

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Defining the Problem

Traditional Argument

- (1) God is omnipotent (all-powerful).
- (2) God is omnibenevolent (all-good).
- (3) Evil exists.

- (4) Therefore, God does not exist.

Hidden Assumptions

- (1) An omnipotent God **can** prevent evil.
- (2) An omnibenevolent God **wants** to prevent evil.
- (3) Evil exists.
- (4) Therefore, either God is not omnipotent (he **cannot** prevent evil) or he is not omnibenevolent (he **will not** prevent evil).
- (5) Therefore, God does not exist.

Moral evil: evil committed by morally responsible creatures that causes pain and suffering for those that experience its effects.

Natural evil: Adverse conditions in a fallen world that also causes pain and suffering for those that experience its effects. Natural evil includes: a) natural disasters, b) accidents, c) illness and disease, d) physical and mental handicaps, and e) physical and mental toil.

Addressing the Problem

Defense: Does not seek to provide a *definite* solution to the problem of evil, but a *possible* solution that merely defends God against the charge that He is morally responsible for evil.

Theodicy: A term combining the Greek words for “God” (*theos*) + “justice” (*dike*), meaning “to justify God.” Provides a definite reason why God permits (i.e., does not prevent) evil or decrees it to take place.

According to Greg Welty, a credible defense or theodicy must have two criteria:

- 1) **Dependent Goods:** God can only allow evil if there are goods that are ‘*dependent*’ on the existence of evil. This rules out ‘*gratuitous*’ evil (i.e., horrendous evil that has no good reason for existing).
- 2) **Weighty Goods:** God can only allow evil whose dependent goods are ‘*weighty*’ and important enough to justify the existence of evil that they are dependent on. God cannot pursue trivial goods that are dependent on enormous (horrendous) evils.

Common Solutions

1) **Free-Will Defense:** God gives us free will which is necessary for moral responsibility and loving relationships. Free will is a ‘*general*’ good that allows people the power to choose good, but also comes with the risk of choosing evil. This shifts moral responsibility for evil from God to humans.

Problems:

- a) Libertarian Free Will (LFW) lacks Biblical support.
- b) LFW denies God’s meticulous sovereignty.
- c) LFW undermines the doctrine of human depravity.
- d) LFW renders decision-making arbitrary.
- e) God does not have LFW.
- f) God could have designed us only to choose good.
- g) LFW does not exist in heaven.
- h) LFW has problems with divine foreknowledge.
- i) LFW allows ‘*gratuitous*’ evil.

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

2) **Natural Law Defense:** God designed orderly, repeatable, predictable laws to govern the world in which good and bad consequences can result from the proper or improper use of these laws. For example, gravity helps stabilize our world but can also be utilized in destructive ways. Therefore, it is not God's fault when we misuse such laws.

Problems:

- a) Cannot be comprehensive explanation for all evil.
- b) The pre- and post-Fall world contain natural laws that have no ill-effects.

3) **Greater Good Defense:** God has multiple and '*particular*' (as opposed to '*general*') good purposes for evil in the world. Out of such evils greater goods come that otherwise could not come. These goods outweigh the evils they overcome. Some good purposes are ascertainable, and some are not. The fact that some purposes remain hidden does not soundly argue against their existence.

Problems:

- a) Does not exonerate God from moral culpability.
- b) Cannot account for most of the supposed goods that come from evil.
- c) Cannot account for '*gratuitous*' evil.
- d) Provides no incentive to oppose evil.

4) **Soul-Making Defense:** Humans are born in a state of immaturity and must experience pain and adversity in order to mature. The Bible indicates that suffering due to various evil circumstances builds character. Just as the fiery furnace purifies gold, evil and suffering purifies and strengthens the human soul.

Problems:

- a) All the problems of the Greater Good Defense (above).
- b) Most evil seems to have a soul-destroying effect, especially for unbelievers.
- c) The price is too high for the minimal soul-building most evils produce.
- d) Cannot explain many evils and therefore cannot be a comprehensive theodicy.

5) **Best of All Possible Worlds Defense:** A perfect and omnibenevolent God would only create a world that is the best possible world that could exist. Therefore, since this world is imperfect and full of undeniable evils, then those evils must be necessary for God to bring about subsequent goods that make this the best possible world.

Problems:

- a) All the problems of the Greater Good Defense (above).
- b) Gives no explanation for how evil makes this world the best, it just assumes it does.
- c) We can conceive of better worlds than this one.

6) **Divine Judgment Defense:** Pain and suffering are the result of God's retributive punishment of evildoers including the everlasting judgment of hell. Good comes out of judgment in the form of rehabilitation, deterrence, societal protection and retribution. The hope of ultimate divine justice redresses the suffering of the innocent.

Problems:

- a) Not all evil occurs due to infractions of God's moral law (e.g., Job)
- b) Cannot explain the emergence of evil in the first place (i.e., original sin)
- c) Cannot be comprehensive explanation for all evil

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Understanding the God who Creates a World in which Evil Emerges

- 1) **Aseity** (self-existence/ self-sufficiency). God is not dependent on anything outside of himself for who he is or what he does. He needs nothing. To the contrary, all else (the whole of creation: time, space, matter, laws of nature, and metaphysical reality) is wholly dependent on him.
- 2) **Transcendence** (absolute holiness). God stands apart from his creation in both his supreme otherworldly perfections and his absolute righteousness.
- 3) **Infinity**. All the perfections and attributes of God are maximal in their degree.
- 4) **Simple**. God is not composed of parts and pieces. All that is *IN* God *IS* God.
- 5) **Timeless Eternality**. God stands outside of time and is no way dependent on it. This means he has no beginning or end. He simply IS!
- 6) **Incomprehensibility**. God is knowable by his creatures, especially humans who are created in the image of God, but the depths (“deep things”) of God can never be approached or exhausted (Job 11:7).
- 7) **Immutability**. God does not change in his being (essential attributes), thoughts, plans or actions.
- 8) **Omnipotence**. There is nothing God cannot do that is possible for him to do.
- 9) **Omniscience**. God knows all things (past, present, and future) because he has determined (decreed) all things and is the source of all knowledge.
- 10) **Omnipresence**. God is a spirit and furthermore, he is not confined to spatial boundaries.
- 11) **Omnibenevolence**. God can only have good thoughts, intentions, and actions. God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt others to evil (James 1:13). He cannot be the direct source of evil.

Divine Sovereignty

God’s Decree. God ordains all that comes to pass. This is God’s *sovereign will*. He is the architect of history and meticulously plans every detail. See Psa. 33:11; Isa. 14:27; 46:9-11; Eph. 1:11 (cf. 3:11).

God’s Providence. God not only plans history as its *architect*, but he ensures that plan is meticulously executed in time and space as its *builder*. See Psa. 33:8-9; Isa. 46:9-11; Dan. 2:21; 4:34-35.

God’s Omnipotence. God possesses all the requisite powers to ensure His plan is executed. God’s all-encompassing power is not an absolute power, otherwise God would be capricious. Rather it conforms to (1) all things that are *logically possible*, and (2) all things that *do not contradict* His other *attributes*.

Divine Sovereignty Over Evil

God is supremely sovereign, wise, and good (see Pss. 34:8; 145:7, 9), therefore, we must conclude that God ordains all things, including evil, for some supremely good and wise purpose. See Isaiah 46:9-11 and Isaiah 45:5-7. Both passages place God’s sovereignty in the context of His incomprehensible holiness. Note Verse 7: God is the ultimate cause of natural and moral evil. This means He is the *primary*, but *remote* cause while other moral creatures are *secondary*, but *immediate* causes. God is never the *efficient* cause of evil. He has no evil will, nor acts in any directly evil manner as this would be impossible due to His supreme and unassailable goodness. See also: Lam. 3:37-38; Job 1-2; 42.

Moral Culpability

Scripture indicates that moral culpability is *always* tied to the intentions of the heart. While man’s intentions are always tainted by evil (see Gen. 6:5; Matt. 15:19; 12:33-35; cf. Prov. 16:2; Jer. 17:9-10), God’s intentions for the same evil He ordains is *always* good. See Gen. 50:20; Isa. 10:5-19.

EXPLORING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

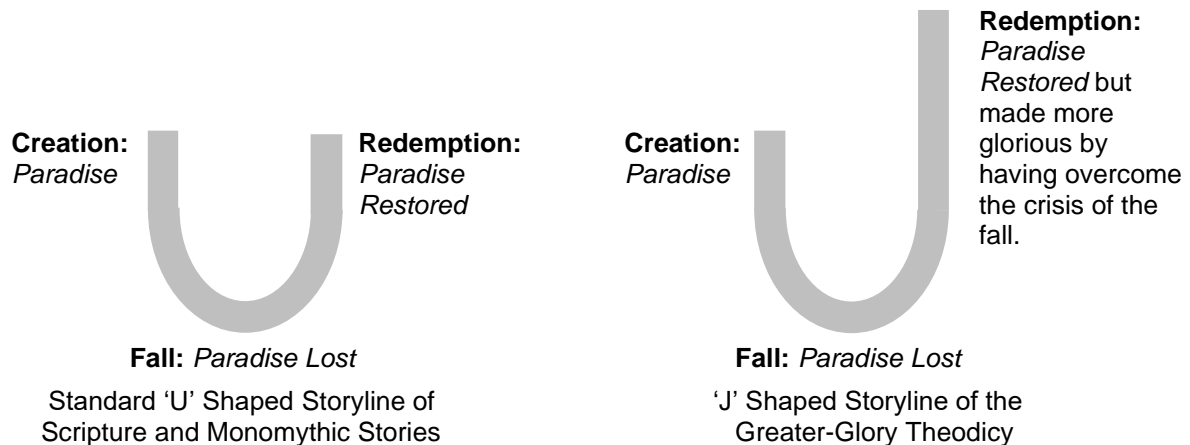
The Greater-Glory Theodicy (See Ephesians 1:9-14; Acts 2:22-23; 4:27-28)

God as Transcendent Author

The best model of God's sovereign decree and providential actions in the world envisions him like a transcendent author, much like Shakespeare as the author of *Macbeth*. Shakespeare writes his plot such that he plans for Macbeth to kill Duncan, and he assumes a world in which this action is regarded as evil, but Shakespeare is not regarded as the *doer* of the evil or even the *instigator* of it. As the author, he seeks to teach a moral lesson. In other words, the plot is meant to highlight good and evil; showing the *evilness* of evil and the *goodness* of good.

Storytelling

All great storytelling follows a universal pattern sometimes known as the *monomyth* (the one story). Every good story assumes that life is meant to be marked by happy, ideal conditions. However, evil or a crisis of some nature has interrupted those conditions causing us to long for its return. Thus, such stories follow a 'U' shaped redemptive pattern: (a) Good conditions (b) ruined by some crisis that is then (c) resolved in the course of the action (plot) such that the good conditions are restored. This pattern mirrors the grand narrative of Scripture: Creation (Paradise), Fall (Paradise Lost) and Redemption (Paradise Restored). J.R.R. Tolkien calls it the *Eucatastrophe* (good catastrophe).



The Argument of the Greater-Glory Theodicy

- 1) God's ultimate purpose in freely creating the world is to supremely magnify the riches of His glory to all His creatures, especially human beings, who alone bear His image.
- 2) God's glory is supremely magnified in the atoning work of Christ, which is the sole means of accomplishing redemption for human beings.
- 3) Redemption is unnecessary unless human beings have fallen into sin.
- 4) Therefore, the fall of humanity is necessary to God's ultimate purpose in creating the world.

God's glory is more magnified in a ***fallen-but-being-redeemed world*** than it would be in the flatlined history of an ***unfallen-not-needing-redemption world***. No other world provides the opportunity for his justice and mercy to be put on display. No other world requires the incredible and utterly surprising plan of the incarnation, death, resurrection, ascension, and glorious return of the Son of God to defeat sin, death, Satan, pain and suffering, and all manner of evil. No world gives the redeemed greater joy and satisfaction.