107] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Haiti Earthquake Situation Report 4," February 19, 2010.
[108] "Haiti Earthquake Situation Report 4."

> leaders, and disaster preparedness/risk reduction activities through assessments and community training.[109]

These sorts of statements convey the ELCA's strong belief in a scientific and comprehensive response strategy to natural disasters. While God and Lutheran values such as the righteousness of humankind play a role in the ELCA Disaster Response, their main goal is to provide for the immediate needs of those affected and then work on a plan for long-term recovery.[110]

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

Theological Background

The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) has a background in the theology of John Calvin, or Calvinism.[111] John Calvin was a Protestant reformer, focusing on the dictum by Augustine "that man is created for communion with God and that he will be unfulfilled until he rests in God."[112] In church doctrine, the emphasis was placed on the action of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ is considered to be the head of the church, with everyone else under him as equals.[113]

The organization of the Presbyterian Church is just as important as the theological doctrine. Calvin believed "that proper order was necessary for both the piety and the purity of the church." The word 'presbyterian' actual means "a graded system of representative ecclesiastical bodies."[114] The polity of a Presbyterian church is emphasized by the unity of the church, which is then governed by a graded series of church courts. This form of governance is what distinguishes Presbyterianism from other forms of Protestantism.[115] Within this system of governance, decisions are made around the

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[109] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Haiti Earthquake Situation Report 3," February 5, 2010.
[110] Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, "Hurricane Sandy Earthquake Situation Report 2," November 9, 2012.
[111] John H. Leith, "Presbyterianism, Reformed," in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Lindsey Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 7389.
[112] Armstrong, Brian G. "Calvin, John," in *Encyclopedia of Religion.* ed. Lindsey Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 1375.
[113] Leith, "Presbyterian Reformed," 7389.
[114] Ibid, 7389.
[115] Ibid, 7390.

consultation of Scripture, faith and Christian ethics.[116]

There are some matters where the Presbyterian Church does not readily accept scientific views, such as on homosexuality. Their statement on homosexuality says, “For instance, whether or not sexual orientation is something unchosen and unchangeable for most people is a matter of crucial significance which continues to be unsettled among scientists or ethicists.”[117] There is much more accountability to God within the understanding of the Presbyterian Church. Being a Christian means being obedient to God and emphasizing the salvation of the Christian as it is presented in the doctrine of predestination.[118] In this sense, and by contrast with Lutheranism, Calvinism is forensic—there is a calculus of human deed and divine response. They say, “For any choice, we are accountable to God; however, even when we err, God offers to forgive us.”[119] Salvation, for Presbyterians, is based on the Calvinism idea that salvation is grace and forgiveness, but human acts still play a role in shaping God’s judgment. Concern for one's self is inferior to praising God and fulfilling God's purpose in life.[120] These views inform how the Presbyterian Church handles current events.

Response to Natural Disasters

The Disaster Assistance from the Presbyterian Church stems from what they call their “divinely ordained mission to stand with the afflicted.”[121] The documents I analyzed focus strongly on the influence of God and Christ in the response to natural disasters over science and technology. The Presbyterian Disaster Assistance- International Responses website summarizes their mission as such:

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[116] Presbyterian Missionary Agency, “Presbyterian 101 Social Issues, Homosexuality,” http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/101/homosexuality/
[117] “Presbyterian 101 Social Issues, Homosexuality.”
[118] Leith, “Presbyterian Reformed,” 7389.
[119] Presbyterian Missionary Agency, “Presbyterian 101 Social Issues, Abortion Issues,” http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/101/abortion-issues/
[120] Leith, “Presbyterian Reformed,” 7389.
[121] Presbyterian Church of the United States General Assembly, “Struck Down, But Not Destroyed: From Hurricane Katrina to a More Equitable Future,” 2006, https://www.pc-biz.org/IOBView.aspx?m=ro&id=1767&promoid=44

> Throughout the world, believers experience the call of God to respond together in times of local, regional or national crisis. Indigenous churches and believing communities best understand the needs and the cultural context of their own people. It is often the churches that offer the most effective and sustained effort in response to human suffering. We are called to stand with our overseas partners and respond to their requests for assistance as they reach out to serve their neighbors. This is part of our enduring witness to Christ's love worldwide.[122]

This statement conveys the Presbyterian belief that the divine plays a strong role in how the church approaches natural disasters. There is much more discussion of God's role in the disaster and how the church should represent this role. The Presbyterians believe that the "message of hope in all disaster must be that God the Creator does not abandon people and neither should we."[123] This message revolves around a theological concern for the common good rather than just caring for their neighbors or a desire to attend to the immediate and long-term needs of those in need. The forensic nature of Calvinism tells Presbyterians to do good because God requires it. Responding to disasters is not just social service for humanitarian merit; there is an inherent connection to the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the Presbyterians. The stories within their faith call on them to attend to the needs of vulnerable people.[124]

The Union for Reform Judaism

Theological Background

Reform Judaism represents an ongoing process of development to adapt tradition to modern society. Reform Jews stress the close connection between religion and ethics, focusing on the prophetic message of social justice, which is embodied by individual congregations and the movement as a whole. The Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) chooses to support progressive religious values, such as the social justice issues caused by climate change. According the URJ's resolution on Climate Change and Energy, climate change "marries our mandate to be good stewards

[122] Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, "International Responses," http://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/pda/international-response/
[123] "Struck Down, But Not Destroyed."
[124] Ibid.

of the earth with our call to care for the least among us."[125] The URJ is very clear that social justice and advocacy concerning alleviating the suffering of others is one of their main priorities. Reform synagogues and congregations are characterized by their openness to the "other" - whether that is in their acceptance of diverse peoples or current issues.

Reform Judaism is also distinguished from other branches by its adherence to the concept of progressive revelation. In this view, Reform Jews believe that "revelation is ongoing with the progress of human knowledge and moral sensitivity."[126] Within the tradition, there is freedom for the individual to draw on rituals and practice that are the most meaningful to them. There is, however, common if theologically diverse liturgy, agreement about basic commitments and a well-structured framework to the overall organization.[127]

The URJ is progressive in its views on science and technology. In 1993 the URJ General Assembly passed a resolution on medical research with Fetal Tissue, stating that this substance can be a vital component to life-saving or life-enhancing research and treatment. The resolution cites the Jewish requirement of using God-given knowledge to heal and the idea of *pikuach nefesh*, the responsibility to save a human life, which overrides all other laws, as the justification for scientific and technical advances to save people's lives.[128] This testifies to the URJ's wholehearted embrace of the improvements science and technology brings to society.

The URJ is extremely concerned about the preservation of our planet and the destruction wrought by the growing population and rampant advance of technology.[129] They write, "As responsible Jews, we must show respect for the quality of life. We who inherit a tradition which is marked by a reverence for life must preserve the earth and all its varied life for our own sake and for

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[125] Union for Reform Judaism General Assembly, "Climate Change and Energy," http://urj.org/about/union/governance/reso/?syspage=article&item_id=27421.

[126] Michael A. Meyer, "Reform Judaism," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* ed. Lindsey Jones. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA: 2005), 7665-7666.

[127] Meyer, "Reform Judaism, 7666.

[128] Union for Reform Judaism General Assembly, "Fetal Tissue Resolution," 1993, http://urj.org//about/union/governance/reso//?syspage=article&item_id=2042.

[129] Union for Reform Judaism General Assembly, "The Environment," 1991, http://urj.org//about/union/governance/reso//?syspage=article&item_id=1898.

generations yet unborn."[130] The URJ is committed to long-term solutions for all the environmental and other issues facing our planet and communities today. Social justice is Reform Judaism's motivation for their work, which contrasts with the more divinely inspired motivations of Lutherans and Presbyterians.

Response to Natural Disasters

The Union for Reform Judaism approaches natural disasters with much of the same mindset that they use with science and technology. Many individual Reform congregations "engaged in grassroots efforts to galvanize volunteers and raise funds" during Hurricane Sandy in November 2012.[131] Overall, their social justice image is a prominent feature in these documents. On the URJ's webpage about the Earthquake in Haiti they write,

> The Reform Jewish community has a long history of generosity when natural disasters affect communities worldwide. Your generosity at this critical time enables us to play a role in recovery efforts and to bring healing and hope to those whose lives have been affected.[132]

The twin goals of this statement, to both play a role in recovery efforts and to bring healing and hope to those affected, reflects the URJ's mission of social justice. The aim is to both provide for the immediate material needs of the victims as well as the emotional and spiritual needs of those affected within the Jewish community. The Reform tradition's connection between religion and social justice reflects their desire to play a significant role in recovery efforts as well as addressing the spiritual needs in healing and hope to those in need.

In the case of Hurricane Sandy, the URJ Emergency Committee addressed short, medium and long-term needs of storm victims, congregations and others.[133] While money is important in the relief efforts the URJ also works to provide volunteers and supplies. The money raised is dispersed

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[130] Union for Reform Judaism General Assembly, "Environmental Pollution," 1969, http://urj.org//about/union/governance/reso//?syspage=article&item_id=2220.
[131] Union for Reform Judaism, "URJ Hurricane Sandy Relief Update," Nov. 8, 2012, http://urj.org/about/union/pr/2012/?syspage=article&item_id=95681.
[132] Union for Reform Judaism, "Earthquake in Haiti," http://urj.org/socialaction/issues/relief/haiti/.
[133] "URJ Hurricane Sandy Relief Update,"

throughout the region and in the period following the disaster so that they can have the maximum long-term support.[134]

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

Theological Background

Conservative Judaism is primarily an American movement whose religious identity stems from the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. The name is slightly misleading, as Conservative Jews can embrace a "variety of theological orientations and norms of religious usage."[135] The name Conservative stems from the desire of the seminary founders to show their commitment to traditional rabbinic Judaism as well as updating that tradition to modern times. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism (USCJ) combines a focus of tradition integrated with necessary change. They insist "on observance of tradition and respect for visionary change." The Conservative movement is defined by their aspiration to closely reflect the image of God. They apply the timeless wisdom of their inherited Jewish tradition and the idea of *tikkun olam,* the focus on repairing the world, when approaching contemporary issues.[136]

One of the core beliefs of the Conservative tradition is that Jews have always had the Torah and so they have also always had the mandate to make all aspects of their tradition relevant and meaningful to the current generation. Even with the pluralistic acceptance in certain matters of doctrine and observance, Conservative Judaism insists upon accepting specific categories of faith and worship.[137] They aim to take a Jewish position on most issues relating to science and technology. For example, The Rabbinical Assembly Resolution on the Environment states "... that members of the Rabbinical Assembly educate its members on climate change and the Jewish responses to it..."[138] The

[134] Union for Reform Judaism, "URJ Hurricane Sandy Relief Update," December 6, 2012, http://urj.org/about/union/pr/2012/?syspage=article&item_id=97640.

[135] Gerson D. Cohen, "Conservative Judaism," in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought* ed. Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr. (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 91.

[136] Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, "Conservative Judaism Covenant and Commitment," (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly).

[137] Cohen, "Conservative Judaism," 92-98.

[138] The Rabbinical Assembly, "Resolution on the Environment," February 2007,

environment is considered precious within the Conservative tradition. They feel that Jews, and all people, have a responsibility to care for the earth as it provides for humanity and for future generations. Political decisions need to be made with the perspective of their environmental impact.[139] These ideas about the environment show how the USCJ blends their traditional Jewish values with contemporary issues in order to address them in a way that maintains connection to observance and heritage, while engaging with the problems the world faces today.

Response to Natural Disasters

The USCJ does not coordinate as widespread disaster assistance as the other religious groups. They assist in connecting people who are in need with people who can help, as well as collecting funds to be distributed to agencies on the ground and to help their congregations. The Rabbinical Assembly of the USCJ has a rapid response *tefillah* (prayer) team that commissions prayers in the aftermath of critical events such as natural disasters.[140] This prayer team appears to be the most coordinated action or response that the USCJ takes towards natural disasters. Because of the focus on observance and tradition along with *tikkun olam,* this kind of response is expected from Conservative Jews. *Tikkun olam* suggests making the world a better place, both in terms of improvements to spirituality and physicality.

The USCJ collected stories of *chesed* (loving-kindness) and *tzedakah* (righteousness or charity) from their synagogues in the region affected by Hurricane Sandy. These inspiring stories, according the USCJ website, in which their members looked beyond the walls of their buildings to care for those around them, are what transform their Jewish community into a sacred community.[141] Providing for those in need brings Jews together in pursuit of repairing the world, which in turn

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http://www.rabbinicalassembly.org/resolution-environment?tp=257.

[139] The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, "Resolution on the Environment," 2003, http://www.uscj.org/Aboutus/Resolutions/ResolutionsbyYear/_2003/Environment.aspx.

[140] The Rabbinical Assembly and The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, http://uscj.org/Objects/Documents/ra-uscj-sandy-letter.pdf.

[141] The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, "Hurricane Sandy and Its Aftermath," http://www.uscj.org/newsroom/mostrecentnews/hurricanesandyanditsaftermath.aspx.

brings them closer to God. Helping others can connect people to their spirituality.[142] Connecting to God is an important part of the Conservative faith and members strive to take whatever steps they can to bring themselves closer to God.

In the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, the USCJ collected money from their member synagogues to provide to relief efforts in the region. Many of the members arranged the donation collection themselves and asked the USCJ to collect the donations. It does not appear that the USCJ had any coordinated efforts to help after the earthquake in Haiti.[143]

These contemporary religious groups responded to the natural disasters based on their differing theological backgrounds. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America expands on their belief of the God-given righteousness of humankind in order to provide immediate and long-term relief in the aftermath of a natural disaster. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) dictates their response to natural disasters based on the forensic calculus of Calvinism that measures human deed to divine response. The Union for Reform Judaism champions social justice as a significant part of their movement. Thus, Reform Jews respond to natural disasters with a framework of humanitarian aid. Their social justice work connects them to their faith and spiritual background. The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism focuses on observance and tradition and a belief in *tikkun olam.* Their work to better the world is driven by these ideas and an adherence to their faith. It is noteworthy how all of these religions abdicate from directly addressing the issue of God's role in the recent natural disasters.

[142] Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson, "Conservative Judaism Covenant and Commitment," (New York: The Rabbinical Assembly).

[143] The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, "USCJ eNews: The United Synagogue Electronic Bulletin," May 2010, http://www.uscj.org/Aboutus/Publications/eNews/Archive/eNewsMay10.aspx.

Analysis

It should be evident at this point that natural disasters have not significantly changed from ancient to modern times in the way they impact societies. The physical destruction wrought by a large seismic event or storm can still flatten buildings, requiring billions of dollars for rebuilding and relief aid.[144] Even with the improvements of modern science and technology, governments today still struggle with enacting the proper response mechanisms for when a hazard comes into contact with a large population.[145] Scientists today still do not have the ability to predict seismic events. There is more information available to assist with disaster preparedness but the majority of locations exposed to natural hazards do not have the proper resources to enact even the most basic disaster mitigation protocols.[146] Thus, even thousands of years removed from the biblical period, people are not significantly better off in the face of a natural disaster than their ancient counterparts.[147]

In the face of suffering and chaos in the aftermath of natural disaster the ancient writers produced sophisticated responses to the role God played in the event. Notably, they did not feel constrained by anything except their belief in God so the writers had flexibility in how they set up their arguments. The three patterns that I discovered in my ancient evidence represent how there was a much more nuanced view of where God was during a natural disaster in antiquity. The majority of earthquakes in these texts are examples of the divine controlling the natural processes of the earth. The meaning behind the event varies from God punishing or eliminating the wicked to making a statement of his awesome power to the people. The instances where God is uninvolved in the seismic event represent the flexibility in how ancient peoples understood the world around them. There were times where they felt an explanation involving God was unnecessary because of their fluid definition of the divine. The few times where nature responds to God's presence with an earthquake conveys yet another example of how these authors' unconstrained definition of God leads to a sophisticated understanding of the role God can play in natural processes. In this case, nature is the agent shaking

[144] Alexander, "Natural Disasters," 433-434.
[145] Ibid, 433.
[146] Pelling, *Vulnerability of Cities*, 13-14.
[147] Berry, "Disasters," 463.

the ground but the catalyst is the presence of the divine being.

The flexibility of the ancients understanding of the divine lies in the varied background of their tradition. They were not constrained by a Leibnizian theodicy and definition of God. The time periods, locations and political, social, and economic situations were different for each author I analyzed, providing unique perspectives on the role God plays in natural disasters. The influences on each writer or group of writers would have helped to dictate the approach they used for the divine's relationship to nature. Many traditions and beliefs were mingling throughout the ancient world and evidence of the integration of ideas can be found throughout both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. The composition of these viewpoints led to varying definitions of divine power, which were all simultaneously held as truth.

As both a person trained in Greek philosophy, engaged in dialogue with others of similar training and a Jew, Philo provides a bridge between theists' responses during antiquity and theists' responses in the face of scientific knowledge in modernity. He clearly is conflicted by the emerging scientific worldviews, and the challenges they pose to his theistic Weltanschauung. Philo struggles to reconcile the dichotomous stances on natural disasters through his writings. He is the closest philosopher the ancient world has to Leibniz. Like Leibniz, Philo's answer becomes more complex as he began to engage with answering the question of God's role in earthquakes when confronted with scientific knowledge that posited natural processes are ongoing phenomena without divine control. Philo takes traditional Jewish thought, for example retributive justice, and extends the ideas in order to make science and theology more compatible.

Contemporary theists appear to be paralyzed when presented with scientific views as compared to how the ancients responded. Rather than engage with the important theological issue of God's role in natural disasters, they apparently choose to abdicate from the debate. Instead, many contemporary religious traditions focus on the needs of the people who are affected by the natural disasters. They respond by creating disaster relief programs, often grounded in their particular religious traditions. These programs are also informed by contemporary disaster studies, which now centers on the concept of vulnerability. In order to reduce vulnerability, the religious groups

emphasize relief aid, rebuilding and future mitigation techniques.

The ELCA and the URJ best represent traditions that base their disaster responses on vulnerability and modern disaster research. They have comprehensive programs dedicated to response and relief in the aftermath of natural disasters. The Presbyterian Church has a dedicated disaster relief program as well, but Presbyterians are also more theologically conflicted. Unfortunately, this uncertainty does not go anywhere. Although the Presbyterian's theological background in Calvinism presents them with a divine requirement to do good, they do not engage with God's role in their response beyond that. In their view, there is a sense of retributive justice in Presbyterian theology but they do not engage in questions of justice in their discussion of natural disasters.

In my judgment, the USCJ represents the most theologically authentic response to God's role in natural disasters. The concept of *tikkun olam*, as understood in Conservative Judaism, originated in the Hebrew Bible and thus is a pre-Leibnizian idea. They do not succumb to the modern ideas of the divine or the vulnerability model of contemporary disaster studies. By enacting a rapid response *tefillah* team in a disaster's aftermath they are valuing their sacred tradition and following rituals that respect their heritage.

Application

Under scrutiny the contemporary theists' responses to natural disasters appears weak because they abdicate from addressing the question of theodicy. One of the reasons that these particular religious traditions choose to sidestep the issue is because of the strong influence of Leibniz's concepts of theodicy and God. Leibniz describes a god who is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good. If these conditions are applied to God then there are constraints within which this divine being must function. The fluid God of the ancient tradition can no longer operate in the variety of positions that the writers assigned to him. Ancient readers had no qualms with transitioning from a God who would wield his power over nature both to convey his awesomeness and to punish the wicked. Under Leibniz's definition of God, the divine cannot use his control of natural processes as a tool of punishment because then God would no longer be all-good.

Starting in the European Renaissance and continuing through the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the retributive explanations of natural disasters took a backseat to reasons based in the emerging scientific fields. The 1755 Lisbon earthquake marked a watershed in this shift of accepted explanations. This particular seismic event was so shocking and yet fascinating that it inspired a fierce debate between proponents who saw God as controlling the disaster and those who viewed it as a purely natural phenomenon. This earthquake was so significant because it hit Lisbon and southern Portugal on All Saints' Day (November 2), while a large portion of the population was at church services. Collapsing buildings and the subsequent fires started by altar candles killed many of the churchgoers. The catastrophic damage caused by the earthquake was interpreted to be multiple variations of divine wrath. Jean-Jacques Rousseau challenged these views and pioneered the definition of disaster as a social construct that forms the basis for modern disaster studies.[148]

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's letter to Voltaire after the Lisbon earthquake explains his firm belief that the root of the disaster lay with human failings coupled with natural hazards. One scholar writes, "Rousseau's arguments have made a significant comeback: we live today with the existence of

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[148] David K. Chester, "Natural Disasters and Christian Theology," (unpublished manuscript), http://www.faraday.st-edmunds.cam.ac.uk/resources/FAR268%20Chester.pdf.

both an embrace of scientific aims of progress and a deeply pervasive adoration of nature, along with a deep suspicion of the advances of science and technology."[149] The contemporary religious groups I analyzed follow this formula. They embrace scientific and technological progress but only after vetting it within the sacred scriptures of their faith traditions. They all promote the preservation of the environment as well.

In order for these religious traditions to recapture the authenticity of their ancient predecessors they will have to shed the burden of Leibniz and his uniform definition of theodicy. Leibniz naïvely conceived his definition of his theodicy that was not based in the Judeo-Christian concept of God and innocent human suffering. Contemporary theists will have to decide which definition they want to embrace, Leibniz's or that from their own religious texts. If the contemporary religious traditions are serious about their own faith then they will have to discard the influence of Leibniz in their theology. In order to do so they will have to challenge the modern constructs of God. This is a big undertaking and will be a significant challenge to their ingrained theological background.

The traditional narratives will need to take the place of Leibniz's ideas of theodicy. Jeremiah is a good example of the replacements that will need to take a more prominent place in contemporary theology. In the book of Jeremiah, God uses both power and nature to accomplish his goals, to show his wrath and to relate the power of an earthquake to the power of an enemy army. Ancient writers like Jeremiah were not troubled by the Leibnizian concept of God. This struggle did not appear at least until Philo, and only then in a minor way. The debate was on the sidelines until the Enlightenment and the Lisbon earthquake sparked a further debate.

Narratives are integral aspects of religion and the contemporary religions I examined have adopted definitions that do not fit within their tradition. For many years they have been operating under concepts that prevent them from engaging in productive dialogue about theodicy. If these

[149] Deneen, Patrick J., "God of earthquakes and uncertainty," Wall Street Journal, March 9, 2010.

theists were to accept the more fluid understanding of God and theodicy, and shed Leibniz, then they could address the issues that have long been sidestepped. It would be beneficial for these religions to have informed conversations of God's role in natural disasters that are based on the divine being that is present in their sacred religious texts. Having these discussions also does not mean they have to discard their disaster relief programs. Adopting new understandings of God and disasters may in fact further the way they respond to catastrophic events with the acceptance that there is always some aspect that is in the control of the divine.

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