

“Every philosopher I know believes that the most serious challenge to theism was, is, and will continue to be the problem of evil.” -Ronald H. Nash

Common Objections to Belief in God

- Intellectual
- Emotional
- Volitional (*willful*)

Each of these objections to belief in God can be seen within the problem of evil.

Emotional Objection

- “If God is good, how could He let this happen to me?”

Volitional Objection

- “I don’t want to believe in a God that allows such evil.”

Intellectual

- The Christian God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.
- Evil and suffering exists.
 - If God is all-powerful and allows evil, He is not all-good.
 - If God is all-good and allows evil, He is not all-powerful.

Two Types of Evil¹

- Natural Evil
 - “The case of a fawn trapped in a forest fire and undergoing several days of terrible agony before dying.”
- Moral Evil
 - “The case of the rape, beating, and murder by strangulation of a five-year-old girl.”

Two Forms of Approaches

- Defense
 - Offers a possible reason that God allows evil.
- Theodicy
 - Offers an actual reason that God allows evil.

The Logical Problem of Evil (Deductive)

- Because of the existence of evil, there is a logical contradiction with the omni-attributes of the Christian God.

“Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.” -J.L. Mackie²

¹ William L. Rowe, “The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look,” in *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 262.

² J.L. Mackie, *Evil and Omnipotence*, in *The Philosophy of Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92-93.

“Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil, on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other.” -H.J. McCloskey³

The Evidential Problem of Evil (Inductive)

- The essence of the inductive problem of evil is the sheer volume of and seemingly useless (gratuitous) amounts of evil that exists in the world.

DEFENSES

Free Will Defense⁴

- To rebut the logical problem of evil, the Christian must show that there is no logical contradiction.
- Alvin Plantinga
- Due to Plantinga’s “Free Will Defense,” most philosophers now do not believe there is a logical problem of evil.

Skeptical Theism

- Defense against the evidential problem of evil
- A common notion in the evidential problem of evil is that “I cannot see any justifying reason for God to allow such evil.”
 - “No good we know of justifies an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being in permitting [natural and moral evil]”⁵
- Noseeum inference
 - It says, more or less, that because we don’t see ‘em, they probably ain’t there

I think skeptical theism is a very biblical position and philosophically defensible since the God the atheists are denying is defined as omniscient.

Isaiah 55:8-9 (ESV)

*8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.*

*9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

Deuteronomy 29:29 (ESV)

29 “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

³ H.J. McCloskey, *God and Evil* (The Philosophical Quarterly 10, 1969), 97.

⁴ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1974).

⁵ Rowe, “The Evidential Argument from Evil: A Second Look,” 263.

THEODICIES

Natural Law Theodicy

- Free creatures work within the framework of an orderly creation.

“The same water which sustains and refreshes can also drown; the same drug which relieves suffering can cause crippling psychological addiction; the same sun which gives light and life can parch fields and bring famine; the same neural arrangements which transmit intense pleasure and ecstasy can also bring extreme pain and agony.”⁶

“...to preserve the lawlike regularity of the world there must come a point at which God will refrain from saving a fawn from fire, for example, even though performing this act of mercy would not significantly decrease the lawlike regularity...Assuming that God sees value in creating a world with meaningful freedom and stable order, it is doubtful that he would intervene often to...disrupt the natural order...”⁷

“Couldn’t God intervene every time something evil was going to take place?” many skeptics may ask. **(ASK: What are your thoughts on this?)**

- What this question is asking is not merely for God to intervene, but for God to suspend the natural order as we know it. If this were to happen, God’s provision would become predictable, and people would never know of His deliverance and His love through sacrifice.

“Couldn’t God have created a world that is orderly yet has no evil and suffering?” is another common question. **(ASK: What are your thoughts on this?)**

“The atheologian has yet to demonstrate that God could create a significantly modified natural system, which, when considered in terms of the entire world system of which it would be a part, would produce significantly less natural evil and yet preserve the integrity of human freedom and retain as much good as we have in our present world. No atheologian has given us any reason to suppose that a different world order might result in as much good and less natural evil than the present system.” -Ronald H. Nash⁸

Soul-Making Theodicy

- Suffering is essential for producing positive character traits.
- John Hick⁹

“The soul-making theodicy states that in order for God to produce the virtuous beings with whom He wants fellowship, these individuals must face challenges that teach them the

⁶ Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1982) 110.

⁷ D. Baggett and Jerry Walls, *Good God* (Oxford 2011), 144,153

⁸ Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1988), 203.

⁹ “Soul-Making Theodicy,” in *God and the Problem of Evil*, ed. William L. Rowe (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001)

intrinsic worth of the virtues He possesses perfectly. Virtues cannot be created instantaneously; the process by which they are acquired is part of the nature of having them. Each of us is given an opportunity to develop into a better or worse person. But we cannot grow in an environment that is free of risk and danger and disappointment. Just as God had good reasons for creating us with free will and for placing us in a lawlike environment, God also had good reasons for placing us in an environment that is challenging, that tests us.”¹⁰

Soul-Making Theodicy

- The Apostle Paul
 - Acts 9:16 - *“For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”*
 - Romans 5:3-5 - *“Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*
- Character cannot, nor will not, develop apart from suffering.

I think the soul-making theodicy is a very biblical theodicy and philosophically defensible, especially when paired with the previous defenses and theodicies.

O Felix Culpa Theodicy– Alvin Plantinga¹¹ (*O Happy Fall*)

Best of possible worlds

- Incarnation
- Atonement
- These are infinite goods.

Best of possible worlds

- Love
- There is a very good reason that suffering exists.
- So that God could suffer in order to demonstrate the full extent of His love.
- There is no better world in which we do not know the love of God through the sacrifice of Jesus and get to live in the presence and cognitively aware of that love for all eternity.

Therefore, Jesus could say to all who trust in Him,

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world.” -John 16:33

This is good news. This is good news that would be no news apart from the bad news of the existence of evil.

¹⁰ Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1988), 204.

¹¹ Alvin Plantinga, “Supralapsarianism, or ‘O Felix Culpa,’” in *Christian Faith and the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).