

# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

S2

## I. KEY THOUGHTS

S3

### 1. The existence of evil is the greatest challenge for theism.

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1. “There is little doubt that the **problem of evil** is the most serious **intellectual** difficulty for **theism**.”

Stephen Davis, *Encountering Evil* (Knox Press, 1981), 2

#### THE PROBLEM

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IF God is all-knowing,

THEN he must know about evil

IF God is all-loving,

THEN he must want to abolish evil

IF God is all-powerful,

THEN he must be able to abolish evil

**BUT evil exists**

THEREFORE

God is not all-loving & not all-powerful

OR

God does not exist

#### THE SOLUTION

S6

**Theodicy** θεος (theos) God δικη (*dikē*) justice

DEF: arguments justifying the existence of evil in a world created by an all-loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing God

### 2. ALL theodicies include the notion of “Greater Good”

S7

God allows evil because it serves an ultimate purpose in bringing overall good into the world

EG selling of Joseph by his brothers → he ends up in Egypt & his family is saved from famine

S8

2. “You [his brothers] **intended to harm me**, but **God intended it for good** to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”

Gen 50:20

### 3. Christian Theodicies have been intimately connected to Gen 3 & the Fall

S9

☛ especially the COSMIC FALL

Protestant Reformer John Calvin

S10

3. “The earth was **cursed** on account of **Adam** [Gen 3:18] ... the **whole** order of nature was subverted by the **sin of man** ... Moses does not enumerate all the disadvantages in which man, by sin, has involved himself; for it appears that all the **evils** of the present life, which experience proves to be innumerable, have proceeded from the same fountain. The inclemency of the air, frost, thunders, unseasonable rains, drought, hail, and whatever is disorderly in the world, are the **fruits of sin**. Nor is there any other primary cause of **diseases** ... For if the **stain of sin** had not polluted the world, no animal would have been addicted to prey on blood [ie predation], but the fruits of the earth [plants] would have sufficed for all, according to the method which God had appointed [Gen 1:30].”

S11

*Commentaries on Genesis* (Baker, 1554) I:114, 117; *Isaiah* (Ethereal Library, 1559) I:296

#### COMMENTS:

S12

- Calvin steeped in scientific & historical concordism  
BUT Gen 3 is built on the Lost Idyllic Age Motif → ancient historiography
- Fossil Record falsifies Cosmic Fall  
inclemency of weather, diseases & predation appear before humans

## II. TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO THEODICY

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## Basic Categories of Evil

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## DISTINGUISH

(1) Moral Evil

due to humans EG murder, rape, torture, etc

## FROM

(2) Natural Evil

due to impersonal forces of nature EG tsunamis, cancers, genetic diseases, etc

## ARGUMENT

most of the evil in the world is caused by humans sinning against other humans

☛ DEFLECTS responsibility away from God

COMMENTS:

S4

- BUT God created nature → tsunamis, cancers, genetic diseases, etc  
 God used evolution → natural selection & survival of the fittest  
 Christians are troubled by these evolutionary mechanisms  
 isn't Christianity about: **spiritual selection?**  
**survival of the spiritually fittest?**

S5

- can nature & forces of nature be EVIL? S6  
 the term "evil" carries moral overtones  
 the natural world is not a moral agent with free will like a human

• **Horrid Natural Realities**

this category is more appropriate than "natural evil" → eliminates the moral element  
 opens the possibility they might be part of God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31)

## Classical Theodicies

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AUGUSTINIAN THEODICY

S8

huge impact on Western (Catholic &amp; Protestant) Christianity EG John Calvin

## BASIC PRINCIPLE:

**Original Perfection**

- God created the original creation perfect (Gen 1 & 2)
- Adam & Eve sin (Gen 3) → **moral evil** enters the world
- God judges Adam & Eve (Gen 3) → **horrid natural realities** enter the world  
 Eve suffers increased birth pain (v. 16)  
 earth is cursed with thorns & thistles (v. 18)  
 Adam is condemned to die (v. 19)  
 ☛ the creation is disrupted → COSMIC FALL

COMMENTS:

S9

## Hermeneutical Problem

Augustine is steeped in scientific &amp; historical concordism

BUT is this the correct hermeneutic for Gen 1-3?

## Moral Problem

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is there justice in one couple's sin leading to a COSMIC FALL?

EG do babies get cancer in the womb because Adam &amp; Eve sinned?

## Scientific Problem

S11 H52

Fossil Record → falsifies the COSMIC FALL

- ☛ a reason to reconsider Augustinian Theodicy?

S12

a reason to reconsider the hermeneutics of Gen 1-3 held by St. Augustine and by  
 most Christians through history?

IRENÆAN THEODICY

S2

Irenaeus the Bishop of Lyons (130-202)

## BASIC PRINCIPLE:

**Original Innocence**

- God created the original creation innocent & immature
- claims that morally free & spiritually mature people cannot be created instantaneously
- people need to experience moral evil & horrid natural realities
- moral evil & horrid natural realities are essential in the process of spiritual development

NOT a downward fall from an originally perfect creation

BUT an upward development toward spiritual maturity

COMMENTS:

S3

**Pedagogical (Educational) Theodicy**

moral evil &amp; horrid natural realities are “teaching tools”

BUT little impact on Western Church

Irenaeus a child of his time → accepted a historical Adam &amp; Eve

**Modern Theodicies**

S4

JOHN HICK’S IRENÆAN-EVOLUTIONARY THEODICY

S5

recasts Irenaeus’s pedagogical theodicy in an evolutionary context

## BASIC PRINCIPLE:

**Soul-Making Universe**

- the purpose of the world is to create people: (1) to know God  
(2) to love God
- requirement of the universe → Epistemic Distance from God  
for humans to have true freedom to develop an uncoerced relationship with God,  
the world must appear **religiously ambiguous**
- moral evil & horrid natural realities contribute to this ambiguity

4. “In order to be a person, exercising some measure of **genuine freedom**, the creature must be brought into existence, not in the immediate divine presence, but at a ‘distance’ from God. This ‘distance’ cannot of course be spatial; for God is omnipresent. It must be an **epistemic distance**, a distance in the cognitive dimension. And the Irenaean hypothesis is that this ‘distance’ consists, in the case of humans, in their existence within and as part of a world which functions as an autonomous system and from within which **God is not overwhelmingly evident**. It is a world ... [that] is **religiously ambiguous**, capable **both** of being seen as **purely natural phenomenon** and of **being seen as God’s creation** and experienced as mediating his presence. In such a world one can exist as a person over against the Creator.”

S6

Hick, “Irenaean Theodicy,” *Encountering Evil*, 43COMMENTS:

S8

a distancing or hiddenness of God is necessary for us to have true freedom

☛ what would the world be like if God was directly in-our-face?

**Star Trek Jesus**

S9

beamed down for our every whim &amp; problem

**Biblical Jesus**

5. Jesus: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” Matt 18:20

- Hick employs the traditional theological concepts:

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***Deus Absconditus*** Latin: God who hides

DEF: the hidden character of God

the world → “as purely natural phenomenon”

“as an autonomous system”

***Deus Revelatus*** Latin: God who reveals

DEF: the revealing character of God

the world → “as mediating his [God’s] presence”

“being seen as God’s creation”

QUESTION

S3

is the natural world “**religiously ambiguous**” as Hick states?

is there a balance between *Deus Absconditus* & *Deus Revelatus*?

OR

is the natural world **religiously unambiguous**?

Natural Revelation

Romans 1 & Wisdom 13 state that the world points to God’s existence

humans are accountable & “without excuse” regarding this revelation

- **Theodicean Juxtaposition**

Notes 149 S4

DEF: the impact of Intelligent Design in nature is an overpowering response to the existence of both moral evil & horrid natural realities

☛ *Deus Revelatus* trumps *Deus Absconditus*

ID is a incessant “voice” in the world declaring:

(1) God is in complete control of the world

(2) God is completely knowledgeable of moral evil & horrid natural realities

PROCESS THEODICY aka Theology of Nature

S5

reformulates traditional Christian doctrines

BASIC PRINCIPLE:

God & humans are in a never-ending process of “becoming”

God is grovelling along through time just like humans

**Panentheism**

S6

NOT pantheism (everything is God)

Dipolar God

belief that the world and God are inseparable realities, yet distinct realities

the world as God’s body & God as the world’s mind or soul

REJECTS:

traditional view of God’s omniscience → God is not all-knowing

traditional view of God’s omnipotence → God is not all-powerful

THEREFORE:

S7

God cannot do anything about moral evil & horrid natural realities

☛ God is NOT in control of the world

COMMENT:

DEFLECTS responsibility away from God

### III. TOWARD A CHRISTIAN HYPOTHESIS ON THEODICY

S2-3

#### 1. Biblical Considerations

S4

##### HERMENEUTICS OF GENESIS 3 & THE FALL

S5

- Gen 1-11 features ancient cosmogony & ancient historiography (recycled ancient motifs)  
scientific & historical concordism NOT possible
- Cosmic Fall in Gen 3 falsified by the fossil record  
suffering & death have been in the world 100s of millions of years before humans appear  
☛ we need to move beyond Augustinian (Western) Theodicy

##### BASIC PRINCIPLE:

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The Bible reveals the topic of theodicy in stages

##### **Revelatory Development in the Bible**

S7

foundational to Christianity → OLD Testament develops into NEW Testament

6. Jesus: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets [Old Testament];  
I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfill** them.” Matt 5:17

##### Examples of Revelatory Development/Fulfilment:

S8

###### Food Laws

OT: some foods are unclean (Lev 19)

NT: Jesus declares all foods clean (Mk 7:19)

###### Ethical Laws

OT: adulterers were stoned to death (Deut 22:22)

NT: Jesus tells adulterers not to sin again (Jn 8:11)

###### Atonement for Sin (making amends for sin)

OT: animal sacrifice (Lev 4)

NT: sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross (Heb 10:4, 10)

##### COMMENTS:

S9

developments in Ethics & Atonement for Sin → **RADICAL** shifts!!!

☛ **PRECEDENT** for revelatory development with theodicy

##### THREE STAGES OF THEODICY IN THE BIBLE

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##### **Stage 1: The Fall (Gen 3)**

S11

Sin **causally connected** to suffering & death

Adam & Eve sin → God launches suffering & death into the world (Cosmic Fall)

##### **Stage 2: The Book of Job**

S12

BEGINS to challenge the notion that sin is **causally connected** to suffering

###### Chapters 1-3

Job loses all possessions, his children are killed & he is stricken by a debilitating disease

###### Chapters 4-37

Job’s “friends” are still in Stage 1 → Job’s suffering is **causally connected** to his sin

###### Chapters 38-41

S13

God enters & points to the Creation & asks Job: (ID Argument)

- where were you when the foundations of the earth were set? Job 38:4
- do you know the laws of the heavens? 38:33
- do you feed the lions? 39:39

###### Chapter 42: The Conclusion

S14

Job is humbled by the Creation & God’s ID Argument

7. “Surely I spoke of things I did not **understand**, things too wonderful for me to **know**.”

Job 42:3

COMMENTS:

S2

- Book of Job is structured on the **Theodicean Juxtaposition**  
Job's suffering (chap 1-37) is answered by design in nature (chap 38-41)  
☛ ID trumps suffering & reveals that God is in complete control
- God does NOT give a **verbal** response S3  
eg, God does not say: "This is how theodicy works ..."  
God gives a **non-verbal** response → ID argument  
Message: "I'm God & I'm in control of the world, including your suffering"
- **Mystery** is a part of theodicy S4  
Job: "things I did not **understand**, things too wonderful for me to **know**"  
☛ humans will never fully understand the issue of theodicy

**Stage 3: Jesus & the New Testament**

S5

Theodicy is fulfilled by Jesus (Matt 5:17) Quote 5

sin DISCONNECTED from suffering & death

☛ **RADICAL** revelatory development → suffering & death have purpose (teleology)!!!

**Teleology (Purpose) of Suffering & Death**

S6

- suffering is used to display the work of God
- 8. "As Jesus went along, he saw a **man blind from birth**. His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' [Stage 1 Theodicy]. Neither this man nor his parents sinned,' said Jesus, "but this happened so that the **work of God might be displayed in his life.**" John 9:1-3

COMMENTS:

S7

Jesus had the perfect opportunity to say:

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but it's because in Gen 3 Adam & Eve sinned and suffering entered the world"

Jesus **DISCONNECTS** sin from suffering

by implication, he also disconnects sin from death

- death is used to glorify God S8
- 9. At the tomb of Lazarus: "Then Jesus said, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the **glory of God**? ... Jesus called in a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The **dead man** came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.'" John 11:40, 43

- suffering & death of Jesus are used for eternal salvation S9
- 10. "Although he [Jesus] was a son, he **learned** obedience from what he **suffered** and, once made perfect, he became the source of **eternal salvation**" Heb 5:8

COMMENTS:

pedagogical theodicy extends to Jesus → he learned from suffering!!!

**Intelligent Design, Goodness of Creation & Horrid Natural Realities**

S10

Jesus' fulfilment of theodicy sheds a **RADICAL** new light on suffering & death

horrid natural realities are TELEOLOGICAL:

- (1) another component of God's design in nature  
they complement traditional design arguments N90
- (2) another component of God's "very good" creation (Gen 1:31) S11

**2. Logical Considerations**

S2

Theodicy includes rational justifications in responding to the intellectual problem in Key Thought #1

NOTE: cold, hard, academic arguments rarely help people who are suffering

**BASIC PRINCIPLES**

S3

## • Human Sin

we are the greatest source of moral evil in the world

☛ **Don't blame God, blame us!!!**

## • Faith

S4

faith is needed to believe:

God is ultimately in complete control of the world

God is fully aware of people suffering from moral evil & horrid natural realities

God will hold people accountable for their moral evil acts at the Final Judgment

## • Mystery

S5

we will never fully understand why God allows moral evil & horrid natural realities

this is due to the limits of our creaturely epistemology

**SPECIFIC PRINCIPLES**

S6

## • Fulfilment by Jesus (Matt 5:17) Quote 5

don't go to Gen 3 for theodicy, but to the teaching & example of Jesus

☛ moral evil & horrid natural realities are opportunities to display the work of God  
& glorify him in our life

## • Greater Good

S7

moral evil & horrid natural realities are used by God for the greater good of creating humans:

(1) to love God

(2) to love other humans

(3) to enjoy eternity with God & other humans who love him

## • Pedagogy

S8

moral evil & horrid natural realities are “teaching tools” in spiritual development

contribute to discipline, testing of faith & spiritual awakening

## • Theodicean Juxtaposition

S9

ID in nature ultimately trumps moral evil & horrid natural realities

moral evil & horrid natural realities contribute to divine hiddenness (*Deus Absconditus*)

☛ creates a world with genuine freedom and which requires faith

**EXAMPLES**

S10

**PERFECT SOUL-MAKING UNIVERSE**

S11

**11.** “Honestly now, if you were God, could you possibly dream up any more **educational**,

contrasty, thrilling, beautiful, tantalizing world than Earth to **develop spirit** in? If you

think you could, do you imagine you would be outdoing Earth if you designed a world

free of germs, diseases, poisons, pains, malice, explosives and conflicts so its people

could relax and enjoy it? Would you, in other words, try to make the world nice and

safe—or would you let it be provocative, dangerous and exciting? In actual fact, if it

ever came to that I'm sure you would find it **impossible to make a better world than**

**God has already made.”**

Guy Murchie, *Seven Mysteries of Life* (Houghton Mifflin, 1978), 622

COMMENTS:

S12

a pedagogical theodicy

moral evil & horrid natural realities part of God's “very good” creation (Gen 1:31)

12. “I consider that our present **sufferings** are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us ... For our light and momentary troubles are **achieving** for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all ... **all things** work together for **good** to those who love God.”

Rom 8:18, 28; 2 Cor 4:17

COMMENTS:

S3

“all things” → include moral evil &amp; horrid natural realities

IF there is eternal life,

THEN our complaints in this life will look quite insignificant

## SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT &amp; HOPE OF ETERNITY

S4

13. Letter by Emma Darwin to Charles (1861): “I am sure you know I love you well enough to believe that I mind your suffering nearly as much as I should my own and I find the only relief to my mind is to take it as **from God’s hand**, and to try to **believe** that all suffering and illness is **meant** to help us to exalt our minds and to look forward with **hope** to a **future state**.”

*Autobiography of Darwin, 237-8*COMMENTS:

a pedagogical theodicy that reflects the importance of faith in theodicy

Emma Darwin was very religious

## SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT &amp; TESTING OF FAITH

S5

14. “Consider it **pure joy**, my brothers, whenever you face **trials** of many kinds, because you know that the **testing** of your faith **develops** perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be **mature and complete**, not lacking anything.”

James 1:2-4

COMMENTS:

radicality of Christian theodicy!

how often to we consider our trials PURE JOY?

## GOODNESS OF DISCIPLINE

S6

15. “God **disciplines** us for our **good** that we may share in his holiness. No **discipline** seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Heb 12:10-11

16. “Before I was **afflicted** I went astray, but now I obey your [God’s] word. You are **good** and what you do is **good**; **teach** me your decrees ... It was **good** for me to be **afflicted** so that I might **learn** your decrees ... In your faithfulness you have **afflicted** me.”

Ps 119:67-8, 71, 75

COMMENTS:

Christians are notorious in praising God for toys—cars, careers, homes, etc

S8

☛ ever hear Christians praising God for disciplining them?

## SPIRITUAL AWAKENING

S9

17. C.S. Lewis: “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.”

*Problem of Pain* (Macmillan, 1962), 93COMMENTS:

pain forces most people to think seriously about the largest questions in life

☛ is there a God? is there life after death? is eternal life attainable?



## 3. Experiential Considerations

S2

Theodicy also includes a personal component that is “meta-rational” or “supra-rational”

NOTE: our lives are not limited to just logic & math

we are also shaped by “messy” personal experiences

messy personal experience has it’s own “logic” that transcends rationality

EG popular aphorism: “The heart has its own reasons”

## BASIC PRINCIPLES

S3

- justification for moral evil & horrid natural realities includes “understanding” they have purpose by **personally living** through them

to appreciate this principle often comes with time & many experiences such as these

QUESTION:

S4

have you ever had a really **evil** or **horrid** experience, and now you look back and say:

“I’m glad that happened because it was **good** for me?”

IF you can,

THEN your **theodicy** includes an experiential (personal) component

- personal struggles are GOOD!!! S5
- struggling with God is an essential part of the human spiritual voyage
- ☛ questioning God’s goodness & even his existence because of moral evil & horrid natural realities is spiritually healthy

remember the meaning of the word “Isra/el”

S6

שָׂרָה (sārāh) to struggle, persist

אֵל (’ēl) God

18. “Your name will no longer be Jacob, but **Israel**, because you have **struggled with God** and with men and have overcome.” Gen 32:28

## Alexander Solzhenitsyn

S7

political prisoner in a Russian prison & an Orthodox Christian.

19. “It was only when I lay there on rotting prison straw that I sensed within myself the first stirrings of **good**. Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating **good** and **evil** passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all **human hearts** ... That is why I turn back to the years of my imprisonment and say, sometimes to the astonishment of those about me: “Bless you, prison!”... **I nourished my soul** there, and I say without hesitation:

**“Bless you, prison, for having been in my life!”**

*Gulag Archipelago*  
II:615-617

QUESTION:

S9

can you take the most morally evil experience or horrid natural reality in your life and say:

**“Bless you, \_\_\_\_\_, for having been in my life.”**

**CONCLUSION: Toward a Christian HYPOTHESIS on Theodicy** S2**1. All theodicies are Limited** S3

- they only provide some reasonable justifications for moral evil & horrid natural realities  
BUT they are never completely satisfying

**Why?**

- mystery & faith are essential components
- messy personal experience is also a component → not everyone has the same experience
- logical arguments are rarely helpful when someone is suffering

**2. Pedagogical & Greater Good arguments are common in theodicies** S4

- many people acknowledge that moral evil & horrid natural realities often teach them valuable insights and lead to good
- personal experience of moral evil & horrid natural realities in retrospect (usually a long time afterward) seems to offer one of the best justifications for their presence in a world created by an all-loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing God

**3. Our universe appears to be the Perfect stage for soul-making** S5

- the central purpose of this existence is to understand & experience LOVE: (1) to love God  
(2) to love one another
- to fully understand love, we need to know & experience what lacking love is → moral evil

**4. Christian theodicies find their Fulfilment in Jesus** S6

IF Jesus “learned obedience from what he suffered” (Heb 5:8)

THEN Christians should as well

IF Jesus through death “became a source of eternal salvation” (Heb 5:8)

THEN death has an ultimate purpose & Christians should be grateful

**5. The Creation Heals us in times when we face suffering & death** S7

Book of Job:

ID in nature declares that God is in complete control of the world, including suffering & death

**6. Theodicy & Evolution: Why did God create through evolution?** S8

- to maintain God’s epistemic distance & his *Deus Absconditus* character

IF the fossil record were like the YEC & PC fossil pattern predictions, S9-10 H52

THEN God would be like the “Star Trek Jesus”

this would be scientific proof for the existence of God & concordism

BUT this would totally disrupt the world as we know it

completely destroy the need of faith

S11 H52

- to provide a “very good” world (Gen 1:31) with real freedom to develop a real relationship with God  
☛ an uncoerced & truly loving relationship

God has given us the freedom to believe whether evolution is:

(1) dysteleological → NO plan, purpose & design → NO God

OR

(2) teleological → planned, purposeful & designed → ordained & sustained by God

Lamoureux