Solving the problem of evil

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SOLVING
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

We are all aware of the great amount of tragedy in the world. Natural disasters have brought massive devastation on entire communities. Death and illness have brought grief and suffering upon every family at some point in time. Severe accidents and physical ailments have altered the lives of numerous individuals. And the list could go on.

It seems as if such suffering is random. And it is clear that such suffering is not distributed on the basis of good or evil that people have done. Both the godly and the wicked suffer. Christian philosopher William Lane Craig writes, “I think of a prominent Christian leader in my home town who was decapitated in a sledding accident when he ran into a barbed wire fence he hadn’t seen; or of a pastor who backed out of his driveway and killed his infant son, who had been playing behind the car; or of some Canadian missionaries who were forced to return from the field when their little daughter fell from her third story window to the concrete driveway below and suffered severe brain damage.”1 The question of why such suffering comes upon us is hard.

The question gets even harder when that suffering is a result of the malice and wickedness of other people. It is a terrible thing for a friend to be killed when his car slides off of a bridge in an icy blizzard. It is an even worse thing if that friend is killed by a drunk driver. It is utterly tragic that so many millions die each year from droughts. But the problem of suffering is doubled when we consider the millions who have died from things such as murder, genocide, and war. For then the issue is not simply how such terrible things could happen to so many, but how human beings could be capable of such wickedness. In World War II alone, more than 51 million people were killed—6 million of those Jews maliciously slain in concentration camps.

What is the Problem of Evil?

Brief reflection at this point reveals that there are two distinct, but closely connected, issues involved: suffering and sin. Sin is the morally wicked acts that people commit. Suffering is the state of anguish and misery “in which we violently or obsessively wish that our situation were otherwise.”2 Suffering may be the direct result of sin (such as the Holocaust) or it may be the direct result of something other than sin (such as a volcanic eruption). Specifically, human sin and the suffering that results from it are referred to as moral evil. Suffering that results from causes other than direct human sin is called natural evil.

When religious beliefs are factored into this equation, we find that the real difficulty is not simply why moral and natural evils happen. It is why does God allow them to happen? This question deeply challenges our concept of God—in fact, for many it challenges the very existence of God.
Throughout history, those who believe in the existence of God (called theists) have offered various answers to this question. The goal of these answers is not only to understand the mysterious ways of God, but to offer an answer to those who argue that the existence of evil makes belief in God irrational (which we will refer to as anti-theists). David Hume, the famous 18th century anti-theist, has forcefully stated the dilemma that the theist must overcome: "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"

Hume has articulated for us what is known as the problem of evil—the most forceful objection to the existence of God ever formulated. As early as the third century B.C., the Greek philosopher Epicurus formally summarized this problem into four premises which have defined the issues involved ever since:

1. If God is perfectly good, He would want to prevent all evil.
2. If God is all-powerful, He would be able to prevent all evil.
3. Evil exists.
4. Therefore, God is either not all-good or not all-powerful.

At first it looks as if this problem cannot show that there is no God, but only that He cannot be the perfectly good and all-powerful (omnipotent) God that theists (such as Christians and Jews) have traditionally believed in. Historically, many anti-theists have settled for making this the goal of their attack because this is enough to dismantle traditional theism. Modern philosopher David Griffen, however, has conclusively demonstrated, it seems to me, that a being who is not omnipotent or perfectly good cannot be considered God. Therefore, the problem of evil does not simply call into question the kind of God we believe in, but calls into question the very existence of God altogether.

Central to Griffen’s reasoning is that God is by definition a perfect reality. This means that in order to be God, a being must meet the standard of perfection. Therefore anything which is not perfect is not God—for such a being violates the very definition of God. Griffen continues that omnipotence and perfect moral goodness are two perfections. Therefore, since God is a perfect being by definition, He must be both omnipotent and morally perfect. From this it follows that if it can be conclusively shown from the problem of evil that God lacks either omnipotence or perfect goodness, then there is no God. For the existence of evil in the world would be contrary to the very definition of God.

The Goals and Framework of our Analysis

Anti-theism seems to have a very powerful case! Is it possible to answer it? An attempt to do so is called a theodicy. Theos is the Greek word for God and dikos is the Greek word for just. So a theodicy is
a rational attempt to understand and demonstrate how the existence of evil is compatible with the justice of God—and therefore His omnipotence and goodness.

Can the theist’s attempt at theodicy succeed? Can the traditional understanding of God as omnipotent and perfectly good be vindicated in light of all of the suffering and evil in the world? I believe that the answer is a resounding yes, and that the best solution is found in the Christian Scriptures.

I will seek to set forth this biblical theodicy for four central reasons: because I believe it is true, because I believe it exalts God, because I believe that the Bible deserves much more attention in modern thought than it has been getting in recent decades, because I believe that the doctrines of the Bible are something which people desperately need in order to make it victoriously through life. I do not believe that we can arrive at accurate and significant truth without being guided by the Scriptures. And I do not believe that the Bible can have the place in our thoughts and hearts which it deserves if we do not know what it says.

In light of this, I will first set forth the answer that I believe the Christian Scriptures give to the problem of evil. In the process of setting forth this theodicy, I will attempt to demonstrate that it is self-consistent, reasonable, and satisfying—and therefore is a successful solution. But I will not stop there. My goal is not only to demonstrate that my theodicy is reasonable and satisfying, but that it is the most reasonable and most satisfying solution of any that have been offered. Consequently, after I have set forth my theodicy and answered some of the major objections against it, I will also set forth the other major theodicies which have been formulated throughout history and evaluate them in contrast to my own. This will provide an opportunity to add greater depth to my theodicy as well as demonstrate that it can withstand the opposing arguments and systems of great thinkers of the past and present.

Many of these thinkers have formulated their theodicies apart from the Bible. In seeking to show the superiority of the theodicy given by the biblical authors as opposed to the theodicies offered by these thinkers, one of my goals is to make evident that it is better to let the Bible be our guide in this area—and, by implication, in all areas.

One obstacle that I must overcome, however, is that many of these thinkers (which I will refer to as “liberal” theologians) call into question the biblical foundations of many of the central doctrines of the traditional Christian faith. In doing so, they are making a formidable attack on my theodicy, for its foundation is the traditional Christian conception of God. For example, if it can be shown that the Bible does not really teach that God is omnipotent, or that it has conflicting truth claims on this doctrine, a central pillar of my theodicy will crumble. Therefore, in interacting with these views I will attempt to demonstrate that the traditional Christian understanding of God and the world is indeed an accurate
interpretation of the Scriptures, and that the objections brought against these interpretations are unsuccessful.\textsuperscript{5}

There are many other great thinkers of the past and present who hold to the complete authority of the Bible and traditional Christian beliefs as I do but have nonetheless formulated theodicies different from my own. Interacting with the theodicy which these thinkers have set forth will provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate how I believe they have erred in their understanding of the Scriptures (not, of course, on the central doctrines of the faith—at that point we agree—but on other crucial doctrines that pertain to solving the problem of evil)—and thus give further support to my claim that I am setting forth a solidly biblical solution to the problem of evil. This is a very important task, for if the Bible is to regain the centrality it deserves to have in our thoughts, we must be sure that we have a right understanding of what it says.

A third group of people are those who are not professional scholars, philosophers, or theologians. My goal in this regard is to demonstrate that my theodicy is not simply significant in an academic setting but is intensely practical. The truths I will set forth are something of value for all people in all walks of life because we all have to deal with suffering and evil. I believe that the truths I will set forth can provide us with the rock of security and comfort that we need in the time of our sufferings.

In light of all this, it should be recognized once again that my goal is not to declare that my theodicy is true because it is taught in the Bible. While I do believe this, I recognize that there are many who do not accept the authority of the Bible. For example, none of the liberal theologians would probably be convinced by my theodicy even if they clearly saw it taught in the Bible.

Therefore, as I said above, my aim is not simply to set forth what I believe the biblical authors teach concerning this issue, but also to make evident that it is the most satisfying and most reasonable theodicy, and therefore there is good reason to accept its validity. Because of this, the success of my theodicy does not depend on whether or not one accepts the authority of the Bible. But if I succeed in showing that my theodicy is the best solution to the problem of evil, then it would be wise to give much closer consideration to the truth of the entire Bible.

I do, however, wish to briefly point out that there is excellent evidence for the divine inspiration of the Christian Scriptures. I have argued elsewhere that this evidence enables one to demonstrate the infallibility of the Bible on the basis of historical evidence without first assuming that it is infallible or inspired by God.\textsuperscript{6} In other words, one doesn’t need to assume that the Bible is inspired in order to prove that it is inspired.

If it can be shown that the Bible is inspired by God, as I believe it can, then it follows that the
Bible does teach the truth—and only the truth. Nonetheless, due to the limited scope of this work, my goal is simply to demonstrate that the Biblical solution is most reasonable so that the success of my theodicy does not depend upon accepting the divine authority of the Scriptures. However, for those who, like myself, do accept the divine authority of the Scriptures, I hope to be an encouragement in their faith and help them come to a deeper submission to the word of God so they can bank on it more fully in their own lives.

Finally, it is common among many philosophers today to claim that the Bible is filled with conflicting claims and therefore its teachings do not form a coherent unity. Thus, it would be argued, my attempt to set forth "the biblical solution" on the problem of evil is utterly misguided. I respond that there is good reason to believe that the Bible is a unity—that the teachings from one part do cohere with the teaching in other parts—because there is good reason to believe that the Bible has been inspired by God (see endnote five). If the Bible is inspired by God, then it does have one ultimate and unifying author—and so, even though this ultimate author made use of secondary agents in causing the Bible to be written, we can expect it to be a unity just like other books with one author. Further, since God is perfect, then He cannot error. If He cannot error, He cannot contradict Himself. Therefore, if the Bible is inspired by God, it must be consistent with itself.

However, as I said above, I will not make it so that the success of my theodicy depends upon accepting the divine inspiration of the Bible. So for those who do not accept that the Bible is coherent, my aim is more modest—to demonstrate that it is reasonable to believe that the biblical authors are in agreement on the problem of evil. This doesn't mean that they all offer the same perspective and that all authors teach the same thing, but means that their perspectives complement and supplement, rather than contradict, one another and do form a consistent whole. I will attempt to illustrate the unity of the Bible on the problem of evil when interacting with the theodicies of the liberal theologians. In dealing with their objections to the traditional interpretations, I will seek to demonstrate how passages which they claim oppose the traditional understanding of God do in fact cohere with the Scriptures that clearly teach the traditional conception of God.

Problems with the Problem of Evil

Before embarking on our journey, it is important to show that there are numerous difficulties with the problem of evil itself which render it a much less forceful objection than it at first seems. This is because, as many philosophers have pointed out, the problem of evil has two internal problems that make it back-fire upon itself. Paradoxically, the problem of evil is self-defeating and is therefore in no position to mount an attack against traditional theism. It is actually more a problem for the unbeliever than for the
First, the problem of evil suffers from an self-contradiction because its presuppositions (assumptions) are at war with its conclusion. The late Christian Apologist Greg Bahnsen, writing in defense of the Christian faith, wisely writes: "It should be obvious upon reflection that there can be no 'problem of evil' to press upon Christian believers unless one can legitimately assert the existence of evil in the world. Accordingly, it is crucial to the unbeliever's case against Christianity to be in a position to assert that there is evil in the world--to point to something and have the right to evaluate it as an instance of evil."

The problem is that the anti-theist is not in a position to do this. For if there is no God, then there can be no such thing as an objective standard of right and wrong. Without God as the universal and objective standard of morality, statements such as "Murder is wrong" simply amount to "I don't like murder" or "Our society doesn't like murder." In other words, without God, right and wrong are merely personal or societal preferences because there is no higher standard above ourselves to establish what is right and what is wrong. This means, then, that without God there can be no such thing as evil.

Thus, when the anti-theist claims that the existence of evil disproves the existence of God, he is actually presupposing the existence of God. For in order to give meaning to the statement "there is evil in the world," he must secretly assume the very thing he is trying to disprove--the existence of God. Otherwise, he is simply uttering a meaningless combination of words which cannot be justified by the assumptions of his own anti-theistic world view. Without God, there can be no problem of evil because there can be no moral evil.

Bahnsen summarizes this well: "What we find, then, is that the unbeliever must secretly rely upon the Christian world view in order to make sense of his argument from the existence of evil which is urged against the Christian world view! Anti-theism presupposes theism to make its case. The problem of evil is thus a logical problem for the unbeliever, rather than the believer. As a Christian, I can make perfectly good sense out of my moral revulsion and condemnation of child abuse. The non-Christian cannot." The anti-theist's objection from the problem of evil, therefore, collapses upon itself in a muddle of self-contradiction.

Second, it follows from this that the existence of evil actually gives good evidence for the existence of God, and therefore the problem of evil actually works for the benefit of the theist. As we saw earlier, if we are going to accept that there is an objective right and wrong apart from personal preference—that some things are really wrong (such as child abuse) and some things are really right (such as helping the poor)—then we must also accept God as the basis for this objective law. Thus, the fact of
evil in the world reveals that God must exist.

Prominent Christian philosopher William Lane Craig summarizes this: "...since objective values cannot exist without God and objective values do exist (as shown by the evil in the world), it follows that God exists. Therefore, evil in the world actually proves that God exists. If this argument is correct—and I think that it is—it constitutes a decisive refutation of the problem of evil. And notice that it does so without attempting to give any explanation at all for evil."

So we see that the problem of evil defeats itself and therefore is unsuccessful from the very beginning in mounting its attack against theism. It defeats itself because it must secretly assume that God exists in order to disprove that God exists, and the existence of evil actually shows that God must exist.

One may object, however, that while the existence of objective morality does demonstrate the existence of God, it does not require the existence of an omnipotent and perfectly good God. In other words, God could serve as the basis of morality without being omnipotent and good as traditional theism claims. I respond that this objection is forgetting what we established earlier—that God is by definition omnipotent and good. Thus, if there is a God, He must be omnipotent and all-good. Since the existence of a real right and wrong demonstrates that God must exist, and God must be perfectly good and omnipotent by definition (for if a being lacks these qualities he violates the standard of what it means to be God), it follows that the existence of a real right and wrong does demonstrate the existence of the God of traditional theism.

Furthermore, if God is not perfectly good, He could not be the basis of the standard by which we determine the difference between good and evil. But since without such a standard there could be no right and wrong, and we know that there is right and wrong, it follows that the foundation of this standard—God—has no shadow of darkness in Him at all.

The standard of right and wrong must also be eternally unchanging in order to be authoritative. If, for example, murder was good a million years ago but is wicked now, it is hard to see how there is a genuine, authoritative standard of good and evil. Right and wrong would seem to be arbitrary (without good reason behind it). So the moral law must be unchanging, which means that it has always been the same and always will be the same. But this is what it means for something to be eternal. Therefore, its source (God) must be eternal. But if God is eternal, He must be totally self-sufficient and incapable of running out of “energy.” And in order for this to be the case, God must be infinitely powerful—that is, He must be omnipotent.

Therefore, it follows from the existence of a real right and wrong not only that there is a God, but
that this God is both perfectly good and omnipotent.

**The General Structure of a Theodicy**

Nonetheless, the theist is not yet out of the woods. Bahnsen writes: “The unbeliever might at this point protest that, even if he as a non-Christian cannot meaningfully explain or make sense of the view that evil objectively exists, nevertheless there still remains a paradox within the set of beliefs which constitute the Christian’s own world view....The unbeliever might argue that, regardless of the ethical inadequacy of his own world view, the Christian is still—on the Christian’s own terms—locked into a logically incoherent position.”

The logically incoherent position would be, as we saw earlier, the affirmation that God is perfectly good, God is all-powerful, and yet evil exists.

Theists respond that there is in fact a perfectly consistent way to affirm these three statements. Free lance writer Doug Erlandson points out a generally accepted axiom: “A being is not morally culpable in allowing preventable evil if he has a ‘morally sufficient reason’ for so doing.”

It is also generally accepted that allowing evil for the sake of a greater good which could not otherwise be obtained constitutes a morally sufficient reason. As 17th century theologian Jonathan Edwards has argued, “Who will deny but that it may be so, that evil’s coming to pass may be an occasion of greater good than it is an evil, and so of there being more good in the whole than if that evil had not come to pass? And if so, then it is a good thing that that evil comes to pass.” Therefore, the perfect goodness of God, the omnipotence of God, and the reality of evil can all be affirmed—and thus the problem of evil solved—if it can be demonstrated that God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil.

For this reason, it is not necessary to conclude from the existence of evil that the theistic position is inconsistent. Rather, it is just as logical to conclude that an omnipotent God who is perfectly good exists and has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil to exist as well. Thus, the following argument is not necessary:

1. If God is all-good, He would want to prevent all evil.
2. If God is all-powerful, He would be able to prevent all evil.
3. Evil exists.
4. Therefore, God is either not all-good or not all-powerful.

Instead, it seems more reasonable and consistent, on the basis of premises one and two, to replace conclusion 4 with conclusion 4’:
4'. Therefore, God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil.

This, then, is the main form of most theodicies—it is better for God to allow the evil that He does rather than prevent it, and therefore God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil that, due to His omnipotence, He could have prevented. Theodicies that argue along these lines we will call greater good defenses, because they generally agree that God has allowed evil in order to make possible a greater good which could not otherwise be achieved. The disagreement among such theodicies (as we will see), however, is precisely what this greater good is.

A second group of theodicies, which we will call finite-god defenses, takes a different approach by conceding that God is either not all-powerful or not perfectly good. Thus, evil happened because he either couldn’t help it, or didn’t care (or, perhaps, is downright mean). A third group of theodicies, which we will classify as denial defenses, attempts to solve the problem by claiming that evil is unreal.

We will first examine the greater good defenses, then the finite-god defenses, and finally the denial defenses. The first greater-good defense presented will be what I believe to be the most satisfying solution to the problem of evil.

THE SUPREMACY OF GOD

I call my theodicy the Supremacy of God Defense (SGD). As I develop the SGD, it is important to remember the general framework from which I will be working. As I stated above, my goal is three-fold.

First, I will seek to illustrate the biblical foundations of the SGD as taught by the biblical authors, especially Paul. Second, as I do this I will develop logical arguments in defense of these truths and illustrate their emotional sufficiency in order to demonstrate that the SGD is an intellectually reasonable and emotionally satisfying theodicy. Third, once this task is complete, we will move on to the alternative theodicies that are popular today and contrast them to the SGD, also dealing with the relevant issues brought up, in order to demonstrate that the SGD is not just a good solution, but the best solution and thoroughly biblical.  

Before diving in, it is also important to recognize that the goal of a theodicy is not to prove or demonstrate that God exists. Since the charge of the problem of evil is that the theistic world view is inconsistent, the goal of a theodicy is to demonstrate that it is consistent to affirm that God is perfectly good, omnipotent, and yet evil exists and that the specific solution offered is livable. The existence of God has already, in fact, been established from what we saw earlier. The problem before us is to show that
it is not irrational to believe in God because the problem of evil can be solved from within a theistic framework.

The Various Dimensions of the Problem

Many philosophers have pointed out that there is both an intellectual and emotional dimension to the problem of evil. **Intellectually**, the challenge concerns, as I laid out in a previous section, how to demonstrate that the traditional theistic conception of a perfectly loving, completely powerful God is consistent with the existence of evil. **Emotionally**, the challenge concerns how to help those who are going through suffering, how to make it through ourselves when the time comes for us, how to be delivered from the sin that we ourselves do, how to maintain a durable peace and compassion in light of a world that seems to have gone haywire, and "how to dissolve the emotional dislike people have of a God who would permit such evil."14

These two dimensions are called the **intellectual problem of evil** and the **emotional problem of evil**, respectively. While it is helpful to treat each problem distinctly, it is essential to recognize that the solution to the emotional problem depends to a large extent upon how we solve the intellectual problem. So while the emotional and intellectual solutions each offer their own unique perspectives, they ultimately work together to provide a wholly integrated, wholly satisfying solution.

In addition to our distinction between the intellectual problem and emotional problem, it seems to me that there are two dimensions to each of these aspects as well. In regards to the intellectual problem, the first dimension is the **intellectual problem of sin**. It focuses on the question, Why does God allow sin? Exploring this question will greatly reveal to us the majestic and awesome character of God. The result should be that we not only see that there is no reason to call into question God’s love and righteousness for allowing sin, but that we bow in worship before the stunning greatness of God.

The second dimension of the intellectual problem is the **intellectual problem of suffering**. It focuses on the question, Why does God allow suffering? Exploring this question will demonstrate how suffering is compatible with the goodness of an omnipotent God, and help provide us with a better understanding of the world we live in.

In addressing these two dimensions of the intellectual problem, any satisfactory theodicy will have to address a third question in the midst of these two: What is the relationship between sin and suffering? As we will see, the answer to this question goes a long way towards vindicating the righteousness of God.

The two dimensions of the emotional problem correspond to the two dimensions of the intellectual problem. The **emotional problem of sin**, the first dimension of the emotional problem, seeks to
apply more directly to us the intellectual solution given to the problem of *sin* in the world. This dimension of the emotional problem forces us to own up with the fact that the problem of evil is essentially a problem of *our* evil. In light of this, it seeks to find a solution to the problem of *evil that we do*.

The emotional problem of *suffering*, the second dimension of the emotional problem, seeks to more completely apply to us the intellectual solution of why God allows *suffering* in the world. It seeks to find a solution to the problem of *evil that happens to us* by asking, How can our understanding of the intellectual solution to suffering provide us with the emotional consolation and strength which is so essential to enduring suffering? Additionally, the emotional solution to suffering seeks to bring out things which can specifically calm those who are unwilling or unable to consider the intellectual solution.

The ultimate goal of both dimensions of the emotional solution as well as both dimensions of the intellectual solution is to show how the existence of evil is consistent with God’s perfect goodness and almighty power, how God is worthy of our worship and trust, and how we can more fully trust Him to bring us victoriously through evil and suffering.

I will first set forth the intellectual solution to why God allowed sin and how this is consistent with His goodness. This will lead us to a consideration of the emotional problem of sin. Third, I will set forth the intellectual solution regarding why God allows suffering. Finally, this will lead us to the emotional solution to the problem of suffering, which will focus on trusting God through suffering.

### THE INTELLECTUAL PROBLEM OF SIN

**Rational Evidence for the Goodness of God**

Before attempting to understand why God allows sin and suffering, it is important to step back and look at the overall picture. It seems to me that if we understand these things in the context of the whole, there are good reasons to affirm that God is good even in the midst of a world where there is suffering and evil. The first three evidences are from reason and experience, the fourth is from the Bible. As we will see, one of the major ways that these four evidences support God’s goodness is by seeming to suggest that evil is contrary to God’s original designs, and thus not a result of the way that He originally set things up. Evil is here because *something has gone wrong*.

First, God’s goodness is evidenced by the fact that *the world is liveable*. He has not set things up such that we need to worry about a “demon behind every bush.” When I walk across campus, I don’t need to worry about the earth suddenly opening up for no apparent reason and swallowing me whole. When I go to the drinking fountain, I don’t need to worry about God arbitrarily turning the water to acid so that my mouth is burned. By and large, the world is set up such that we can get along quite comfortably, without
considerable worry about dangers. It runs by consistent natural laws and cause effect relationships. We
don’t need to worry about gravity suddenly “turning off” and everybody who is outside at the time floating
off into space. We don’t need to worry about our pets suddenly turning into vicious monsters out to
consume us. And when problems do occur, we can usually discover their cause so that we can take action
to create protection. If God was not good, we would expect that life would be more frightening, with
things naturally out to get us to a much more considerable extent.

Second, God’s goodness is evidenced by the fact that the disasters which occur are abnormalities
and to a large extent predictable. A tornado, for example, is a relatively rare occurrence and minor threat.
Likewise with volcanoes, floods, and other natural disasters. They seem to be the exception rather than the
rule, and we can generally (though not always) receive sufficient warning to protect ourselves. I do not
deny that there are many places where you do have to worry about safety when you leave the house. But
the danger people face in these places is mostly from human beings (such as in New York or other places
of crime), and thus a result of the corruption of things rather than a natural order God established (more on
this later). The fact that suffering and disasters appear to be abnormalities again shows that this is not the
way in which the world God made generally works, and hints at the idea that something has gone wrong
with the original creation and original state of human beings rather than that God is mean at heart (more on
this later as well).

Third, God’s goodness is evidenced by the fact that the life necessities we must undergo to
continue living—such as eating and drinking—are pleasurable by nature. If God were sadistic, we would
expect these things to be very painful. What a great opportunity for God—He could have made it so that we
would be forced to endure great suffering several times a day when we have to eat, and several times a
minute when we have to breathe. But He didn’t do it this way. Instead, He made these things enjoyable.
The best explanation seems to be that God is good, not cruel. And since pain in these life necessities is
contrary to the way they work by nature (being the result of disease or other such things), it seems that pain
is contrary to God’s original establishment of things.

Fourth, the goodness of God is demonstrated in the biblical teaching on the amazing salvation He
gives to those who believe. The uniform biblical teaching (as we will see later) is that all humans have
radically slandered God’s good name by rebelling against His good intentions for them. When we do this
to other people, we don’t expect them to treat us very kindly--let alone make enormous self-sacrifices for
our welfare. The amazing thing is that God sent His Son to become man and die a painful death so that the
very people who have rebelled against Him can be forgiven and taken to eternal glory through faith in
Him! How astonishing that God gives the radical opposite of what we deserve. This screams out “love”
like nothing we can ever imagine. It is almost impossible to comprehend how God could be so good and loving as to go to such great lengths to give such a great gift to those who have so greatly offended Him. And, again, this is good evidence from the biblical point of view that sin is something that has gone wrong with us—for if this is the way God naturally set things up, we wouldn’t need to be saved from it by God.

There is a fifth reason for affirming the goodness of God in the light of evil, which to my mind decisively dismisses all assertions that God is not as good as He says. This element is central to my theodicy and will therefore be discussed in detail.

The Goodness of God Reflected in the Original State of Creation

Crucial for understanding my theodicy is to recognize that God did not create the world in the state in which it now is. As these four evidences we have already seen make clear and as I will argue in my analysis of the alternative theodicies, there are solid biblical and philosophical reasons for believing that God created the whole universe completely good and created man in a state of original righteousness and maturity.

This means, in other words, that God created the world without any natural evil looming over humankind as an ominous threat to our welfare and that He originally created humans without any sin. Adam and Eve are the first two humans God created, and He made it so that they would be the parents of the entire human race. Because God created persons and not robots, Adam and Eve (like the rest of us) were created as responsible moral agents who made voluntary choices. Therefore, after placing them in a delightful paradise called the Garden of Eden, God subjected them to a test of obedience so that they could use their moral agency to honor Him by their choosing obedience over disobedience.

In this test, Adam was appointed as the federal head of the entire human race—all of the descendants who were destined to come from him. This meant that much like Congress represents the whole nation in the decisions it makes (especially the decision to go to war), Adam would represent the whole human race in the decision that he made. It wasn’t anymore necessary for God to test all humans individually than it is for us, when we want to evaluate the quality of a batch of lawnmowers, to individually examine each one. Rather, all we need to do is pick a fair representative of the batch and test that one.

If Adam chose to obey, he would be confirmed in his state of righteousness and all the rest of his descendants would forever have been righteous as well. But if he chose to disobey, he would fall from his state of original righteousness and, consequently, the rest of his descendants would fall with him and become sinful as well.15
The result is that Adam rebelled against God and, due to our union with him, we did too. Thus, evil entered into the world through *human beings* when Adam and Eve rebelled against God of their own accord. Because of this, God is not to blame for the evil in the world. We are.

**The Relationship Between Sin and Suffering**

This rebellion of the entire human race in Adam not only made us all sinful from that point on, but also made the universe over which we had been given rule a place of hardship and natural evil that posed great threat to our well-being. God brought this upon the world because it is part of the judgment we deserve for our rebellion (and thus *His* involvement was righteous—who calls into question a judge that rightly sentences a criminal?) and so that the creation which we ruled would reflect the wickedness that we had done. It is amazing that God did not make this aspect of His judgement more severe than He did!

In sum, it is not only our fault that we sinned, but all of the consequent moral and natural evil in the world is also our fault because if we had not sinned, it would not be here. I am not suggesting here a one to one correspondence between sin and suffering, as if all suffering that a person endures is punishment for specific sins he has committed. I agree with D.A. Carson, who has said that this belief is “a hideous piece of heresy, capable of inflicting untold mental anguish.”

Rather, as Reformed theologian R.C. Sproul has said, “suffering is related to sin; but people do not always suffer in direct proportion to their sin.” Our sin is what exposed us to the possibility of suffering, and therefore we ought to recognize suffering as ultimately our fault. But that doesn’t mean that every element of suffering is retribution for specific sins we have personally committed, or that the more you sin, the more you suffer and the less you sin, the less you suffer. Suffering *may* be punishment or discipline for specific sins we have done, but it usually isn’t. The book of Job is adamant in warning us against a theology that the wicked always suffer, and the righteous always prosper.

**How the Relationship Between Sin and Suffering Upholds God’s Goodness**

The fact that God created both humans and the world in an original state of goodness and righteousness manifestly demonstrates His goodness. For it means that the horrors we are now subject to are not the original establishment made by *God*, but are the perversion brought upon creation by *humans*. Something indeed has gone awry, and it is us.

The fact that the moral and natural evil that occurs *now* is a result of the first sin the human race goes a long way towards vindicating God’s righteousness in allowing them. Very often we have the assumption that we are good, innocent people minding our own business, and all of a sudden God strikes
us with suffering for no good reason. For example, a very popular recent book was titled, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The problem is that there is no such thing as a good person. We all know that we sin every day—and that we are to blame for it.

When we recognize that none of us is truly good, the problem becomes more a matter of why *good* things happen to such *bad* people. How can God allow so many good things to happen to so many people who deserve the opposite? In light of this, D.A. Carson wisely writes: "...there is a profound sense in which our 'rights' before God have been sacrificed by our sin. If in fact we believe that our sin properly deserves the wrath [punishment and anger] of God, then when we experience the sufferings of this world, all of them the consequences of human rebellion, we will be less quick to blame God and a lot quicker to recognize that we have no fundamental right to expect a life of unbroken ease and comfort. From the biblical perspective, it is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed...”

**Why Does God Allow Sin?**

We have now established a broad foundation that helps solve many things. The reason that there have been natural disasters, human wickedness, and suffering at the hands of such wickedness for so long is because of our rebellion against God in the original paradise of creation. This sin brought all of these other sins and sufferings upon us. How terrible sin must be if one instance of it can result in such severe consequences!

There is much more that can be said in regards to this ongoing sin and suffering in the world, but the relationship they have to the rebellion of the human race in Adam is foundational to it all. Before we can investigate this further, however, there is a very pressing question that this discussion has led us to, a question which is at the heart of the whole matter. Simply put, why did God allow us to sin in the first place? Before we can understand why God allows people to sin and suffer right now, we need to ask: Why did God allow humans to fall in the first place and bring this terrible state of affairs upon ourselves?

According to the Supremacy of God Defense, God permitted the world to fall into sin because the temporary presence of evil in the universe would, all things considered, result in the greatest honor, glory, and praise to His name. This motive is both righteous and loving (as I will show), and therefore God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil. Thus, the existence of evil is not only consistent with the goodness of an omnipotent God, but is actually a reflection of His amazing goodness.

I will begin by highlighting five central elements of this answer that are crucial for understanding the big picture. Then, I will expand the central core of my theodicy. This will bring up many difficult questions and objections which will allow for a greater refinement, understanding, and philosophical
defense of why the SGD should not only be accepted as true, but should be rested in as most satisfying. Having accomplished this resolution to the intellectual problem, I will attempt to make the hope which my theodicy gives manifestly evident by applying it to the emotion dimension of the problem.

Part of His plan

First, it is central to my view that evil is a part of God's plan. Evil is not something that ruined God's purposes for the world and made Him revert into "Plan B," and much less is it something that took God by surprise. Rather, the existence of evil has been eternally planned by God as the best course of action for achieving the best possible goal. God did not, as in many theodicies, permit evil because He was unable to prevent it (that would be inability, not permission). Nor did God, as a popular theodicy we will examine later claims, allow evil because He willingly surrendered the ability to always get His way by giving us the gift of free-will. Instead, my view is that God could have prevented Adam from sinning without violating his moral agency, but willingly chose to allow him to sin for wise and holy reasons which we will examine later. Thus, evil is not a result of God's concession to let humans determine their own course of action, but rather is, like all things, fully under His determination and control. God has surrendered none of His sovereign power.

Man is to blame

Second, evil is man's fault. This is because God did not tempt or coerce Adam to sin, but allowed him to sin of his own accord. God could have prevented Adam from sinning because He is omnipotent and sovereign, but chose not to. Many object to this that a being who can prevent evil but chooses not to is just as guilty as the one who actually does it. But, as we saw above, this is not true when there are good reasons for allowing the preventable evil (this is, in fact, the very heart of the problem of evil—did God have good reasons for allowing evil?). It is simply not true that an agent is responsible for all of the consequences of his acts. For example, I know that if I have a child one day, he will sin just like all other children do. But does that make me responsible and guilty for his sins? Of course not. The reason is that human life is of sufficient value to justify a parent deliberately bringing into the world a child that they know will one day sin. 19

Evil is extremely wicked and appalling

Third, since evil is man's own fault, the genuineness of evil is in no way minimized, and the demonstration of God's wisdom is supremely maximized. The very nature of evil is to defy the purposes
us with suffering for no good reason. For example, a very popular recent book was titled, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The problem is that there is no such thing as a good person. We all know that we sin every day—and that we are to blame for it.

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I will begin by highlighting five central elements of this answer that are crucial for understanding the big picture. Then, I will expand the central core of my theodicy. This will bring up many difficult questions and objections which will allow for a greater refinement, understanding, and philosophical
and glory of God. But in mounting its monumental assault on God, evil turned out to be working perfectly into God’s plan (we explore how later). So evil has shot itself in the foot! Its very act of rebellious to thwart the purposes of God has turned out to be unwitting service His wonderful plans! And as we will see, this is true not only of the first sin of man, but of all evils that have happened since. Thus, the boast and pride of evil is destroyed because it has not succeeded in the slightest manner, but has defeated itself in its very act of aggression. God has made evil backfire upon itself. And at the same time, evil is in no way minimized—made to be something less than genuinely wicked—because the lack of something’s success in no way minimizes the obscenity of its intentions and nature.

For example, let’s assume that I have a neighbor who greatly dislikes me for no apparent reason. His great dislike towards me has been expressing itself for many months in a malicious plan to lock me in the basement. So one night he breaks into the house, forces me into the basement, and locks the door thinking that I will be trapped down there for many days. However, contrary to his knowledge a giant tornado is heading into town. Further, a friend of mine both knew about the tornado and my neighbor’s plan to lock me in the basement. Knowing this, my friend could have stopped my neighbor, but deliberately allowed him to carry out this plan because he recognized it as an efficient way of getting me into the basement to be safe from the tornado. Soon the tornado roars through town and devastates the neighborhood, including my house. And because my neighbor, with wicked intent, threw me into the basement, I was safe and secure in my basement.

My neighbor’s malicious plan has completely backfired because his very attempt to ruin my welfare has ended up working for my good. Yet, it is evident that this in no way minimizes the horrible nature of the hatred my (hypothetical) neighbor has for me or the wickedness of his plans. And clearly he could take no credit for my safety, because his intentions were for my harm, not my safety.

In a similar way, this shows how God has made evil backfire upon itself, and therefore made it to perfectly suit His plan, and yet the wickedness of evil is in no way minimized. Such a plan to make use of evil in this way exceedingly exalts the wisdom of the Most High God.

Thus, it seems reasonable to agree with Jonathan Edwards, who said “evil is an evil thing, and yet it may be a good thing that evil should be in the world....As for instance, it might be an evil thing to crucify Christ, but yet it was a good thing that the crucifying of Christ came to pass [since it resulted in salvation].” Later on we will examine this issue more fully

Evil is temporary

Fourth, evil is temporary. Just as God created the world in a state of perfect righteousness (which
evidences His goodness), so also He will restore it to a state of perfect righteousness (which also evidences His goodness). This renewed heavens and earth will then continue forever with no falls into sin, no suffering, and no sadness. It will be a universe of complete righteousness and unbounded goodness. Evil is simply a temporary interlude between paradise lost and paradise restored.

**Evil is defeated**

Fifth, evil is defeated. If evil is only temporary, then it follows that God must one day put an end to it. According to my thesis, God will bring about the end of evil one day in the future because He has already triumphed over evil in the past. There is a sense in which evil is already defeated, and a sense in which it is not yet defeated. It is already defeated because Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Trinity, became man and died on a cross for the sins of His people. He then rose from the dead, conquering sin and the death that results from it. So often people say, “Why hasn’t God done anything about evil?” The answer is that He has—in Jesus Christ.

Evil is not yet defeated, however, in the sense that God has not yet fully manifest the victory He has won. Currently He is working to bring those whom He has chosen into His kingdom of salvation in Christ, and when that is complete Jesus will return from heaven in great power and glory, fully subduing all of His enemies and putting evil away forever through the final judgment. Then He will renew the heavens and earth, where His people will live forever.

With these five elements clarified, we are now in a position to explore the heart of my theodicy: The reason God decreed to permit the entrance of evil into the universe and all other evils and sufferings that resulted from it throughout history is because a universe where God defeats these evils this will result in the greatest glory, honor, and praise to His name in the long run. In other words, God’s “morally sufficient reason” in allowing evil is to fully manifest His glory in defeating it and receive all the praise that He deserves.

In order to understand how this solves the problem, we must understand the answer to three questions that this raises. First, how does God work through evil to bring honor to Himself? Second, why is God so devoted to His own glory? Third, it sounds selfish for God to seek His own glory—how can this be loving?

**How Does God Work Through Evil to Glorify Himself?**

When I speak of God bringing glory to Himself, I do not mean that He seeks to make Himself more glorious. I do not mean that He has some deficiencies that He needs to shore up in Himself through
His creation. For God is completely sufficient in Himself and has no needs. God cannot make Himself more glorious because He is now, always has been, and always will be infinitely glorious in Himself totally apart from creation. That's what it means to be God.

The glory of God may be defined as “the visible splendor or moral beauty of God’s manifold perfections. It is an attempt to put into words what cannot be contained in words—what God is like in his unveiled magnificent and excellence.” So when God acts to glorify Himself—when He acts “for the sake of His name”—He is not acting to make Himself more glorious, but is acting to make known His glory. It means for Him to display, make known, and call attention to the manifold perfections of His character so that they are acknowledged as glorious—that is, as awesome, majestic, and praiseworthy.

For example, when God rescues His people from danger, He is displaying His strength and love. He is glorified in this display of His glory as His people take joy in Him for being strong to save and for being concerned about them. This joy comes to full bloom among His people through praise. God is also glorified in those who refuse to delight in His glory—perhaps those whom He rescued His people from—in that they are humbled at their failure and God’s strength is displayed in their defeat.

The way this relates to the problem of evil is that, as theologians such as Jonathan Edwards, John Piper, Jay Adams and many others have argued, it seems that many of God’s attributes can be more clearly and brightly displayed to us if there is the temporary presence of sin in the universe. For example, while many of God’s attributes were displayed through creation, it seems that God’s attribute of holiness can only be fully highlighted in the punishment of sin, and His attribute of mercy can only be highlighted in the forgiveness of sin. Further, God can make known a greater expression of His power and wisdom through defeating evil.

So God allows sin so that He can display His power and wisdom in defeating it, display the depths of His holiness in judging it (which is one way God defeats evil), and display the extent of His mercy in forgiving it (which is another way in which God defeats evil). If God had not permitted evil, He would not be able to make known the full range of His character to the maximum possible extent. In allowing evil, therefore, God is bringing about a greater good that could not otherwise be accomplished—the full display of His glory.

**Power and wisdom magnificently displayed in defeating evil**

In Romans 9:17, it seems to me that the apostle Paul tells us the main reason God decided to allow sin in His universe. Using the wicked Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus to represent all wicked people, Paul writes, “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I raised you up, to
demonstrate My power in you, and that My name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.'"

First, notice that Paul is acknowledging God's sovereign control over evil. He doesn't solve the problem, for example, by denying that God is in charge. Second, notice that Paul tells us the purpose towards which God exercises this sovereignty—to demonstrate His power in defeating evil, thereby causing His name to be proclaimed and glorified throughout the earth. As we saw earlier, this is the heart of the SGD—God has permitted the temporary presence of evil in the world in order to fully display His glory, and the way God glorifies Himself through evil is by defeating it.

This is a common biblical theme. In the book of Exodus, for example, Moses writes "In the greatness of Thine excellence Thou dost overthrow those who rise up against Thee; Thou dost send forth Thy burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff" (Exodus 15:7). Moses also records for us the reaction the nation of Israel had when they saw the Lord bring down judgment upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians for having rebelled against Him and having sought to harm His people: "And when Israel saw the great power which the Lord had used against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord, and they believed in the Lord and in His servant Moses" (Exodus 14:31). So God is glorified by the great display of His power in defeating evil, and this display brings His people to deep reverence and trust.

God is also glorified in the great display of His wisdom which is manifest in the way He judges evil. He not only repays evildoers with exactly what they deserve, but does it in such a way that the judgement brings the consequences of their own sin back upon their head. For example, in the book of Revelation an angel of God says, "Righteous art Thou, who art and who wast, O holy One, because Thou didst judge these things; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and Thou hast given them blood to drink. They deserve it" (Revelation 16:5-6). God's enemies had shed the blood of His people, and God's judgement was to bring this back upon them by giving them blood to drink. Likewise, Paul writes, "For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you..." (2 Thessalonians 1:6). Those who are afflicting others in this verse, Paul says, will have affliction brought back upon themselves. So God's wisdom and righteousness are displayed in the fact that His judgments bring back upon evil-doers consequences of a similar nature to the sins they committed to deserve their judgment.

Before looking at the second way God defeats evil—by forgiving sin and cleansing His people of impurity—we look even more closely about how the judgment God brings upon evil glorifies Him.

**Holiness and justice more awesomely manifest**

God's holiness means that He is morally pure and in a class by Himself. Nothing else is like
God. It seems that many aspects of God’s holiness would not shine as brightly to us if there were no sin in the world. Therefore, in allowing evil and then in defeating evil, God is enabled to make known things about His holiness which otherwise would not have been known very well, if at all.

First of all, the stark contrast between those who sin and God who possesses spotless moral purity greatly highlights His holiness. God’s purity is much more clearly understood when we see what it is like for something to be unholy—much like we would much more appreciate the safety of our homes if we had to endure a few weeks in high crime areas of Washington D.C. Jonathan Edwards seems correct in saying, “We little consider how much the sense of good is heightened by the sense of evil, both moral and natural.” It seems that the utter purity of God’s holiness is more vividly highlighted when seen in contrast to wickedness.

Second, without sin we would not see at all God’s holiness acting in judgment, which is crucial for grasping the extent of His utter purity and the extreme value of it. Sin is the utter contradiction of God’s holiness—it is exceedingly corrupt and aims at defacing everything that is good and honorable, everything that God stands for. Therefore, since God is holy He must react in judgment against sin. For if He did not, He would be saying that goodness and moral purity are not very valuable. He would be saying that it is OK to spray graffiti all over everything that He stands for and everything that is right.

But when we see that God is so holy that He utterly hates sin and thus reacts against it in judgment, the great value of God’s purity and the zeal of His righteousness in protecting the honor of that purity are made crystal clear. When God takes action to vindicate His holiness by judging all attacks on His holiness (that is, all sin), the message is unmistakable: the holiness of God is extremely valuable, and attacks on this holiness are utterly appalling. We see this in the Scriptures where the prophet Isaiah, writing of a judgment upon sin that God would soon execute upon Israel, speaks of how judgment exalts God by showing forth His holiness: “The common man will be humbled, and the man of importance abased, the eyes of the proud also will be abased. But the Lord of hosts will be exalted in judgment, and the holy God will show Himself holy in righteousness” (Isaiah 5:16).

So if there were no sin upon which God could pour His eternal judgement, He could not assert the full range of His holiness because He could not show that, in His holiness, He hates and despises all that is unholy. And the merit of His holiness is also highlighted as He shows the terrible demerit of those who are unholy in that they deserve His judgment.

**Grace and mercy more wondrously displayed**

God's mercy is His goodness, concern, and help shown to those who are in a miserable plight.
But mercy could not be shown if there was no sin and evil in the universe, because then there would be no one in a miserable plight to need mercy (since without sin there would be no suffering). So I believe that another reason God has allowed evil and suffering is to display the fullness of His mercy.

Second, God's mercy involves more than just His concern for those who need help. It is His concern for those who need help but don't deserve it. As we saw above, sin deserves judgment because it attacks the infinite worth of God's holiness. So it would not be expected at all that God might love some of the creatures that deserve such judgment. But this is exactly what He does! It is amazing, but God loves and seeks to help those who deserve only His judgment. Clearly, this highlights the wonders of His mercy. It shows amazing and surpassing love. But if God had not allowed sin, He could not display this marvelous facet of His character. Thus, because of the sin in the world, we are now able to see the mercy of God in action.

We can take this even deeper. The greatness of God's mercy is highlighted not only by the fact that He loves those who don't deserve it, but also by the fact that those whom God chooses to save from their sins are rescued out from the most awful and terrifying situation possible—being under God's almighty judgment (wrath). As Dr. Daniel Fuller has written, "How could God's mercy appear fully as his great mercy unless it was extended to people who were under his wrath and therefore could only ask for mercy... It would be impossible for [the saved] to share with God the delight He has in his mercy unless they saw clearly the awfulness of the almighty wrath from which his mercy delivers them." So when the saved realize the extent of the danger God has rescued them from, they understand more completely the value of His mercy—for they see what would have happened to them without it.

As we will explore more later on, the fact that God has not chosen to save everybody will provide an eternal display of the severity of the wrath which sin deserves. Thus, the greatness of God’s mercy will be eternally highlighted to the saved as it is seen against the backdrop of His wrath.

This seems to be one of the ways the apostle Paul taught that God glorifies Himself in defeating evil. He writes, "What if God, in order to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory..." (Romans 9:22, 23, RSV). God endures with great patience those who refuse to repent so that when the time does come for judgment, He can greatly demonstrate His wrath and power in that judgment. Paul adds that this judgment—this display of God’s wrath and power—makes known more fully the riches of God’s glory to those whom He has saved, and that is God’s ultimate motive in judgement.

John Piper, whose commentary on Romans 9:1-23 is said by Richard Muller to be "the most
compelling and forceful exposition of Romans 9:1-23 that I have ever seen,” comments on these verses: “It behooves every great artist to demonstrate in the variety of his work the full range of his skill and power. And, according to Paul, it is God’s right and his great desire to manifest the full range of his character in the things that he does. This includes wrath and tremendous power in its execution....[but] Paul’s justification of God does not stop with the demonstration that God, as God, must display the whole panorama of his character in order to be righteous; he goes on to assert that there is a unity in this display in that the various manifestations of all God’s attributes stand in the service of his mercy, and thus function to heighten the revelation of glory for the vessels of mercy and to intensify their appreciation of it.”

Loraine Boettner offers a good summary of what we have seen. “Sin, then, is permitted in order that the mercy of God may be shown in its forgiveness, and that His justice may be shown in its punishment. Its entrance is the result of a settled design which God formed in eternity, and through which He purposed to reveal Himself to His rational creatures as complete and full-orbed in all conceivable perfections.” These things make the words of the apostle Paul very impacting to me: “Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God’s kindness, if you continue in His kindness [by trusting Him]...” (Romans 11:22).

**Goodness more manifest**

Finally, I simply wish to make more explicit how the things we have seen specifically reveal the goodness of God. The fact that God hates and judges evil shows that He is good, for it shows that He is opposed to evil to the fullest possible extent. He completely disapproves of evil and therefore brings it to defeat in judgment. Therefore, God’s judgment reveals the perfection of His goodness.

The fact that God loves evil-doers and forgives many of them, rescuing them from His wrath, also reveals His goodness. For such extravagant love can only be explained by the fact that God is utterly loving at heart and greatly desiring the welfare of those that He has made—even after they have forfeited all rights to happiness and deserve only punishment.

**Why is God so Devoted to His Glory?**

We have seen that God allowed evil in order to fully display His glory through defeating it in judgment upon some, mercy upon others. But is this a morally sufficient reason for permitting sin? If not, the SGD fails. But if so, we will have demonstrated the righteousness of God in permitting evil. To discover whether the glory of God is a morally sufficient reason, we must ask, why has God gone to such
great lengths for the sake of his glory? Why is God so devoted to His glory?

Jonathan Edward’s tremendous insights in his *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* take us a long way towards answering this question. Edward’s entire dissertation is aimed at showing, through both reason and Scripture, that God’s goal in *everything* He does is to glorify Himself. Towards the end of his dissertation, he writes: “Thus we see that the great end of God’s works, which is so variously expressed in Scripture, is indeed but ONE; and this *one* end is most properly and comprehensively called, THE GLORY OF GOD.” Understanding why God’s goal in all things is His glory will bring us to understand why the demonstration of His glory was a morally sufficient reason for permitting sin.

As was demonstrated earlier, God is by definition a *perfect reality*. From this it follows that God is the most valuable being in the universe, for all other beings are by definition less than God. In fact, since God is a perfect reality, it follows that He is infinitely valuable—for a being that we could conceive of as having greater worth than He does would not be perfect.

Since God is of infinite value, He must place primary importance and value on Himself. Therefore God’s goal in all things is to exalt Himself, for any other goal would be placing priority on something that is less than infinitely valuable. Any other goal would be denying the infinite value of God’s own worth, because it would be wrongly implying that there are other things that are of greater worth than God.

Because this point is so crucial to understand—it is at the heart of my theodicy—it is important to be very clear on it. So I will let Jonathan Edwards and John Piper, from whom I learned this, articulate it with their robust clarity. Edwards writes, “All things else, with regard to worthiness, importance, and excellence, are perfectly as nothing in comparison of him. And therefore, if God has respect to things according to their nature and proportions, he must necessarily have the greatest respect to himself.” Edward’s goes on to argue that what is highest in God’s *heart* must be the highest goal in His *actions* and *conduct*, for otherwise His behavior would be contradicting His heart. Thus, if God *values* His glory above all things, He must *seek* His glory in all things.

Along these same lines, John Piper argues that the essence of righteousness is placing supreme worth on the object which is in fact worthy of this supreme worth. Therefore, if either humans or God place supreme worth on something less than God, then we would be committing unrighteousness. As Piper writes, “...God is righteous. The opposite of righteousness is to value and enjoy what is not truly valuable or rewarding. This is why people are called unrighteous in Romans 1:18. They suppress the truth of God’s value and exchange God for created things. So they belittle God and discredit his worth. Righteousness is the opposite. It means recognizing true value for what it is and esteeming it and enjoying
it in proportion to its true worth. God is righteous. This means that he recognizes, welcomes, loves and
upholds with infinite jealously and energy what is infinitely valuable, namely, the worth of God. God’s
righteous passion and delight is to display and uphold his infinitely valuable glory. The logical
consequence of this is that if God “were ever to act contrary to this eternal passion for his own perfections
he would be unrighteous, he would be an idolater.”

Both Piper and Edwards give extensive examinations of the biblical material on this issue, and
conclusively show that the united testimony of all of the Biblical authors is that God’s primary goal in all
things is His own glory. Isaiah 48:9-11 probably states this most forcefully: “For the sake of My name I
delay My wrath, and for My praise I restrain it for you, in order not to cut you off. Behold, I have refined
you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For My own sake, for My own sake, I
will act; For how can My name be profaned? And My glory I will not give to another.”

To make evident that the glory of God is the central theme of the entire Bible, from Genesis to
Revelation, Piper takes each of the main works of God throughout redemptive history and shows how the
Scriptures which declare these works also teach these that God has done them for His own glory. For
example, God chooses His people for His glory (Ephesians 1:4-6), creates His people for His glory (Isaiah
43:6-7), formed the nation of Israel for his glory (Isaiah 49:3; Jeremiah 13:1), rescued Israel from slavery
in Egypt for the sake of His glory (Psalm 106:7-8), is faithful to His people even when they sin for His
own glory (1 Samuel 12:20-222), defended Israel from attack for His glory (2 Kings 19:34), and restored
Israel from its exile for His glory (Ezekiel 36:22-23, 32).

Jesus pursued His Father’s glory in everything (John 7:18), told us to do likewise (Matthew 5:16),
and warned that it is impossible to believe if we do not seek the glory of God (John 5:44). God answers
prayer so that He will be glorified through Jesus (John 14:13), Jesus endured His suffering for Gods’ glory
(John 12:27; 17:1), Jesus is coming again for the glory of God (2 Thessalonians 1:9-10), and His ultimate
aim is that we enjoy His glory with Him (John 17:24). All humans deserve judgment for dishonoring
God’s glory (Romans 1:23; 6:23), God forgives His people who are under judgment for His glory (Isaiah
43:25; Psalm 25:11) and judges those who do not repent in order to display the riches of His glory
(Romans 9:22-23), examples of whom are Pharaoh (Romans 9:17; Exodus 14:4) and Herod, who was
struck dead for not giving glory to God (Acts 12:23). Thus, Piper shows decisively that the unified and
unmistakable theme of the biblical authors is that God is devoted to His glory in all things.

From this it follows that it was righteous and good for God to allow evil because in doing so God
was acting for His glory (in the ways we just examined)—and acting for the glory of God is the essence of
righteousness because the glory of God is of infinite worth. Since it was righteous for God to permit evil,
God's permission of evil is therefore consonant with His perfect goodness. Thus, it is possible to uphold the goodness of God in the face of evil while at the same time affirming that God is omnipotent and could have prevented all evil.

**How is this Loving of God?**

What we have seen so far is that, because He is fully devoted to His glory, God allowed evil to enter into the universe so that He could manifest the full range of His attributes in all their majesty by defeating evil. This shows God's righteousness in allowing evil, but does not yet completely solve the problem. For many object that it is selfish and unloving for God to be supremely devoted to Himself. So in order to decisively solve the problem of evil, we must answer the question, is it loving for God to act for the sake of His glory?

I believe that the answer is yes. In fact, the most loving thing that God can do is to act for His own glory. I believe that there are four reasons for this. First, God is not selfish or unloving in seeking His own glory because He does not do so out of a low self-esteem complex. Most of us know people who vainly seek the complements of others, people whom Ayn Rand calls "second handers." Their devotion to the praise of others shows them to be proud, selfish, and inauthentic.

But God is not a second-hander because He does not seek His own praise from a low self-esteem problem or because He needs to compensate for deficiencies in Himself by seeking vain complements. Because God is a perfect being, He has no deficiencies, is fully happy in Himself, and has no need for people. He doesn't need us to acknowledge His supremacy before He can feel good about Himself. God seeks His own glory because He is worthy of it and because He takes such great pleasure in displaying His glory, not because He needs it. Thus, God is not acting in selfishness or vanity.

Second, as we saw above, if God was not supremely devoted to His own honor, He would be unrighteous. An unrighteous God would be of no benefit to anyone. God can only be good to us and be sufficient to satisfy our hearts if He is a righteous God. What comfort and trust could we have in God if we did not know that He was completely devoted to what is of the greatest value? What good could God be for us if He were unrighteous? Therefore, if God is going to be for us at all, He must be for Himself first.

This brings us to the third reason that God is not selfish or unloving in seeking His glory: it is best for creation that God seek His own glory in all things. This is because, as we saw, God is perfect and infinitely valuable. Therefore, *God is what is best for us*; He the highest good. So in promoting His own honor—that is, in making known His glory and seeking praise for it—God is promoting the very thing that
will give creation the greatest joy, happiness, and satisfaction! It is not selfish for God to seek His glory because it is the best thing for all creation for God to do so! For in calling attention His own glory, God is calling attention to what is supremely valuable. In fact, it seems as if it would be selfish if God did not seek His own glory—if He kept His glory to Himself—because then He would be robbing us of the highest good.

This leads right into the fourth reason that it is in fact very loving for God to seek His glory. Since the glorification of God is the best thing for creation, God’s devotion to His own glory is not at odds with His desire for our welfare. Instead, the two purposes unite as one. For the way God does good to His people is by glorifying Himself in them—since His glory is their highest good and brings the greatest possible happiness to them. And the way that God glorifies Himself is by acting for His people’s welfare—since it is more glorious to give than to receive.

Let me connect this more closely with what we saw concerning God’s righteousness. A holy and righteous God would place infinite value on His own worth—otherwise He would not be fully valuing what is supremely valuable, which would be idolatry. And a loving God, it seems to me, would want the best for His people. But if God Himself is the most valuable being, then the most loving thing that God can do for His people is to give us Himself and cause us to deeply and joyfully praise His excellency. For not only is God more exalted when His glory is rejoiced in, rather than simply acknowledged, but humans are more satisfied when they can express praise towards the object of their greatest value. Joy overflows into praise, and, as C.S. Lewis has shown, this praise is in fact the completion of our joy. Our joy is incomplete until it is enabled to express itself in praise (for example, listen to what people say the next time you are around a newborn baby).

Thus, the best thing for God’s people is that God seek to glorify Himself (i.e., to display His greatness and moral perfections to the highest possible extent) and thereby bring great praise to their hearts. And this means that God’s pursuit of our good and His glory are the same pursuit.

John Piper explains this very clearly:

...God’s pursuit of praise from us and our pursuit of pleasure in him are one and the same pursuit. God’s quest to be glorified and our quest to be satisfied reach their goal in this one experience: our delight in God which overflows in praise. For God, praise is the sweet echo of his own excellence in the hearts of his people. For us, praise is the summit of satisfaction that comes from living in fellowship with God. The stunning implication of this discovery is that all the omnipotent energy that drives the heart of God to pursue his own glory, also drives him to satisfy the hearts of those who seek their joy in him. The good news of the Bible is that God is not at all disinclined to satisfy the hearts of those who hope in him. Just the opposite: The very thing that can make us most happy is what God delights in with all his heart and with all his soul.}"
This marvelous truth demonstrates to us how it was not only righteous for God to permit evil, but loving. Since the decree to permit evil results in greater glory, honor, and praise to God than had He not permitted evil, it also results, in the long run, in deeper joy and satisfaction to His people. Thus, it is more loving for God to allow evil than for Him to prevent evil.

As Edwards concluded, “So evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which he made the world; because the creature’s happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and sense of his love. And if the knowledge of him be imperfect [as it would have been without God’s glory displayed in conquering evil], the happiness of the creature must be proportionably imperfect.” In other words, it is not only in the best interests of creation for God to allow evil temporarily, it is actually better than had He prevented it altogether. Thus, far from calling into question God’s love, the problem of evil is a manifest display of His love.

THE EMOTIONAL PROBLEM OF SIN

The intellectual problem of sin is therefore unsuccessful in eliminating the existence, goodness, or omnipotence of God. It is fully possible to maintain both God’s perfect goodness and His omnipotence in the face of the terrible sin in the world. In fact, understanding how this is so actually serves to give us a greater appreciation of God and a more awesome marvel at His wisdom and righteousness.

Because of this, I believe that what we have seen does more than just solve the intellectual problem. The solution I have offered is intensely practical and can enable us to triumph over the experience of evil in our own lives. Thus, we will now apply our solution to the intellectual problem of sin to the emotional problem of sin.

Lessons from the Righteousness of God

There is a very important lesson we ought to learn from the righteousness of God: If God places supreme importance on Himself, then we should too. God’s goal in all things is to glorify Himself, and therefore our goal in all things should be to glorify God. The wonderful thing we saw is that in seeking God’s glory, we are seeking the one thing that can fully satisfy and delight our hearts. Therefore, our passion to be satisfied and God’s passion to be glorified need not be at odds. Rather, they can join together in devotion to the glory of God. For God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.

It is our rejection of the joy that comes from devoting ourselves to the supreme worth of God that is the essence of sin (cf. Jeremiah 2:13). When you delight in something, you honor it. But instead of seeking our delight in God and honoring Him, we have sought our satisfaction outside of God and thus
attempted to glorify things that do not deserve it. We have refused to be satisfied in the only thing capable of truly satisfying us and instead pursued our satisfaction in things that are less valuable than God—thereby declaring that we don’t believe that God is of infinite worth.

As we saw above, because God is holy He must bring all sin to judgment. For if He did not, He would be treating attacks on His glory as inconsequential and therefore He would be treating His glory as inconsequential. Therefore, we have all brought upon ourselves the judgment of God and need to be rescued by His mercy. So the emotional problem of sin amounts to the problem of evil that we do. And this is the most important problem to solve.

The problem of evil that we do

C.S. Lewis has written words that we all know are true: “All men alike stand condemned, not by alien codes of ethics, but by their own, and all men are therefore conscious of guilt.” Yes, we all know deep down that the real problem is not with God. It is with ourselves. We all know that we have wickedness in our hearts, and we all know that it is our own fault. The problem of evil does not show that God is not good; it shows that we are not good. We are the ones who sin, not God.

If we are to genuinely solve the problem of evil for ourselves, we must reckon with this fact. If we have not perceived how appalling our sin really is, it is easy to dismiss the idea that we are under God’s wrath because of our sins as idle notions of a less civilized age. It is easy to consider Jonathan Edward’s sermon Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God as simply a peculiar sermon to be studied in the history of American literature, rather than a reality that must be reckoned with in our own lives. But the blinders come off when we finally become aware of how bad sin really is. “When we merely say that we are bad, the ‘wrath’ of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our badness, it appears inevitable, a mere corollary from God’s goodness.” When we finally perceive the wickedness of our own sin, we see how justly we deserve God’s wrath. For we have defied the most valuable being in the universe!

Our failure to grasp this accounts for why Jesus’ perspective on disaster is so radically different from that of most people today. In Luke 13:1 some people report to Jesus an incident where Pilate’s soldiers slaughtered some Galileans as they were offering sacrifices in the temple. Jesus gives two answers for the price of one when he not only addresses this disaster, but also addresses an instance where a tower fell on eighteen people in Jerusalem. The typical 20th century American might expect Jesus to say something like, “I know I said that the hairs of your head are all numbered and that my Father knows every sparrow that touches the earth. But I was just trying to make a point. Don’t push it too far. Remember what a herculean task it is to count all the hairs on all the heads of all the people on earth. Do you know
how many birds there are in the world? Well, this one afternoon there was a great flock of migratory birds that diverted my Father’s attention from that tower.\textsuperscript{38}

But instead, Jesus’ response is astonishing. In regards to the slaughter by Pilate’s soldiers, he says, “Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish” (v. 2). He then says the same thing concerning the tower.

Amazing! Jesus did not see these disasters as something that raised questions about the divine justice. Rather, He sees disaster as something that should make us evaluate our own state before God. D.A. Carson very aptly paraphrases Jesus’ view in this passage: “disaster is a call to repentance.”\textsuperscript{39}

As R.C. Sproul points out, it seems that Jesus is saying that they were asking him the wrong question. The question is not “why did God let the tower fall on those people,” but, “Why didn’t that happen to me.” We take God’s mercy for granted, and thus “our astonishment is in the wrong place. The real question is: Why has God not destroyed us all since we got out of our beds this morning? Why does He tolerate us as we continue our work of sin and destruction upon His planet?”\textsuperscript{40}

My point is that too often we allow the disasters that happen to distract us from the real issue. We turn the issue into a problem with the way God runs things, and therefore end up ignoring the real problem—the state of our hearts before the righteous standard of God’s law. D.A. Carson writes, “...the distance between our perception of where the problem lies and the perceptions of the biblical writers is one of the most sobering considerations for those who take the Bible seriously. It is one more indication that we have given ourselves to thinking great thoughts about human beings and small thoughts about God. How does rebellion appear to One so incomparably transcendent that even the superpowers appear to his eyes like the fine dust in a balance? How does rebellion appear to One who measures our sin by the death of his Son?”\textsuperscript{41}

What, then, is the solution to the problem of our wickedness when we finally come to see that we actually have a problem? I believe that the solution is found in the center of the Christian faith—the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

Earlier we discussed how God’s holiness is manifest when He judges sin, and His mercy is manifest when He forgives sin. What I didn’t discuss is how a holy God can forgive sin without compromising His holiness. This is a real problem. Since sin treats the glory of God as cheap, if God does not judge it He will be treating Himself as cheap. This would be to act contrary to His infinite worth, and thus be unrighteous. So how can God be righteous in forgiving sins?

The answer is found in Jesus Christ. God sent Christ to die in the place of those who would come
to believe in Him. By so doing, He took their punishment upon Himself so that they would not have to be
punished themselves. So God remains holy in forgiving His people because He did judge their sins—on
Jesus. This is what the apostle Paul argues in Romans 3:25-26, where He says that God set forth Jesus to
absorb the punishment for sin in order “to demonstrate His righteousness...that He might be just and the
justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

No other religion upholds justice in the solution it gives to the human problem of sin. All other
religions either deny that sin is as serious as we all know it is, deny that sin is evil at all (which also goes
against our common sense), or provide forgiveness to humans without proper compensation to justice.
Christianity is thus the only religion that does justice to our sense of justice.42

In very wise and compassionate book on suffering and evil, D.A. Carson very helpfully explains
the centrality of the cross to the problem of evil that we do: “The cross, then, is the place where God’s
justice and love meet. God retains the integrity of his justice; God pours out the fullness of his love. In the
cross, God shows himself to be just and the one who justifies sinners whose faith rests in his Son. The
death of God’s own Son is the only adequate gauge of what God thinks of my sin; the death of God’s own
Son is the only basis on which I may be forgiven that sin. The cross is the triumph of justice and love.”43

God has solved the problem of our evil by sending His Son to die for sins so that we can be
forgiven. Because God desires to make known His glory in forgiving sinners, there is a solution to the
problem of our evil. How, then, can we apply this solution to ourselves so that we will benefit from it?
The solution is to run to Christ and trust Him for the forgiveness of sins and to bring us into the
glorious eternity God has prepared for those who love Him. Jesus said, “For God so loved the world, that
He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.”
Likewise, the apostle Paul tells us “that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your
heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved; for with the heart man believes, resulting in
righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses resulting in salvation...’whoever will call upon the name of
the Lord will be saved’” (Romans 10:9-10, 13).

Christ is the heart of the solution. Once we have come to Him, the real problem for us—eternal
punishment for our sins—has been taken out of the way and we have entered into an eternal life of
continually coming to know Christ better in joyful fellowship and worship. “Truly, truly, I say to you,”
Jesus said, “he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come
into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24). As we will see later, this also serves as
the heart of the solution to the second dimension of the emotional problem—the problem of evil that
happens to us.
THE INTELLECTUAL PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

The intellectual solution to the problem of sin that we have seen exalts before us the majesty of God and should humble us before Him in reverent worship. The emotional solution to the problem of sin has shown us that humbly coming to God through Christ brings us salvation from our sins and is what enables us bow in this way before God, bringing us into an eternal relationship with Him. As we now probe the intellectual problem of suffering, the things we learned from the intellectual and emotional solutions to sin will provide a significant framework from which to rightly evaluate things. And as we will also see, much of the intellectual solution to suffering goes a long way towards providing the emotional solution to suffering.

All of History Working Towards the Final Judgement

The first thing we must do in order to accurately understand the intellectual problem of suffering is understand how it relates to the problem of sin. We have seen that God’s overall aim in permitting humans to fall into sin is to bring about a state of affairs where He can fully demonstrate His mercy in forgiving sin and fully demonstrate His justice and holiness in judging sin. I believe that the suffering people endure in this life ultimately contributes to the fullness of this final state of affairs where God’s mercy and holiness will be fully highlighted. Thus, all suffering is for the purpose of bringing glory to God—both now, at the final judgment, and forever.

Since humanity at the final judgment will be fully separated into two utterly distinct groups that will never change—the eternally saved and eternally lost—it follows that the suffering of those who will be among the saved serves a different ultimate purpose than the suffering of those who will be among the lost. Consequently, we will examine each group distinctly.

God’s purposes in the suffering of the saved

In regards to those who will be saved, every bad thing that they must endure is permitted to occur as a means to transform them into people who are more like their Savior, Jesus, so that they will be more suited for their glorious destiny of worshiping God in joyful praise and reflecting back to Him the excellency of Christ’s character in their own character. As Paul writes in Romans 8:28-29, “And we know that God causes all things [which would include suffering] to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son [this is the good all things work toward for us], that He might be the first-born among many brethren.” The sufferings of the saved are also working to give them a
greater appreciation for the unrestricted joy they will experience in this day when their experience of suffering is forever ended. And their sins have all been forgiven, and thus provide an occasion for them to deeply appreciate God’s mercy towards them. We will take a closer look at this later.

**God’s purposes in the suffering of the lost**

In regards to those who will not be saved in the end, God is first of all working to lead them to repentance. For God desires the eternal joy of all of His creatures. So when suffering happens to them it is intended as something that will show them their need for God. Thus, suffering is a mercy to them as well. However, since they reject these merciful purposes of God in their suffering (and in their welfare—that is a mercy too, since they don’t deserve it), their suffering ends up working towards their judgment. So the sufferings of the non-elect ultimately prepare them more fully for their judgment. And since God is sovereign, their refusal of God’s mercy (which results in everything work towards their judgment) is not against God’s ultimate plan. Rather, it is ultimately part of His purposes to make their rebellion backfire.

**God’s purposes are primarily future oriented**

So we see that the glorification of God in defeating evil is primarily future oriented. Right now, as history moves onward, God is exercising but not yet clearly manifesting to us the full display of His attributes. Rather, God is making everything work towards the final consummation of things when He will display His attributes in all their fullness, brilliance, and glory to the whole creation. He is preparing things for the final judgment, when all of human history will be set before us and God will condemn those who refused to trust in His Son, and will bring into everlasting joy those whom He has forgiven through faith in His Son.

At this time when all people are gathered before God and all of human history is set before us, God’s manifold wisdom, the appalling nature of all of our sin, the triumph of God’s holiness in judging all of this sin that has happened, and the marvels of His mercy in forgiving so much sin in His people will then be fully displayed before all creation. It is at this point when the climax of God’s glorification will be reached and the glories of His holiness in judgment and mercy in forgiveness will be most awe-inspiring.

For those whom God has saved, this demonstration will never cease. They will eternally remember the great works of God in mercy upon them while they were on earth, and He will continue pouring out His mercy upon them forever in heaven a billion times more intensely (cf. Ephesians 2:7). Thus, they will praise Him forever in unbounded joy. And they will never again sin or suffer again for all
eternity. Evil will be finished.

As God will eternally condemn to the lake of fire all of those who refused to trust Him for happiness (see, for example, Revelation 20:15), God’s holiness will also be eternally displayed in judgment. Thus, the infinite preciousness and purity of God’s holiness will be forever evident in the action He takes to recompense all those who attacked His infinite majesty.

This vindication of God’s majesty and display of His holiness will also be an eternal cause of praise to the saved, as these attributes are of infinite value as well as His mercy. Also, God’s love will reign supreme as it will be evident that His wrath is made subservient to His mercy. For, as we saw earlier, the contrast between God’s wrath and His mercy will heighten the appreciation and gratitude that the saved have for the mercy that they received.

Finally, the suffering of those who will be saved in the end is working now to prepare them to more fully appreciate His glory in this day, to have the joy of being like Christ, and to have the character qualities necessary for being humble in the experience of such exultation.

Because suffering is working towards this great display of God’s glory for all eternity, God has good and loving reasons for allowing it. And, as has been pointed out many times, it should never be forgotten that the reason that the world is a place where people suffer is because people have rebelled against God. We have brought the suffering on ourselves by rebelling against God. It is the wonders of His mercy that He has chosen to make this suffering work for the God of those whom He will save. And the fact that God has not decided to extend saving mercy to all keeps before us the terrible reality of how wicked our sin really is. The terrible consequences of sin reveal the terrible nature of sin.

The Goodness of God in Allowing the Suffering of His People

With this eternal perspective on suffering, we will now examine more closely Christian teachings that help apply this eternal perspective to us here and now. If we are followers of Christ, an opportunity which is open to all, the perspective of the eternal gives us hope and strength for the here and now, for we know that our suffering is working to prepare us for this great glory. But there are also many other things which can help us more specifically understand why God allows suffering in the lives of His saints and how this is a manifestation of His goodness. These things also can show us how to trust God through our sufferings and emerge victoriously.

To do this, I will offer a brief summary of pastor-theologian John Piper’s theology of suffering and list some of the verses he explores. I will focus on Piper’s theology of suffering because it is well organized and I believe that it is thoroughly biblical. It will also be relevant at one point to supplement
Piper’s teaching with some insight from D.A. Carson.

First, Piper points out that suffering should not surprise us, for the Bible is clear that Christians will suffer (1 Thess. 3:2-3; Acts 14:22; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Peter 3:8-9). Second, Piper demonstrates that this is not because things have gotten out of hand for God, but because God Himself is the one who appoints this suffering that Christians endure (Philippians 1:29; 1 Peter 3:17; 4:19; Hebrews 12:4-6; 1 Thess. 3:3).

If our conception of God is that He will shield us from all suffering, when suffering does come upon us we will have agonizing and perplexing torment indeed. But half of the comfort comes in knowing that the suffering which has come upon us is the course we have been destined for. Therefore, we don’t need to worry that suffering which we undergo means that God has abandoned us or that we have committed some terrible sin that He is disciplining us for. That may be the case in certain instances, but generally suffering happens because that’s the road God has, in His wisdom, designed for Christians to follow for the promotion of their holiness.

Knowing that God is the one in control of our suffering is a cause of hope, strength, and courage because it means that all of our pain has a purpose. It is not random or willy nilly. Because God is in charge of our suffering, we can be confident that He is causing it to work for our good, and if the good was possible any other way we would not be going through it (cf. 1 Peter 1:6).

To make it evident that God’s aim is for our good, Piper gives six reasons that God appoints suffering. The first reason is that suffering yields in us a deeper faith and righteousness (Hebrews 12:10; 5:8; 2 Corinthians 1:8-9). He writes, “I have never heard anyone say, ‘The really deep lessons of life have come through times of ease and comfort.’ But I have heard strong saints say, ‘Every significant advance I have ever made in grasping the depths of God’s love and growing deep with him, has come through suffering.’”

Second, suffering “makes our cup increase”—that is, it yields a greater treasure of glory for us to enjoy in heaven. God will not allow the persecution His saints endure for Christ’s name go unrewarded (Matt. 5:11-12). Therefore the persecution Christians undergo is said to be a gift (Philippians 1:29), a privilege (Acts 5:41), and for our good (Hebrews 12:10). The suffering that results from causes other than persecution is also working to bring about greater glory for us if we endure it by faith. Paul writes, “For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen” (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

Third, God gives suffering to His church because it awakens sleepy saints to boldness (Philippians 1:14). The fourth reason Piper gives is that the suffering of God’s saints is a means to visibly display to non-Christians the suffering Christ went through for the salvation of the world so that they will grasp what
He did and come to faith (Colossians 1:24). Fifth, God appoints suffering because it works to position the troops to places they might not have gone for the purpose of evangelism (Acts 11:19). And sixth, God appoints suffering because it magnifies the power and supremacy of Christ (2 Cor. 12:9-10; Acts 5:41).

Piper writes of how suffering magnifies God’s worth: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him. And the supremacy of that glory shines most brightly when the satisfaction that we have in him endures in spite of suffering and pain in the mission of love.”

Moses is one of Piper’s favorite examples of this, for the Scripture says of him, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward” (Hebrews 11:24-26). Because Moses valued God over sin, even when following God meant enduring great suffering, the superior worth of God was greatly manifested in his life.

In addition to Piper’s six reasons why God appoints suffering for His people, D.A. Carson gives three ways that suffering received in faith contributes to Christian growth. First, it cleanses us to give fuller attention to God, making His word have easier entrance into our hearts. Second, suffering molds us. Citing Romans 5:3-5, Carson explains that “rightly accepted, pain cleanses us from self-centeredness, gives us insight into the nature of this fallen world, prepares us for death, makes us remember the sufferings of Christ and of others.” Third, experiences of suffering endured in faith make us more compassionate and sympathetic people, thereby enabling us to be a greater help to others.

These six reasons from Piper (and three from Carson) on why God appoints suffering enable us to do the third, and central, mandate of Piper’s theology of suffering: We ought to pursue joy in suffering (Colossians 1:24; Matthew 5:11-12; Romans 8:8; 1 Peter 4:13). The apostle Paul is the primary example of this, who said “we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character, and proven character, hope...” (Romans 5:2-4).

We can rejoice in our sufferings because we can know that they are intended to bring us closer to God on this earth. We can rejoice in our sufferings because, as we just saw, when endured by faith, they mold us, cleanse us, make us more compassionate, work in us greater holiness, make our cup increase in heaven, and magnify the worth of Christ. And this not only benefits us here, but (as we saw earlier) prepares us for the ultimate experience of God’s glory in eternity. Thus, a right understanding of suffering can help shatter all complaining and bitterness, replacing them with great hope and joy. And the result of hope and joy is strength and courage.
As we saw earlier, we can also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that our God is in control of all of them. This can keep us from despair and instead give us patience and comfort, strength and hope through suffering and adversity because we know that there is a good and kind purpose in our trials. God's control over the evil events in our lives is an expression of His love, and to the extent that we do not recognize this we will have a harder time trusting Him.

Margaret Clarkson applies this all very well: "The sovereignty of God is the one impregnable rock to which the suffering human heart must cling. The circumstances surrounding our lives are no accident; they may be the work of evil, but that evil is held firmly within the mighty hand of our sovereign God.... All evil is subject to Him, and evil cannot touch His children unless He permits it."

In light of all of this, the fact that God allows suffering to come upon His children in no way calls into question His goodness. Rather, the things we have seen make clear that it is a great manifestation of His goodness, for He cares enough to do what it takes to make us as close to Him as we ought to be and the kind of people we ought to be.

This foundation of joy in the Lord can then enable us to carry out the fourth mandate Piper gives us: we ought to suffer in the same manner Christ did (1 Peter 2:20-21). Christ suffered terrible injustice, and he nonetheless endured it without uttering threats of revenge or malicious obscenities. In fact, he didn’t even open his mouth. How could Christ do such a thing? The same way He provides for us to do so: by looking to the reward. “For the joy set before Him [Christ] endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2). For followers of Christ, the reward is closer fellowship with Christ Himself.

But is there a place for sorrow?

What has been said about rejoicing in sufferings, however, does not mean that there is no place for sorrow. Christianity does not teach that we should deny all emotions of grief, sorrow, sadness, or even anger. When suffering comes, it is perfectly legitimate to weep. It is perfectly legitimate to be full of sorrow. But the joy Piper is exhorting us to pursue is a joy that is perfectly compatible with this sorrow. Christian joy in suffering is not intended to replace the sorrow, but to make it bearable.

Does this cause passivity?

There are some who object that the mandate to rejoice in hope through our sufferings causes passivity. For example, a Christian wife who is forced to endure beatings at the hands of a violent husband may decide just to accept it because it is “working for her good.”

The problem with this objection is that it neglects one of the central purpose God has given to all
Christians: to glorify Him by making Christ known and obeying His commandments. Since this is the purpose of the Christian life, joy in the midst of our sufferings will not cause passivity. Joy in God will surely not cause a Christian to be passive about obeying God! Instead, joy in God in the midst of sufferings will give us the strength and motivation to carry on with this purpose of making Christ known and obeying Him in the midst of great hardship and immense obstacles.

For example, without joy in the midst of persecution, a Christian might be likely to give up and stop making Christ known. But with the joy of Christ and hope of glory in their suffering, they have the courage and power to press on in spite of the immense obstacles. As we saw above, it is this kind of joy that empowered Moses to endure great hardship for the kingdom of God. Joy in suffering gives power to do what is truly important, not incentive to be passive.

Second, the Christian mandate to rejoice in sufferings does not mean to seek suffering. It means don’t compromise on God’s commands or your witness for Christ to avoid suffering and that we should be willing to go to great expense for these things—but not that we should unnecessarily seek to suffer. For example, the wife who is being beaten by her husband is fulfilling none of God’s commands by “just taking it.” So there is nothing preventing her from seeking help.

Third, most suffering is beyond our control and cannot be changed by us. In this case we ought to just accept it—not in the sense of trying not to be sad, but in the sense of seeking the joy of Christ to bear us up in the midst of our sorrow and seeking the serenity to accept what can’t be changed. For example, if there is an earthquake that destroys my home, there is nothing I can do to change that. But I can change my attitude.

Finally, this objection makes me question the motivation it assumes should underlie social action. Lack of joy is certainly not a good motivation. On the other hand, the desire, out of love, to correct situations where God’s commands are being broken is a good motivation.

But does it work?

Piper gives real life examples of Christians who have suffered much for the name of Christ to show that His theology is liveable in real life. It doesn’t just look good on paper. For example, Piper recounts the following example:

An aging Christian once objected to John G. Paton’s plan to go as a missionary to the South Sea Islands with the words, “You’ll be eaten by Cannibals!” Paton responded: “Mr. Dickson, you are advanced in years now, and your own prospect is soon to be laid in the grave, there to be eaten by worms; I confess to you, that if I can but live and die serving and honoring the Lord Jesus, it will make no difference to me whether I am eaten by Cannibals or worms; and in the Great Day my resurrection body will arise as fair as yours in the likeness of our risen Redeemer.”
Piper gives dozens of other examples, and concludes with that of the two great missionaries Hudson Taylor and David Livingston. After extraordinary suffering and loss for the sake of the gospel, both said “I never made a sacrifice.” They could say this because they knew the joy and comfort of Christ in their sufferings, and were brought closer to Him by means of them.

THE EMOTIONAL PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

Triumphing over suffering and evil

The intellectual solution to the problem of suffering is obviously very practical. Therefore, it goes a long way in itself towards providing the emotional solution to the problem of suffering. In fact, I think that what we have seen from Piper’s theology should be classified under both the intellectual and the emotional solution. It is part of the intellectual solution because it shows us how it is reasonable to believe in God’s goodness in the midst of a world where we may have to suffer greatly. And it is part of the emotional solution because it shows us how to trust in God in the midst of our suffering and endure them victoriously.

Because of the emotional success of Piper’s theology of suffering, in offering the following thoughts on the emotional problem of suffering I will focus mainly on things which are less intellectual in nature. These things can be of help and consolation to those who are in too much pain to consider the aspects of the solution which require a lot of thought and can also help resolve the emotional dislike many have for a God who allows suffering--and are consequently unwilling to pay attention to the more intellectual solutions.

First, we will deal with the problem of evil that happens to us—either through the accident of others, the malicious intentions of others, or through natural disasters. As will be clear, this solution stems from the previous solution given to the problem of evil that we do. Second, we will deal with the problem of resolving the emotional dislike people may have for God because of suffering.

The Problem of Evil that Happens to You

We saw above that Christianity does not just offer the best solution to the problem of evil that we do, but the only solution that truly works. The same is true in regards to the problem of evil that happens to us. And once again, the reason is Jesus. His cross solves the problem of evil that we do because it provides deliverance from our moral guilt. And it solves the problem of evil that happens to us because it provides us with a Savior who suffered not only like us, but worse than us and who can therefore comfort
and support us through our trials.

**Refuge in the sufferings of Christ**

I believe that Christianity is the only satisfying solution to the problem of evil that happens to us because it is the only faith that presents a God who cared enough to become man and live a life of suffering Himself. Jesus shared our sorrows and knows what we are going through first hand—no matter how hard our suffering is or how unfairly others are treating us. God has never made us endure suffering that Jesus has not Himself endured a thousand-fold.

No other religion presents such a compassionate, loving God. In all other religions and all other theological systems, no matter how much lip service is given to God’s compassion, the fact is that he remains detached and distant from our sorrows. He cannot fully identify with us because he did not have the courage to become man and endure our state first hand. It is hard for me, therefore, to conceive of how anyone can find refuge from suffering anywhere other than in the God who became man in real space-time history, suffered like us, and then died for us that our suffering may one day end forever as we are taken into eternal glory.

The climax of Christ’s suffering is the cross where He who is worthy of infinite honor and unhindered happiness endured intense shame and suffering for our salvation. The cross is therefore a loud and clear demonstration of what God is like. It makes clear that God is not unconcerned and stuck-up because of His majesty, but is willing to come to the aid of the lowliest of creatures. God is not unable to sympathize with us because of His infinite happiness, for He became man and endured the sorrows of suffering in all its forms—even to the point of an excruciating death. And God is not concerned simply with His own welfare because of His infinite worth, but rather His infinite worth is of such a nature that He seeks His own glory by seeking the good of His people—even at great cost.

The cross proves that God is compassionate. The cross proves that God is love. The cross proves that God is concerned. And the cross reveals that God is able to help—both in sympathy and deliverance. Therefore the cross reveals that God can be trusted to bring us through our trials. For those who have been tempted to doubt the faithfulness and trustworthiness of God because of all the suffering in the world, look at the cross. This is certain proof that God is faithful, God is trustworthy, and God will stop at nothing to save His people.

So when we are in the midst of terrible anguish, distressing perplexity, uncertain fear, the cross is the refuge we need. We can take refuge in Christ because He can sympathize with us and comfort us unlike anyone else. There really is someone we can trust and someone who can help. Christ can help us
because He is omnipotent, and Christ can be trusted because He is love—as the cross proves. As D.A. Carson has written, “Frequently it is when we are crushed and devastated that the cross speaks most powerfully to us. The wounds of Christ then become Christ’s credentials. The world mocks, but we are assured of God’s love by Christ’s wounds.”

The key to enduring suffering, therefore, is this: we must cultivate a relationship with Christ to sustain us “when every other pillar crumbles.” Then we can take courage in Jesus’ words of comfort recorded in John 16:33: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

In light of this, is it any wonder that the New Testament writers see the cross as the central demonstration of God’s love? Paul writes, “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners [yes, even while we were attacking His glory and deserving of condemnation!], Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). John writes “...God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:8-10).

The cross, then, reveals to us how wonderful God is and therefore how wonderful God’s glory is. We do not need to worry that God’s glorification of Himself might be selfish—for the cross reveals what a kind and loving God He is. It reveals that He is not selfish, but loving to the center of His being. He is not mean-hearted, but tender-hearted. What I know of God from the cross of Christ makes me want God to seek His glory in everything, including my own life.

Comfort through the sufferings of Christ’s people

Jesus does not promise to keep His people from suffering but to keep them through suffering (John 16:33). There are many Christians who have gone down the path of suffering and demonstrate this truth to us, providing great inspiration and comfort. The sufferings of Christ’s people give comfort because they point to the sufferings that Christ himself went through and show us that we are not alone.

The late Christian lay-theologian C.S. Lewis is a good example. Lewis went through a time of terrible grief upon the death of his wife. He had written a book dealing with the intellectual problem of evil many years earlier called The Problem of Pain. In the introduction he wrote these words: “I must add, too, that the only purpose of the book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified, nor have I anything to offer my readers except my conviction that when pain is to be borne, a little courage
helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all.”

At the time of writing his theodicy to the intellectual problem he might not have considered himself qualified for teaching the character qualities needed to make it through the emotional struggle, but through the death of his wife he not only became qualified for this but produced a companion volume that specifically deals with the emotional problem first-hand. Lewis did not intentionally produce this volume. But during his time of grief, he found that writing down his feelings was very helpful and comforting. His journals were at a later date published under the title *A Grief Observed*.

At the beginning of his sufferings, Lewis felt that God was silent. He said he found “a door slammed in [his] face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence.” But later on he came to understand that this “silence” was not really silence after all: “When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But rather a special sort of ‘No answer.’ It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though He shook His head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, ‘Peace, child; you don’t understand.’”

Lewis had experienced one of the key truths he had recorded in his previous book, *The Problem of Pain*: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” God rouses our attention through our sufferings to draw us closer to Himself. And He is there to be found by all those who seek Him through Christ.

Another example of suffering endured with courage is the family of John and Betty Stam. John and Betty were two Christian missionaries to China. After being married for nine months, they had child. Three months later, the communists invaded their village and they were killed. Miraculously, Betty was able to hide their infant daughter from the communists before she was killed and the little infant escaped being murdered like its parents. But the baby was not yet out of danger.

When John’s parents found out that their son and daughter-in-law had been killed and their infant Grandson was in great danger in China, the things they wrote demonstrate the joyful comfort they received from Christ in the midst of their sorrow. For example, they wrote to a friend, “Deeply appreciate your consolation. Sacrifice seems great, but not too great for Him who gave Himself for us. Experiencing God’s grace. Believe wholeheartedly Romans 8:28.” Romans 8:28 says “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” The promise of the sovereign God to work all things together for their good upheld them in their grief.

Later on they wrote to some friends in the midst of their sorrow:
Our dear children, John and Betty, have gone to be with the Lord. They loved Him. They served Him and now they are with Him. What could be more glorious?... It was our desire that he as well as we should serve the Lord, and if that could be better done by death than life, we would have it so. The sacrifice may seem great now, but no sacrifice is too great to make for Him who gave Himself for us. We are earnestly praying that it will all be for God’s glory and the salvation of souls.... We are sure that our dear brother and sister, Dr. and Mrs. C.E.. Scott [Betty’s parents], both join us in saying, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Miraculously, it turns out the friends of John and Betty in China were able to keep the baby alive and deliver her from the danger. Upon hearing about this, Betty’s parents demonstrate the great peace the sovereignty of God gave them in the midst of their sorrow: “Everything about her deliverance tells of God’s love and power. And we know that if He could bring a tiny, helpless infant, not three months old, through such dangers in perfect safety, He could no less surely have saved the lives of her precious parents had that been in His divine plan for them.” Remarking on the tragedy of their daughter and son-in-law being killed while she was so young, they write: “John and Betty had a heavenly perspective. Given that, all other things fall into their proper proportion.”

Angry at God?

There is one last facet of the emotional problem of suffering that must be dealt with: many people are angry at God for allowing so much suffering. Some people even say they could not worship a God who allows suffering.

If such anger is a result of suffering that they have themselves experienced, I believe that the things we saw above about Christ’s sufferings, His presence available to those who call on Him, and a Christian theology of suffering are more than adequate to resolve such anger. This person can experience the joy of Christ if they will call upon Him. Then their suffering we become a blessing. Also, it must be kept in mind that the problem of evil that happens to us is a result of the problem of evil that we have done. For if humans hadn’t brought evil into the world, we wouldn’t suffer. Thus, God is not to blame for this state of affairs—we are.

For many, however, the problem is not “How could God let this happen to me?” but “How could God let this happen to anyone? Why has He let so many people suffer throughout history?” The Holocaust is perhaps the clearest example of what these people mean. Those who are angry may not have experienced it themselves, but the fact that God allowed 6 million other people to experience it causes a large emotional problem for their attitude towards God.

Therefore, in order to offer my solution on how to resolve the emotion dislike people may have for
a God who allows suffering, I will apply what we have learned so far to the specific case of the Holocaust. The specifics which I summarize here should provide a framework that can be generalized to apply to all instances of accepting the suffering that happens to others.

The Holocaust is among the ugliest, most wicked events to ever occur on the face of the earth. For many liberal theologians, this event has come to redefine their whole concept of God. Eugen Borowitz seems to echo the sentiments of many: "Any God who could permit the Holocaust, who could remain silent during it, who could 'hide His face' while it dragged on, was not worth believing in." How do the things we have seen demonstrate that, contrary to Borowitz's claim, it is unjustified to have such emotional dislike towards God?

First, it must be remembered that the sufferings of this world are here because of our sins. This is not the original order God established, it is the consequence of our rebellion. To be blunt, we are simply getting a taste of our own medicine. Calling God's justice into question over allowing the Holocaust is much like a serial killer calling into question the judge's justice for sentencing him to life imprisonment. Our sins deserve a punishment far greater than anything that can even compare to the Holocaust. I am not suggesting that the Holocaust was God's judgment on the Jews, but simply that it is among the consequences we all deserve for our sins.

Second, we must remember that Christ is available to all people. He is able to keep us strong in our own sufferings, and He is available to keep everybody strong who calls upon Him. So the terrible sufferings of things such as the Holocaust can be made by God to serve the greatest good of those who must endure them. God can turn suffering into a blessing in disguise for those who trust him. And, perhaps, the worse the suffering, the greater the blessing. There were indeed many in the Holocaust who turned to Christ and were strengthened.

Third, we too often forget that the Holocaust is an expression of human wickedness. God did not force any of the Nazi's to carry out the Holocaust. Rather, God allowed the wickedness that was already in their hearts to be expressed. God was allowing the human heart to display itself in its full wickedness. Therefore, the Holocaust is not a bad reflection on God. It is a bad reflection on us. One of God's good intentions in the Holocaust may have been to give a wake up call to the whole earth to realize how sinful we really are. God may have been seeking to wake us up out of the myth that "people are basically good." It is tragic that we ignore the wake-up call by trying to "pass the buck" up to God.

Fourth, we must remember that God's ultimate goal in all suffering is the greatest good of His creation. God is acting for His glory and the good of creation, and therefore He has good intentions. It only makes sense to be angry at those who either don't know what they are doing or else have wicked
intentions. But God has perfect wisdom to guide Him, and His intentions are wholly righteous. Further, His glory is of infinite worth. But no suffering here on earth is infinitely horrible. Therefore, all suffering that God allows for the sake of His glory is worth the cost.

The fifth truth I wish to bring out goes to the heart of the problem: God Himself became man and suffered just like so many of us do. No other world-view presents a God who can both truly identify with the suffering and offer a solid refuge in the midst of the suffering. That is why I believe that Christianity is the only possible system that can adequately deal with such atrocities as the Holocaust. Liberal Christianity which denies the real deity and physical resurrection of Christ can’t deal with it, Judaism can’t deal with it, Islam can’t deal with it, the Eastern Religions can’t deal with it. Only traditional, biblical Christianity can.

A deeply moving event in the life of Christian theologian and apologist Greg Boyd illustrates what I mean. Boyd recounts a terrible struggle he had with the truth of Christianity his freshman year in college which illustrates my point. He would see all the design and beauty in the world and think there must be a God, but then consider all the suffering in the world and think there can’t be a God. He was in great distress and confusion. In his own words, he explains the resolution of his experience as follows:

It all came to a head for me one cold February night as I was walking back from an astronomy class at the University of Minnesota....The two thoughts were battling with each other at hyper speed. I was tormented. Finally, just as I approached my car, I looked up to the sky and cried out with a loud, angry voice – ‘the only God I can believe in is one who knows firsthand what it’s like to be a Jewish child buried alive, and knows what it’s like to be a Jewish mother watching her child be buried!’ And just then it occurred to me (or was it revealed?): that is exactly the kind of God Christianity proclaims. There is no other belief which does this. Only the Gospel dares to proclaim that God enters smack-dab into the middle of the hell we create....Only the Gospel portrait of God makes sense of the contradictory fact that the world is at once so beautiful and so ugly.

Finally, philosopher William Lane Craig recounts a story that brings home just as forcefully the satisfying nature of the Christian solution to the problem of evil. He writes,

I remember hearing a story once of three men who stood in the crowd before God’s throne on the Judgment Day. Each had a score to settle with God. ‘I was hanged for a crime I didn’t commit,’ complained one man bitterly. ‘I died from a disease that dragged on for months, leaving me broken in both body and spirit,’ said another. ‘My son was killed in the prime of life when some drunk behind the wheel jumped the curb and ran him down,’ muttered the third. Each was angry and anxious to give God a piece of his mind. But when they reached the throne and saw their Judge with His nail-scarred hands and feet and His wounded side, a ‘man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,’ each mouth was stopped, and they dropped silently to their knees.

In light of what we have seen about the solution to the emotional problem of suffering, taken
together with the solutions to the emotional problem of sin and the intellectual problems of sin and suffering, I agree with Craig, who concludes his own theodicy by saying, "...paradoxically, even though the problem of evil is the greatest objection to the existence of God, at the end of the day God is the only solution to the problem of evil. If God does not exist, then we are lost without hope in a life filled with gratuitous [purposeless] and unredeemed suffering."

**OBJECTIONS**

With the Supremacy of God Defense complete, we are now in a position to enhance our understanding of it even further by seeing how it can deal with some of the most common objections to theodicies which uphold the perfect goodness and omnipotent power of God. This will not only result in a more in-depth comprehension of the SGD, but also enhance our confidence that it is the best solution by seeing how it is able to stand up against the most forceful objections.

**Would it Have Been Better if God Had Not Created at All?**

A common objection against all greater good theodicies is that God should not have made anything at all since He knew the enormous evils that would come about through His creation. He should have spared us all of the trouble.

First, I respond that if God had not created us, we might have been spared lots of suffering, but we would also miss out on the great opportunity for the eternal satisfaction that comes from worshiping God. As we have already seen, no amount of hardship is too much to bear for the sake of being satisfied in God.

Second, we saw above that a world where evil is temporarily present and then fully defeated is better *all things considered* than a world with no evil, because in a world with no evil we would be deprived of delight in many of God’s attributes. From this it follows that if it is good for God to create a world where no evil would result (as the objector would certainly agree), it is good for God to create a world where evil temporarily abides and is then defeated—because this world is actually *better* than the world without evil (since it manifests more of God’s glory).

As Jonathan Edwards has argued, "...if, all things considered, it be really the best [for God to permit evil], how can it be otherwise than that it should be chosen by an infinitely wise and good being, whose holiness and goodness consists in always choosing what is best? Which does it argue most, wisdom or folly, a good disposition or an evil one, when two things are set before a being, the one better
and the other worse, to choose the worse, and refuse the better?" So it seems that the suffering is worth the cost for those who will become a part of the eternal worshiping community.

In response to this, the objector regroups for a second wave of attack. As we have seen, traditional Christian theism, including the Supremacy of God Defense, does not believe that everybody will be a part of this eternal worshiping community. There are many people who will, in spite of God’s great love displayed in creation and at the cross, refuse to come to Christ for the satisfaction of their hearts. Because heaven is not a place for people who don’t want to be there and these people have refused to allow Christ to take away their sins, these people will spend eternity paying the penalty for their own sins in hell.

The objector is claiming, however, that belief in an eternal hell is inconsistent with a greater good theodicy because then there are many who never benefit from this greater good. For example, liberal theologian John Hick argues that “a combination of sin and suffering that is endless [in hell] is, by definition, an evil that is never turned to good but remains for ever a blot upon God’s creation.”

There are two things that dispel this objection.

First, contrary to Hick’s claim, hell is not “an evil that is never turned to good.” Hell is the eternal wrath of God upon those who refuse to repent of their sins. As we saw above, the execution of God’s wrath brings honor to Him (and thus good to His people) because it highlights the purity and zeal of His holiness. Therefore, hell is made to work for good because it is where God executes His judgment on sin, thereby vindicating His righteousness and demonstrating the purity and zeal of His holiness.

So hell is made to (indirectly) glorify God. It is not the suffering of those in hell in and of itself that glorifies Him, but the demonstration of His righteousness. In addition to highlighting the holiness of God, hell causes God’s those who are saved to have greater appreciation for His mercy. For the horrors of hell will make absolutely evident what they deserved but the mercy of God delivered them from.

Hell actually demonstrates the goodness of God in bringing honor to Himself through the execution of His wrath. It is significant to point out that the fact that God choose to display His judgment on those who were truly guilty (as everybody is), rather than only apparently guilty, proves His goodness. If God were not good, He could have manifest the fullness of His attributes by simply judging people who weren’t really guilty. The fact that He doesn’t work that way is evidence of His goodness. “Unless evil existed, it would be impossible for a good God to exhibit wrath, judgment, and power.”

Evil proves the goodness of God, for it means that when God demonstrates His wrath and judgement, He does it in a just way. If He were not good, then He would have demonstrated His wrath and judgement on people who didn’t deserve it.
Hell is not only evidence of the goodness of God, but also demonstrates the infinite value of His perfections. Why? Because the infinite penalty of attacking God's glory—eternal punishment in hell—reveals the infinite value of the glory that was attacked. Since God is of infinite value, and all sins are ultimately committed against God, all sins therefore deserve an infinite penalty. Thus, the everlasting punishment of hell makes clear that the glory of God that has been attacked by those in hell is of infinite value.

Second, not everybody has to benefit from the greater good in order for God to be justified in bringing it about. For if it is best that not everybody benefits from the greater good, then the fact that not everybody benefits from the greater good is itself part of the greater good—and therefore justified. For example, if God saved everybody, it would seem as if salvation was a birth-right. It would seem that He owed it to us. Therefore, we might not appreciate it as fully. Also, if God saved everybody, then the seriousness of sin might not be as fully upheld. For then it might appear that there are no ultimate consequences for attacking His glory. Finally, we have already seen how judgment upon sin is necessary for God to display the full range of His glory. For these reasons, it is best that God not save everybody, and therefore hell is consistent with the greater good defense.

To this I might add that if God were good, He would not exclude anybody from heaven that deserves to be there. And He would not consign anybody to hell that does not deserve to be there. But God doesn't do either of these things, which is evidence of His goodness. The fact is that everybody deserves hell because everybody has sinned. So those who are in hell, deserve to be there. Likewise, nobody deserves heaven. So the astonishing thing is not that there are people in hell, but that there are people in heaven. It is an amazing testimony of God's grace that He has provided forgiveness for those who hope in His Son so that they could be given the wonders of heaven—the very opposite of what they deserve. So God's goodness is very much magnified in the fact that He doesn't consign anybody to hell who doesn't deserve to be there, but He does bring many people to heaven who don't deserve to be there.

Why Doesn't Evil Ruin God's Happiness?

But how can God be happy in light of all the calamity which He permits? And does the fact that evil is made use of by God for a greater good mean that He doesn't consider it that bad? John Piper summarizes the solution Jonathan Edwards gave to this problem:

...the infinite complexity of the divine mind is such that God has the capacity to look at the world through two lenses. He can look through a narrow lens or through a wide-angle lens. When God looks at a painful or wicked event through his narrow lens, he sees the tragedy or the sin for what it is in itself and he is angered and grieved. 'I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the
Lord God’ (Ezekiel 18:32). But when God looks at a painful or wicked event through his wide-angle lense, he sees the tragedy or the sin in relation to everything leading up to it and everything flowing out from it. He sees it in relation to all the connections and effects that form a pattern or mosaic stretching into eternity. This mosaic in all its parts—good and evil—brings him delight.67

Thus, evil does not ruin God’s happiness because all things considered, it is made to work towards His glory. And God nonetheless despises all evil to the fullest extent because He not only views it through the wide lens to see how it is good for Him to allow it, but also through the narrow lens to see how abhorrent it is in itself.

Is Fighting Against Evil Fighting Against God’s Plan?

Does the fact that evil is allowed by God as part of His plan mean that fighting against evil is to fight against God, and therefore we ought not to fight evil? This seems to be the misunderstanding David Griffen has in his critique of John Calvin’s position.68 However, Calvin and all major theologians who hold to absolute divine sovereignty assert that God wills things in different ways and for different reasons. For example, when I am hungry I do not conclude that God must want me to starve to death, and so eating must be fighting against Him. Rather, I conclude that I ought to have lunch, and hunger is perhaps the means God is using to cause me to have lunch.

The distinctions between what theologians call God’s will of command and will of decree is crucial here. God’s will of command is what we ought to do, such as help the poor and fight against evil, for God has told us to do these things in Scripture. His will of command is what reflects the perfections of His nature. God’s will of decree is what He actually brings to pass in the world—either by direct cause (as in the case of goodness) or permission (as in the case of evil). Our duty is to follow God’s will of command, not try to figure out His will of decree. In fighting against evil, we are not opposing God because we are being obedient to His will of command—the will He commands us to follow. And this may in fact be the sovereign means He uses to eliminate the evil.

Augustine speaks well concerning the two wills in God: “Wherefore these mighty works of God, exquisitely perfect, according to every bent of His will, are such that, in a wonderful and ineffable way, that is not done without the will of God which is even done contrary to His will, because it could not be done at all, unless He permitted it to be done; and yet, He does not permit unwillingly, but willingly. Nor, as the God of goodness, would He permit a thing to be done evilly, unless, as the God of omnipotence, He could work good even out of the evil done.”69
Do Greater Good Defenses Make the End Justify the Means?

In asserting that God allowed evil for a greater good, do greater good defenses fall prey to the error that good consequences make a bad act good? The answer is no. First, we saw above how evil is not minimized by the fact that God overrules it for His glory. Second, God’s permission of evil is not a bad act that is justified by its good consequences because God permits sin without doing sin. Thus, there is nothing immoral about God permitting sin. As Paul Helm writes, “Such an arrangement would be immoral only if permitting or ordaining [sin] was itself immoral. And for this to be immoral God would have to be the author of sin, be sinful. Our previous argument has been that this is not, and cannot be, the case.” 70 Therefore, the end does not justify the means because there is nothing inherently wrong with the Creator of the universe permitting sin to enter that universe, and the sin itself that He allows is minimized in no way.

Is There Such a Thing as Pointless Evil?

A common objection against greater good theodicies is that many evils appear to serve not good purpose. Thus, it would seem that it is not reasonable to conclude that God is really working in all things for the best.

William Lane Craig addresses this objection well: “We just don’t know how the sufferings we endure might be used of God in our lives or, if not ours, in the lives of those around us. Yes, they often look pointless, but we are simply not in a position to judge.” 71 In other words, appearances are not a good foundation for such objections.

On the other hand, the Supremacy of God Defense does provide a good basis for understanding evil that is apparently pointless. Since God works for the sake of His glory in all things—good and evil—we can be certain that the apparently pointless evils that happen really do have a purpose. God hates evil too much, and loves His glory too much, to allow needless evils to happen. So we don’t know how every evil event will specifically glorify God, but we do know that they will somehow—for we have already seen the general pattern of how suffering and evil are made to ultimately result in glory to God. The love of God for His glory is a much more solid foundation for our conclusions on this issue than the appearance from our limited perspective.

Is it Worth the Cost?

To this the objector often responds that even if all evils are allowed for a good purpose, it is not
worth the price. However, we have seen that the glory of God is, by definition, infinitely valuable. And since the glory of God is the ultimate purpose for all things that happen, obviously it is all worth the price!

All suffering is finite. God’s glory is infinite. Therefore, the good that God is working for in all things is very clearly something so great as to render the evil “cost-effective.” In fact, a more reasonable conclusion from the monstrosity of evil is to conclude that it demonstrates just how valuable the glory of God is. For clearly it would take a very valuable good to make the permission of evils such as the Holocaust “cost-effective.” Therefore, God’s glory must be of astounding worth!

Do Greater Good Defenses Actually Deny the Reality of Evil?

Finally, philosophers such as David Griffen will respond that in asserting that all evils are made by God to result in a greater good, I am actually denying the reality of true evil. Griffen distinguishes evil form genuine evil, evil being bad things which happen but result in a greater good, and genuine evil being bad things which do not result in a greater good, but all things considered the world would have been better off without them. He implies (look at his term “genuine evil”) that any theodicy which rejects the existence of genuine evil is not taking evil seriously enough and is therefore deficient. He asserts that the greater good defenses result in a false confidence that the problem is solved because believing that “a good God would not want to prevent all evil, since much evil turns to contribute to a higher good,” is actually a rejection of the truth that evil exists.

While there is indeed no such thing as genuine evil in the way Griffen defines it, this does not mean, as Griffen implies, that the evil that occurs is minimized or not really “evil.” Griffen seems to failing to grasp the fact that just because evil results in a greater good does not mean that it is not really evil. In regards to a tragedy of natural evil, a friend of mine, for example, had to endure the death of his mother in High School. The fact that, by his own testimony, this has made him a stronger person does not minimize in any way the tragedy and suffering he went through. Rather, it gives the suffering a purpose and makes it bearable. To deny the greater good that came about through this situation would not help in retaining the seriousness of evil, and would actually make evil more difficult to bear.

In regards to a tragedy of moral evil, the crucifixion of Christ is the most wicked thing that humans have ever done. Yet it was also God’s plan for securing the salvation of His people. God made the evil intentions of those who wanted to get rid of Christ backfire and result in good. Yet those who crucified Christ cannot take any credit for our salvation because they were intending something else, something wicked. And it is just as obvious that the good which came from the crucifixion does not in any way make their actions excusable or less evil. The desire to crucify Christ is by its own nature evil.
Griffen seems to be forgetting that good and evil are not determined by their consequences. Rather, something is morally good or evil based upon its conformity to the commands of God and the purity of one’s intentions.

Therefore, the fact that God overruled the sin of those who crucified Christ and made it have good consequences for His people in no way minimizes its wickedness. For evil is not made good by positive consequences any more than good is made evil by negative consequences. The fact that evil remains wicked even though God uses it for good is what we earlier illustrated with the example of my (hypothetical) neighbor maliciously locking me into my basement, and thus unintentionally working towards my deliverance from a tornado.

Second, evil is not minimized by the greater good God brings out of it because evil does not result in this greater good due to anything inherent in the nature of evil itself, but only due to the omnipotence and wisdom of God whereby He overrules evil for good. Therefore, evil itself can take no credit for what happens. For *God* is the one who acted in goodness to make the evil have good results.

Third, the greater good defense actually establishes the seriousness of sin. For example, one of God’s goals is to show how foolish it is to disobey Him. So when sin occurs, one of the good things God brings out of it is the demonstration of how sin is foolish. How is the sin in any way minimized here? It was shown to be foolish! Its seriousness is the very thing which made the greater good possible.

Fourth, evil is not minimized by most greater good defenses because most of them, including the SGD, acknowledge that God does not save everybody. Thus, there are many people who eternally endure the terrible consequences of sin. This punishment does result in a greater good for creation as a whole, but not for them. Therefore, God manifestly displays how serious sin is.

Fifth, as I have referred to before, when God brings good out of evil He is actually making it backfire upon itself. If I cause my opponent’s evil plans to blow up in his face and bring about my victory (thus “using” it for a greater good), how have I minimized the seriousness of those evil plans? Again, this doesn’t in any way minimize how terrible it is. Rather, it keeps it from exalting itself by having the last laugh. It is strange indeed to imply that in order to maintain the seriousness of evil, we must allow evil to have the last laugh! It is only in bringing about the greater good through it, and thus frustrating its ultimate plans, that evil it is kept in its place and humiliated. This is necessary for a universe where good is the victor over evil. The universe that Griffen wants, with evil that does not result in a greater good, is one where evil wins. For if any evil occurrence does *not* result in a greater good, then evil has won the day because it got its way and ruined God’s ultimate, and good, plans. Evil would then be more powerful than good.
So there are really only two options. Either evil does not result in greater good, and thus evil has the upper hand, or else evil does result in a greater good, and thus does not have the upper hand. Really it is the first option which defeats goodness, not the second. Why must it be concluded that evil has the upper hand in order for it to be considered genuinely evil?

In sum, the greater good defense does not minimize evil or secretly deny that evil is real, but does put evil in the proper perspective. We must beware of giving evil too much credit.

CONCLUSION

From what we have seen, it seems that Greg Bahnsen is correct in saying, “Therefore, it should not be thought that ‘the problem of evil’ is anything like an intellectual [or, I would add, emotional] basis for a lack of faith in God. It is rather simply the personal expression of such a lack of faith.” The goodness, love, and righteousness of God can all be upheld in the face of the existence of evil. Thus, the most forceful objection to theism, and especially Christian theism, fails.

There is no way to escape having a theodicy of our own. If we ignore the problem of evil, that is our theodicy. If we ignore God, then that is our theodicy. We cannot not react in some way to the problem, and for that reason we are all taking refuge in some theodicy. The question is—are we taking refuge in a theodicy that can provide genuine hope and victory?

ALTERNATIVE THEODICIES

By relating the Supremacy of God Defense to some of the other major theodicies which have been offered, our perspective on all that is involved in solving the problem of evil will be greatly enhanced. By examining the claims of the various theodicies, our understanding of the overall issue will be both deepen and broadened. By examining the points of disagreement between the SGD and its alternatives, I can more closely demonstrate the adequacy of the SGD. It should become more precise exactly what the SGD claims, why it makes the claims it does, and how securely it is able to withstand the opposing arguments. Thus, our comparison will demonstrate more fully the reasons for affirming the superior validity of my position and the superior satisfaction it offers.

Since the source of my theodicy is the Christian Scriptures, and my goal is to demonstrate that they present the most satisfying solution to the problem of evil, in relating these theodicies to the SGD I will necessarily be relating them to the Scriptures.
Of course, as I pointed out at the beginning, most of the liberal theologians dispute the traditional Christian understanding of the Scriptures. And even among the theologians who accept the authority of the Bible and hold to the traditional understanding of its doctrines there is disagreement on some key points concerning the problem of evil. By interacting the Bible with these various theodicies, these differences in interpretation will be revealed and dealt with. This will not only provide opportunity to demonstrate the accuracy of the SGD’s understanding of the Scriptures in regards to the various issues involved, but also provide an even greater opportunity to show that the Bible accords with reason.

As I stated earlier, my goal in regards to the liberal theologians is to demonstrate that it is best to let the Bible be our guide. In regards to the theologians who accept the traditional Christian beliefs but have formulated a theology that is different from the SGD at many points, my goal is to demonstrate why I believe that their theodicy is contrary to the Scriptures. In regards to those who are not professional scholars, my goal is to bring forth much of the biblical teaching concerning God and the world so that it can have greater prominence in our lives.

Finally, a biblical evaluation of each theodicy will also be relevant because most of the theodicies have been formulated by professing Christians. Therefore, it is appropriate to compare their theodicies with the Bible in order to determine whether the theologians are within the tradition that they claim that they are. As philosophy of religion expert John Hick acknowledges, a theodicy must “be consistent with the data both of the religious tradition on which it is based, and of the world” in order to be successful.74

We will examine five of the most significant theodicies which are asserted today. The next two theodicies are classified, like the SGD, as greater good defenses. From there, we will move on to the finite-good defenses. The first one we will examine limits God’s power, the second one limits His goodness. Finally, we will investigate a denial defense which claims that evil is unreal.

**GREATER GOOD DEFENSES**

The two remaining greater good defenses which we will explore are the soul-making theodicy of John Hick and the Free-will defense that is so popular among many Christian philosophers. We will begin with the Free Will Defense.

**THE FREE WILL DEFENSE: GOD SURRENDERS CONTROL**

By far one of the most common theodicies today, especially among Christians, is the Free-Will Defense (which I will refer to as FWD). Like the Supremacy of God Defense (SGD), the FWD accepts the
traditional Christian position that God created Adam and Eve perfectly righteous and innocent. In the world as God originally created it, there was no moral evil and no natural evil. And like the SGD, the free-will defenders are adamant in arguing that humans are to blame for bringing evil into the world. Finally, both the SGD and FWD agree that God is both perfectly good and all-powerful.

However, this is where the FWD makes a sharp departure from the SGD. While both agree that God could have prevented Adam from falling and thus prevented all subsequent evils, they disagree on the reason that God did not prevent Adam from sinning. According to the SGD, the reason God did not do so is because permitting evil into the universe temporarily would allow God to bring about a greater display of His glory (and thus a greater good to creation) than could otherwise be achieved. According to the FWD, the reason God did not prevent Adam from sinning is that to do so would have taken away his free-will and turned him into a robot. So according to the FWD, God did not have specific purposes to accomplish in allowing evil, but was simply letting free-will run its course.

The Importance of Freedom

The central assumption, therefore, of the FWD is that God cannot prevent His creatures from sinning without destroying their humanity and moral accountability. The FWD claims that if God were to act to decisively prevent a human, such as Adam, from sinning He would be taking away his freedom and thus treating him as less than human. So in order to preserve human freedom, God must leave our choices ultimately up to us—He must leave the outcome ultimately in our hands. As free-will exponent Greg Boyd declares, “A freedom which was prevented from being exercised whenever it was going to be misused simply wouldn’t be a freedom.”

Another argument they give is that if we did not have the freedom of ultimate self-determination, then we would be robots.

In giving humans this freedom, God was by definition placing the outcome of Adam’s choice to obey or disobey outside of His own hands. For if God were to cause humans, such as Adam, to choose righteousness, their choice would no longer be free. And, if it is not free in this sense, they claim that it is not genuine. Therefore, when God tested Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He had to leave the decision up to them so that they could make a genuine choice and not be robots. So even though God desired in all ways that Adam obey, he considered the gift of freedom as worth the cost of evil, because without it we would be mere robots.

Unfortunately, things turned out for the worse. Adam and Eve choose to disobey God, and thus they and the entire human race became sinful. Sin is no small matter, and therefore their moral evil brought with it the consequences of natural evil. The world would now be a place where we would suffer
not only for man’s inhumanity to man, but a place where we would at times be in danger from nature itself.

The gist of the FWD is that human sin is not God’s fault because it resulted from our bad use of free-will. God is not to blame for natural evil, either, because it is the consequence which resulted from our own misuse of free will.

Having examined the importance of freedom on the FWD, it will be worthwhile to explore more fully the relationship this kind of freedom has to God’s omnipotence and goodness. Christian philosopher William Lane Craig, who offers one of the most sophisticated expositions of the FWD, says that there are two false assumptions concerning our views of God’s omnipotence and goodness which create the problem of evil. The first is that an omnipotent God “can create any world that He chooses”, and the second is that a perfectly good God “would prefer a world without evil over a world with evil.”

Free-will and the Omnipotence of God

Craig dismisses the first assumption by pointing to free will. Yes, he says, it is conceivable that there is a world where everyone freely chooses to do right. However, since it is best for God to give humans free will, “it is impossible for Him to guarantee what their choices will be. All He can do is create the circumstances in which a person is able to make a free choice and then stand back and let him make that choice.” Craig continues,

Now what that means is that there may be worlds which are possible in and of themselves, but which God is incapable of creating. Suppose, for example, that in every world where God created free creatures those creatures would freely choose to do evil. In such a case, it is the creatures themselves who bring about the evil, and God can do nothing to prevent their doing so unless He removes their free will. Thus it is possible that every world God could create containing free creatures would be a world with sin and evil.

But doesn’t it deny God’s omnipotence to claim that there are worlds which are possible in themselves but which He is incapable of creating? To answer this, Craig and the free-will defenders rightly point to the need for a precise definition of omnipotence. The traditional view of omnipotence has never meant that God can do absolutely anything. Rather, it means that He can do anything that is logically possible. As C.S. Lewis explains, “Meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words ‘God can.’ It remains true that all things are possible with God: the intrinsic [logical] impossibilities are not things but nonentities.”

The Neo-Arminian theologian Richard Swindburne refines this even further. He refined definition
states that omnipotence means the ability to bring about any state of affairs that is logically possible.\textsuperscript{79} But if a state of affairs is logically contradictory, not even God can bring it about—not because there is a limit on His power, but because, in Lewis's words, "nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God."\textsuperscript{80}

This definition of omnipotence is an extremely helpful distinction which I agree with, and most of the anti-theists have come to accept as well. Though I disagree with the way the FWD makes use of it (as I will explain later), this refinement of omnipotence does show how the FWD upholds the omnipotence of God.

As we saw above, the fundamental assumption of the FWD is that it is an intrinsic impossibility for God to make morally responsible creatures and at the same time intervene to determine their choices. For if God causes us to do something, such as obey Him, it is by definition not free (in their sense) and, they conclude, therefore not genuine. Thus, it is no limit on God's omnipotence that He could not prevent human sin without eliminating our moral responsibility.

**Free-will and the Goodness of God**

Moving on to the second false assumption, Craig finds in the problem of evil, he brings into question the assertion that a perfectly good God would want a world without any evil. He says "The fact is that in many cases we allow pain and suffering to occur in a person's life in order to bring about some greater good or because we have some sufficient reason for allowing it."\textsuperscript{81} So, for example, God may have allowed the Holocaust because it was the only way to bring about a certain good without violating human freedom.

In response to this, there are many who object that the FWD does not "get God off the hook" because His gift of freedom was not worth the cost. Knowing that free-will would result in so much evil, they ask, shouldn't God have decided not to create at all? But the free-will defender responds that this objection misunderstands the central theme of theodicy. As I mentioned earlier, the FWD believes that freedom was worth the cost because genuine love is only possible if we have free-will, and love is the most precious thing in the universe. To prevent the possibility for true love out of fear for evil would have been giving sin the ultimate victory.

Further, the FWD points out that God has taken action to redeem fallen humanity. God became man in Christ, who died for sins and rose from the dead so that humans could be reconciled to God. So God gives everybody the opportunity to repent of their mis-use of free-will and be given an eternal life of blessedness. Because many do repent and receive everlasting salvation, free will was certainly worth the
temporary presence of evil in the world.

To the objection that God should still not have created because many people also reject his offer of salvation and perish eternally, most agree with C.S. that hell should not be allowed to veto heaven. As Craig says, "Why should the joy and blessedness of those who would receive Christ be precluded by some other people who would freely spurn God’s love and forgiveness?"³¹

**Free-will and Natural Evil**

In regards to the problem of natural evil, the FWD is able to say more than that our sin has brought about such a world where these disasters happen. The popular view has become that humans aren’t the only free-wills that God has to deal with. There are also demons who have free-will. Demons, then, are said to be the cause of natural evils. God allows them to do this because he doesn’t want to take away their free-will any more than he wants to take away the free-will of humans.

Obviously, such an explanation seems very far-fetched, which the free-willers acknowledge. But they point out that the solution doesn’t need to be likely, it only needs to be possible. With this reasoning, C.S. Lewis has provided us with a very interesting explanation of animal pain. He asks, what possible value could there be in animal suffering? For they haven’t sinned, and it doesn’t seem that they will be repaid for their suffering in the afterlife. Lewis responds that animal suffering seems to be the work of demons. Satan and his demons somehow corrupted the animal kingdom long ago, changing it from a state of peace into the dog-eat-dog world we see now.

**Does the Amount of Evil Make God’s Existence Unlikely?**

Philosophers have come to generally acknowledge that the FWD gives a successful solution to the logical problem of evil. It may not be true, they say, but it is a possibility and therefore it at least shows that the theist is not holding an inconsistent set of beliefs.

However, this has not silenced the skeptics. Instead, they have regrouped for a second wave of attack, called the probabilistic problem of evil. In this wave of attack, it is asserted that there may not be any logical contradiction between God and evil, but the atrocious amount of evil in the universe makes it very unlikely that God exists.

Summing up Craig’s answer to the probabilistic problem, he first says that even if it cannot be answered, God’s existence is still probable because of the good evidence for God’s existence and the “testimony of the Holy Spirit” who subjectively testifies to the truth of Christianity. Second, the coexistence of God and evil is probable in light of the Christian belief that God’s main goal for humans is
knowledge of God (which is an infinitely valuable good), and that there is an eternal life of reward and punishment.

Third, he points out that the concept of probability is overly vague and subjective. Who is to say how much evil renders God’s existence improbable? This leads to his fourth point, which is that God most likely has a morally sufficient reason for every single instance of evil in the world. And he goes on to say that perhaps, given human freedom, God has set up this world to have the optimal balance between good and evil. Thus, “any world containing less evil might also have contained less good.” Those who claim that God is allowing too much evil should recognize that if he were to allow less evil, that might result in a lot less good as well.

**PROBLEMS WITH THE FWD**

I reject the FWD because I believe it lessens the supremacy of God. And the reason it does this is because of its central concern for human freedom. My first four objections to the FWD, therefore, concern its concept of free-will. The fifth objection brings out the practical and emotional difficulties created by the focus on freedom instead of God’s supremacy. And the last objection will bring us to a closer look at the Scriptures, which both the FWD and SGD accept as authoritative, to see if the FWD is being faithful to its source of authority.

**The FWD seems to make human freedom its focus instead of the supremacy of God**

First, it seems to present God as more concerned about human freedom than His own glory. For God is not, on the FWD, allowing evil because He specifically desires to exalt Himself through it, but because it is the only way He can maintain the liberty of His creatures. This seems to make God’s ultimate commitment be to something that is not supremely valuable—for His motive in allowing evil is not the infinite worth of His glory, but the finite freedom of human beings.

**Free-will takes honor away from God**

Of course, free-will defenders respond that God is more glorified by us if we choose Him freely (in the sense explained above). Thus, they argue that God is acting for His glory in allowing human freedom. I acknowledge that they sincerely believe that they are upholding the glory of God. But I believe that they are nonetheless misguided. As Jonathan Edward’s has argued in his excellent sermon “God Glorified in Man’s Dependence,” God is more glorified in us when He is the source of everything that is good about us (and thus is the cause of our love and obedience to Him), because if God is not the source of something
good (such as a human decision to love and obey Him), He does not receive full credit—and thus full glory—for that good. And if He acts in a way that gives ultimate glory for anything good to something other than Himself, then He would not be preserving the infinite worth of His glory. This, as we saw earlier, would be unrighteous.

Therefore, since the FWD asserts that God is seeking for humans to produce their love and obedience ultimately from themselves (ultimately because free-will defenders acknowledge that God influences people to love, but they deny that this influence is ever made strong enough to be the cause of that love), then it seems that the FWD has God acting in an unrighteous way. So far from vindicating the righteousness of God, the FWD actually raises more questions about God’s righteousness than it solves.

The real source of genuine love is God, not free-will

Third, the FWD assertion that if God were to cause us to love Him it would turn us into robots does not seem to be valid. Instead, it seems most reasonable to believe that if God is our creator, He can cause us to love Him without destroying the authenticity of our love. In fact, the FWD agrees with the SGD in declaring that “God is love” (1 John 4:8). But if God is love, it is hard to see how we could have genuine love that is not caused by Him. If God is love, it seems as if the only love that is truly genuine is love which God creates in our hearts. Therefore, it is utterly misguided to argue that God had to give humans free-will in order to make it possible for us to genuinely love Him.

At this point it should be obvious why the SGD, in asserting the sovereign control of God over human choices, does not destroy the genuineness of our choices. For the SGD does not deny that humans who love God do so willingly and from the heart. God does not force anybody to love Him because He makes His elect want to love Him. And the very reason that this is genuine love is precisely because the Creator of all things, who is love itself, is the Creator of this love as well. And just as God does this today when He brings people to faith in His Son, so also He could have done it for Adam in the Garden of Eden and prevented Him from sinning in the first place.

Free-will is philosophically contradictory

Fourth, Jonathan Edwards has offered a sharp refutation of the claim that humans have the power to determine their own actions. He argues that the FWD concept of a freedom conceived as the power of ultimate self-determination—where our choice is ultimately up to us and not God—is contradictory and therefore impossible. Edwards is very concise in his argument, though he has expanded it immensely into his excellent work called The Freedom of the Will. His major undercutting of the FWD form of free-will
is as follows:

If the will determines itself, one of these three things must be meant, viz. 1. That that very same act of the will determines itself. But this is as absurd as to say that something makes itself; and it supposes it to be before it is. For the act of determining is as much prior to the thing determined, as the act of making is before the thing made. Or, 2. The meaning must be, that the will determines its own act, by some other act that is prior to it in order of nature; which implies that the will acts before its first act. Or, 3. The meaning must be, that the faculty, considered at the same time as perfectly without act, determines its own consequent act; which is to talk without a meaning, and is a great absurdity. To suppose that the faculty, remaining at the same time perfectly without act, can determine any thing, is a plain contradiction; for determining is acting.86

Practical difficulties of the FWD

Fifth, the FWD has many practical difficulties which make it hard to endure suffering with joy. What good is it to me if God has all-power, but doesn’t use it to ensure that things are going to work out for the best as I follow Him? How does a God who possesses all power but doesn’t generally use it differ in principle from a God who doesn’t even have all power to begin with?

On the FWD, all pain does not have a specific purpose. God does not allow the evil He does because He specifically planned it for the sake of a specific greater good, but simply because He is letting free-will run its course. Greg Boyd, a popular free-will defender, (unknowingly) brings out the devastating implications of this: “I know Christians frequently speak about ‘the purpose of God’ in the midst of a tragedy caused by someone else. There was a young girl this year at Bethel who was killed by a drunk driver, and a lot of students were wondering what purpose God had in ‘taking her home.’ But this I regard to simply be a piously confused way of thinking. The drunk driver alone is to blame for the girl’s untimely death. The only purpose of God in the whole thing is His design to allow morally responsible people the right to decide whether to drink responsibly or irresponsibly.”87

As Boyd makes clear, the FWD robs one of the comfort and peace of knowing that his life is under the control of a good and sovereign God. Many who have endured tragedy, such as drunk driving accidents, have remarked that the worst part was not the pain, but the apparent randomness of it all. The FWD, as Boyd’s illustration demonstrates, cannot help these people with this part of the pain.88 Any comfort which would come from knowing that God willed this to happen for your good would be dismissed as “a piously confused way of thinking.” The practical costs of the FWD are too high. If suffering has no specific divine purpose, it has no point.

The FWD is in opposition to its own source of authority

It has always been peculiar to me that I have never seen any theologians point to any biblical
passages which teach their fundamental assumption that God must allow us freedom from His control in order to maintain our moral agency. When I looked into this issue further several years ago, I discovered that the biblical authors seem to actually be at odds with the FWD.

For example, I do not see how the FWD can be reconciled with Paul’s statement that God “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11). I wish to point out two things from this verse. First, as many commentators have pointed out, this verse expressly declares that God “works” or “brings about” everything that happens. Second, it should be noted that Paul says that God not only does this with “all things” (not just some things), but also does so according to His plan (and not, therefore, the free-will decisions of His creatures).

Likewise, the Psalms do not present God as one who shapes His plans around the free-will decisions of His creatures. For example, we read in Psalm 115:3 that “God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.” I wish to point out three things from this verse. First, the fact that God is in the heavens makes evident His absolute authority and kingship over all things. Second, this Psalm is saying that God does whatever He wants to. In other words, God is never prevented from being able to do what He plans. Third, God does whatever He wants. Thus, God’s plans are in accordance with His desires, and He is never hindered from the ability to carry them out.

This connects up well with Psalm 135:5, which states, “Whatever the Lord pleases, He does.” This verse not only declares that God is able to do everything He wants to, but that He actually does everything that He wants to. Thus, events never take a turn contrary to what God wants to happen, all things considered—for such a turn is surely something that God would want to prevent, and therefore according to this verse would prevent. “Whatever the Lord pleases, He does.”

From what we have seen, it seems that for all the good things that the FWD has in common with the SGD, in the areas where they differ the SGD is most satisfying and most reasonable. We will now move on to see if this trend continues with the remaining four theodicies we will examine.

THE IRANEAN THEODICY: EVIL HELPS CREATE SOULS

In formulating a relatively uncommon theodicy, Philosopher John Hick has recently made use of several elements of thought from a second century Bishop named Iraneaus. While Iraneaus had not developed a full blown theodicy, Hick has taken the central elements of his thought and added his own to formulate a unique approach to the problem.
Two Stages of Creation

This “Iranean Theodicy” distinguishes two stages of creation. In the first stage, God created human beings “as intelligent animals endowed with the capacity for immense moral and spiritual development.” Whereas the traditional Christian view is that God created humans fully mature and sinless, Hick’s theodicy differs in that it views humans as created imperfect, immature and therefore “at the beginning of a long process of growth.”

The second stage of creation began upon completion of the first stage and has continued through the present. In this stage, the immature, imperfect creatures which God has created “are gradually being transformed through their own free responses from human animals into ‘children of God.’” As we will see shortly, evil is a crucial tool needed for the maturing formulation of our souls in this second stage of creation. Thus, evil is necessary for God’s creation of our souls to reach its consummation.

In the first stage of creation, God created humans in an imperfect original state so that they could achieve perfection through their own decisions, their own co-operation, during the transforming process of the second stage of creation. There are two reasons Hick gives for this.

First, he believes that a human goodness that is a result of our own free decisions is much more valuable than “a goodness that has been created ready-made, without the free participation of the human agent.” Second, he believes that if humans had been originally created perfect and in the presence of God, we would not have been able to make a completely free choice to love Him. For then, choosing God would have been the only logical option, and thus not a “genuine” choice. Instead, God created humans at an epistemic distance so that we would make a choice among seemingly reasonable alternatives. Thus, our choices for God, when made, would be fully genuine.

From this, Hick formulates his answer as to the origin of moral evil: “... the answer of the Irenaean theodicy to the question of the origin of moral evil is that it is a necessary condition of the creation of humanity at an epistemic distance from God, in a state in which one has a genuine freedom in relation to one’s Maker and can freely develop, in response to God’s non-coercive presence, toward one’s own fulfillment as a child of God.”

A Revised View of the Fall

In light of his claim that humans were created immature and basically sinful from the start, Hick must re-interpret the biblical account of the fall of man. He re-interprets it as mythical symbolism meant to convey the fact that all people sin, instead of the traditional view that it is an historical account of the parents of the entire human race sinning against God and thus bringing guilt and corruption upon both
themselves and all of their descendants. Thus, he rejects the teaching of a literal Adam and Eve, of the Garden of Eden, and of their creation in original righteousness.

On his view, the “myth” of the fall “suggests to the modern reader that in man’s initial situation as a created being set in his own world, it was almost inevitable that he should direct his attention elsewhere than to God; and this not through some individual idiosyncrasy or culpable failing, but generically and unavoidably in all mankind.” Because his view makes sin inevitable, the mythical fall is not the catastrophe which the literal fall is portrayed as in the Scriptures. Nonetheless, Hick agrees with Iraneaus that the fall was “a failure within the second phase of this creative process, a failure that has multiplied the perils and complicated the route of the journey in which God is seeking to lead mankind.”

Hick sees the theory of evolution not only as evidence that man was created immature, rather than in perfect and original righteousness, but also as evidence for the two stages of creation. The long process of the development of the species Homo-sapiens was the first stage, and the second stage began when this species suddenly became more than just another animal. “And the creation of man in his own relatively autonomous world, in which the awareness of God is not forced upon him but in which he is cognitively free in relation to his Maker, is what mythological language calls the fall of man.”

So it seems clear how Hick’s theology accounts for human sin—it is the inevitable consequence of our being created in an immature state, and even though he claims that God created us as fallen, God cannot be faulted for this because it was the only way to allow us to make genuine decisions that would ultimately result in our complete goodness.

A World of Soul Making

But how does this account for pain and suffering? First, Hick points out that most human pain results from human sin—“misused freedom” and therefore is our fault, not God’s. But what about natural evils, such as tornadoes and earthquakes? Hick’s response goes to the heart of his theodicy, for it not only gives his explanation of natural evil, but is a further reason that he believes humans were created so susceptible to sinning.

Hick sees the world as a vale of “soul making” which is carried out through the second stage of creation. The “rough edges”—the pains and difficulties that we must endure in this world—are allowed by God because they allow us to develop our character in ways that couldn’t otherwise be achieved. Thus, the endurance of pain and suffering is necessary for us to develop many highly valuable character traits that would not otherwise be possible. As Hick explains,

Courage and fortitude would have no point in an environment in which there is, by definition, no
danger or difficulty. Generosity, kindness, the agape aspect of love, prudence, unselfishness, and other ethical notions that presuppose life in an objective environment could not even be formed. Consequently, such a world, however well it might promote pleasure, would be very ill adapted for the development of the moral qualities of human personality. In relation to this purpose it might well be the worst of all possible worlds!\textsuperscript{98}

The final crucial element of Hick’s theodicy is the reality of life after death. He gives two main reasons that his theodicy points to the reality of and need for life after death. First, many instances of evil have actually caused people to develop bad character qualities, rather than good. Therefore, it seems that the soul making must continue in a life beyond the grave. Second, he says “if we ask the ultimate question—whether the business of person making is worth all the toil and sorrow of human life—the answer must be in terms of a future good great enough to justify all that has happened on the way to it.”\textsuperscript{99}

Hick continues to develop the details of his theodicy in his book \textit{Evil and the God of Love}, such as a closer look at pain and suffering and the distinction between the two, animal pain, how he believes that hell is inconsistent with God’s goodness (something we examined above), and finally tries to answer a few main objections to his theodicy. But what we have seen is sufficient for our main purposes, and what remains is simply to evaluate the positive and negative elements of his theodicy. The objections I will offer are either ones that he has not dealt with at all, or ones that he has not dealt with very well.

\section*{Problems with the Soul-Making Theodicy

Fails to uphold the goodness of God

There are many problems with Hick’s theodicy which make it untenable. First, Hick’s claim that his theodicy makes God ultimately responsible for evil but not indictable for evil (because evil was the only way to carry out the second stage of creation, soul making) seems untenable. In the traditional Christian understanding (which the SGD affirms), God created man mature and righteous, and man corrupted himself. Thus, it is unmistakably clear that evil is man’s fault and not God’s.

But on Hick’s view, sin is the direct result of the way God created the world. Sin flows from the nature of things, and thus it is hard to see how God’s goodness is upheld. The way God made creation originally is a reflection of God, just as a painting is a reflection of the artist. If the world is now wicked as a result of \textit{man} corrupting it, then this wickedness is not a reflection on God, but man. But if, as Hick asserts, God originally created the world in a condition of natural evil and man in a condition of moral evil, that would seem to reflect badly upon His nature. Thus, it is hard to see how Hick’s theodicy upholds God’s goodness.
The foundation is insecure

Second, Hick’s view of how love for God must be freely chosen to be genuine (which seems to be the reason his theodicy takes the direction it does) is problematic. As I have already argued in response to the Free Will Defense, the kind of free-will Hick envisions (which is the same kind that the FWD envisions) is unnecessary for genuine human choices and love.

For God is the source of good, and everything He does is good. Thus, if He creates us in a state of genuine righteousness, or causes us to willingly love Him, it is a genuine righteousness and a genuine love. One doesn’t need to be free from the sovereignty of God in order to make genuine choices, for the genuineness of our choices stems from the fact that we are deliberately choosing what we want—something which the sovereignty of God over us upholds rather than destroys. Thus, there is no good reason to believe that God has created us at an “epistemic distance” from himself in order to preserve our freedom.

The process of soul making seems to be at odds with the goal

Third, many philosophers have pointed out that when the whole second stage of creation is complete, there will be no more need for virtues such as courage, compassion, etc. (at least in the form they take now) because there will be no more suffering. But if this is the case, why does God take us through such a process to develop them? For we won’t need them anymore when the process is complete! Hick does not give a good answer to this in his Evil and the God of Love.

COMPARING THE FWD AND THE IRENAEAN THEODICY

At this point one of the major differences between the Irenaean Theodicy and the common ground shared by the FWD and SGD can be appreciated. Whereas the FWD and SGD see the evil and suffering in the world as the ultimate consequence of the first sin of man, the Irenaean theodicy views the evil and suffering in the world as an essential stage in God’s creative process for man—a stage which God originally placed man into apart from man’s choice. Clearly the FWD and SGD are superior to the Irenaean theodicy at this point, for they hold that the suffering in the world is a direct result of the willful choice of humanity and wouldn’t have happened otherwise. The Irenaean view that man had no choice but to fall into a world of suffering and evil seems to be less demonstrative of the goodness of God.

ISSUES RAISED FOR THE SGD

Since Hick is a liberal theologian who, in the formulation of his theodicy, calls into question many
of the traditional interpretations of the Scriptures, this seems to be a good opportunity to explore the validity of these traditional interpretations.

**Was the world created good?**

First, the unified testimony of the biblical authors who touch on the state of the original creation seems to be that, contrary to Hick’s theodicy, humans were originally created in righteousness and full maturity. Humans were created fully mature (and thus not needing to go through the ‘vale of soul-making’) because “God created man in His own image” (Genesis 1:27). Humans were created in righteousness because God testified of all creation, including man, “And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Genesis 1:31). Likewise, we read in Ecclesiastes 7:29 that “God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices.”

Hick’s view of creation does not simply have a few select texts against it, but is against the whole storyline of the Bible. D.A. Carson, of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, does a good job emphasizing the relevance to the Bible’s whole story line in evaluating the problem of evil. Carson points out that in Genesis 1-2, God’s repeated verdict is “very good,” thus demonstrating that there is no sin and no suffering (for those things, as we saw above, are not “good”).

But upon the human rebellion of Genesis 3, we have the onset of suffering and death. The endlessly repeated “then he died...then he died...then he died...” in the records after the fall hauntingly demonstrates that something has gone wrong. Then the Old Testament books move us through the drama of how God deals with sin in the history of the nation of Israel through the animal sacrifices. This leads us to the New Testament, where God finally deals a decisive blow to sin by sending His Son (to whom the animal sacrifices pointed) to die on the cross. Finally, we come to the end of the Bible to discover “the ultimate reparation of the damage, ‘a new heaven and a new earth’ (Rev. 21:1), ‘The home of righteousness’ (2 Peter 3:13).” And just as this renewal of creation marks the end of pain and suffering (Revelation 21:3-5), so it also marks the end of sin (Revelation 21:27)—indicating, as we saw in Genesis where suffering entered after sin, that suffering is related to sin. So just as suffering began when sin began, when sin ends, suffering ends. Thus, it seems that the general storyline of the Bible does a much more satisfying job of upholding the goodness of God than does Hick’s theodicy.

**Were Adam and Eve the first humans?**

Second, the Bible’s own testimony seems to be, contrary to Hick’s claims, that Adam and Eve were literally the first humans, and all other humans have descended from them. This is the uniform
testimony of the Biblical authors who touch upon this issue, with Moses in Genesis 3:20 calling Eve “the mother of all the living,” Luke in Luke 3:38 including Adam in a historical genealogy to which the origin of all others in the genealogy is traced (and since there is no dispute that the other people in the genealogy are considered as historical persons by Luke, it is most reasonable to conclude that their source, Adam, is also considered historical), and Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:45 referring to him as “the first man.”

Was the fall a historical event?

Third, the testimony of Scripture seems to be that the fall of Adam and Eve was a literal historical event, and the corruption of the human race is the consequence of this fall. Hick, of course, believes that the biblical account of the fall of humans through Adam is a myth. There does not, however, seem to be any indication in the text of the Bible itself that the fall is intended as a myth. Further, the uniform testimony of all phases of Biblical revelation seems to be that the fall really was a historical event.

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul contrasts Adam and Christ in Romans 5:12-21. If Adam was not just as historical as Christ, this contrast would lose all meaning. But what is even more significant for our purposes is that the specific contrast at issue in this text is the disobedience of Adam and the results it had as opposed to the obedience of Christ and the results that it had. Paul seems to be teaching that Christ’s obedience was needed not only because of our individual sins, but because Adam’s disobedience plummeted the entire human race into sin.

For example, he writes “For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (v. 19). This contrast (which runs all the way from verse 12 to verse 19) would lose all meaning whatsoever if Adam (and his fall as our representative) was not just as historical as Christ (and his obedience as the representative of believers). For Adam and Christ are paralleled with each other.

Strangely, Hick acknowledges that Paul views Adam as a historical individual and his fall as historical. Nonetheless, he appears to simply dismiss this fact, thereby violating his own criteria that a valid theodicy must be consistent with the tradition it claims to be within.

Hick’s main argument for rejecting a historical fall and believing that God made men immature is the theory of evolution. However, writing before Hick, C.S. Lewis anticipated Hick’s argument that the scientific theory of evolution has shown that “so far from having fallen out of a primeval state of virtue and happiness, men have slowly risen from brutality and savagery.”

Lewis, himself a believer (unfortunately) in theistic evolution, states: “If by saying that man rose from brutality you mean simply that man is physically descended from animals, I have no objection. But it
does not follow that the further back you go the more brutal— in the sense of wicked or wretched— you will find man to be. No animal has moral virtue: but it is not true that all animal behavior is of the kind one should call ‘wicked’ if it were practiced by men....Science, then, has nothing to say either for or against the doctrine of the Fall.” While it is unfortunate that Lewis himself rejects the historical doctrine of the fall, his reasoning here successfully demonstrates that even on Hick’s own terms, his claim that humans were created immature is not necessary.

Do the saved enter into eternal joy at death?

Fourth, Hick’s belief in continuing suffering after death for those who are saved (so that they can finish developing their virtues) does not find support in the biblical text. The apostle Paul, for example, teaches that at death the Christian goes to be with Christ (Philippians 1:21) who is in heaven (Philippians 3:21), where there is no corruption (Matthew 6:20).

Is there eternal punishment for the unsaved upon death?

Fifth, Hick’s belief in universalism (that all people will be saved in the end) is also against the testimony of the authors of the Scriptures. While an extended defense of the reality and eternity of hell is outside the scope of our purposes, it is enough for me that Jesus taught that hell is just as everlasting as eternal life. “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46). The parallelism between life and punishment indicates that punishment is just as long lasting as life—and thus eternal (for who disputes that Jesus believed heaven to be eternal?). Salvation can be entered into by any and all in this life by banking all of one’s hope on Christ for a happy future. But once death comes, the door is closed (Luke 16:23-26).

FINITE GOD SOLUTIONS

PROCESS THEOLOGY: A GOD WHO LACKS POWER

Dualism is the name for a whole group of theodicies which postulate that evil is something that is inherent in the nature of things and is not subject to God’s control. It has genuine power in its own right that stands over and against God, rather than a power that is subject to God’s (as in the greater good defenses). There are varying degrees of dualism. The most extreme form posits the existence of two equally powerful rival gods, one good and one evil.

Some more recent forms of dualism are less extreme by positing the existence of only one god.
However, this god is thought to be finite in power, and thus is still unable to exercise full control over the universe. Harold Kushner, a Jewish Rabbi who authored the popular book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, came to this view as he struggled with the death of son and concluded that we need to forgive God.107

Slightly more extreme than this form but less extreme than the first form, many forms of dualism go so far as to deny that God is the creator of the universe. This is part of the most popular form of dualism in academic circles today, called Process Theology. Process Theology is very similar, though not identical, with the dualism of Plato, who held that there is only one god, but this “good but limited deity stands over against an independent realm of chaotic and intractable matter which he is only partially able to control to his own ends” and which he did not fully create.108 Because of the current significance of Process Theology, we will explore it as the representative of the dualist theodicies.

Process theology is a 20th century line of thought stemming primarily from the philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. This view is sometimes called “bipolar theism” because it believes that there are two poles to God—the physical pole and the mental pole. The physical pole is God’s physical relation to the world. It is the influence of the world on the nature of God, God experiencing what the world does. Since the universe is constantly changing, God is therefore undergoing constant change as well (hence the name “process theology”). The mental pole is God’s eternal potential which transcends the universe.

David Griffen, a leading exponent of Process Theology, has recently brought together a systematic formulation of its answer to the problem of evil. His view is extensively developed in his work *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, and summarized (as well as slightly updated) in *Encountering Evil*, a book where five different authors present their unique theodicies and interact with one another.

There are three central elements to Griffen’s theodicy which need to be highlighted. First is his modified version of omnipotence and how it attempts to absolve the Process god from blame for evil. Second is his understanding how this god’s goodness led him to risk the possibility of evil he would not be powerful enough to control. And third is the way in which the process god is responsible for evil.

**Step 1: An Alteration of Omnipotence**

Central to Griffen’s Process Theodicy is the concept of a God who is not all-powerful. He writes, “My solution dissolves the problem of evil by denying the doctrine of omnipotence fundamental to it.”109 Of course, in doing so he must overcome much opposition from thousands of years of traditional theology. For this reason, Griffen must first attempt to show the traditional view of omnipotence to be false in order
to have any hope of making headway.

Philosophers and theologians have traditionally dismissed as inadequate any theodicy which denies God's omnipotence. Griffen believes that there are three reasons for this. The first is cultural conditioning. Our history and western cultural environment has conditioned us to believe that the only God worthy of worship is one who is omnipotent. He cites Terence Penelhum as summing this up: "Christianity may not have convinced everybody, but it has certainly made us all very finicky. For...the only God in whose existence we can evince interest is one whom it would be proper to worship"^{110}—and a finite God is not considered worthy of worship. The result is that most philosophers and theologians "are so 'bored' with the 'finite' God that they curtly dismiss it with mockery and name-calling."^{111} Griffen, however, believes that a god who lacks omnipotence would still be worthy of worship because he does not believe that omnipotence is necessary for god to be perfect. He asserts that if we were free of our "cultural blinders" we would see that too.

Second, Griffen believes that a desire to have a vulnerable opponent has driven most philosophers to consider the finite views of God as silly. He cites the example of atheists such as Antony Flew and Roland Puccetti, who insist that "the traditional notion of omnipotence belongs to the very 'concept of God'"^{112} because, according to Griffen, they believe that it is very simple to show that there is a contradiction between God’s omnipotence, goodness, and the existence of evil. Thus, they think they can very easily dismiss God’s existence all together, rather than having to deal also with the possibility that God may yet exist—albeit in a more limited way.

Third, Griffen believes that the logical argument which theists use to prove that God must be omnipotent is fallacious. The argument (which we saw earlier) for God’s omnipotence is basically that God, by definition, is a perfect reality. Therefore, he must possess all “admirable attributes” in the greatest conceivable manner—for if He did not, we could conceive of something greater than God and he would therefore not be what He is defined to be (a perfect reality). Omnipotence is the quality of possessing all-power and being limited by nothing outside oneself. Since this is a perfection that is conceivable and admirable, then it follows that, since God is a perfect reality, He is omnipotent.

Griffen takes exception to the premise that a being with omnipotence, defined in this way, is conceivable. In arguing for this objection, he first rightly points out that if God is omnipotent and has all power, then nothing else—animals, humans, the world—has any power in and of itself. Rather, all power that they have is given from God and is thus a delegated, rather than inherent, power. But what is power? Griffen defines it as the ability to determine yourself and to influence others. Thus, on the traditional view, God’s creatures can only determine their own steps and influence the world to the extent that God decides
Next, Griffen makes the crucial assertion on which his whole argument against the traditional concept of omnipotence depends. He claims, as many other philosophers have, that in order to use a term meaningfully, you must be able to point to an example in experience of the term. The problem with the traditional view of omnipotence, he argues, is that one cannot show by experience that everything in creation derives its power from God (and is thus powerless in and of itself). He asks rhetorically, “What reality could one point to that would supply an experiential basis for the meaning of a ‘powerless actuality’? This thing would have to be directly experienced, and directly experienced as being devoid of power. I do not experience anything meeting these criteria which I would term an actuality.”113 Rather, in our experience we see things influencing one another, and it also seems that things have the power of self-determination.

Therefore, he argues, it is unwarranted to believe that all things have power only by virtue of delegation from God and we must conclude that the world does indeed have inherent power of its own to determine itself and influence others. But if entities in the world have power in their own right (as, he argues, we must conclude from experience), then all power is not derived from God. Therefore God does not have all power. Rather, He has a lot of power, but He doesn’t have all power because the world also has power of its own. Thus, God is not omnipotent (all-powerful and thus the giver of the creature’s power), and to the extent that the world has power of its own, God cannot control the world.

This argument from the nature of the universe is the first way in which Griffen argues for a limitation on God’s power. The nature of things is such that God cannot have all power. Later on in *God, Power, and Evil*, he offers a second argument in support of his finite conception of God. This argument is from the nature of the divine act of creation. In a nutshell, Process Theology does not believe that God is the single and unilateral Creator of the world. Instead, it holds that a part of the world has eternally existed alongside of this god which was not fully created by him. When the right time came, god intervened in this primordial chaos to cause it to begin moving towards order and the world we see now. But he was nonetheless working with material that he himself did not create and which to a large extent determines its own course of action. It was creation out of chaos rather than creation out of nothing. Since the world wasn’t fully created by God, it cannot be fully subject to God.

In sum, Griffen is arguing that God cannot be omnipotent not only because of the inherent possession of power by all creatures, but also because he was not the one who set up the original conditions of the universe. Rather, those conditions are inherent in the nature of things from all eternity, and god must simply make use of them the best that he can. As Stephen T. Davis summarizes in his
critique of Griffen, "God's power is limited both by the uncreated, pre-existent material out of which he fashioned the world and by the built-in power over against God that every actual thing has."\textsuperscript{114}

This conception of god as a being who is limited in power is crucial to his theodicy. Since god does not have all power, he is not able to prevent all evil. God wants to prevent all evil, but he cannot because he is not omnipotent. Due to the nature of things, it is not logically possible for one being (such as the process god) to completely determine the activity of another being (such as god’s creatures who do evil), since all beings have some power of their own and therefore the ability to determine themselves and resist determination from other beings. God is "absolved from blame" for evil because he is powerless to prevent it and because "the possibility of genuine evil is rooted in the metaphysical (i.e., necessary) characteristics of the world."\textsuperscript{115}

At this point, the sharp philosopher will point out that Griffen has just aborted all possibility of actually solving problem of evil. For he has in effect given in to the problem of evil by admitting that God is not omnipotent. Griffen, however, has a ready response. He replies that what must be maintained is God’s perfection, but not the traditional understanding of what that perfection means. The traditional view of omnipotence cannot be a perfection because, he believes, he has shown it to be incoherent. His revised version of the power of god is, however, a perfection because it ascribes to the process god the most power that a being could logically (though not conceivably) possess.

On his view of omnipotence, god has the most power that a being can possibly have without taking away all power whatsoever from creatures. Griffen approvingly quotes Charles Hartshorne in an attempt to give us the right perspective on this understanding of the power of god: "Instead of saying that God’s power is limited, suggesting that it is less than some conceivable power, we should rather say: his power is absolutely maximal, the greatest possible, but even the greatest possible power is still one power among others, is not the only power."\textsuperscript{116} Because this revised view of god’s power is not inconsistent with the divine perfections (according to Griffen and Hartshorne), Griffen believes that he has not folded to the problem of evil.

In summary, since it is logically impossible "for one being completely to determine the dispositions of other actual beings...it is no limitation on divine perfection that God cannot do it. Accordingly, there is nothing in this theodicy which undercuts God’s perfection and hence worshipfulness."\textsuperscript{117}

Step 2: Why a Good, but Weak, God Would Risk Evil

It may seem at first glance that, if Griffen’s arguments are correct, then he has provided a
consistent solution to the problem of evil. However, his denial of the traditional view of omnipotence has actually served to raise another problem which would seem to impugn his god’s goodness. The problem is that, in light of his inability to prevent evil, it seems that the good god of process theology should have decided to “play it safe” and not order the world out of the primordial chaos at all. But since he did “create” and thus risk the terrors of a world that has become too much for him to handle, it seems that he must not be perfectly good.

Griffen’s solution to this dilemma is provided by his understanding of the relationship between what he calls intrinsic goodness and intrinsic evil. Something is intrinsically good if it is good in itself, apart from its usefulness all things considered. There are two dimensions of intrinsic good—harmony and intensity. Something is intrinsically evil if it is evil in itself, apart from its harmfulness all things considered. The two dimensions of intrinsic evil are disharmony and triviality.

There is an intriguing relationship between intrinsic good and intrinsic evil. In an attempt to achieve a greater degree of intensity (an intrinsic good), harmony may be disrupted and thus disharmony produced (an intrinsic evil) because greater intensity requires greater complexity—and the greater the complexity one works toward, the greater the possibility for disharmony to come about. Therefore, an attempt to bring about a greater good of intensity may also result in a greater degree of the evil of discord. On the other hand, an attempt to bring about a greater harmony may result also result in a greater evil of triviality because harmony is most easily achieved through a lesser degree of complexity (and thus a greater likelihood for triviality).

Because of this, the attempt to rate the goodness of experiences in the world is very complicated. “One cannot simply say that an experience which is harmonious is ipso facto ‘better’ than one which is more discordant. It is true that ‘the more discordant the feeling, the further the retreat from perfection’ (AI 330). But it is also true that ‘Perfection at a low level ranks below Imperfection with higher aim’ (AI 331). Accordingly, encouraging the emergence of forms of experience which will be more intense but also more discordant than present ones is not necessarily inconsistent with moral goodness.”

In fact, if one sacrifices the higher experience for the sake of the lower experience, in order to prevent any possibility of evil, that is in itself evil. “In other words, suffering and sinful intentions resulting in suffering are not the only forms of evil. An absence of good that could have been realized is evil even if no suffering is involved.”

This is crucial to Griffen’s reasoning as to why a good yet limited god would “create” in spite of the possibility of such great evils that he cannot prevent. Remember that on the Process view, the world has eternally existed in some form, and God simply works to help it move towards greater complexity—and
thus the development of life. Thus, if God would not have “created,” he would not have been preventing evil after all—for then he would be permitting the “evil” of triviality to continue. Thus, God moved the world towards a greater complexity so that it could escape the evil of triviality and experience the good of greater intensity. But, as we have seen, this necessitated that God risk a world where the great evil of disharmony would result. Thus, an attempt to increase complexity overcomes triviality, but the result may not be the beauty of intense harmony which is intended, but may unfortunately result in “the evil of extreme discord.”

Step 3: Understanding God’s Responsibility for Evil

The third element of Griffen’s theodicy is to tie up loose ends and bring everything together. The main way he does this is by making explicit the correlations between value and power which are implicit from what has gone before. This provides his answer to many difficult questions. For example, why did God create free beings? According to Process theology, all creatures necessarily have some degree of freedom (this is what we saw earlier in his argument concerning why God cannot be omnipotent). So God had no choice.

The question is therefore, why did God create beings with such a great degree of freedom? He answers that since power is the ability to determine yourself and influence others, having greater freedom over what you choose means having more power, because greater freedom gives you greater control over yourself and greater ability to influence others with that control (which are the two elements of power on his view). Thus, beings with greater freedom have greater power and therefore greater value. For the more powerful is more valuable than the less powerful. Putting it in terms we examined earlier, something of greater intensity is more good than something that tends toward triviality. Therefore, “no significant degree of intrinsic value would be possible without a significant degree of freedom. If there is trivial freedom, there is trivial value.”

Griffen acknowledges that because God is the one who started the ball rolling towards greater complexity, he is in some sense responsible for evil. But the question is, Does the kind of responsibility which God has for evil make him blameworthy for evil? Does it make him guilty of wrongdoing? All that we have seen so far is brought together by Griffen to answer this, in a statement which seems to be the climax of the Process Theodicy:

...the question as to whether God is indictable [for evil] is to be answered in terms of the question as to whether the positive values that are possible in our world are valuable enough to be worth the risk of the negative experiences which have occurred, and the even greater horrors which stand before us as real possibilities for the near future. Should God, for the sake of avoiding the
possibility of persons such as Hitler, and the horrors such as Auschwitz, have precluded the possibility of Jesus, Gautam, Socrates,...and millions of other marvelous human beings, well known and not well known alike, who have lived on the face of this earth? In other words, should God, for the sake of avoiding ‘man’s inhumanity to man,’ have avoided humanity (or some comparable complex species) altogether? Only those who could sincerely answer this question affirmatively could indict the God of process theology on the basis of the evil in the world.122

THE PROBLEMS OF THE PROCESS THEODICY

Many arguments against the Process Theodicy generally apply to all other forms of dualism as well—for Process Theodicy is just a sophisticated form of dualism. First, we will examine whether it is reasonable, in light of Griffen’s argumentation, to uphold the traditional doctrine of God’s omnipotence. Second, we will examine whether his theodicy succeeds in upholding the goodness of God. Third, we will examine whether his theodicy offers any genuine hope.

The omnipotence of God

There are many reasons which lead me to believe that Griffen’s view of a god of limited power is not a very reasonable view and that his arguments against the traditional concept of God’s omnipotence are unsuccessful.

First, the personal costs of adopting a limited concept of God’s power, such as what Griffen argues for, are disastrous. It makes religious faith irrelevant because it leaves us with a god who cannot help us in our trials. D.A. Carson writes, “Belief in an omnipotent God brings with it all sorts of hard questions about how such a God, if he is good, can permit evil and suffering, but it also brings with it the promise of help, relief, an answer, an eschatological prospect. To abandon belief in the omnipotence of God may ‘solve’ the problem of evil, but the cost is enormous: the resulting god is incapable of helping us....There is no point praying to such a god and asking for his help. He is already doing the best he can, poor chap, but he has reached the end of his resources.”123

It is little consolation to know that god wants the best for you if he is powerless to make all things, including trials, work together for your good. And it is little consolation to know that god is “doing his best” to bring about at least some good, and can even offer a little relief, if he is not powerful enough to make certain that in the end, it will have been better to have suffered than to not have suffered.

This is the kind of help the God of the SGD defense can give. Without it, I don’t see how we can have any comfort in our trials, for if God cannot make it better that we suffered than had we not suffered, it seems that our suffering is in vain. If you can reach the end of your suffering and say “it is better, all things considered, that this happened,” then the suffering was worth the cost. But if you must say, “it
would have been better, all things considered, if this had not happened,” then your suffering didn’t do you any ultimate good—no matter how much “God” was trying. And to the extent that God lacks power to make suffering work to your ultimate good you will lack peace, comfort, and joy in suffering.

Second, Griffen is utterly unconvincing in his attempt to make a god of limited power worthy of worship. He isn’t worthy of worship because he can be defeated. And a god who can be defeated is not supreme—and thereby not deserving of complete allegiance. Further, even if he was worthy of worship to some extent, we would not be able to give him our full allegiance. For you can only give your full allegiance to something that you believe will be victorious. But at Griffen’s own admission, there is no guarantee that the Process god will defeat evil in the end. Thus, it would be impossible to give full allegiance, and therefore full worship, to the Process god.

In fact, Norman Geisler argues very convincingly that to worship the process god would in fact be idolatry. He writes, “As Paul Tillich pointed out, only what is really ultimate is worthy of an ultimate commitment. To give an ultimate commitment (which is what religion is) to anything less than the Ultimate is idolatry. Panentheists, in fact, worship a finite god. And every finite thing is a creature” and therefore unworthy of worship. To worship something finite is to worship an idol.

Thus, the reason most people believe that omnipotence is necessary for worshipfulness is not due to cultural conditioning as Griffen claims (for what caused our culture and the Bible to have this idea?), but is due to common sense and logical argumentation.

We may therefore agree with John Roth, who writes in response to Griffen’s theodicy, “A God of such weakness, no matter how much he suffers, is rather pathetic. Good though he may be, Griffen’s God is too small. He inspires little awe, little sense of holiness.” Likewise, Stephen Davis writes that “The God of Process reminds me of a mad scientist who fashions a monster he hopes will behave but whom he cannot control.”

Third, in the attempt to demonstrate that experience refutes the traditional concept of God as all-powerful, process thought seems to be confusing possession of power with the ownership of power. It is true that it appears as if beings really do possess some degree of power. I don’t know of any theist who would deny this. But Griffen’s claim that, since we’ve never experienced a “powerless actuality,” entities actually own the power they possess (that is, have their power inherently rather than as delegated from God) seems utterly flawed. How would experience of an entity with derived power and inherent power differ? It doesn’t seem like they would. In fact, Griffen’s position is refuted by his own criteria that one must be able to point to an example in experience to validate something’s truth. For how in the world can one tell by experience whether the entity’s power is inherent or delegated?
In fact, this criteria which Griffen uses has come to be recognized as flawed. It was popular in the 50s and 60s to claim that if you can’t point to an experience to verify or falsify your belief, it is invalid. But then people recognized that this “verification criterion” is self-defeating because there is nothing in experience that can verify or falsify it! Also, philosophers recognized that the verification criterion led to the absurdity of denying the reality of a moral right and wrong, because nothing in experience can prove that there is such a thing as a moral law. Thus, the verification criteria which is essential to Griffen’s argument against the traditional view of God’s omnipotence is invalid.

Thus, not only do Griffen’s arguments for a god of limited power fail, but he is also unsuccessful in attempting to overthrow the logical argument given for the traditional view of omnipotence. Thus, the traditional argument for omnipotence is sound.

But if the traditional argument for the omnipotence of God is sound, then the conclusion that we reached from it above is also sound—that omnipotence is an essential attribute of God (that is, an attribute without which a being is cannot be considered God). So Process Theology is contradicting itself in claiming that God exists and yet is limited in power. For a being who is limited in power is by definition not God. This is a fatal problem with Process Theology.

The goodness of God

Next, it seems that the Process Theodicy does not even succeed in upholding the goodness of God. First, it is problematic that the goodness god aims at in Process thought is aesthetic (for intrinsic goodness is an aesthetic quality of greater harmony and intensity, not a moral quality of conformity to the moral law) instead of moral. The reason that this is a problem is because it seems evident that morality is more important than aesthetics. The process god, however, seems to be lessening the importance of morality. As a Philosophy of Religion textbook argues, “Process theists have replied that aesthetic value is a larger, more inclusive category than moral value, a maneuver that appears to make God’s goodness unlike anything we are capable of recognizing and approving.”

Furthermore, Griffen’s Process Theodicy seems to be unjustified in holding to the goodness of God. For Griffen doesn’t seem to argue for the goodness of god, but rather assumes it. But this makes his claim that god is perfectly good arbitrary. This problem is well articulated by the late Presbyterian theologian Gordon Clark:

If the mixture of good and evil in the world rules out the possibility of a good and omnipotent God, and if the extent of good in the world hardly allows the assumption of an infinite evil demon, it still does not follow that there is a finite good god. A finite evil god is an equally acceptable conclusion. Instead of saying that god does the best he can, but being limited he cannot quite
dominate the evil in the world, we could just as well say that god does the worst he can, but being limited he cannot quite eradicate the forces of good which oppose his will. Evidently, therefore, the advocates of a finite god arrive at their conclusion more by emotion than by reason.\footnote{128}

In other words, Process Theology’s denial of God’s omnipotence seems to be arbitrary and based on wishful thinking more than good evidence.

No hope

The final problem I wish to mention is the lack of hope that Griffen’s theodicy offers. We have already seen how the denial of God’s omnipotence destroys hope because it makes God unable to fully help and gives no guarantee that good will succeed in the end. But an even worse problem is that whenever hope goes, anxiety comes to take its place. For when the certainty of our joy in the object upon which we place supreme value is threatened, anxiety results. Belief in the absolute sovereignty of God removes anxiety because we can be confident if we believe in Him that He exercises it to make sure that our ultimate concern cannot be damaged, because our ultimate concern is God and His purposes—the very things that the omnipotent God is most concerned about. But if God is not omnipotent, He cannot offer this security to those who follow Him.

A second problem with the Process system in this regard is its lack of any emphasis on life after death. This seems to make any divine progress in overcoming evil irrelevant for those who suffer. For the blessing of goodness might not become available for them until long after they are gone and can no longer benefit from them. Taken to its logical conclusion, the result for the individual is at best uncertainty (and therefore insecurity in suffering) and at worst despair (for ultimately all that they have to look forward to is, most likely, nothingness).

THE PROCESS THEODICY COMPARED TO THE FWD

The FWD also has many similarities and differences with the Process Theodicy which are important to be clear about. In regards to their similarities, both seek to absolve God from blame for evil by saying that it was out of his control. But their fundamental difference concerns the reason why it was outside of His control.

Process theology says God is not, by nature, powerful enough to be in control. The nature of things made it such that God had to allow evil. The Free Will Defense, however, believes that God has all power and that God could, therefore, have prevented evil. However, God deemed it best to voluntarily limit the exercise of His power so that humans could be free. In other words, God choose to not use His
omnipotence in preventing evil so that He could uphold the free-will of man. Nothing forced God to do this; it was His own choice, and therefore His omnipotence is upheld.

As we saw earlier, this is in stark contrast with the SGD, which holds that God has surrendered none of His omnipotence because He can prevent human evil without violating the human will.

**ISSUES RAISED FOR THE SGD**

What we have in these three main issues should be sufficient to demonstrate the superiority of the SGD, for unlike Process Theology it asserts a God who is omnipotent (and thus can fully help), is perfectly good (because He is fully devoted to what is most valuable), and offers genuine hope (because of Christ and the eternal life that He gives). Now all that remains is to demonstrate that the SGD is on solid biblical ground in asserting the omnipotence of God so that the Scriptures receive the credit for having the superior solution. Also, this will be a good opportunity to lay to rest some of the objections Process Theology has made to the traditional belief that God is the full creator of the world out of nothing.

**God is Creator of all**

First, everything in the Bible that deals with the creation seems to oppose Griffen’s claim that God is not the full Creator of all things. The authors of Scripture take a firm stance that God is in fact the Creator of all things. There is not some sort of primordial chaos that existed independent of God and he had to shape into creation.

For example, John 1:3, speaking of Christ, says “All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.” If everything that exists apart from God was brought into existence by God, then nothing existed (other than God) before creation. This means, then, that God created out of nothing—not out of chaos. Likewise, Romans 11:36 says that all things are from God, and Colossians 1:16 says that “by Him [Christ] all things were created...all things have been created by Him and for Him.”

Griffen, however, tries to read his creation out of chaos into the creation account in Genesis 1:2, which says, “And the earth was formless and void...” However, this seems to be a description of verse 1, which says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” Therefore, the point of verse two is that the initial state of creation was formless and empty, something which God soon changed through the six days of creation, culminating in the creation of man.
God is sovereign over all

Second, it follows that if God is the complete Creator of the world, He is entirely authoritative over the world. Many passages of Scripture confirm this deduction.

The apostle Peter declares that God is sovereign—the top and undefeatable authority in the universe—both now always when he writes, “To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 5:11). Jude adds to this that there has never been a time when God has not been sovereign: “...to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever” (Jude 25). And Paul makes evident that it would be a mistake to think that there are any other sovereigns that God must compete with: “He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion!” (1 Timothy 6:16).

God is omnipotent

Third, it also follows that if God is the sole and complete Creator of the world from nothing, then He has all-power and is thus omnipotent. As we have seen, omnipotence means that God possesses all-power and that He is able to bring about any logically possible state of affairs that will please Him.

The fact that God possesses all power, not just some, is evident from the verses which declare that He can do all things (which imply that He has all power since He is able to do all things). In the New Testament, Jesus declares that: “…with God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). In the Old Testament, Jeremiah seems to infer this same thing from the fact that God is creator: “Behold, Thou hast made the heavens and the earth by Thy great power and by Thine outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for Thee” (Jeremiah 32:17).

Likewise, the author of Hebrews declares that Christ “upholds all things by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3). If all things depend upon the power of Christ to be held in existence, then, contrary to the claims of Process Theology, nothing has any power of its own. In other words, nothing has power inherently, but only as delegated by God. Thus, all power is from God and therefore God has all power.130

That God uses all of His power to bring about whatever makes Him happy is taught, for example, in Psalm 135:6, where we read that “Whatever the Lord pleases, He does.” So according to this Psalm, if God wants to do something, He does it. He doesn’t refrain from doing anything which will work towards His full delight in creation. There is therefore nothing that God desires to do which He leaves undone. From this it follows that everything in creation is precisely falling out according to God’s wishes.

In Isaiah God also declares that nothing will prevent Him from accomplishing everything He
pleases: “My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure” (Isaiah 46:10).
Thus, there are many verses which rule out any view which considers evil as a source of power that God cannot control and subject to Himself.

However, if God has the power to do whatever makes Him happy, then why do we read in Ezekiel that if the nation of Israel does not repent He will have to do something that He takes no pleasure in—judgement. “‘As I live!’ Declares the Lord God, ‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked... Turn back, turn back from your evil ways!’” (Ezekiel 33:11). Here it seems as if God is trapped into a course of action that will not make Him happy. How, then, does this fit with the verses we saw about how God always and only does what makes Him happy?

John Piper does an excellent job of demonstrating how these verses are complementary rather than contradictory:

The answer I propose is that God is grieved in one sense by the death of the wicked, and pleased in another....the death and misery of the unrepentant is in and of itself no delight to God. God is not a sadist. He is not malicious or bloodthirsty. Instead when a rebellious, wicked, unbelieving person is judged, what God delights in is the exaltation of truth and righteousness, and the vindication of his own honor and glory....those who have rebelled against the Lord and moved beyond repentance will not be able to gloat that they have made the Almighty miserable. God is not defeated in the triumphs of his righteous judgment....Let this be a warning to us. God is not mocked. He is not tapped or cornered or coerced.”

This solution is an application of what we saw earlier concerning the narrow lens and wide lens through which God views the world. In the narrow lens, God does not delight in judgement. But all things considered, He delights in judgement because it vindicates His holiness. Thus, God’s omnipotence ensures that God cannot be trapped into a course of action where He takes no delight.

Whereas process theology makes God finite by limiting His power, there is another theodicy which make Him finite by limiting His goodness. To this we will now turn.

**PROTEST THEOLOGY: A GOD WHO LACKS GOODNESS**

It seems incredible, but there are actually those who try to “solve” the problem of evil by denying that God is perfectly good. Such theodicies are a specific species of dualism, called internal dualism. They are given this name because they “locate the opposition to good within the divine nature itself.” In contrast, external dualism places the evil that god cannot control as a force outside of him. According to what we saw above, Process Theology is a form of external dualism.

One exponent of internal dualism is Edgar Sheffield Brightman (1884-1953), who stated that “in God is the source of surd evil.” Frederick Sontag is a more recent exponent of this view. His essay in
the book *Encountering Evil* tends to beat around the bush and lack organization, but he finally comes right out and says, "It is the status of evil in God's nature which forces us to reconceive divinity."\(^{134}\)

Sontag appeals more to emotionalism than reason in his essay, and to that extent his philosophy is unsound. For example, in speaking of the Holocaust he makes the unsupported assertion that "the notion that such waste of human life serves God's ultimate purpose in any simple way is ... repugnant."\(^{135}\) His basic argument is that there is so much evil and it is of such a bad nature that there can be no good reason whatsoever that God has for allowing it. Since Sontag accepts the traditional doctrine of God's omnipotence, he therefore concludes that God must not be fully good.

Denying the perfect goodness of God in a way such as this is the foundation of what I will call Protest Theology. While Sontag himself does not proceed to protest against God for "not being perfectly good," there are many, such as theologian John K. Roth, who do take this next step. Instead of attempting to defend the ways of God in light of evil, he uses the problem of evil to stand up against God and accuse him of injustice. In his chapter "A Theodicy of Protest," he explains for us what exactly his theodicy attempts to do: "A protesting theodicy puts God on trial, and in that process the issue of God's wasteful complicity in evil takes center stage."\(^{136}\)

Roth's attitude in his essay appears to make it impossible for him to be satisfied. Whatever the reason one may postulate for why God allows evil, it cannot be enough. There is nothing that could justify the terrible extent of evil in the world. "No matter what happens, God is going to be much less than perfectly justified."\(^{137}\) Roth simply will not allow for the possibility that God had just reasons for allowing evil. And he refuses to water down the issue by limiting God's power. "Everything hinges on the proposition that God possess—but fails to use well enough—the power to intervene decisively at any moment to make history's course less wasteful. Thus, in spite and because of his sovereignty, this God is everlastingly guilty and the degrees run from gross negligence to murder."\(^{138}\)

In blaming God and protesting against him, he makes some very bold statements: "It is irresponsible to assign responsibility inequitably. God must bear his share, and it is not small unless he could never be described as one for whom all things are possible."\(^{139}\) "To the extent that [we] are born with the potential and the power to be dirty, credit for that fact belongs elsewhere. 'Elsewhere' is God's address."\(^{140}\) Roth is forging an assault on the Almighty, and he will not be satisfied unless he is heard.

Roth does believe that humans have free-will and that much evil is a result of this. But, he protests, this does not remove God from responsibility because God gave us that freedom in the first place, knowing the evil that would result. He cites the cynical thinker Camus, who said "Man is not entirely to blame; it was not he who started history."\(^{141}\) He sees two problems with freedom: in many ways we have
too little freedom, and in other ways we have too much.

Because our freedom is limited, it cannot explain all evil. For example, if we had the ability to cure cancer, we would certainly use our freedom to do that. However, we lack this ability even though we desire to do it, and therefore “freedom” cannot absolve God of all responsibility.

On the other hand, we also have “more power, more freedom, than is good for us.” The results of this excessive amount of freedom are things such as the Holocaust. “The world — too much no doubt — is in our hands.”

Roth mentions that one of the main influences in his pilgrimage of theodicy has been Elie Wiesel, a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. At the age of fifteen, he was forced to endure the concentration camps with his father and to separate from his mother and little sister, who were led into the gas chamber. Wiesel recounts his horrible story and how it brought him to rise up in protest against God in his book *Night*. We will examine Wiesel’s experiences in greater depth later on in order to show the results such a theodicy has in people’s lives.

### PROBLEMS WITH PROTEST THEOLOGY

#### Not a real theodicy

It is, of course, difficult to see how a Theodicy of Protest is a solution to the problem of evil. For this is precisely one of the paths the objector wants the theist to take. Denying God’s perfect goodness is in effect admitting defeat. It is not solving the problem of evil, it is succumbing to it. Thus, it cannot be considered a theodicy.

#### Consequences of this view are personally disastrous

Second, whereas views that reduce God’s power leave us with a God who cannot help, views which reduce God’s goodness leave us with a God who cannot be trusted. Sontag implies this in the last statement of his essay: “God may intercede in individual cases in the present and thus lead us to hope for an altered future, but our gamble is on how much trust to place in such promises.” But if God cannot be trusted, why even bother with him at all? Such a price is clearly too high to pay—especially when Sontag’s theodicy is entirely based upon his limited perspective of the world.

#### Sontag offers more unjustified assertions than arguments

Third, Sontag’s claim that God has placed us in a universe “subject to more waste and destruction than any purpose can account for” is simply blind conjecture. We just aren’t in a position to know that this
is the case. And as long as it is possible that God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil, it is foolish to impugn his goodness. The things we saw earlier in regards to Craig’s response to the probabilistic problem of evil also militate against Sontag at this point.

Additionally, Sontag seems to be overstating the case to make his point. As C.S. Lewis wisely argues, “If the universe is so bad, or even half so bad, how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good Creator? Men are fools, perhaps; but hardly so foolish as that.”

Destructive to character and joy

Fourth, a theodicy of protest hinders character development. It seems hard to deny that one who holds to this theodicy will become bitter, rather than better, when trials come upon him. Wiesel himself seems to indicate this, when at the end of Night he sees himself in the mirror as a skeleton, less than human. The symbolism seems to be unmistakable: just as the Holocaust had destroyed his faith in God, it had also destroyed his humanity. It would be hard to deny that the reason his love grew cold was because he lacked the rock of God’s peace and hope in the midst of suffering.

Also, protest theology makes suffering harder to endure. As we will see later when we compare Wiesel’s reaction to suffering with that of Richard Wurmbrand (who endured fourteen years in a communist prison), Christians who trust in God can have deep joy in the midst of sorrow and suffering. But for one who is assaulting the Almighty, the source of joy is forsaken.

ISSUES RAISED FOR THE SGD

Sontag’s theology of protest shows us that it is not only important to have rational evidence for God’s goodness, but for theodicies which desire to reflect the teaching of the Bible, it is important to have a solid biblical foundation as well. So first we will look at some of the Scriptural teaching on God’s goodness. Then, we will look at the response Paul has to Protest theology and the response that the book of Job has.

God is perfectly good

First, there are many verses in Scripture which are zealous to insist upon the spotless goodness of God. For example, we read, “And this is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). This verse teaches God’s perfect goodness in two ways, the first positive (stating what He is) and the second negative (stating what He is
First, John says that God is light—perfect moral purity with nothing to hide. Second, this means, John tells us, that there is not even a hint of darkness in God. Thus, there is no flaw in His perfect moral purity. In the Old Testament, we read: “For I proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, for all His ways are just; a God of faithfulness and without injustice, righteous and upright is He” (Deuteronomy 32:3-4). This verse teaches God’s perfect goodness in six ways. It asserts that what He does is flawless, all of His ways of acting and thinking and being are in accordance with justice, He is without injustice (and thus has no hint of evil in Him), He is righteous, and He is upright. It seems like Moses is trying to make a pretty powerful point!

So both the beginning and end of the biblical revelation contain very clear teachings on the perfect goodness of God. But what about a verse like Isaiah 45:7, which many versions of the Scriptures translate God as saying, “I create evil”? First, this verse in no way calls into question God’s goodness because it does not say that God does evil. “Create” here is best understood as “bring about” or “ordain.” There is a difference between ordaining evil and doing evil. But second, “evil” here likely does not mean moral evil, but calamity. God is probably saying, “I create calamity.” This is in accord with the whole tenor of biblical revelation that God does take action to judge sin, very often by bringing calamity on those who sin. Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of this. We saw in regards to the SGD how the judgement of God is consistent with His goodness.

Protest Theology is pride

Second, many Scriptures unmask protest theology for what it is: pride. A humble probing into the mysteries of God is worship. There is nothing wrong with asking God why, being sorrowful at what has happened, or being perplexed at His ways. But a blasphemous accusation of injustice against God is pride.

Before protest theologians can seriously listen to the arguments of traditional theism, they need to take to heart the words of Paul: “On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, ‘Why did you make me like this,’ will it? Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?” (Romans 9:20-21).

According to biblical saints such as Paul, man is the one condemned, not God, and God is the judge, not man. These roles cannot be reversed. “Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar” (Romans 3:4). Responding to similar protests in ancient times, God said “But the house of Israel says, ‘the way of the Lord is not right.’ Are My ways not right, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not right? Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, each according to his conduct” (Ezekiel
What is amazing is that God does not stop here and leave the protestors in their sins. He goes on to say, “Repent and turn away from all your transgressions, so that iniquity may not become a stumbling block to you. Cast away from you all your transgressions which you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! For why will you die, O house of Israel? For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Therefore, repent and live’” (Ezekiel 18:30-32).

What amazing mercy! The problem is not with God, but with man. Yet, even though man reverses the tables and tries to accuse God, God nonetheless offers mercy and salvation to man, the offending party! It is hard to see how people like Sontag and Wiesel find this God cruel, hostile, and indifferent.

There is much we do not understand

In addition to the call to repent of our pride, the second thing the Bible has to say against Protestant Theology is that our limited perspective makes many things incomprehensible to us—which makes our casting judgment upon God’s ways utterly out of place.

This is a major theme of the book of Job. When terrible suffering first comes upon him, he handles it flawlessly. But as his suffering draws on, Job begins to question God’s justice. When this happens, his friend Elihu cannot keep silent any longer. The substance of his speeches seems to be, “Behold, let me tell you, you are not right in this, for God is greater than man. Why do you complain against Him, that He does not give an account of all His doings? Indeed God speaks once, Or twice, yet no one notices it” (Job 33:12-14).

God begins His speech to Job by reminding him of his limited perspective: “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?” (Job 38:2). Then God proceeds to fire at Job “question after question, each designed to remind Job of the kinds of things he cannot do, and that only God can.”

D.A. Carson points out that God’s response to Job is two-fold. First, because of Job’s ignorance and status as creature, Job is in no position to try to justify himself by condemning God. Second, “if there are so many things that Job does not understand, why should he so petulantly and persistently demand that he understand his own suffering? There are some things you will not understand, for you are not God.”

Protest theologians should take note of Job’s response: “he repents of his arrogance in impugning God’s justice, ...He repents of not having known God better.” Of course, Elie Wiesel has declared his dissatisfaction to God’s answer to Job. While there is more to the biblical solution than simply what is contained in the book of Job, D.A. Carson has some wise insight at this point: “To those who do not know God, to those who insist on being God, this outcome will never suffice. Those who do know God come in
time to recognize that it is better to know God and to trust God than to claim the rights of God."  

THE FRUITS OF PROTEST THEOLOGY AND THE FRUITS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

A very helpful way to understand the value of the Christian faith in bringing people through suffering is to see the good affects it has in people’s lives as opposed to the bad effects a finite god solution such as Protest Theology has in people’s lives.

Therefore, we will contrast the response that Richard Wurmbrand had to his suffering with the response that Elie Wiesel had. I have picked these two because they both suffered extraordinary turmoil and they are both alive at the time of writing. Wiesel is a Jew who endured the concentration camps of the Holocaust for a year. Wurmbrand is a Christian who endured fourteen years of torture and suffering in a Communist prison for being a Christian.

I have also picked these two because they represent the two main opposing theodicies: That which has Christ to cling to in suffering, and that which doesn’t. Therefore, their lives are somewhat of an example of the kind of people the opposing theologies yield in suffering.

Their common ground: terrible suffering

*Wiesel’s suffering.* Wiesel both witnessed and experienced terrible suffering. He witnessed babies thrown into the furnaces the hanging of the young boy. He experienced fear of burning in the furnace himself, malice threatening by the SS officers, many unjust and severe beatings, a forty mile walk in the snow, starvation, separation from his family, and the death of his father. We may say without reserve that Wiesel both endured and witnessed injustice of massive proportions.

*Wurmbrand’s suffering.* Wurmbrand’s suffering began when he was kidnaped for being a Christian. “A van of the secret police stopped in front of me, four men jumped out and pushed me into the van. I was taken away for many years. For over eight years, no one knew if I was alive or dead. My wife was visited by the secret police who posed as released fellow-prisoners. They told her they had attended my burial. She was heartbroken.” After the eight years, he was released for a period of two years. But a few years later, he was returned to prison for another six years. Overall, Wurmbrand was in prison for fourteen years.

Just like Wiesel, Wurmbrand was taken captive unjustly, for he had not done anything wrong. And like Wiesel, his sufferings were horrible. For the first three years he was forced to endure solitary confinement. For the next five he was in a mass cell. During both phases, the communists forced him and the other Christian prisoners to endure tortures of unthinkable proportions. “What the communists have
done to Christians surpasses any possibility of human understanding.” He writes that the “tortures were sometimes horrible. I prefer not to speak too much about those through which I have passed. When I do, I cannot sleep at night. It is too painful.”

Among the tortures was the “ice-box.” He was thrown into an ice-box that was so cold, frost and ice covered the inside. When he had almost frozen to death, they took him out to let him thaw out. Once thawed, they put him back in. They repeated this over and over again. He writes that, “Even today sometimes I can’t bear to open a refrigerator.” He also endured starvation, numerous beatings, and brainwashing (for seventeen hours a day for a period of several years).

We can truly say that Wurmbrand has endured and witnessed unjust suffering of the most immense proportions.

Where they differ: contrasting reactions

We have seen that Wiesel and Wurmbrand have in common that they witnessed and endured tremendous injustice and suffering. What is so striking to me is that there reactions are miles apart.

Joy? Wiesel’s theodicy of protest was forged in the awful concentration camps. All of the suffering he witnessed and endured didn’t make him doubt God’s existence, but did make him doubt God’s goodness. As a result, he eventually stopped thinking of himself as accountable to God and started believing that his creator was accountable to him. When he first witnessed the horrors of the Nazi furnaces, his faith in the goodness of God was consumed in the flames. “Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. ...Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust.” What despair!

But his faith was not simply lost. It was soon replaced with rebellion. Several months later, when most of the Jews were praising God on the day of the Jewish New Year, Wiesel found himself rising in complete revolt and protest against God. He writes, “Why, but why should I bless Him? In every fiber I rebelled....Yes, man is very strong, greater than God....I was the accuser, God the accused. My eyes were open and I was alone—terribly alone in a world without God and without man. Without love or mercy....I stood amid that praying congregation, observing it like a stranger.”

This protestation was brought to full bloom later in his life when he wrote The Trial of God, a play where a group of traveling entertainers and a bartender put God on trial for crimes against humanity. At the beginning of the trial, Wiesel has one of the main characters say, “I—Berish, Jewish innkeeper at Shamgorod—accuse Him of hostility, cruelty, and indifference.” This seems to make clear that the results of Wiesel’s protest against God have been to solidify in him bitterness, anger, and hopelessness.
For he is so bitter towards God that he continues writing against His goodness even decades after his experience of the Holocaust. And don’t misunderstand me. I am not claiming that Wiesel is bitter towards other people or angry at the world. I am claiming that his bitterness and anger is directed at God, and therefore he has put up an unfortunate barrier to the benefits that only come by trusting God and relying on His goodness.

In contrast to Wiesel, Wurmbrand and the other Christian prisoners actually experienced hope, love, and joy in the midst of their sufferings. He writes of how the presence of Christ gave comfort: “Often, when tortured, we felt the tortures, but it seemed as something distant and far removed from the spirit which was lost in the glory of Christ and His presence with us.”

He writes of how the love of Christ provided strength: “If the heart is cleansed by the love of Jesus Christ, and if the heart loves Him, you can resist all tortures.” And he writes of how the hope of Christ gave joy: “When I look back on the fourteen years of prison, it was sometimes a very happy time. Other prisoners and even the guards very often wondered at how happy Christians could be under most terrible circumstances. We could not be prevented from singing, although we were beaten for this.”

**Love for enemies?** Wiesel shows no sign of compassion towards his oppressors in *Night,* and at times even finds hatred welling up towards them. While it is understandable that Wiesel would struggle with hatred, what stands out most is that he never seemed to have a hint of love for his captors.

On the other hand, the love of Christ that Wurmbrand took his comfort in enabled him to love even his enemies: “...tortures endured in Communist prisons have not made me hate communists. They are God’s creatures. How can I hate them?” Wurmbrand testifies that this experience of love for enemies was not unique to him, but common among the Christians. Many Christians even organized groups that tried to bring the message of salvation in Christ to the communist’s so they could be saved.

The account of a particular Christian who was sentenced to death and allowed to see his wife one last time is particularly touching: “His last words to his wife were, ‘You must know that I die loving those who kill me. They don’t know what they do and my last request of you is to love them, too. Don’t have bitterness in your heart because they kill your beloved one. We will meet in heaven.’ The officer who heard this became a Christian and was put in jail himself.”

**Love for friends?** Another striking difference is the lack of love Wiesel saw his fellow Jews have for one another. This is not to say that there was no sacrificial love at all expressed among the Jews. Wiesel gives many examples of that. But what stands out to me is that this was not the general tone of *Night.*
For example, this story which Wiesel recounts towards the end of his captivity was actually very common: “One day when we had stopped, a workman took a piece of bread out of his bag and threw it into a wagon. There was a stampede. Dozens of starving men fought each other to the death for a few crumbs.”

In contrast, Wurmbrand testifies how sacrificial love among the Christians was an overriding theme. “If I were to continue to tell all the horrors of communists and all the self-sacrifices of Christians, I would never finish. Not only the tortures were known. The heroic deeds were known, too. The heroic examples of those in prison greatly inspired the brethren who were still free....God will judge us not according to how much we endured, but how much we could love. I am a witness for the Christians in communist prisons that they could love. They could love God and men.” 162 Wiesel makes no such claim in Night.

Faith? In conclusion, Wiesel’s experience murdered he and his faith: “Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and [thereby] turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.” 163

But Wurmbrand’s experience strengthened he and his faith. “I don’t feel frustrated to have lost many years in prison. I have seen beautiful things. I myself have been among the weak and insignificant ones in prison, but have had the privilege to be in the same jail with great saints, heroes of faith who equaled the Christians of the first centuries. They went gladly to die for Christ. The spiritual beauty of such saints and heroes of faith can never be described.” 164

My conclusion not that all Christians endure suffering without any flaws or that non-Christians endure suffering without any strength at all. It is that the Christian hope better enables people to endure suffering. For beliefs that leave Christ out, and especially beliefs that protest against God, ultimately force us into a pit of despair and bitterness.

DENIAL DEFENSES

EVIL IS UNREAL

Denial defenses claim that evil is not real. These theodicies take two main forms. Some systems, such as Christian Science or many Eastern religions, assert that evil is really an illusion. If we could just realize this, the entire problem of evil would go away.

Christian Apologist John Frame offers a wise response to such views: “There is no reason for us
to think that evil is an illusion. Further, to say that it is, is to play games with words. For if evil is an
illusion, it is a terribly troublesome illusion, an illusion that brings misery, pain, suffering, and death. If
it is said that the pain also is illusory, I reply that there is no difference between illusory pain and real
pain as far as the problem of evil is concerned. The problem just backs up a step and asks, ‘How could a
good God give us all such a terrible illusion of pain?’”

Other systems, such as the highly developed theodicy of 17th century philosopher Baruch
Spinoza, assert that evil is really good. It only appears bad because of our limited perspective; if we
could see all of reality it would be evident that there really is no such thing as evil.

But this seems to be playing word games. Spinoza’s claim is shown to be untenable by a precise
understanding of the nature of what is called “evil.” Natural evil, as we defined it above, is the
calamities that occur in nature which cause suffering to human beings (see endnote one for a definition
of pain and suffering). Obviously nature is not doing anything morally wrong in these instances, so it is
not absolutely necessary to call such things “evils.” But they are nonetheless harmful. That is why they
are given the name natural evil. It means harm caused by nature.

To call natural evil “good” is simply to dismiss the problem, not solve it. For whether we call
such suffering good or evil, the fact remains that it hurts and it harms. Changing the words around does
not change this. A rose (or thorn) by any other name will still prick as sharply.

Moral evil, as we defined above, is the things people do that are morally wrong and the suffering
that results from it. Again, the suffering itself is not strictly “evil,” but it is harmful and therefore to call
it “good” is to fall prey to the same objections to calling natural evil good. But the evil actions of
humans and their intentions to cause this suffering are, strictly speaking, evil. It seems to be commonly
accepted that this means that the person’s action in itself is really wrong. That is, it is not simply evil
because it has harmful consequences (that would be the error of utilitarianism) or because it is contrary
to popular opinion, but because it violates a standard of justice.

If this is the case, then nothing which violates this standard can be considered good—for if it
violates this standard it is by definition evil. Therefore, even if a wicked event turns out to have
beneficial consequences all things considered, it does not become good because it is still, considered in
itself, a violation of this standard. This is why the greater good defenses, the SGD included, do not
commit the error of making evil really be good.

Of course, as we saw above, the theist is the only one who can consistently assert the existence
of such a standard, and thus there can only be real evil if there is a God. So if there is no God, then there
really can be no objection made to Spinoza’s claim—for good and evil would be whatever we want them
From this it also follows that if we want to obtain a more precise definition of moral evil, we must turn to theism. Theism has no problem here. It defines evil as any intent, action, or state of the heart that is contrary to the commandments and nature of God. Or, putting it in terms of the SGD, the essence of evil is to place supreme worth on something other than God.

**CONCLUSION**

We have taken a long journey. In summary, we have seen how the Supremacy of God Defense addresses both the intellectual and emotional problems of sin and suffering. We also saw many things that make this a very reasonable and satisfying theodicy. Through comparing it with the alternative theodicies, I believe that it has been made evident that the SGD is in fact the *most* reasonable and *most* satisfying solution.

And because of the many opportunities to examine the biblical teaching on relevant issues, we have established that the central elements of the SGD are solidly biblical. Thus, the Bible really does offer the most reasonable and most satisfying solution to the problem of evil, for the Bible is the source of the SGD. The implications of this are that we should allow the Bible to be supreme in the life of our mind and heart.

I will close with some words from a song by the Christian music group Petra—words which capture the essence of the hope and encouragement offered by the SGD and Christian world view.

*There are times when you feel like you can't go on*
*There are times when you feel like giving in*
*There are times when you feel like you can't try anymore*
*There are times of trouble in believing*
*This rest of your faith will last*
*As long as it takes to pass*
*Do you have no more doubt you'll endure*
*And your faith will emerge true and pure?*

*No doubt it will be all right*
*With God it will all work together for good*
*No doubt in the end it will be understood*
*No doubt it will all work out*
*With faith He can move any mountain for us*
*No doubt in the power of Jesus*
*And after all is done we find out*
*All we really need to have is no doubt*
NOTES


1. William Lane Craig, No Easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure, and Unanswered Prayer (Chicago, IL: Moody Bible Institute, 1990), pp. 77-78.

2. John Hick, Evil and the God of Love, revised edition (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 318. Both medical experts and philosophers draw a distinction between pain and suffering. Pain is a physical sensation, while suffering is a mental state of anguish and misery. Pain usually gives rise to suffering, but not always. It is possible to have pain without suffering, and suffering without pain. Causes of suffering other than pain are things such as loneliness, grief, anxiety, fear, regret, frustration, and despair. Most are agreed that such mental anguish is much more difficult to bear than the physical sensation of pain.


4. David Griffen, God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy (Philadelphia, PN: Westminster Press, 1976), pp. 19-27. It should be noted that Griffen himself does not use this argument to attempt to disprove God’s existence. He offers his own solution to the problem which we will investigate later on. But he has formulated this argument as the strongest possible case against the existence of God so that theists know exactly what they are arguing against.

5. What is ironic is that most of these theologians who formulate their theodicies apart from the Bible claim to be Christians and that their theodicies should be considered Christian as well. Stephen T. Davis brings out the problems with this: “If fidelity to the teachings of the Bible and to the Christian religious tradition no longer plays the normative role it once did in developing theological propositions that are acceptable to Christians, what will?...How then do we determine what is allowable and what is not in Christian theology? I mean this as a serious question. Can a person come up with any thesis, however bizarre, and push it on Christians?...In an age of religious charlatans like Jim Jones....I would have thought we needed far more, not less, adherence to the Bible and to the Christian religious tradition” (Encountering Evil, edited by Stephen T. Davis).

6. For a defense of the historical trustworthiness of the Bible, see my articles Historical Evidence for the Bible (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/two.html) and Can we Trust the New Testament (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/reliable.html). For a defense, using historical evidence (not circular reasoning) of the divine inspiration and thus infallibility of the entire Bible, see my article Decisive Evidence for the Inspiration of the Bible (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/three.html), where I expand upon the following argument:
   1. The Bible claims to be the infallible word of God.
   2. Jesus Christ believed this and taught that the Bible is the infallible and inerrant word of God.
   3. The Gospels give us an accurate record of what Jesus taught.
4. Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead, which can be demonstrated using only the evidence which critical scholars accept, validates the truth of everything He said.

5. Therefore, the Bible is the word of God.

For articles defending the physical resurrection of Christ, upon which the whole issue turns, see my The Resurrection of Christ: Myth or Reality (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/res.html), and Evidence for the Resurrection (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/res.html). Finally, for a defense of the fact that Jesus claimed to be God, using only the words that virtually all critical scholars accept as belonging to Christ, see my article Historical Evidence and the Claims of Christ (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/claims.html). The value of using only the evidence which the majority of critical scholars accept is to demonstrate that even on the skeptics own turns, there is good reason to accept the divinity of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, and the inspiration of the Bible. One does not need to assume that the Bible is true or even very reliable in order to prove that the Bible is reliable and true.


13. Also, it is relevant for me to respond from the Christian perspective because I am a Christian and the problem of evil is an assertion that my own belief system is contradictory. Since the charge pertains to the specific form of theism which I adhere to, I must answer the charge from within the beliefs of my own world view. For I am not very concerned about upholding the consistency, for example, of the Islamic form of theism. I am only concerned about the form of theism I hold to, because I believe that it is the only truth among all the world religions and philosophies. Thus, my desire is to show that, while the problem of evil may be a fatal problem to other forms of theism, it can be successfully solved from within the Christian framework.


15. There are many who would dispute that the Bible teaches a historical Adam and Eve, let alone the fact that he was representing the rest of the human race in his test. In regards to the historicity of Adam and Eve, see my evaluation of John Hick's Irenaean theodicy later in this thesis. For an examination of the relevant biblical texts on the issue, and a demonstration that they do teach that Adam was representing the
whole human race and therefore we all became sinful when he fell, see my articles Born Guilty
(http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/impute.html), which defends that Adam was our representative, and
Born Sinful (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/original.html), which attempts to demonstrate that we are
all born sinful as a result of his sin. For in depth scholarly defenses of these truths, see John Murray’s
excellent work on Romans 5:12-19 called The Imputation of Adam’s Sin (Philipsburg, New Jersey:
Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1959), and Jonathan Edward’s exhaustive exposition of the
biblical and rational arguments for original sin in The Great Christian Doctrine of Original Sin Defended
(Works, I, pp. 143-233).

1999), p. 47.

17. R.C. Sproul, Reason to Believe: A Response to Common Objections to Christianity (Grand Rapids,

18. Carson, p. 47.

19. One may respond that the analogy fails because no parent would have a child that they knew in
advance would turn out to engineer, for example, the nuclear destruction of the world. Parents have
children, knowing that the children will sin, because they expect the children to only commit “minor” sins.
I respond that there is, strictly speaking, no such thing as a minor sin. An occasional lie, though not as bad
as murder, is still an act of disregard for God’s moral law, and thus an utterly wicked sin. So even though
some sins are worse than others, there is no such thing as a minor sin.


21. John Piper, Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist (Sisters, Oregon: Multnomah Press,

22. Consider the following argument from Edward’s short discourse, Concerning the Divine Decrees in
General and Election in Particular, (Works, II, p. 528): “It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite
glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God’s glory should be
complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionably
effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God....Thus it is necessary, that God’s awful
majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could
not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God’s glory would be
very imperfect, both because these parts of divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also
the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they could scarcely shine
forth at all. If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no
manifestation of God’s holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in his providence, of
godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God’s grace or true goodness, if there was no sin
to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from.”

23. For a thorough defense of this interpretation, see my article Is Individual Election to Salvation Taught
in Romans 9? (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/rom.html) as well as John Piper’s scholarly work
The Justification of God: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Romans 9:1-23 (Grand Rapids, MI:


29. There are also many other reasons for affirming that God is of infinite worth. First, this truth is included in His holiness. As we saw earlier, God’s holiness means that He is of perfect moral purity and that He is one of kind. There is nothing else like Him. This is not only evident from reason, but also from Scripture. For example, Samuel’s mother sang, “There is no one holy like the Lord, indeed, there is no one besides Thee, nor is there any rock like our God” (2 Samuel 2:2). Likewise, we read in Isaiah, “‘To whom then will you liken Me that I should be his equal?’ says the Holy One” (Isaiah 40:25). John Piper argues how the infinite value of God follows from the holiness of God: “God is holy in His absolute uniqueness. Everything else belongs to a class. We are human. Rover is a dog, the oak is a tree. Earth is a planet, the Milky Way is one of a million galaxies, Gabriel is an angel, Satan is a demon. But only God is God. And therefore He is holy, utterly different, distinct, unique. All else is creation. He alone creates. All else begins. He alone always was. All else depends. He alone is self-sufficient. And therefore the holiness of God is synonymous with His infinite value. Diamonds are valuable because they are rare and hard to make. God is infinitely valuable because He is the rarest of all beings and cannot be made at all, nor was He ever made” (John Piper, *Standard* article, “Brothers, God is Love!”, March 1983).

Second, God’s infinite value is revealed by the fact that He is what brings the greatest happiness. Third, God’s infinite value is revealed by the fact that He is perfectly self-sufficient. He needs nothing. And therefore, He doesn’t need humans to work for Him to meet His needs. Rather, *He works for us* to meet our needs. God is always the giver, and He is utterly glorious because the giver receives the glory. Finally, God’s infinite value is evident from the fact that He always works to bring the greatest amount of happiness to the greatest number of people for the greatest amount of time. He is infinitely valuable because He provides this infinite worth to people. And, of course, this infinite worth is Himself.


34. Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 53. Consider also the following quote from Edward's *Dissertation Concerning the End for Which God Created the World*: “God in seeking his glory, seeks the good of his creatures; because the emanation of his glory (which he seeks and delight in, as he delights in himself and his own eternal glory) implies the communicated excellency and happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself; because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God's glory: God, in seeking their glory and happiness, seeks himself: and in seeking himself, i.e. himself diffused and expressed, (which he delights in, as he delights in his own beauty and fulness,) he seeks their glory and happiness” (*Works*, I, p. 105).


37. Lewis, 58.

38. Sproul, p. 140.


40. Sproul, p. 140.

41. Carson, pp. 96-97.

42. From what we have seen earlier about God's infinite worth, we have another reason for concluding that the Christian view is the only one worthy of God. For all other religions end up denying the infinite worth of the Supreme Being, and why should we accept a religion with such a less than fully valuable God? Could we really call that being "supreme"? But you may be wondering, "How do other religions dishonor God's worth?" Because they present God as forgiving sin without vindicating the worth of His glory. Christianity is the only religion which believes that God became man in the Person of Christ, who then, as man, died on the cross. Since Christ is fully God and fully man, He is of infinite value and thus He fully vindicated the worth of God's infinite glory in His suffering. But, you may ask again, what about the religions who don't believe in a God who is of infinite honor, or perhaps the regions that don't believe in God at all? How can you say that the gods in those religions would be violating their honor—for they don't have any honor to uphold!? But to this I respond again, would such a god, who has no honor, be worth worshiping? He would not even be worthy of the name God. For a more thorough discussion of why God must judge sin, see *The Necessity and Reasonableness of the Christian Doctrine of Satisfaction for Sin* by Jonathan Edwards (*Works*, II, pp. 565-578).

43. Carson, p. 183.

44. Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 222.


46. Carson, p. 121.
47. Margaret Clarkson, quoted in "Does Divine Sovereignty Make a Difference in Everyday Life?" by Jerry Bridges in *The Grace of God, The Bondage of the Will*, Thomas Schreiner and Bruce Ware, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), vol. I, p. 209. Bridges goes on to write, "Those who do not believe God is sovereign over the intents and actions of others do not enjoy this comfort. They often struggle unduly with the sinful actions of other people and, in many instances, allow bitterness to ruin their lives. Those who do believe God is in control can take courage in the fact that God is working in and through their pain and suffering for their ultimate good" (p. 210).


49. Carson, p. 191. Carson also says, "The triune God makes himself present in the lives of his people by his Spirit (John 14:23), whom Jesus bequeaths to his own, along with copious peace (John 14:27) and joy (John 15:11) so that our hearts will be neither troubled nor afraid (John 14:27)" (p. 128).

50. Carson, p. 128.

51. Lewis, p. 10.


56. Taylor, pp. 120-121.


61. Craig, p. 103.

62. Craig, p. 103.


64. Hick, p. 89.

66. The fact of God's infinite value also allows us to answer the objection presented by theologians such as Clark Pinnock and John Stott, that "eternal punishment is disproportionate to a finite life of sinning" (Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Missions*, p. 127). These theologians neglect the fact that "degrees of blameworthiness come not from how long you offend dignity, but from how high the dignity is that you offend" (Piper, p. 127).


68. Griffen, p. 127.


71. Craig, p. 88.


74. Encountering Evil, p. 39.

75. Boyd, p. 23.

76. Craig, p. 79.

77. Craig, p. 80.


81. Craig, p. 81.

82. Craig, p. 113.

83. Craig, p. 83.

84. I wish to make clear that I use free-will here as in the same way I have been using it up to this point—to mean that humans have the power of ultimate self-determination because God has adopted a "hands-off" policy in regards to the majority of our decisions. In this section I argue that this kind of free-will makes us the ultimate source of our goodness, and therefore takes honor away from God. However, I do not wish to imply by my rejection of this conception of "free-will" that humans are robots or that we do not make willing choices. In the sense that we choose according to our desires and make our choices deliberately it would be legitimate to say that we are "free." But we are not free from God's control, which is what the
FWD means by “free-will.” And God can move us to act such that we choose willingly and are not turned into robots.


87. Boyd, p. 47.

88. There are those free-will defenders, such as Craig, who attempt to bring in a great degree of divine sovereignty to their theology. Craig (but not Boyd), for example, would probably even argue that his view allows for the possibility for a specific purpose of God in every instance of suffering and evil. However, such attempts to uphold free-will and a divine plan behind all things still limit God because on such views free-will—not God’s perfect purposes for the situation—defines the boundaries within which God can work with His sovereignty. The only way to allow for the complete sovereignty of God in all things—that all things are going according to His perfect plan (see Ephesians 1:11) because He is unlimited in what He can do with His creation (Psalm 115:3; 135:6)—is to acknowledge that He can move His creatures to act without destroying their moral agency.


90. Ibid., *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 44.

91. Ibid, p. 44.

92. Ibid, p. 44.

93. Ibid, p. 45.


95. Ibid, pp. 254-255.

96. Ibid, pp. 283.


98. Ibid, p. 46.


100. Carson, p. 41.

101. See endnote 12 for sources which very convincingly demonstrate that, contrary to the claims of some, the Bible does indeed teach that Adam was the federal head of the human race and that all humans
were corrupted when we fell in him.


104. Ibid, pp. 72-73, 74.

105. Another objection to Hick's argument is that there are good scientific arguments against evolution. For a summary of these arguments, see my article, *Evolution: Fact or Fiction?* (http://www.geocities.com/Athena/Atlantis/1557/evol.html).

106. Of course, those who reject the authority of the Bible will claim that Jesus never really said this. In response, I point back to the evidence we have seen for the trustworthiness and inspiration of the Scriptures. For an in-depth biblical defense of the traditional Christian view that hell is eternal and many will go there, see Robert Peterson's work *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 1995). Also, see my article *A Biblical Understanding of Hell* (http://www.geocities.com/Athena/Atlantis/1557/bviewh.html).


110. Griffen, p. 258.

111. Ibid, p. 258.


113. Ibid, p. 266.


117. Ibid, pp. 273-274.


120. Griffen, p. 293.
121. Griffen, p. 292.

122. Griffen, p. 309.

123. Carson, p. 31.


126. Ibid, p. 128

127. Peterson, et. al., p. 139.


129. Another plausible interpretation is that verse 2 is not referring to the creation of the universe. Rather, the creation of the universe as a whole is only dealt with in verse 1. Then, verses 2 through the end of the creation account assume the universe as already created and are dealing with the *promise land* being made a suitable habitation for man. On this view, verse two means “and the promise land was not yet shaped into a suitable inhabitation for man.” In support of this is that the Hebrew construction for “the earth” in verse 2 is the same construction used throughout the books of Moses to refer to the promise land. This view is thoroughly set forth by John Sailhamer in *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996).

130. I also wish to point out that in recent years, scientific evidence has decisively confirmed the biblical teaching we have seen that the universe had a beginning. See, for example, my article *Science and the Existence of God: Big Bang or Big Bust* ([http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/bang.html](http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/bang.html)) where I explore this issue.

This is very relevant to the omnipotence of God. For if the universe has a beginning, as science shows, then not only must it have a Creator, but this creator must be the source of all the power that the universe has. Therefore, the Creator must have all power—that is, He must be omnipotent.


133. Cited in Ibid, p. 32.


137. Ibid, p. 15.
138. Ibid, p. 16.
139. Ibid, p. 11.
140. Ibid, p. 11.
141. Ibid, p. 11.
144. Ibid, p. 150-151.
146. Carson, p. 171.
152. Ibid, p. 35.
155. Ibid, pp. 64 and 65.
157. Wurmbrand, p. 45.
158. Ibid, p. 41.
159. Ibid, p. 59.
160. Ibid, p. 56.

161. Ibid, p. 45.

162. Ibid, pp. 39, 41.


164. Wurmbrand, p. 47.

165. Frame, p. 156.

166. For a refutation of Utilitarianism, see my paper *Can There be Ethics Without God?* (http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Delphi/8449/ethics.html).