

Is Free Will a Facade?

She attempted suicide.

I take a seat in the box-shaped room, wiping my sweaty palms on my legs and bouncing my right knee up and down. I can taste the salt in my mouth of tears that I've been struggling to hold back. My nose is running slightly, another side effect of tears that have yet to fall from my eyes. The room is freezing. I'm living in Arizona, and while it's an outrageous temperature outside, the inside of this room is ice cold. Of course I'm cold though. I'm wearing my favorite plaid shorts and a short-sleeved blue shirt and ratty tennis shoes. I'm not dressed for the frigid inside weather. The three large windows in this room tell me that it looks so, so warm outside, better than being inside. Here I am, though. Inside this room.

I'm generally a pretty good student, but on occasion, when I lose my temper, I find myself in this room. I hate being in this room. I hate talking with the ladies in the office. They make me sit here for hours and reflect on the bad things I did. I normally cry. These days, in this office, are the worst days of my life. I hate getting in trouble, and I hate being told that I did something bad.

But today? I couldn't think of a single reason as to why I was in the office. I assume I did something bad, but as I rack my brain, I can't think of a single reason as to why I'm in trouble today. I sit there until an unfamiliar woman sits down in front of me. She isn't a lady from the office. She has brown hair, and she's dressed in a suit. She starts asking me some questions. Basic ones at first.

“What's your name?” (My name). “How old are you, (my name)?” I'm ten.

I'm so nervous. Why am I here? Then she starts asking weird questions.

“What’s it like living at home?” I pause. I don’t know, normal? “How do your mom and dad treat you?” I don’t know... Normal, I guess? I... I don’t know. *How am I supposed to answer these questions?*

The lady looks at me. *Are these bad answers? I’m not sure what she’s looking for. What kind of get-to-know-you questions are these anyways?*

Then she pauses.

“(My name)... do your parents treat your older sister any differently?”

I sit in silence. *How do I answer a question like that? I’m ten years old.*

Then she tells me why she’s here. Why I’m here.

And I’m not dressed for the frigid news.

“(My name), your sister is in the hospital...”

She attempted suicide. She was thirteen years old, yet she felt that the only alternative to life was suicide.

My sister struggled through a lot of things as a child; she had trichotillomania, a disease that causes an individual to experience irresistible urges to pull hair out of her scalp, which led to balding at a young age, which led to bullying in public schools, which led to transferring schools, which led to friend issues, which led to mental health concerns, which led to therapy which... led to suicide. Maybe these are the reasons she attempted suicide, the reasons why she tried to do a bad thing, but why was her life bad in the first place? Why wasn’t mine as bad as hers? Why did her life seem utterly and completely terrible, whereas mine seemed somewhat bearable? She had it bad, and I don’t understand why she had it so bad.

I'm not sure I realized at age ten how bad she had it. When she returned home from the hospital, we fought as if nothing had ever happened. At nineteen years old, though, I think I might have finally realized just how bad it was.

Even before I recognized the bad luck my older sister seemed to have, I found myself sitting in church pews and kneeling before a seemingly unknowable divine being wondering why bad things happen. The answers I hear in church are unsatisfying. "God allows us to make our own choices," or "God gives us bad experiences so we can learn from them", but I cannot help thinking that these are the answers that people give when they don't know the real answer.

If there's a person in history who deserves more than anyone an answer as to why bad things happen, it's Job from the Bible. His story is simple: Job is the main character in a competition between God and the Devil in which God tries to prove that Job would be faithful, even in adversity.¹ This is a rather uniform teaching in most Christian religions; God gives Satan the power to first bring affliction upon everything that Job owns and then to bring affliction upon Job himself.

Note here: God does not Himself bring affliction upon Job as Satan tells Him that He should, but rather He gives Satan the power to do so. Or at least, this is what the Old Testament from the Bible teaches. In Job chapter 1, it says:

"Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power."²

¹ Zgambo, Humphreys Frackson, and Angelo Nicolaides. 2022. "A Brief Exposition on the Notions of Human Suffering, Theodicy and Theocracy in the Book of Job." *Pharos Journal of Theology* 103: 1-13.

² Job 1:9-12 (King James' Version).

How much should I place my trust in the Bible to provide me with a realistic historical report as to what really happened? What if, instead of God giving Satan the power to slowly ruin Job's life, God was never in control to begin with? If God is the creator of all things, what need does He have to prove to Satan that His creations fear Him? Furthermore, if God is perfectly good and perfectly merciful, then He would not tolerate any harm befalling one of His creations as He did with Job; therefore, God must not have had any power to stop Satan from causing Job to suffer.³ As it turns out, Job is a big focal point for many academics who research theodicy, the "vindication" of God, or clearing God's name from blame as to why there's evil in the world, and many of those academics argue this causal logic, that it's quite possible that God simply doesn't have any power over His creations—He cannot control what they do, nor can He control what happens to them, hence Job's sucky life. A myriad of theories exist as to why Job was treated as such, but this specific theory stood out to me, perhaps because it seems to be in opposition to all that I was taught as a child about the nature of God. The theory argues that it's not that God wanted to prove to Satan that Job would be faithful in all adversity but rather that He could do nothing to stop Satan from testing Job. In accordance with this theory, all the good things in Job's life were not a blessing of God for his faithfulness but just a mere coincidence.⁴ In summary, all things, both good and bad, happen because God actually has no power to stop anything from happening in the world.⁵ Upon reading this theory, I felt a little guilty at the slight feeling of relief or rest or peace I was feeling. How else am I supposed to understand my sister's suicide attempt? I find it hard to believe that God, the heavenly father of my older sister, just stood back and watched her do something so painful. How could He stand back and watch her

³ Andersen, Francis I. 1974. *Job: An Introduction and Commentary by Francis I. Andersen*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.

⁴ Andersen, Francis I., 1974.

⁵ Andersen, Francis I., 1974.

suffer at such a young age? Furthermore, how could He let *anyone* suffer from thoughts of depression and suicide, since those thoughts are hardly a productive influence? It seems so unlikely that God would allow evil to exist in the world so permissively unless He truly had no power to stop it. It seems even more unlikely that He would permit suffering to fall upon His creations—like how a parent would never permit his child to touch a hot stove—unless He truly were powerless.

But God created *everything*, right? “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”⁶ Might He have a semblance of control over *any* of His creations, even the more complacent, less-alive creatures? Does God have any control at all, even control over something so microscopic as cells that dwell within our bodies? Perhaps cells are subject to whatever comes at them without being controlled by an omnipotent cell-creator, in a way that mirrors this hypothetical God-human relationship. I don’t tell the cells in my body to divide and duplicate, but they seem to do so anyways.

As it turns out, cells actually are told what to do, in a way. They work under a horizontal hierarchy in which cells simply communicate with one another using cyclins, a special protein capable of delivering chemical signals.⁷ These signals inform cells to stop and start dividing, since it isn’t always necessary to be doing so. So, cells don’t follow some omnipotent creator but instead follow the directions of one of their colleagues. In the cell division referred to as mitosis, a cell will divide into two daughter cells, requiring that this original parent cell duplicate its genetic material in order to produce a split as such.⁸ The parent cell chromosomes condense in order to allow for the nuclear membrane to break down, and at this point, the sister chromatids

⁶ John 1:3. (King James’ Version).

⁷ Iyer, Shyamala. 2014. “Cell Division.” Arizona State University - Ask a Biologist.

⁸ MedlinePlus. 2020. “How Do Cells Divide?” *MedlinePlus*. U.S. National Library of Medicine.

are attached to spindle poles in preparation for the identical chromatids to split apart and separate.⁹ As the chromatids arrive at their respective cell poles, the parent cell is finally ready to split into two identical daughter cells. Simple enough, right?

Of course, this process is much more intricate than what I have explained, and if you were a cell yourself, you most likely would not be equipped with enough information to perform mitosis (I wasn't very thorough in my explanation). However, the important thing to remember here is that cells undergo a very exact process that is unchanging. The cell must follow exact instructions on how many proteins to produce or when to stop dividing.¹⁰ When I took my ninth-grade biology course some eight years ago, I learned only of perfect cell performance. They follow division instructions perfectly, a utopian process.

If humans lived in a utopia, an imagined place of perfection, especially with regards to laws, government, and social conditions,¹¹ it is entirely possible that no evil would occur at all. However, this is not the case in reality. In the same way, if cells always followed their utopian-like system of reproduction, it is entirely possible that no mutations would occur at all. However, this is not the case; ninth-grade biology is, in fact, a lie. Bad things *do* happen, and cells make rather simple mistakes that cause mutations, like working overtime to keep dividing, even in situations in which normal cells would wait for further instruction from cyclins.¹² Cancer is often caused by a singular mutation in a singular cell of DNA, but as time goes on and these cells continue to mutate past their allotted permissions, that singular mutation turns into a second mutation, and then a third mutation, and then a fourth mutation, and then a fifth, sixth, seventh,

⁹ Nature Education. 2014. "Mitosis." Nature Education.

¹⁰ Iyer, Shyamala, 2014.

¹¹ Merriam-Webster. n.d. "Utopia." In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*.

¹² Gibbs, W. Wayt. 2003. "Untangling the Roots of Cancer." *Scientific American* 289, no. 1 (July): 56-65.

etc.¹³ These mutated cells eventually undergo enough mutations to be considered “malignant,” attacking surrounding tissues and spreading enough to be considered bad to the body.¹⁴ Just one mutative mistake is enough to cause an untimely cancerous death.

Every source I read provides me with a greater grasp of how good cells mutate into something evil enough to attack the body. For example, cancer is often caused by:

- Errors in DNA replication during cell division;
- Exposure to agents that permanently change genetic material;
- And viral infections.¹⁵

When I first started studying cancer cells, I was convinced that I could understand the “how” behind cancer if I had enough brain cells to remember all that I have read about the disease. For all I read, though, I never discovered the “why”. Why does cancer happen? How could a body, an immune system designed to protect its host, allow for its own minions to turn into something willing to attack the very thing that gives it life? There seems to be a general consensus: we don’t really know.¹⁶

Socialist Salvador Allende was democratically elected to be President of Chile in 1970, a time in which there was a great fear of communism in the Western world; however, he was elected democratically, and so stood the will of the people. During his time as President, he implemented a variety of economic policies with the idea of reform in mind; he nationalized businesses and increased wages, which, in turn, led to a surge in consumerism and inflation.¹⁷

¹³ Robin, Hesketh, 2012.

¹⁴ Vogelstein, Bert, and Kenneth W. Kinzler. 1993. “The Multistep Nature of Cancer.” *Trends in Genetics* 9, no. 4 (April): 138-141.

¹⁵ Robin, Hesketh, 2012.

¹⁶ Jackson, A. L., and L. A. Loeb. 1998. “The Mutation Rate and Cancer.” *Genetics* 148, no. 4 (April): 1483-1490.

¹⁷ Directorate of Intelligence. 1972. “Chile: Allende’s Economic Record.” Central Intelligence Agency, Intelligence Memorandum.

Given its great fear of communism smack dab in the middle of the Cold War, the United States placed sanctions on Chile, refusing to be its main source of foreign aid, and thus, the reforms that Allende thought would save his country actually led to its downfall.¹⁸ On September 11, 1973, the Chilean military attacked the palace at which Allende was located, and the attack ultimately ended in the suicide of Allende and the rise to power of Augusto Pinochet.¹⁹ Cue seventeen years of dictatorship.

When most people talk about dictators, Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin are frequently the first two names to pop up in conversation. Even so, before I knew anything about Latin American history, I knew the name Pinochet, and any dictator that gets name recognition from someone who couldn't care less about military regimes must have been bad. In modern days, anything other than democracy, especially in the Western world, is considered to be a sin, and while Pinochet's regime wasn't quite as violent as Hitler's, he violated some of the most critical pillars of democracy during his reign. States must generally meet the following five criteria in order to qualify as a democracy:

1. Elections are regularly held;
2. All adult citizens have the right to vote in elections;
3. All citizens have the right to organize parties and run for office;
4. Said elections are fraud-free and all participating candidates and citizens are free to make decisions without pressure or threats;
5. And all citizens have rights of expression, association, assembly, and information access.²⁰

¹⁸ Office of the Historian. "The Allende Years and the Pinochet Coup, 1969–1973."

¹⁹ Office of the Historian.

²⁰ Luna, Juan Pablo, and Gerardo L. Munck. 2022. *Latin American Politics and Society: A Comparative and Historical Analysis*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

In order to even qualify as a partial democracy, a state must meet all criteria, even if they have deficiencies in some categories.

Check a few boxes and decide what is a democracy and what isn't. Could I do the same thing with my sister's life? Following this model, I could check a few boxes and decide that, even if her life isn't a perfect vision of the ideal life, her life isn't really all that bad. What is the threshold that determines if a life is truly so bad that it warrants suicide? I'm not sure it's actually possible to measure the quality of life so objectively. In that case, should the measurement of democracy be objective at all? What about cancerous cells? Is there some sort of checklist that outlines a threshold that a cell must surpass in order to be considered truly malignant? Is the difference between good and bad really so clear cut and defined, or is it more just something you know by its outcome? Cancerous cells lead to cancer, and authoritarianism leads to oppression—right? It might be more difficult than we think to make that clear-cut division between democracy and authoritarianism, so how can we really know what is a truly good or bad form of government? Take a step back and ask this: how can we know what is truly good or bad?

Maybe the wrong question to be asking here is why bad things, like authoritarianism and its accompanying evils, exist. While I'm so used to thinking that democracy is the norm and freedoms are a guarantee, the definition that I hold of a bad government (one like Pinochet's) is not consistent outside of Northern America or Western Europe; freedoms, like the ones I know and cherish, are not necessarily the standard universally.²¹ Does this mean that authoritarianism is less bad in the eyes of developing states, or even a possible good? Or, kind of like Job in his never-ending world of suffering, are the people of these states just so used to the poor conditions

²¹ Frantz, Erica. 2012. "How and Why do Dictatorships Survive? Lessons for the Middle East." *Bridgewater Review* 31, no. 2: 16-18.

of authoritarianism that bad doesn't feel that bad anymore because it's all they know? The appropriate question here, then, might be, "what *is* bad?"

As it turns out, developing states might be ambiguous about the concept of democracy because they carry major misconceptions of what democracy stands for. In Southeast Asia, particularly among states that Freedom House ranks as having limited freedoms or no freedoms at all, many citizens report that they live in a democratic state.²² For example, even though Singapore has limited party competition in its single-party-dominated state, as well as limited press freedom, 91% of Singaporeans believe that they live in a democratic state.²³ A widespread phenomenon exists among many non-democratic states in which individuals confuse and combine authoritarian and democratic traits, a phenomenon that undermines the true reality of democracy and leads to acceptance of a low-quality state without asking questions.²⁴ It's important to ask here: can authoritarianism even be considered bad if most people define its most basic attributes as democratic, or is this just a really bad case of "ignorance is bliss"? Are people truly living in a bad environment if they don't know that it isn't good? Yes, the perpetuation of bad political systems is made possible by the military leaders who use force and threats to preserve their power, but it is also made possible by the confused citizens who simply don't know any better. After all, how can you want for anything more if you don't know that your current situation is less than optimal? Is bad the same universally, or does it vary based on the cultures and environments in which we are situated? And can we really consider bad *bad* if no one who lives the "bad" in question thinks of it as so?

²² Pietsch, Juliet. 2015. "Authoritarian Durability: Public Opinion towards Democracy in Southeast Asia." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 25, no. 1: 31-46.

²³ Pietsch, Juliet, 2015.

²⁴ Welzel, Christian, and Helen Kirsch. 2019. "Democracy Misunderstood: Authoritarian Notions of Democracy around the Globe." *Social Forces* 98, no. 1 (September): 59-92.

The three major monotheisms (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) agree with the following assumptions:

- (1) God is omnipotent;
- (2) God is omniscient;
- (3) God is omnibenevolent;

Most people, including atheists, believe this as well:

- (4) There is evil in the world.²⁵

Philosopher David Hume fought fervently to defend the belief that assumptions 1-4 were logically incoherent and could not stand together, that God is an amoral being who cares not when bad things happen to us.²⁶ However, theists fight against the idea that the four beliefs cannot coexist peacefully.²⁷ Because evil exists AND God is omnipotent and omniscient and omnibenevolent, there must exist some morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of evil to occur.²⁸ One possible moral reason? God is justified in creating a world with evil because He has granted us the gift of free will.²⁹ As a theist, it's difficult for me to believe that God is truly powerless to do anything about evil in the world. In fact, I think most religious people would disagree as well. However, most theists *do* believe that God has gifted humans with free will. As such, God allows me to make bad decisions when I stay up until 4:00am on a school night, and God allows dictators to make bad decisions when they violate basic human rights.

²⁵ Stump, Eleonore. 1985. "The Problem of Evil." *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (October): 392-423.

²⁶ Hume, David. 1779. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Belgium: Ghent University.

²⁷ Schlesinger, George. 1964. "The Problem of Evil and the Problem of Suffering." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (July): 244-247.

²⁸ Cary, Phillip, William Lane Craig, William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Stephen Wykstra. 2017. *God and the Problem of Evil: Five Views*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press.

²⁹ O'Mathúna, Dónal P, Vilius Dranseika, and Bert Cordijn. 2018. *Disasters: Core Concepts and Ethical Theories*. Germany: Springer Nature.

Sometimes I think, *so what? Who cares about having free will?* I often think that my life would be easier if God just made decisions for me. Maybe now I understand why individuals living in states where democracy does not exist in any way, report living in a democracy and seem satisfied with it. Sure, maybe they don't have much of a choice in anything, but does that make life bad? Not all non-democratic leaders are created equal; some surely must be better than others, so who am I to sit back in my "good, perfect" democracy and judge other individuals living in their "bad, awful" non-democracies? Maybe they have less decisions to make than I do, and maybe their life is better for it. Less of a chance that their free will gets in the way of their happiness.

Decisions that I have had to make recently:

Should I accept this job offer?

Should I take this class?

Should I do my homework tonight, or should I go to the Stephen Sanchez concert instead?

None of the outcomes of any of these questions could be considered inherently *bad*, though, just that each choice has a good or better outcome. Although, maybe I'll fail my class as a result of my decision to ditch the homework (it was worth it though). Raise the stakes a little more, then.

Should I run this red light?

Should I lie to my friend?

Should I cheat on my significant other?

Should I overthrow the current socialist government of my country with a military coup d'état, impose strict economic changes on the people who are already poor, and violently silence any who oppose my rule?

Many daily decisions we make won't necessarily affect those around us, but there are sometimes quandaries that we encounter that can have enormously negative consequences for someone else. Run a red light, cause a car accident. Lie to a friend, lose his trust. Cheat on a significant other, destroy the relationship. Overthrow a government, oppress the people. So, in order to have the entirety of God's gift of free will, we have to *choose* to avoid the bad and become a source of good in God's world, as He would like; however, that freedom inevitably gives us the chance to embrace the bad and become a source of evil in God's world, contrary to His hopes.³⁰ According to this philosophical take, God preferred to give us the free will necessary to choose, even if it meant us choosing poorly and making major mistakes, instead of forcing us to act in accordance with the good that God ultimately desires for us.³¹ After all, "if God intervened every time we could be hurt, much pain and suffering could be avoided, but our free will would be an illusion. The world as we know it would not exist."³²

But what if I don't want to exist in the world as I know it?

It's difficult to discuss my sister's suicide attempt with her. Obviously, I want to respect her personal life and feelings, but the reality of the situation here is that the second I was let in on what was going on in *her* life, it became an integral part of *my* life. Now, as I envision how my life has changed since I was ten years old, I can see my life in two parts—pre and post. Before, I didn't really understand what my sister was going through. I knew she struggled in school, and I knew she met with a therapist, and I knew she struggled with friends, but I didn't know what the sum of all these factors could lead to. After, I still didn't understand perfectly what my sister was going through, but I do now know what the sum of all these factors can lead to. More

³⁰ Swinburne, Richard. 2022. "A Christian Theodicy." *Forum Philosophicum* 27, no. 1: 9-25.

³¹ Mackie, J. L. 1955. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind* 64, no. 254 (April): 200-212.

³² O'Mathúna, Dónal P, Vilius Dranseika, and Bert Cordijn, 2018.

importantly, I asked myself for the first time why my older sister seemed to be worse off than every other person I knew in my life. Did she really choose suicide, or did suicide choose her? Is God's idea of free will a joke? After all, I don't think my sister chose trichotillomania and anxiety and depression. Short of asking her, I am nearly confident that she did not just wake up one morning and decide, "today is the day that I pull out half a head of hair, and tomorrow I will stop producing serotonin so I can be sad for the rest of my life". Then, if not her, who gave my sister the shuffled deck of cards to play with? Was it God? Or maybe the decisions of generations and generations before her made the decision on her behalf; my sister and most things that she has endured in life has been the result of a predetermined gene pool that happened to her, not the other way around. Sometimes the outcome of a gene pool is good; it also just so happens that, sometimes, it is bad.

It appears that genetic predispositions are really not the main cause of cancer-causing cell mutations. For about 5-10% of cancer patients, genetic factors might be the primary cause of their cancer.³³ The most common cause of cancerous mutations among cells, however, is actually exposure to agents that permanently change genetic material. Let's be real; while errors in cell replication can happen, it's interference from outside the cell that causes the most damage. Pick your poison: radiation, tobacco, or alcohol. These are among the top agents that can permanently change your genetic material enough.³⁴ Moral of the story? People suffer cancerous consequences of their actions. Smoking can increase your likelihood of contracting and dying from lung cancer by tenfold or even fiftyfold at the most,³⁵ but God evidently won't stop a smoker from condemning himself to this cancerous type of death.

³³ Hodgson, S. V., and E. R. Maher. 1993. *A Practical Guide to Human Cancer Genetics*. UK: Cambridge University Press.

³⁴ Robin, Hesketh, 2012

³⁵ Cairns, John. 1975. "The Cancer Problem." *Scientific American* 233, no. 5 (November): 64-79.

I recently listened to a religious devotional in which the speaker said that we should ask “what for?” instead of “why me?” when we encounter trials.³⁶ The point was to think about how the bad things in life could actually exist for the purpose of growth. The “process of soul-making”; apparently, soul-making requires traits such as resilience, bravery, and compassion, and encountering evils is a necessary condition to developing said traits.³⁷ Here we are, back at the useless conclusion that God provides humans with trials so that we can grow from the experiences. God seemingly poisons our lives with bad experiences so that we can learn, grow, and improve, as such is the “process of soul-making”. Apparently God governs our lives, disguising a series of life lessons with a life-changing trial, and His believers take His word for it, willingly (and sometimes begrudgingly) making room for bad experiences under the pretense that these bad experiences will help them somehow. Apparently, this process is ultimately supposed to lead us to know and to love God,³⁸ which I suppose could be a beneficial thing if you actually desire to know who God is. While I love God, I’m not sure that suffering just for the sake of developing moral characteristics and coming to know who He is, is worth it.

Could it be true, though? Can bad things actually be for our benefit?

The time period immediately preceding Pinochet’s military regime was, as is the case for most dictatorships, a period of crisis.³⁹ Although Allende had been elected by way of democracy, his victory was a close call, so when his government mismanaged the economy, Allende’s opposition strengthened in antagonism.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the CIA was involved in Chile in an

³⁶ Costa, Joaquin E. 2023. “The Power of Jesus Christ in Our Lives Every Day.” General Conference for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, October 2023.

³⁷ Hick, John. 2010. *Evil and the Love of God*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

³⁸ Kane, G. Stanley. 1975. “The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy.” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 6, no. 1 (Spring): 1-22.

³⁹ Hertzler, J. O. 1940. “Crises and Dictatorships.” *American Sociological Review* 5, no. 2 (April): 157-169.

⁴⁰ Devine, Jack. 2014. “What Really Happened in Chile: The CIA, the Coup against Allende, and the Rise of Pinochet.” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 4 (July/August): 26-35.

attempt to reduce support for Allende, fearing the worst from a socialist government during the Cold War.⁴¹ Pinochet's takeover presented a major blow to democracy, but the government he formed paved the way for an economic transformation in the form of neoliberal modernization.⁴² Economic neoliberalism is typically characterized by a minimalist state approach, including governmental actions such as eliminating price controls, lowering trade barriers, privatizing previously state-owned enterprises, and spending austerely, and this model strengthened the Chilean economy into the unforeseeable future. In fact, Chile is considered nowadays to be a high-quality democracy, and most successful democracies also tend to have thriving economies as well.⁴³ Doesn't seem so bad, does it?

Now imagine living life on edge, not being able to trust your neighbor because he might report you to the government for any type of insubordination. This was the reality of Chile in any given year between 1974 and 1990.⁴⁴ The fear that Pinochet instilled in his people was quite possibly the worst element of his regime. Neighbor was against neighbor because everyone knew someone who knew someone who had "disappeared" during the course of Pinochet's dictatorship. So, was life in Chile good or bad during Pinochet's rule?

The Rettig Report, a report given as a summary of human rights abuses following Pinochet's regime, discovered that there were 2,115 victims of human rights violations, 1,068 of which were disappeared and 164 of which were victims of political violence during Pinochet's regime.⁴⁵ Now, take these numbers in comparison to the Holocaust—the horrors of Pinochet's

⁴¹ Devine, Jack, 2014.

⁴² Richards, Donald G. 1997. "Review: The Political Economy of the Chilean Miracle." Review of various works. *Latin American Research Review* 32, no.1: 139-159.

⁴³ Luna, Juan Pablo, and Gerardo L. Munck, 2022.

⁴⁴ Hawkins, Darren. Interview with Darren Hawkins, Professor in the Brigham Young University Department of Political Science, October 6, 2023.

⁴⁵ United States Institute of Peace. 2002. "Report of the Chilean National Commission on Truth and Reconciliation." USIP Library, October 4, 2002.

regime pale in comparison. That's not all, though. Pinochet *delegated* his governmental responsibilities, as if he were preserving the state institutions that made up a democracy.⁴⁶ Why would Pinochet preserve any form of good in Chile if his government and regime represented a bad? Maybe it *is* possible for good things to come under the guise of trials, like God has said all along. Maybe God really *does* want the best for me, and He knows that suffering is difficult but that it is ultimately for the best. Maybe the things necessary for our complete and total transformation come only when we welcome the bad experiences as well. After all, without a military coup d'état in Chile, Pinochet would have never been in the position necessary to appoint the Chicago boys⁴⁷ to high government positions, and Chile's economy would have continued to tank instead of transforming into the thriving, fast-growing financial state it is today.⁴⁸ Pinochet recognized, unlike a typical dictator would, that his state would not thrive under his own decision-making. In this way, Pinochet could possibly be considered an enlightened despot, someone who chooses to use his absolute power for the improvement of the lives of citizens. Ask someone who had a loved one disappeared during Pinochet's regime, and he'll call Pinochet a militaristic dictator, but any other unaffected citizen during the time? He might just shrug his shoulders.

Pinochet might not be considered a dictator...? I thought, as I walked away a bit confused from an interview with a political science faculty at my university. Perhaps this was the

⁴⁶ Hawkins, Darren. Interview with Darren Hawkins, Professor in the Brigham Young University Department of Political Science, October 6, 2023.

⁴⁷ The Chicago Boys were a group of Chilean economists who studied at the University of Chicago under major American economists at the time. When Augusto Pinochet took over the Chilean government, Chile was facing big economic challenges, so Pinochet appointed the Chicago Boys to key positions in the government, allowing them to implement economic reforms that came from their studies at the University of Chicago, including liberalizing markets, reducing state intervention, privatizing state-owned enterprises, and implementing free-market policies. These policies ultimately overturned the economic policies that Salvador Allende had made during his presidency.

⁴⁸ Winter, Brian. 2023. "Fifty Years On, the "Chicago Boys" Remain Difficult to Discuss." *Americas Quarterly*.

thought process of a convoluted attempt to propose an original point of view for the purpose of an academic paper, but perhaps it was the start of a new idea. Things might be good when we most expect them to be bad, and vice versa—things might be bad when we most expect them to be good.

Hiding under the guise of a regular cell, a mutation promises the body's immune system that it is there to do its job, to maintain the normal functioning of the body.⁴⁹ A mutated cell promises that it exists for the betterment of the whole system of cells, but it lies, and it turns into a cancerous tumor capable of murder. Now God may make promises that the bad in my life will ultimately be for good, and I might believe Him, but my immune system shows me the risk of falling for such a lie. The outcome doesn't change whether God's lie was inadvertent (because He's not all-powerful) or actually malicious (because He's not all-good)—the outcome is still the same. Now maybe there are individuals out there who are like Job, enduring one suffering blow after another, and maybe they are able to pretend that life isn't all that bad just as it is, but I'm not like that. I'm not Singapore—I can't believe in the false idea that I actually live in an idealistic democracy instead of facing the reality that I live in a country that consistently undermines my democratically-promised rights. I don't even rely on a principle of international law to understand what is universally considered good or bad—I just *know*—so I'm not really sure how I'm supposed to embrace the bad in my life without fully understanding where it comes from or why it's there. If I *do* choose to embrace the bad in my life, will it consume me when I'm not looking? I might falsely believe that I can overcome my difficulties and be better off in the aftermath simply because God is supposed to give me trials for my benefit. Or maybe I

⁴⁹ Taylor, Graham R. 2005. *Guide to Mutation Detection*. New York, NY: Wiley, edited by Graham R. Taylor and Ian N. M. Day.

believe in God's promise, and I turn out to be like Chile, a little scarred from the bad experience but ultimately better off. But where's my guarantee? How do I know if my bad experiences will be for my benefit and not just for my harm? I need a guarantee.

I don't think I will ever truly understand what went through my sister's mind when she attempted suicide at thirteen years old, but to some extent, I understand her thought process. What's the point of living if you don't have a guarantee that things will turn out okay? What's the point of living if you don't have a guarantee that the military regime that just took over your state will do more good than harm? What's the point of living if you don't have a guarantee that the cells mutating in your system are improving your quality of life, not damaging it? What's the point of living if you don't have a guarantee that God exists and that He is omnipotent and omniscient and omnibenevolent?

I'm not sure I realized at age ten how bad my sister had it. At nineteen years old, I think I might have finally realized just how bad it was because, when I was nineteen years old, I received this text:

Hi, I don't know you but I know you're [redacted]'s family. Something is happening, she's saying goodbye and she turned off her phone. Someone needs to go check on her and I'm in Michigan and I'm not friends with any of her Arizona friends and I don't know who else to tell

Ten is a young age for God to expect someone to understand a suicide attempt.

Nineteen is a young age for God to expect someone to understand a suicide attempt.

I'm twenty-two now, and I still don't understand.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ As I type this conclusion, I sit in a tall stool in the food court at my university. I am sitting in front of a window, but it's nighttime, so the window is acting more like a dimly-lit mirror. I sit, at twenty-two years old, looking at my reflection, noting how dark the circles under my eyes have gotten and how long my hair has gotten, and a thought suddenly comes to my mind. *Out of all the things that God planned for my life, did He plan me learning about my sister's suicide attempt when I was ten?* I wonder if this thought negates all the research that I have done on theodicy, about having free will or about God being unable to prevent bad things from happening to me. Despite all that research, I can't help but think that God must have given me such an awful, perspective-changing experience at such a young age for a reason. My siblings didn't learn about what was going on, not until years later, so why me? Perhaps it was to prepare me for a future that would repeat the past, to teach me what the accumulation of pain looks like. I'm not sure if I appreciate that.

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