EVIL NECESSITATES THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

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by

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The Nuclear Option

Blaise Pascal observed that "evil is easy and has infinite forms; good is almost unique."[1] It is one thing to contemplate the philosophy of evil from the scholastic halls of academia or the comfort of one's living room couch; it is another matter entirely to experience it first-hand and face-to-face, and suffer a ferocious tempest deep within one's soul. In the latter case, as Alvin Plantinga notes, "a believer in God may undergo a crisis of faith. He may be tempted to follow the advice of Job's 'friends'; he may be tempted to 'curse God and die'."[2] In the midst of horrendous suffering, Job cried out, "*But when I hoped for good, evil came*", Job 30:25 (ESV). The author of Ecclesiastes, wrote of an "evil under the sun" that "lies heavily on mankind" (Ecc 6:1). Ironically, the evil that Solomon identifies is "wealth, possessions and honor" given by God, but that ultimately fallen man is not privileged to enjoy. To fear God is to hate evil (Prov 8:13; Ps 97:10). Evil is rooted in a spiritual source of darkness (Eph 6:12). Christ taught his disciples to pray for deliverance from evil (Matt 6:13) and Ecc 9:3 recognizes that the evil of death comes for everyone, both good and bad. Tertullian recognized the ubiquitousness of evil writing "for we men are all born under sin, and our very origin is in evil."[3] Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli present three good reasons why the problem of evil is uniquely important for Christians: (1) it is the apparent proof of atheism, (2) it is universal, and (3) it is not merely a theoretical problem but an intensely practical one.[4]

The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume echoed the classic problem of evil presented by Epicurus: "(1) Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent, (2) Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent, (3) Is he both able and willing? Then from where does evil come?"[5] Evil has vexed philosophers and the church for Millenia, representing

[1] Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, public domain, digital edtition, 2017, 136, Kindle. I will define evil during its metaphysical analysis while good will be defined in premise three of my argument.

[2] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, And Evil*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Edermans Publishing Company, 1974, 28, Kindle

[3] Tertullian, *On Repentance*, The Complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene And Post-Nicene Collection of Early Church Fathers: Cross-Linked to the Bible, (Philip Schaff, editor), Public Domain, Toronto, CA, 2016, 447, Kindle

[4] Peter Kreeft & Ronald Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, Downers Gove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 122-123

[5] Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology, An Introduction To Christian Doctrine*, Grand Rapids, MI:

the most significant challenge for both Christianity and the existence of God. Aquinas acknowledged evil to be a common and strong objection to the existence of God.[6]

 C. S. Lewis pondered the mystery of evil wondering, "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?"[7] Contemporary apologist William Lane Craig admits that the most important argument raised by atheists against the existence of God is that of suffering; he acknowledges, "When you consider the extent and depth of suffering in the world, whether due to natural disasters or to man's own inhumanity to man, then you have to admit that it's hard to believe in God. The horrible suffering in the world certainly seems to be evidence of God's absence."[8] There is no question that evil can evoke a powerful emotional reaction. But Craig also observes that as a philosopher, he is called upon to articulate what he *thinks* about evil, not how he *feels* about this "emotionally loaded topic."[9] The duty of the apologist is to recognize and acknowledge the devastating impact that evil can have, but then voice an argument independent of emotion. When trying cases involving horrific evil, our justice system seeks objective evidence to determine guilt or innocence; the emotional damage is considered separately (post-conviction) prior to sentencing. The elephant-in-the-room for the apologist to address regarding the irrefutable existence of evil is where does the evidence lead with respect to the existence of God?

Millard Erickson acknowledges, "The continued presence of evil in both forms (moral and natural) seems to argue loudly and eloquently against the existence of such a (all-powerful and all-loving) God."[10] Douglas Groothuis admits in his monumental volume on *Christian*

Zondervan. 2011, 203-204, Kindle

[6] Matthew Levering, *Proofs of God: Classical Arguments from Tertullian to Barth*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016, 182, Kindle

[7] C. S. Lewis, *The Problem Of Pain*, HarperOne, 2009, 5, Kindle

[8] William Lane Craig, *On Guard*, Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010, 151

[9] Craig, *On Guard*, 152

[10] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House,1985, 115

Apologetics that evil is a vexing question with no simple answer and concedes it to be a "heavy weight for Christianity."[11] So powerful is the problem of evil that Groothuis admits that it "is often flashed before Christians as a trump card."[12] Indeed, evil inevitably becomes the "nuclear option" for atheists to deploy against Christian theism. The problem of evil often goes head to head with the moral argument with such ferocity that only one can survive the clash; either the problem of evil completely undermines belief in a perfectly good God as Hume argued, "or the moral argument decisively undercuts the argument from evil."[13] In the 19th century, John Mill was adamant that evil was "absolutely contradictory to an all-powerful, all-good being."[14] He concluded that, at best, there can only be a "partially good deity with limited power."[15] So persuasive and powerful is the problem of evil that atheist Paul Draper who does indeed accept that beauty is evidence for God, thinks that it is dwarfed by the evidential problem of evil.[16] Jacob Friesenhahn, Chair of the Religious Studies Department at TMI - The Episcopal School of Texas, admits,

> There is no corner of creation unaffected by evil. Further, the forms that evil takes can appear horrific, even demonic, as well as inexplicable. Both the *degree* to which evil exists and the terrible types of evil that we find in our world compound the problem of evil. Finally, profound evil is not only 'out there' in the world but also within each of *our own souls* (original emphasis).[17]

Many simply ignore evil rather than face the unpleasant task of confronting it. An example is the "common tendency to deny the reality of death by removing natural death from

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[11] Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics: A Comprehensive Case For Biblical Faith*, Downers Grove, IL, IVP Academic, 2022. 670, Kindle

[12] Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 670

[13] David Baggett & Jerry L. Walls, *Good God, The Theistic Foundations Of Morality*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, 143, Kindle

[14] Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics, Second Edition*, Grand Rapids MI: Baker Academic, 2013, 164, Kindle

[15] Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 165

[16] Philip Tallon, *Two Dozen (Or So) Arguments For God, The Plantinga Project,* Jerry L. Walls & Trent Dougherty, editors, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018, 322-323, Kindle

[17] Jacob H. Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy; The "Trinitarian Theology of von Balthasr and the Problem of Evil*, New York, Ashgate Publishing, 2011, 1, Kindle

public consideration and from the home to the hospital, and by acting as if modern technology and progress are a match for disease and death."[18] The job of the mortuary (Funeral) makeup artist is to try and shield the effects of death and disguise the deceased to appear lifelike—a job that is usually futile in my opinion and experience.

However, *is it possible that evil actually presents a powerful argument for the very existence of God*? Can the existence of evil be used, in the words of Anselm, "to shatter the rigid resistance of unbelievers?"[19] Philosopher Gregory Ganssle acknowledges that evil seems to supply evidence against the existence of God, but further argues that "it is also the case that the existence and nature of evil provides evidence *for* the existence of God."[20] Philosopher R. Douglas Geivett correctly points out that "it is difficult to even give a rough characterization of what evil is without implying God's existence."[21]

As an extension of the moral argument, I will contend with an abductive argument that evil necessitates the existence of God, concluding that a transcendent God is required for the resolution of evil.[22] (Abductive reasoning works backward from a present set of conditions to the most likely explanation.[23]) While we cannot reasonably expect to be able to justify or explain *all* instances of evil, the very existence of evil necessitates the existence of God who alone can bring ultimate resolution to the problem of evil.[24] The consolidated evidence to be evaluated consists of the metaphysical analysis of evil, historical references, contemporary philosophers and

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[18] Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy,* 11, Kindle

[19] Benjamin K. Forest, Joshua D. Chatraw, Alister E. McGrath (editors), *The History Of Apologetics, A Biographical and Methodological Introduction*, Grand Rapid, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020, 219, Kindle

[20] Gregory E. Ganssle, *Evil As Evidence For Christianity*, God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain, (Chad Meister & James K. Dew, editors), Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 214, Kindle

[21] Ganssle, *Evil As Evidence For Christianity*, 217, Kindle

[22] In fact, the moral argument is encapsulated in premise three of my argument.

[23] Gavin Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't: The Beauty of Christian Theism*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2021, 12, Kindle

[24] In formal logic, deductive arguments start with premises and reason to a necessary conclusion. Inductive arguments similarly start with premises and reason to a probable conclusion. Most philosophers agree that abduction (in the sense of Inference to the Best Explanation) is a type of inference that is frequently employed, in some form or other, both in everyday and in scientific reasoning (https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abduction/).

theologians, and the Biblical data—all of which will forcefully argue that the existence of evil necessitates the existence of God. The presence of evil is ultimately powerful evidence for the existence of God and the argument most often raised against Christianity backfires on its proponents. The starting point will be a metaphysical analysis of evil, followed by an exploration of gratuitous evil and the doctrine of skeptical theism. The argument then logically proceeds, presenting evil as evidence for the existence of God, reinforced by the impact of Natural Law. Finally, the theology of *Christus Victor* contends that the resolution to evil requires God.

Ultimate Reality

Baggett and Walls assert that the problem of evil is a philosophical matter; it is a question not of physics but of metaphysics.[25] Metaphysics is defined as "any enquiry that raises questions about reality that lie beyond or behind those capable of being tackled by the methods of science."[26] But what exactly is evil? Laura Ekstrom, Chancellor Professor of Philosophy at William & Mary, argues in her book *Evil and Theodicy* that metaphysical analysis must precede any attempt to address the problem of evil. She asks, "How one should think about the question of the theoretical fit between a metaphysical picture of the world as created and overseen by God, on the one hand, and the realities of the atrocities and suffering we observe?"[27] In contrast to worldviews that insist evil is an illusion (i.e., Christian Science, some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, etc.), Christianity asserts that evil is indeed real and not an illusion.[28]

Thomas Aquinas addressed evil in his *Summa Theologica* when contemplating the existence of God. He considers the theorem, "If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist." He then follows with

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[25] Baggett & Walls, *Good God,* 148, Kindle

[26] Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy (Oxford Quick Reference)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 305, Kindle

[27] Laura W. Ekstrom, *Evil and Theodicy*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023, 2, Kindle

[28] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology, An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020, 857, Kindle

five philosophical proofs for the existence of God.[29] He postulates the cause of evil in the *Summa*, agreeing with Augustine that evil is the "absence of good."[30] We must be careful though not to conclude that evil must therefore be "nothing." While darkness is accurately described as the absence of light, and evil can indeed be considered an "absence of good," the privation of good does not thereby ascribe non-existence to evil. We must not equate the statement that "darkness is the absence of light" with the assertion that "evil is the absence of good." It is a false comparison. Darkness prevails where light is absent; light is something (energy) and darkness is nothing.

What about the declaration that evil is the absence of good? Norman Geisler and J. Y. Amanu comment in the *New Dictionary of Theology* on the nature of evil, "The reality of evil does not necessarily imply that it is a substance or thing. Evil could be a real privation or lack of some good thing (as Augustine asserted). Accordingly, evil could exist in a good thing as an imperfection in it, like a hole in a piece of wood."[31] Leibniz argued that "evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in suffering, and *moral evil* in sin" (original emphasis).[32] With this understanding—evil is an imperfection to an original good design; what was originally perfectly good, is marred and scarred with imperfection. Evil is therefore the corruption of something created good and perfect. The *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion* agrees, "Most Christian theologians have held that evil is not a positive thing or substance but should be understood as a defect or damage to God's creation. Though evil is not a substance, it does have a positive, active character in that it is rooted in the actions of free agents."[33] Consider that the

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[29] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. William Benton. 1952, I.2, 51, Kindle

[30] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.49, 666, Kindle

[31] Norman L. Geisler, J. Y. Amanu, (Editors: Sinclair F Ferguson, David F. Wright, J. I. Packer), *New Dictionary of Theology*, Intervarsity Press, 1988, 242, Kindle

[32] Freiherr Von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Theodicy Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul Limited, 1951, 61, Kindle

[33] C. Stephen Evans, *Pocket Dictionary of Apologetics and Philosophy of Religion,* Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2013, 41-42, Kindle

devil "is a good thing gone bad—in fact, a very good thing gone very bad."[34] Ortlund writes "For on theism, evil really is a perversion, a desacralizing, a 'fall', a twisting of what things should be. Theism might not tell you why wrongness is there just yet; but naturalism cannot even tell you that it is wrong."[35] Ganssle points out that,

> If Geivett is right and something is evil if it ought not be the way it is, then it ought to be otherwise. It ought to be good. Therefore, there is a way things ought to be. One implication of there being a way things ought to be is that there must be some purposes or ends to which things are directed. It makes no sense to say that things ought to be a certain way unless there are some objective goals or ends or purposes for them. Such purposes make little sense if there is no God.[36]

While natural evil (i.e., tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.) is distinct from moral evil, all natural evil is ultimately the consequence of moral evil for Scripture is explicit that creation was cursed as a result of the Fall in Eden (Rom 8:19-21). All evil is ultimately grounded in moral evil, whether angelic or human.

Entropy is a measure of the disorder of a system and describes how much energy is *not* available to do work. The more disordered a system and higher the entropy, the less energy is available to do work. The Second Law of Thermodynamics states that the total entropy of a closed system either increases or remains constant in any process; it *never* decreases. In layman's terms—the Second Law explains why everything decays, runs down or wears out. The Second Law is instrumental in the universal pain and suffering throughout the cosmos. James Shin, PhD in Systematic Theology, authored a fascinating book entitled *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy: A Trinitarian Panentheistic Vision* which wrestles with God's involvement with a world "ridden with natural and cosmic evil." He postulates that "the problem of pain, suffering, and death is contingent but inherent in the fabric of the universe because the second law of thermodynamics is universal."[37] He is correct; there are no known exceptions to the Second Law of

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[34] Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, 132

[35] Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't,* 160, Kindle

[36] Ganssle, *Evil As Evidence For Christianity*, 218, Kindle

[37] James Jongseock Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy: A Trinitarian Panentheistic Vision*, Eugene Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2022, 228, Kindle

Thermodynamics.

However, there are problems with Shin's hypothesis that entropy therefore "produces pain, death, and decay that are inevitably essential for the birth of individual living creatures."[38] In other words, Shin uses entropy to justify the pain and suffering inherent in an evolutionary process that he believes occurred prior to the Fall in Eden. He writes that it is "undeniable that the Second Law of Thermodynamics governs the cycle of entropy in the birth of a new life and the emergence of a higher level of complexity."[39] However it is "undeniable" only if one accepts the theory of evolution as established scientific fact. Shin views pain and suffering as contingent to a long-range *telos*, believing that "every creature" is not fully completed in the present creation. But Shin is wrong. Entropy is a result of the Fall, not the divine mechanism for creation; he attributes it to initial creation believing it to be "embodied in God's creation with the eschatological *telos*."[40] With Shin's definition of entropy which he correctly describes as the reduction of available energy and an increase in disorder, the "*instability* and *disorder* of entropy can be likened to evil since evil is a state of death, disorder, and decay."[41] Ironically, Shin ascribes a creative role to entropy "in evolution and civilization" which seems to contradict his view that entropy can be likened to evil.[42] He explicitly declares that therefore "natural evil is part of God's act of continuous creation that is ultimately good."[43]

In other words, Shin is claiming that God used the evil of entropy to produce a creation that Gen 1:13 describes as "very good" upon completion. Suffering, pain and death can indeed be attributed to the inexorable increase in entropy throughout the Cosmos as a result of what happened in Eden, but *not* as something purposely embedded in creation from the

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[38] Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy*, 12, Kindle

[39] Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy*, 15, Kindle

[40] Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy*, 12, Kindle

[41] Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy*, 16, Kindle

[42] Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy*, 16, Kindle

[43] Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy*, 16, Kindle

beginning (Gen 1:1).

"Pointless Evils" And Skeptical Theism

The phrase "problem of evil" is actually a label for multiple problems involving God

and evil.[44] There is the logical problem of evil, the evidential problem of evil, and the existential

problem of evil. A foundational issue that is common to all the problems of evil and must first be

addressed is known theologically as "skeptical theism."[45] Philosopher Laura Ekstrom defines

skeptical theism as "a shared skepticism about our human intellectual abilities when it comes to

understanding the reasons for which God might cause or allow particular instances of evil to

occur or the reasons for which God might cause or allow the facts about evil in our world."[46] The

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines skeptical theism,

> Skeptical theism is the view that God exists but that we should be skeptical of our ability to discern God's reasons for acting or refraining from acting in any particular instance. In particular, says the skeptical theist, we should not grant that our inability to think of a good reason for doing or allowing something is indicative of whether or not God might have a good reason for doing or allowing something. If there is a God, he knows much more than we do about the relevant facts, and thus it would not be surprising at all if he has reasons for doing or allowing something that we cannot fathom.[47]

Ekstrom, however, does not find skeptical theism to be a satisfactory response to the

problem of evil particularly for what she terms "pointless evil." She defines pointless evil,

> There are some evils that despite our working very hard, with as much diligence, care, fair-mindedness, and insight as we can concoct reasons that might justify God in permitting them, are instances of suffering for which theodicies fail. Thus the reasonable conclusion to reach, in light of this failed collective project, is that there are instances of pointless evil in the world . . . A pointless evil is one for which there is no God-justifying reason for causing or allowing it to occur.[48]

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[44] J. S. Feinberg, (Walter A. Ewell, editor), *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Second Edition, Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic, 2001, 413, Kindle

[45] "Skeptical theism" is a theological term prone to misunderstanding by those not familiar with it. It does *not* mean skepticism about the existence of God, but that we are skeptical of the finite mind's ability to grasp all justification that God may have for permitting evil. Timothy Perrine provides a useful, in-depth philosophical discussion and definition of skeptical theism at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skeptical-theism/

[46] Ekstrom, *Evil and Theodicy*, 11, Kindle

[47] Justin P. McBrayer, Skeptical Theism, https://iep.utm.edu/skept-th/

[48] Ekstrom, *Evil and Theodicy*, 6-10, Kindle

The core thesis of skeptical theism that she finds so objectionable is the claim that skeptical theists are united in thinking that ... *"no human is justified* in believing that any particular evil is gratuitous" (original emphasis); she finds the argument by skeptical theists that no instance of evil is pointless but sometimes beyond our ability to understand, to be an "extraordinarily absurd claim."[49] She recounts several real-world instances of horrible suffering that do indeed defy human explanation or justification, and therefore concludes that gratuitous (pointless) evil exists. While she refers to the book of Job to reflect on pointless suffering, she draws a puzzling conclusion from Job 42:4 commenting that "In his suffering, Job recounts he has met God—God has shown himself to the sufferer."[50] That is her ultimate take-away from the book of Job . . . God has shown himself to Job.

When God finally speaks in Job chapters 38-42, Job has indeed encountered God. But far more importantly—and the *key* point that Ekstrom misses— is that Job is inexorably driven to the truth by God's incessant rhetorical questioning that some divine actions are simply beyond human justification and comprehension. Instead of God explaining "why" Job has experienced what Ekstrom regards as pointless evil, God instead regales Job through four magnificent chapters with unanswerable questions that repeatedly hammer home the truth that a human finite mind is simply incapable of understanding every divine action of an infinite mind (i.e., skeptical theism).

There are others who regard skeptical theism as a blank bullet in the apologetics revolver. Luis Oliveira philosophically argues against skeptical theism using a "paradox of evil" writing,

> I have called this the paradox of evil, and identified our merely modest fallibility as its source. So long as we are not hopelessly fallible with respect to justifying reasons— and I have argued that even the Christian theist must accept that we are not—we can legitimately expect to see God's justifying reasons for so much apparently pointless suffering, were such a God and such reasons to really be there.[51]

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[49] Ekstrom, *Evil and Theodicy*, 13, Kindle

[50] Ekstrom, *Evil and Theodicy*, 39, Kindle

[51] Luis R. G. Oliveira, *Sceptical Theism and the Paradox of Evil,* https://philpapers.org/archive/

Oliveira's questionable conclusion is that we are not "hopelessly fallible," and should therefore always expect to be able to ascertain justifying reasons for apparently pointless suffering. In the parlance of a popular phrase relating to cognitive dissonance, his bizarre conclusion "does not compute."

Scott Aiken and Brian Rebeiro cast their vote against skeptical theism because of what they term "skeptical creep." They elaborate, "Our view is that skeptical theism has a problem with what we call skeptical creep – namely, that the skeptical consequences of the view spread beyond the domain of the evidential problem of evil to theology, moral knowledge, and then at last to become a global skeptical problem."[52] For Aiken and Rebeiro, the creep phenomenon not only extends to theological and moral knowledge, but ultimately to *all* knowledge in general.[53] In their view, the skeptical theist will inevitably find him/herself drowning with general knowledge skepticism.

The theory of "skeptical creep" is rejected as humans have made obvious significant and noteworthy progress in many areas of general knowledge, leading to jaw-dropping accomplishments. Consider the achievement of the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU-APL) in 2022 to successfully impact an asteroid 7,000,000 miles from Earth after a 10-month flight with a "DART" impact probe to ascertain the feasibility of altering an asteroid's orbit. Our grasp of rocket propulsion, orbital mechanics, Newtonian physics, robotics, nuclear power, computers, sophisticated optics, astronomy and complex math (to name just a few of the disciplines involved) enabled this incredible feat. Consider the success of the probe to Pluto in 2020; after a voyage of nearly ten years and a journey of more than three billion miles, the New Horizons probe flew within 7,800 miles of Pluto. For the first time ever, we saw the surface of this distant world in spectacular, colored detail.[54] Common sense and experience

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[52] Scott Aiken and Brian Rebeiro, *Skeptical Theism and the Creep Problem*, https://www.academia.edu/ 43890425/SKEPTICAL_THEISM_AND_THE_CREEP_PROBLEM

[53] Scott Aiken and Brian Rebeiro, *Skeptical Theism and the Creep Problem*, https://www.academia.edu/ 43890425/SKEPTICAL_THEISM_AND_THE_CREEP_PROBLEM

[54] https://www.nasa.gov/feature/five-years-after-new-horizons-historic-flyby-here-are-10-cool-things-

dictates that we clearly are not "drowning in general knowledge skepticism."

Scott Sehon argues that "skeptical theism leads to moral paralysis, theorizing that the acceptance of skeptical theism undermines our ability to make any moral judgments whatsoever."[55] However, the logical and inescapable conclusion of his line of reasoning is that only an infinite mind can therefore accurately produce moral judgments. Yet, Scripture repeatedly enjoins us to make morally right judgments, a command that is meaningless if Sehon is correct (i.e., Lev 19:15; Deut 1:16; 16:18; Zech 8:16; John 7:24; Luke 12:57; etc.).

Virtually all opponents of skeptical theism share one thing in common: a grossly inflated opinion of a finite mind's ability to fully and comprehensively grasp the workings of an infinite mind. Isaiah 40:28 is a corrective rebuke: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable." Other passages affirming the principle of skeptical theism include Deut 29:29, Isa 55:8-9, Rom 11:33-34, and 1 Cor 2:11-16.

Steven Cowan (Ph.D. in Philosophy) defines the *Noseeum Rationality Principle* this way, "A noseeum inference is reasonable only if it is reasonable to believe that we would very likely see (grasp, comprehend, understand) the item in question if it existed."[56] He asks "if God has a reason for allowing an instance of evil such as the child being tortured to death, is it reasonable for us to always expect to see it?"[57] He concludes the answer is "no" since "On the Christian worldview, we believe that we are finite, while God is unlimited in knowledge and power and very different from us."[58]

Stephen Wykstra coined an epistemological principle that he dubbed 'CORNEA'

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[55] Scott Sehon, *The problem of evil: skeptical theism leads to moral paralysis,* Int J Philos Relig (2010) 67:67–80 DOI 10.1007/s11153-009-9213-1

[56] Steven B. Cowan, *Responding to the Philosophical Problem of Evil,* https://arcapologetics.org/peering-through-a-glass-darkly/#ftnt12

[57] Cowan, *Responding to the Philosophical Problem of Evil*

[58] Cowan, *Responding to the Philosophical Problem of Evil*

(Condition On ReasoNable Epistemic Access) as his foundational argument for the truth of skeptical theism. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy has a succinct explanation.[59] As Perrine concludes "If God created the universe, God created it with 'physical depth,' where many of the features of the universe are difficult to learn about. So too, if God has plans for creation, *God is likely to have created it with 'moral depth,' where many of the goods that play a role in God's plan are not 'surface' goods easily identified but rather more obscure to us*" (my emphasis).[60] Elsewhere, Perrine defends Wykstra's epistemological principle.[61] An updated version of Wykstra's defense of skeptical theism was published in 2015 and presented as a "neutralizing tactic to defuse strong evidence"; it is entitled *The Foundations of Skeptical Theism*. Wykstra and Perrine write,

> The new "inductive atheism" argues that certain empirical features of evil are strong inductive (or "probabilistic") evidence against theism. A feature stressed by William Rowe, for example, is the "noseeum" character of much suffering. We can, try as we may, see no God-justifying (good served by much suffering). And our seeing no God-justifying good served by an instance of suffering is, it is argued, strong evidence for there being no God-justifying good served by it—and hence also, by a further short step, for there being no God. Against this reasoning, so-called "skeptical theists" press this question:

> Granted, atheism makes the feature you cite—here, the noseeum feature—entirely expectable. But isn't this feature also pretty expectable if it were the case that God exists? If God were to exist, shouldn't we expect—God being God and us being us—to often not see the goods He purposes for many evils? And if that's so, how can this feature be regarded as strong evidence that God doesn't exist?

> The skeptical theist here employs a "neutralizing tactic"—a tactic for defusing alleged strong evidence—that we can find used in many contexts. While this neutralizing strategy is intuitively appealing, it is not easy to adequately formulate the implicit principle on which it rests. One formulation has been Wykstra's CORNEA—the Condition of ReasoNable Epistemic Access.[62]

Wysktra and Perrine's development and exposition of their CORNEA epistemological

[59] Timothy Perrine, *CORNEA-based Criticisms*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skeptical-theism/#CORNBaseCrit

[60] Timothy Perrine, *CORNEA-based Criticisms*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/skeptical-theism/#CORNBaseCrit

[61] Timothy Perrine, *On an Epistemic Cornerstone of Skeptical Theism: in Defense of CORNEA*, https://www.academia.edu/57408264/On_an_Epistemic_Cornerstone_of_Skeptical_Theism_in_Defense_of_CORNEA

[62] Stephen Wykstra & Timothy Perrine, *Foundations of Skeptical Theism; CORNEA, CORE and Conditional Probabilities*, 2015, https://philpapers.org/archive/WYKTFO.pdf

principle is philosophically complex and controversial; they acknowledge that a number of

people do not believe their CORNEA proposal is valid. They cite Justin McBrayer who,

> notes that CORNEA resembles 'truth-tracking' or 'sensitivity' theories of knowledge like that of Robert Nozick. Such theories place 'sensitivity' requirements on knowledge—requirements usually stated using subjunctive conditionals. To say that my belief that the chimes on my patio are now ringing is 'sensitive' means that if they weren't now ringing, I would not now be forming the belief that they are. Nozick's idea that a belief that p is knowledge only if it is sensitive to p is attractive, but it is now widely seen as falling to counterexamples—counterexamples arising, especially, for inductive knowledge. And CORNEA, McBrayer thinks, falls to similar counterexamples. It is, he writes, 'a sensitivity constraint on evidence, and inductive evidence is often insensitive'.[63]

They admit that McBrayer poses a challenging thrust against skeptical theism and spend

considerable effort refuting him using probability calculus, Bayes' theorem and weighted

averages.[64] Their argument is challenging and difficult to follow. However, I am neither a fan nor

advocate of Bayes' theorem because of the inherent subjectivity that must be assigned to

probabilities. Ultimately Wykstra's proposal of CORNEA is of limited value, appealing primarily

to theological specialists in skeptical theism.

Perry Hendricks proposes a broader definition for skeptical theism in a penultimate

draft of a forthcoming paper; he deems the current definition of skeptical theism too narrow and

explains that,

> skeptical theists have traditionally had too narrow a focus: they have zoomed in on God's *axiological* reasons and have ignored non-axiological reasons that God may have. Their focus is too narrow because predicting how God will act requires knowing more than God's axiological reasons. Instead, it requires knowing the weight of reasons God has *in general*, and this includes both his axiological and non-axiological reasons. And so when considering how likely some fact (evil or otherwise) is given theism, we need to consider God's reasons *simpliciter*, not just his axiological reasons. In light of this, I propose what I call *Deontological Sceptical Theism*.[65]

What is Deontological Sceptical Theism? Hendricks enlightens us,

> For any evil state of affairs we know of E, we have no good public antecedent reason to

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[63] Wykstra & Perrine, *Foundations of Skeptical Theism*

[64] Bayes' Theorem is a mathematical formula used for calculating conditional probabilities. It figures prominently in subjectivist or Bayesian approaches to epistemology, statistics, and inductive logic. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bayes-theorem/

[65] Perry Hendricks, *Deontological sceptical theism proved*, https://www.academia.edu/97719172/Deontological_sceptical_theism_proved_Religious_Studies_forthcoming_

think it's likely that the *known* weight of justifying and requiring reasons God has in favor of (or against) permitting E resembles the *actual* weight of God's justifying and requiring reasons in favor of (or against) permitting E (emphasis is mine).[66]

Recognizing the validity of skeptical theism, Robin Collins admits that "we have no idea of how large the realm is of possible greater purposes for evil that an all-good, omnipotent being could have."[67] Ratzinger puts it eloquently, "The basic certainty of the existence of God was and is always accompanied by a sense of its being an immense riddle."[68] A closely related term for skeptical theism is *epistemic theism* which is defined as the recognition of the limitations of human perspective such that humans do not have unmediated acess to reality as known by God.[69]

Skeptical theism remains a robust field of discussion with new proposals, perspectives, rejections and defenses constantly emerging. But it is cardinal to effective engagement with the problem of evil—otherwise we are perilously close to the futile and dangerous attempt to elevate ourselves to godhood (Gen 3:5). C. S. Lewis offered this insight on skeptical theism in his classic *The Problem of Pain*:

> What seems to us good may therefore not be good in His eyes, and what seems to us evil may not be evil. On the other hand, if God's moral judgement differs from ours so that our 'black' may be His 'white', we can mean nothing by calling Him good; for to say 'God is good', while asserting that His goodness is wholly other than ours, is really only to say 'God is we know not what'.[70]

Kreeft and Tacelli wisely observe,

> For if there is a God, his wisdom must be infinitely superior to ours, and we will not understand all his ways. This is the only answer Job got, and Job was satisfied, for he was a good philosopher. This posture is not blind fideism but eminent reasonableness. Who are we, the players on the stage, to tell off the author of the play? How pitiful the sight of the pot trying to lecture the potter.We cannot explain the particular evils we see, but we *can*

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[66] Perry Hendricks, *Deontological sceptical theism proved*, https://www.academia.edu/97719172/ Deontological_sceptical_theism_proved_Religious_Studies_forthcoming_

[67] Robin Collins, *A Recent Fine Tuning Design Argument*, Christian Apologetics: An Anthology Of Primary Sources (Khaldoun A. Sweis & Chad V. Meister, editors), Zondervan Academic, 2012, 116, Kindle

[68] Matthew Levering, *Proofs of God*, 11, Kindle

[69] Donald McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary Of Theological Terms, Second Edition*, Louisville, KY: Westminster: John Knox Press, 104, Kindle

[70] Lewis, *The Problem Of Pain*, 21, Kindle

explain why we cannot explain them.[71]

God is utterly ineffable. We must approach the problem of evil with skeptical theism, recognizing that we cannot possibly explain or justify every instance of evil. What Ekstrom calls "pointless" evil, is better characterized as inexplicable from our finite human perspective. Skeptical theism is paramount in our engagement with evil as we acknowledge that a finite mind is simply incapable of understanding all the potential justifying reasons of an infinite mind. Skeptical theism enables us to explain why we *cannot* explain all instances of evil. With this mindset, let us now proceed to develop the philosophical argument that evil necessitates the existence of God.

The Ultimate Paradox
First Premise: The reality of evil is not contradictory with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God.

In addressing evil, two counterarguments are offered against the contention that evil cannot coexist with an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God—(1) theodicy and (2) defense. The word *theodicy* derives from two Greek words - "*theos*" for God and "*dike*" for justice. A *theodicy* is offered as justification of God's justice and goodness in light of suffering and evil.[72] A *defense* on the other hand claims to offer a possible explanation for why God permits an evil.[73] There are multiple problems of evil (logical, evidential and existential) and no single theodicy or defense can effectively address every problem. Most importantly, skeptical theism admits that some (perhaps many) instances of evil are simply inexplicable from a human, finite mind. Plantinga cautions that while the theist believes that God has a reason for permitting evil, he may not know the reason, but that does not mean the belief is irrational.[74] Robert Adams counsels us,

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[71] Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, 124

[72] McKim, *Westminster Dictionary Of Theological Terms,* 316, Kindle

[73] John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces Of Evil, Theological Systems And The Problems Of Evil*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 29, Kindle

[74] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, And Evil*, 10-11, Kindle

It is worth remarking that the theist does not need a Defense against the logical arguments from evil any more than against the probabilistic argument from evil. Our not knowing any reason that could, logically, have been morally sufficient for an omnipotent God to permit the evils that occur would no more prove that such a reason is logically impossible, than our not knowing any good reason that God may, plausibly, have had for permitting the evils would prove that He had no such reason in fact. The disproportion between an infinite intellect and our own gives grounds for some distrust of any argument or judgment about what good reasons God could, logically, have had, just as it gives grounds for some distrust of any conjecture about how much more or less likely something would be to happen if God existed than if He did not.[75]

There is abundant Biblical data and historical reference affirming the co-existence of evil in creation with an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God who rules over that creation. The book of Job presents a sovereign God who permits and rules over the effects of evil (Job 1:6-19; 2:1-8). In Isa 45:7, God explicitly declares that he brings disaster/calamity (the NKJV translates it as "create evil"). Regarding Isa 45:7, Chrysostom interpreted it to mean that God permits evil for our good.[76] Augustine understood that verse to teach that God makes good and "orders" evil to accomplish his good purposes.[77] Origen understood it as God creating evil to discipline those he loves.[78] Previewing the Divine Judgment Defense, Eusebius sees Isa 45:7 as God using evil to exercise divine judgment.[79] While acknowledging the reality of evil in this verse, Tertullian castigated Marcion for incorrectly ascribing God as the author of evil.[80]

While evil and God currently coexist in this fallen world, God is clearly sovereign over evil (i.e., Job 1:1-2:10). God is never presented as the direct agent of evil in Scripture and is therefore not morally culpable for it. In Revelation, it is repeatedly made clear that the authority of the dragon and his beast to exercise evil is "given" to them by God (Rev 17:17). Habakkuk

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[75] Robert M. Adams, *Plantinga on the Problem of Evil*, James E. Tomberlin and Peter van Inwagen, editors, Boston: D. Reidel, 1985, 237

[76] Chrysostom, *Concerning The Power Of Demons*, Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Old Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003, 74-75

[77] Augustine, *The Catholic And Manichaen Ways Of Life*, Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Old Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 75

[78] Origen, *Against Celsus*, Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Old Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 75

[79] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary On Isaiah*, Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Old Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 75

[80] Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, Old Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007, 75-76

1:5-11 is a prophecy in which God relates His intention to raise up Babylon, a "ruthless" and "dreaded" nation, to achieve the purpose of judging his people. These verses represent the Lord's chastisement of his sinning people.[81] As Charles Hodge observes in his Systematic Theology, "But evil inflicted for the benefit of the sufferer, is chastisement, and not punishment. Punishment, properly speaking, is evil inflicted in satisfaction of justice."[82] Hodge offers the Divine Judgment Defense for the problem of evil. Yet, despite God permitting and even using evil to execute divine judgment, Hab 1:13 emphasizes the purity and holiness of God in contrast to evil. God ordains evil for ultimate good purposes, while the agents who carry it out do it for evil purposes (i.e., Gen 50:20).

Oswald Chambers was a chaplain in WW1 serving in the Egyptian desert in 1917, ministering to men destined for combat. He wrote a commentary on the book of Job, *Our Ultimate Refuge; Job and the Problem of Suffering*, from April through May while in poor health and died in Egypt five months after finishing the manuscript. Macy Halford comments in the preface to Chamber's book that it has an unusual message: "Pain and suffering are not unusual occurrences; they are the 'basis of human life', the very foundation of our earthly existence. This, he argued, is the reality we must accept if we are to have a true relationship with God."[83] She comments on Oswald's perspective about the "fantasizing faithful who, blinkered by their own rosy ideas about God, cannot see God himself"; Chambers regards them as more dangerous than secular realists because they "give a false idea of God's nature . . . people are losing their faith not because they have been finally brought face to face with the tragic nature of reality but because they have been told that God would never let such horrors happen to His children."[84] In his commentary on Job, Chambers echoes skeptical theism and remarks "The point for each one

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[81] Carl E. Armerding, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994, 2378, Kindle

[82] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Public Domain, Ravenio Books, 2014, 6931, Kindle

[83] Macy Halford, Preface to *Our Ultimate Refuge: Job and the Problem of Suffering* by Oswald Chambers, Grand Rapids, MI: Oswald Chambers Publications Association, ebook edition, 2019, 6, Kindle

[84] Halford, Preface to *Our Ultimate Refuge,* 6-7, Kindle

is whether we will hang on, as Job did, and say, 'Though things look black, I will trust in God.'"[85] Job explicitly acknowledges skeptical theism with his confession in 42;3b, "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know."

The philosophical and theological response to the problem of evil, the perspective of the ancient church and the Biblical data all combine to support the conclusion that the reality of evil is _not_ contradictory with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God in this fallen world.

Objection - The logical problem of evil

In objection to the first premise, the logical deductive problem of evil is often presented as the following syllogism,

1 An omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God would have the power, knowledge and will to prevent evil.

2 Evil exists.

3 Therefore an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God must not exist.

The power of the problem of evil against Christian theism is strong. John Frame acknowledges evil as "the most difficult problem in all of theology, and for many atheists it is the Achilles' Heel of the theistic worldview."[86] Evil is raised as the most powerful evidence that God does not and cannot exist. The atheist Anthony Flew, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at the University of Reading, penned an article in 2000 entitled *C.S. Lewis, God and the Problem of Evil*. In it, he acknowledges that "In 1940 many of us who had been raised as Christians became atheists because it appeared to us that claims that the Universe was created by a Being both loving and omnipotent were flat incompatible with what we saw happening in the world around us."[87] Consequently, Flew rejected the coexistence of God and evil.

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[85] Oswald Chambers, *Our Ultimate Refuge: Job and the Problem of Suffering*, Grand Rapids, MI: Oswald Chambers Publications Association, ebook edition, 2019, 115, Kindle

[86] John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction To Christian Belief*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Company, 2013, 281, Kindle

[87] Anthony Flew, *C.S. Lewis, God and the Problem of Evil,* https://philosophynow.org/issues/26/CS_Lewis_God_and_the_Problem_of_Evil

In a deductive argument, if the premises are true and the logic is sound, the conclusion is certain. However, Groothuis points out that the deductive Logical Problem of Evil is now rarely offered, writing "in the past several decades very few philosophers have advanced the argument in this form, due to the work of several philosophers to defeat it, principally Alvin Plantinga."[88] Jerry Walls clarifies,

> The heart of Plantinga's famous work is that it is possible, given free will, that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil. Plantinga has always been careful to stress that he was not proposing a theodicy, that is, an actual explanation of why God allows evil. His Defense has the more modest goal of showing that theism can be saved from the charge of internal contradiction advanced by those who maintain that a perfectly powerful and good God could surely create a world without evil.[89]

Alvin Plantinga refutes the logical problem of evil by restating the premise, "An omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God would have the power, knowledge and will to prevent evil *unless he has good reason to*" and offered the Free Will Defense as a possible good reason that God permits evil.[90] Consequently, he has largely put to rest the so-called logical problem of evil so that few, including most atheists, now accept it as a real threat to theism.[91] Atheist Richard Gale acknowledges that "It is generally conceded that the logical challenge of evil has been successfully neutralized by Plantinga and his cohorts."[92] C. S. Lewis agreed writing, "free will is what made evil possible."[93] This position is not new, with Athenagoras arguing in the second century that humans "have the freedom of choice as to both virtue and vice."[94] Tertullian also offered an early version of Plantinga's free will defense.[95]

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[88] Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics*, 681, Kindle

[89] Jerry L. Walls, *Can God Be Trusted? Faith And The Challenge Of Evil*, 1998, https://www.firstthings.com/article/1998/12/can-god-be-trustedfaith-and-the-challenge-of-evil

[90] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, And Evil*, 29-34, Kindle

[91] Ronnie P. Campbell Jr, *Worldviews & The Problem Of Evil, A Comparative Approach*, Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019, 5, Kindle

[92] Forest, Chatraw, McGrath (editors), *The History Of Apologetics*, 704, Kindle

[93] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Harper Collins ebooks. 2009, 47, Kindle

[94] Athenagoras, *The Writings Of Athenagoras*, Public Domain, 2014, 37, Kindle

[95] Tertullian, *The Writings of Tertullian, Against Marcion, Book II*, Toronto, CA: Public Domain, 2016, 8491, Kindle

In 2001, Bruce Langtry submitted an article entitled *Evaluating A New Logical Argument From Evil*; examining a new argument, a two-pronged approach proposed by J. L. Schellenberg. Schellenberg argues

> that (if God exists) God has, of necessity, a disappreciation of evil, operating at a meta-level in such a way as to give God a non-defeasible reason to rule out actualizing a world containing evil. He also argues that since God's motive in creating the world is to share with finite beings the good that God experiences prior to creation, which is good without evil, it follows that God will create a world that contains no evil.[96]

Langtry acknowledges that while the Schellenberg approach rests "on intuitively appealing assumptions, and are worthy of respect," he rejects the new argument. Schellenberg uses two approaches: the Core Modeling Approach (CModA), and the Motives Approach. After extensive analysis, Langtry rejects the CModA approach with the conclusion that Schellenberg classifies questionable events as "evil,"

> Suppose that you are disappointed that your daughter does not want to study Philosophy as part of her university degree, or you have an unpleasant half-hour walking home soaked by the heavy rain, or you make an arithmetical error when working out how much you spent on food last week. Such occurrences, considered in themselves, are typically unwelcome, but surely they lack the axiological seriousness required for counting as evils. Although none of them occur in God's own life, presumably they could have a place within a finite person's life that involves increasingly great and rich goods, amongst which is an increasingly deep experience of God. If so, then why couldn't the presence of some evil be accommodated within a finite person's life of the foregoing kind? With respect to the evil, the individual's life would not be mirroring the goods in God's life, just as with respect to disappointment, and so on, it would not be mirroring God's own life; but in many other respects it would be. If Schellenberg were to say that a life that involves increasingly great and rich goods including an increasingly deep experience of God could not also involve disappointments, and so on, then it would seem that Schellenberg's New Logical Problem of Evil foreshadows supposed new logical problems of many features of human life that do not count as evils.[97]

After examination, Langtry concludes that Schellenberg's deductive argument is flawed writing that,

> the scope of free will (whether seen in libertarian or compatibilist terms) could be wide, including choices affecting the levels of good finite persons enjoyed at any given time but not including an individual's causing evil or allowing evil to occur; nevertheless . . . considerations concerning free will provide God with a pro tanto reason to refrain from

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[96] Bruce Langtry, *Evaluating A New Logical Argument From Evil*, FAITH AND PHILOSOPHY Vol. 38 No. 2 April 2021

[97] Langtry, *Evaluating A New Logical Argument From Evil*

ensuring that no finite persons ever cause evil.[98]

Don Strand acknowledges that the logical argument has fallen out of favor with most serious thinkers today because it is easily defeated.[99] Michael Novak in his article entitled *Atheism and Evil* penned an astute and disturbing observation, "Is that why atheists and agnostics take morose delectation in the existence of evil? Because, for them, evil disproves the existence of a good and caring God? Let's suppose there is no God. The same evils still exist. Are atheists suggesting that the nonexistence of God and the existence of evil fit neatly together in a logical argument?"[100] Novak is not afraid to confront atheists with an intimidating dilemma as he concludes,

> Could it possibly improve things to believe that the long pain of human evolution was set in motion by chance alone? The atheist view of the world is actually rather bleaker than that of Jews and Christians: Suffering under the weight of evil is meaningless, and so is any struggle against evil. Everything in the atheist's world begins and ends in randomness and chance. Few atheists seem to be as rigorously honest as Friedrich Nietzsche, who warned that if God is dead, it is wishful thinking to hold that reason alone can confer "meaning" on life. Reason has been outmoded by chance.[101]

Frank Turek makes the same point,

> The "problem of evil" is measured by the atheist by the existential fact that there is pain in the world. Having pointed this out, and having set the groundwork for his complaint, if we allow his complaint to stand we cannot then walk away from its basis after he has finished complaining. If the existential fact of pain is the problem, and it exists when we rule out God as a cause or a solution, we cannot then just toss out pain as a factor in the world.[102]

Turek argues in another article, "if in the atheist existential case we can admit that in order to achieve outcomes which we desire we often have to pay a steep price for the sake of achieving what we intend to achieve, why must this be ruled out in the case of God?"[103] In the first article

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[98] Langtry, *Evaluating A New Logical Argument From Evil*

[99] Don Strand, *A Christian Response to the Evidential Problem of Evil*, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/93369591/A_Christian_Response_to_the_Evidential_Problem_of_Evil

[100] Michael Novak, *Atheism And Evil*, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2008/07/atheism-and-evil

[101] Novak, *Atheism And Evil*

[102] Frank Turek, *Bailing Out The Problem Of Evil [6]*, https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/02/bailing-out-the-problem-of-evil-6

[103] Frank Turek, *Bailing Out The Problem Of Evil [4]*, https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/02/bailing-out-the-problem-of-evil-4]

of his series on the problem of evil, Turek deduces that "*the problem of evil is not resolved by eliminating God from your metaphysical puzzle*" (original emphasis).[104] All other worldviews, to include atheism, are not off the hook and must account for evil; it is illogical to hold only the Christian worldview accountable. In conclusion, the deductive argument for the logical problem of evil is no longer considered valid by most philosophers and theologians.

Objection - The evidential problem of evil

The evidential problem of evil is an inductive argument that the tremendous amount of evil in the world and the horrendous nature of much of it indicate the probability (but not certainty) of God's nonexistence. Robert Simpson, Associate Professor in the Philosophy Department at University College London, rejects any theodicy that claims to effectively refute evidential evil as "an appropriate and notionally viable response to the evidential problem of evil."[105] Laura Ekstom's conclusion for "pointless evil" falls under the category of the evidential problem of evil. John Feinberg admits,

> Despite the success of theists in handling the logical problem, atheists aren't ready to retreat, so they attack theism on a different front. They still believe that evil poses an insuperable problem for theism, but now they claim that even though evil's existence doesn't contradict any traditional theistic beliefs, it counts as strong evidence against the likelihood that God exists.[106]

In rebutting the evidential problem of evil, the apologist can adopt either a defensive or offensive strategy. Defensively, Feinberg recommends that one argue against the subjective nature of inductive arguments with the probability of Bayes' Theorem—however, there is no way the atheist and theist will agree on the subjective assignment of probabilities. The apologist can also offer a theodicy why God would permit the existence of evil (i.e., the Greater Good Theodicy which argues that evil causally produces subsequent greater goods). Offensively, the theist can offer traditional arguments for the existence of God. Michael Peterson employs a

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[104] Frank Turek, *Bailing Out The Problem Of Evil [1]*. 2010. *https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2010/02/bailing-out-the-problem-of-evil-1*

[105] Robert Mark Simpson, *Moral Antitheodicy: Prospects and Problems*, International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 65/1 (2009): 153-69

[106] Feinberg, *The Many Faces Of Evil*, 207, Kindle

different offensive strategy arguing for God's existence by appealing to evil.[107] In contrast to the proposed abductive argument presented here, Peterson uses evil to construct an inductive argument for God's existence.

However, Scott Christensen points out that "philosophers who argue against God in this fashion (with the evidential deductive argument) *no longer question the coexistence of God and evil per se*, conceding the arguments of Plantinga and others" (emphasis is mine).[108] Thus, the evidential argument is no longer valid to deny the coexistence of evil and God.

Objection - The existential problem of evil

The existential problem of evil, also known as the personal or religious problem, is the personal dimension where evil directly intersects one's own life.[109] While multiple theodicies have been offered to account for the existence of evil, all of them affirm the coexistence of evil and God. They all seek to either justify the existence of evil or offer an explanation for the coexistence of evil and God. Other possible morally-sufficient reasons that have been offered by Christian philosophers and theologians to explain the coexistence of evil and God include: Natural Law Defense, Soul-Making Theodicy, Best-Of-All-Possible-Worlds Theodicy, Divine Judgment Defense, and the especially potent Greater-Good Theodicy and Greater-Glory Theodicy.[110]

Aquinas deals specifically with the apparent contradiction of the coexistence of evil and God; in his *Summa Theologica* he provides proof for the existence of God in five ways (arguments from change [motion], causality, contingency, perfection, and purpose), despite the reality of evil.[111] Plantinga concludes that the "existence of God is neither precluded nor

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[107] Feinberg, *The Many Faces Of Evil*, 359, Kindle

[108] Scott Christensen, *What About Evil? A Defense Of God's Sovereign Glory*, Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020, 121, Kindle

[109] Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 124, Kindle

[110] Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 29-30, Kindle

[111] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, q. 2, a. 3, Kindle

rendered improbable by the existence of evil."[112] At the C.S. Lewis Institute, Jana Harmon comments on a well-known book that Lewis penned, "*The Problem of Pain* seeks to understand how a loving, good, and powerful God can possibly coexist with the pain and suffering pervasive in the world and in our lives. As we shall see, the problem of pain could not even exist without the reality of a good and loving and powerful God."[113]

The first premise of the proposed syllogism is true: *The reality of evil is not contradictory with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God.*

The Dark And Light Side

Second Premise: Evil cannot exist without good.

Every great story arrays good against evil. While you may sometimes find rare stories which present only good (i.e., a child's story book), you will never find a story which presents only evil. Evil needs good for its definition; without good for contrast, evil becomes subjectively meaningless. Thomas Aquinas affirmed that "good is the cause of evil in that way in which evil can have a cause."[114] In the *Enchiridion*, Augustine explicitly declares that "evil cannot exist without good or in anything that is not good. Good, however, can exist without evil."[115] This statement reflects that truth that good preexisted evil. In Gen 1:31, we find God pronouncing a judgment of "very good" on *all* creation prior to the appearance of evil. As an attribute of God (i.e., Psalm 13:6; 25:7-8; 34:8; 86:5; 100:5; 106:1; Phil 2:13; 1 Pet 2:3, etc.), good is a transcendent, eternal and immutable value that preexists creation, residing in the very nature of God.

Athanasius affirmed this truth in his apologetic work *On The Incarnation* writing, "For

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[112] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 63, Kindle

[113] Jana Harmon, *C.S. Lewis On The Problem Of Pain*, 2012, https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/c-s-lewis-on-the-problem-of-pain/

[114] Thomas Aquinas, *On Evil*, translated by John A. Oesterle and Jean T. Oesterle, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995, 20

[115] Augustine, *The Enchiridion*, The Complete Works of St. Augustine, edited by Philip Schaff, Post Nicene Fathers - Volumes 1-8. Omaha, NE: Patristic Publishing, 2019 4613, Kindle

God is good, or rather is essentially the source of goodness."[116] Athanasius goes on to affirm that evil had no existence prior to creation.[117] The *Dictionary Of Latin And Greek Theological Terms* expounds on the Latin theological term for evil (*malum*) admitting that evil "cannot be an ultimate value opposed eternally to ultimate good; for its every existence depends upon the existence of the good."[118] Philip Carey writes that "evil has no being of its own is an important ontological point because it upholds the pure goodness of the creator."[119]

Plantinga argues that God can prevent the existence of moral evil only by removing the possibility of moral good.[120] Within this line of reasoning, evil cannot occur unless good exists. Theologian Ronnie Campbell reasons that evil does not have to do only with the corruption of a thing but is also a disruption to the order and function that God assigned to certain things within creation.[121] Evil cannot exist independently of and is ultimately dependent upon an originally good creation. Campbell concludes that evil cannot exist apart from the good although it is true that good can exist apart from the evil.[122] Kreeft and Tacelli elaborate on why everyone wonders why bad things happen to good people or bad things happen at all,

> Incidentally, this very wonder hints at a solution to the problem of evil. The fact that we do not naturally accept this world full of injustice, suffering, sin, disease and death—that we spontaneously cheer the poet (Dylan Thomas) when he says, so irrationally yet nobly: 'Do not go into that good night / Rage, rage against the dying of the light.—the very fact of our outrage at evil is a clue we are in touch with a standard of goodness by which we judge this world as defective, as falling drastically short of the mark.[123]

Greg Welty finds it useful to distinguish between two kinds of evil (moral and

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[116] Athanasius, *On The Incarnation*, The Complete Works of Saint Athansius, Philip Schaff (translator), Toronto, CA: Public Domain. 2016, 51, Kindle

[117] Forest, Chatraw, McGrath (editors), *The History Of Apologetics*, 125, Kindle

[118] Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary Of Latin And Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally From Protestant Scholastic Theology*, Second Edition, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017, 207, Kindle

[119] Philip Carey, *God And The Problem Of Evil, Five Views*, (Chad Meister & James K. Dew Jr, editors). Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017, 18, Kindle

[120] Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 30, Kindle

[121] Campbell, *Worldviews & The Problem Of Evil*, 19, Kindle

[122] Campbell, *Worldviews & The Problem Of Evil,* 22, Kindle

[123] Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, 122-123

natural) with moral evil originating in free persons while natural evil is any evil that is not moral in nature.[124] Moral evil requires created moral agents (i.e., angels and humans) and natural evil requires material creation (i.e., hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, etc.). Therefore to exist at all, evil requires an originally good moral and material creation. It is significant that the transcendent Son of God entered creation (enfleshed) to defeat and destroy evil (Gen 3:15; 1 John 3:8; Heb 2:14). Christ's redemption delivers us from this "present evil age" (Gal 1:4). God commands evil (Luke 4:36), and his good law serves to restrain evil in this fallen world. Good preceded evil as an eternal attribute of God; evil would never have existed had not the good God created. Evil cannot exist without good.

Martin Luther drew a close connection between original sin and moral evil writing that "original sin has so destroyed us ... it causes the utmost molestation by striving against that which is good; it is manifest, that there can be nothing left in a man devoid of the Spirit, which can turn itself towards good, but which must turn towards evil!"[125] Calvin echoed Luther affirming, "the will is so utterly vitiated and corrupted in every part as to produce nothing but evil."[126] Calvin, in his exposition of "total depravity," is explicit that this does not mean that fallen humans are incapable of good acts, but that every part of their being is inexorably influenced by sin. There is an inevitable relationship between good and evil in that the greatest act of evil ever perpetrated, the crucifixion of Christ, brought about the greatest good—the redemption of fallen mankind.

Philip Hallie was a philosopher, ethicist and researcher of Holocaust atrocities. In seeking to understand the "strange moral impulse" to save lives at the risk of losing one's own, this irreligious philosopher ultimately discovered that "there is a mystery to goodness that is even

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[124] Greg Welty, *Why Is There Evil In The World (And So Much Of It?)*, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2018, 259, Kindle

[125] Martin Luther, (C.M. Jacobs, translator), *The Collected Works of Martin Luther*, C.M. Jacobs, translator, e-artnow. 2018, 319, Kindle

[126] John Calvin, (Henry Beveridge, translator), *The Institutes of the Christian Religion,* Bonham Norton, Public Domain, 1599, bk. II, ch. II, 26, Kindle

deeper than the mystery of evil."[127] Expounding upon the relationship between good and evil, the philosopher Boethius wrote that "good and evil are contraries, the proof that goodness contains power shows that evil contains weakness, while exposing the fragility of evil confirms the solidity of good."[128] To be morally bad, you must first be ontologically good.[129] Moral good is eternal, transcending space and time—while evil is dependent upon good for its very existence.

Objection - Dualism

Dualism is defined as "any view that is constituted by two basic or fundamental principles such as spirit and matter or good and evil."[130] Dualism postulates the existence of both good and evil as coequal, *independent* principles.[131] Ontological dualism where God and Satan are equally powerful is in view here as opposed to historic dualism which involves a cosmic conflict between God and Satan.[132] Good and evil are neither coequal nor independent for good precedes evil so that evil cannot exist without good.[133] However, not everyone agrees that evil is under the sovereign control of God. Episcopal priest Fleming Rutledge argues that, "Evil is *in no way* part of God's good purpose, and cannot be, since it does not have existence as a created good. Evil is neither rationally nor morally intelligible and must simply be loathed and resisted" (original emphasis).[134] Ironically, she offers her view in a book that is focused on the crucifixion—an act of the greatest evil which produced the greatest good. Scripture is explicit that God orchestrated the evil inherent in the crucifixion (Acts 2:23). She ignores the testimony

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[127] Christensen, *What About Evil?*, 595, Kindle

[128] Boethius, *The Consolation Of Philosophy*, (translated by Soren Filipski). Hythloday Press, 2021, 95, Kindle

[129] Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, 133

[130] McKim, *Westminster Dictionary Of Theological Terms*, 95, Kindle

[131] Howard Robinson, "*Dualism*", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/dualism/>.

[132] Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing: A Theology of the Book of Revelation (New Testament Theology)*, Wheaton IL, Crossway, 2021, 26, Kindle

[133] Before creation, only the triune God who is good by nature, eternally existed. Evil entered the angelic realm after a rebellion among the angels, and it entered the material creation subsequent to the Fall in Eden.

[134] Fleming Rutledge, *The Crucifixion: Understanding The Death Of Jesus Christ*, Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B. Erdmanns Publishing Co. 2015, 434, Kindle

of Joseph in Gen 50:20 that what his brothers intended as evil, God meant for good. Fleming's worldview does not permit God to be sovereign over evil; from her perspective evil somehow exists despite God.

James Shin, PhD in Systematic Theology, authored a fascinating book entitled *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy: A Trinitarian Panentheistic Vision* which wrestles with God's involvement with a world "ridden with natural and cosmic evil." He argues that "In the Christian tradition, the doctrine of *ex nihilo* rejects the Neo-Platonist notions such as moral and metaphysical dualism."[135] If creation ex nihilo is true, dualism cannot be true. Classic dualism must be rejected as an explanation for the existence of good and evil, for evil is dependent upon good for its very existence. Wayne Grudem warns, "The problem with dualism is that it indicates an eternal conflict between God and the evil aspects of the material universe."[136] However, God manifests as the ruler of *both* good and evil.[137] God can override evil for good for the benefit of his people (Gen 50:20; Ps 76:10; Acts 3:13). Dualism denies the inherent goodness of original creation when evil was non-existent (Gen 1:31).

Scripture presents a perfectly good God sovereignly reigning over evil, a point forcefully documented in Stephen Wellum's class handout notes for Southern Seminary's apologetics course "The Problem of Evil."[138] God is sovereign over evil (i.e., Josh 10:8, 40; 11:20; 24:8; Judg 1:4, 7; 4:23; 20:35, etc.) God hardens Pharaoh's heart (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 8:15, 32; 9:12, 34; 10:20; 14:4, 8). While Scripture also records that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (Ex 8:15, 32; 9:34), God's act of hardening Pharaoh's heart was in response to the initial rebellion and hardness of heart that Pharaoh exhibited of his own free will. Yet, God promised long before Pharaoh hardened his own heart that he (God) would harden Pharaoh's heart. God raises up the Assyrians (Isa 10:5ff) and Babylonians (2 Chron 36:17; Hab 1:6) to execute their evil as divine

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[135] James Jongseock Shin, *Natural and Cosmic Theodicy: A Trinitarian Panentheistic Vision*, Eugene Oregon, Pickwick Publications, 2022, 228, Kindle

[136] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 695, Kindle

[137] Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Public Domain, 52, Kindle

[138] Stephen J. Wellum, *Class Handouts for "The Problem of Evil"*, SBTS, 2021, 45-46

judgment upon his rebellious covenant people. The entire book of Job powerfully articulates

God's sovereign rule over evil. In Rev 17:17, the authority of the Beast and Dragon to execute

evil is given them by the sovereign good God. God is sovereign over natural evil: famine (Deut

43:23-24; Ps 105:15, etc), drought (Deut 28:22; Amos 4:6-8, etc.), wild animals (Lev 26:22;

Deut 32:23-24, etc.), disease (Lev 26:16, Deut 28:21-22, etc.), birth defects (John 9:1-3), death

(Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6-7), and plagues (Ex 7-11). God is sovereign over moral evil (Eli's sons in

1 Sam 2:23-25 and 1 Sam 4:11), Samson (Judg 14:1-4), assassinations (2 Chron 22:7, 9;

32:21-22), and human hatred (Ps 105:23-25; Num 21:23-24; 2 Chron 21:16-17).

Dualism was championed in gnosticism and fiercely combatted by the early church to

uphold orthodoxy. Gnosticism regarded matter as inherently evil and the product of the

"Demiurge", a deity believed to have created the material world and often viewed as the

originator of evil.[139] Responding to the threat of gnosticism, Irenaeus of Lyon penned five books

vehemently refuting its claims. Dualism has been popularized in our contemporary culture by the

Star Wars movies, portraying the dualism of light and darkness—good versus evil. Harold Kuhn,

former president of the Evangelical Theological Society, explains that

> Christian Theology generally accepts a modified moral dualism, recognizing God as
> supremely good and Satan as a deteriorated creature bent everywhere upon the intrusion of
> evil. This however, is not dualism in the sense of its usual definition, since Christian
> theology does not consider Satan to be ultimate or original, and sees him ultimately
> excluded from the universe.[140]

In contrasting good and evil, C.S. Lewis believed that "dualism in a strict sense, will not

work."[141] Friesenhahn elaborates on the weakness of dualism,

> The weakness of dualism is that God no longer seems God in the Christian monotheistic
> sense. God fully opposes evil, but evil nonetheless remains. For all of God's supposed
> opposition, evil endures and does so in enormous supply and horrific dimensions. Dualism
> tends to occlude God's power. God stands over against a foreign principle of evil, which He
> is unable to control or conquer. Evil stands stubbornly outside of God's good intentions and

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[139] Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 178, Kindle

[140] H. B. Kuhn, *Dualism*, Evangelical Dictionary Of Theology, (Walter A. Elwell, editor), Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001, 357, Kindle

[141] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45, Kindle

in a way that is of great detriment to God's creation.[142]

Dualism is theologically untenable and rejected as a viable understanding of the relationship between good and evil.

The second premise of the proposed syllogism is true: *Evil cannot exist without good.*

The Ultimate Ground

Third Premise: Good is grounded in God.

This premise is a variation of the moral argument for God and the key premise in my argument; it requires significant time in reflection. Before diving in, we must first contrast faith versus reason. Is faith even compatible with reason? Some would argue that faith is not compatible with and even beyond reason—the view known as *fideism*. Fideism ascribes dubious value to rational arguments.[143] The opposing view, common among unbelievers, is that faith is simply irrational. However, faith and reason are not enemies but instead allies related by a key principle—knowledge accessed by reason can never contradict truth given by revelation that is understood by faith. Reason is the friend of faith. Francis Bacon thought that "a little philosophy inclined a man's mind to atheism, but depth in philosophy brought men's minds to religion."[144]

Where does moral good come from? Is there an ontological basis for morality or does it simply exist as mere preference? Nineteenth-century author Henry Sedgwick thought that the fundamental intuition of morality was as self-evident as mathematics and therefore not in need of grounding.[145] Science confines itself to the investigation and explanation of the physical universe; as such science can therefore discover nothing metaphysical beyond the physical universe. As Baggett and Walls observe, "How collections of atoms could generate and issue genuinely binding moral commands is altogether mysterious, if not absurd."[146] But if morality

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[142] Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy,* 144, Kindle

[143] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 8, Kindle

[144] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 8, Kindle

[145] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 13, Kindle

[146] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 11, Kindle

does exist, where does it come from? How could a strictly naturalistic world account for moral absolutes? J. L. Mackie believes it "most unlikely" that moral absolutes could have arisen without "an all-powerful God to create them."[147] As an atheist, Mackie's conclusion is to therefore doubt the existence at all of any moral absolutes, espousing a worldview that is unlivable.

Before considering moral good, we must first define truth. What is truth? According to the Correspondence Theory of Truth, *truth corresponds to reality*—i.e., to the way things actually are, that is to the facts. For example, how does one know the truth about any human's gender? It is not rocket science; their chromosomes determine their gender with X and Y for male, and Y and Y for female. In contrast to the current prevailing belief among an increasingly significant percentage of our culture, one's chromosomes factually determine the truth of their gender, not how one feels or wants to be perceived. To live in denial of the truth is to live in denial of reality. We do not *invent* truth, but must instead *discover* it.

Similarly one cannot invent morality—which has an objective origin— but must discover it. Thomas Morris addresses the elephant in the room in his Foreword to *Good God, The Theistic Foundations Of Morality* asking, "What would be the objective, ontological nature of a moral principle, or moral standard, in a world where mind, soul, and personhood were completely reducible to materialistic entities—whether finally spelled out in the language of matter or physical energy?"[148] In 1979, Yale Law Professor Arthur Alen Leff published an essay probing postmodern morality,

> Leff goes on to show that coming up with a suitable moral substitute for God is no easy task. What is required is some convincing account of who, short of God, has the authority to provide normative moral evaluations and obligations. When finite, fallible beings attempt to take that role, they invariably invite "what is known in barrooms and schoolyards as 'the grand sez who'?" Leff's article concludes on a memorable, if somewhat despairing note as he acknowledges the dismal prospects if we ourselves are all we have when it comes to morality.[149]

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[147] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 16, Kindle

[148] Thomas Morris, *Foreword to Good God,* X, Kindle

[149] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 3, Kindle

Sociobiologist E. O. Wilson argues there are only two fundamental options for morality: the "transcendentalist" and "empiricist" option; the former holds that moral principles exist outside human minds and are true irrespective of our experience while the latter holds they are the invention of human minds.[150] With the delusional understanding of truth that is popular today among many, the prevailing grasp of "good" is that it is subjective to personal whims and peculiar to time and culture. Nietzsche futilely attempted to carve out subjective meaning in a world of objective meaninglessness.[151] Postmodernism deems good as a mere social reification, siphoning out of reality any objective concept of good.[152] Postmodernism can be described "as a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning."[153] In a postmodern worldview, reality (i.e., truth) has no objective external referent but is whatever is subjectively perceived. Ultimately, everyone constructs their own reality—i.e., what is true for you may not be true for me.

Friesenhahn refers to the attempt to explain the presence of evil with the "necessary balance" principle . . . i.e., that good is needed to "balance evil."[154] In contrast though, good is required to even *account* for the existence of evil. The philosopher Immanuel Kant posited that moral life is possible only if God exists.[155] The Christian worldview alone grounds objective moral good in a transcendent reality and can account for the existence of evil. In the Biblical understanding of reality, "good" is grounded in the transcendent God in eternity beyond space

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[150] Baggett & Walls, *The Theistic Foundations Of Morality*, 3, Kindle

[151] Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay, Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, 316, Kindle

[152] Groothuis, *Truth Decay*, 370, Kindle

[153] Gary Aylesworth, "*Postmodernism*", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2015/entries/postmodernism/>.

[154] Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy,* 18, Kindle

[155] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within The Limits of Reason Alone*, William C. Placher, Derek R. Nelson (eds), *Readings In The History Of Christian Theology, Volume 2, From The Reformation To The Present*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 2017, 86-90, Kindle

and time and defined by his very nature. All other worldviews necessarily self-destruct when pressed to their logical conclusion regarding the problem of evil.

Few can actually live consistently within any worldview that denies the existence of good and evil or any transcendent values whatsoever. Consider the worldview of materialism. Materialism is a worldview based on a naturalistic understanding of reality. In materialism, the natural world is all there is. There is no supernatural, no transcendent values, neither spirit nor soul nor God. There is only material "nature", a cosmic matrix of matter and energy operating according to physical laws. However most sane people operating within that worldview recognize that good and evil exist, and they will thus invariably "steal" the concept of good and evil from the Christian worldview. However, it is an illegitimate use of Christian capital for their concept of "good" has no ground within their own worldview. In fact, all moral truth abides and originates in God and reflects his nature and wisdom; divine truth governs morality.[156] Ultimately, sound moral theology always points to Christ.[157]

Natural Law theory is pertinent to the discussion of moral good and evil. Natural Law theory affirms that God embedded His moral law into creation such that rational creatures intuitively know of its existence and comprehend good and evil to some degree. The Natural Law that is implanted in creation derives from the divine eternal law that resides in the nature and mind of God before creation and exists for all eternity. Knowledge of the Natural Law is part of the general revelation that is universally available to everyone, independant of special revelation. Natural Law theory is addressed in more detail later.

Figure 1 graphically depicts the illegitimate use of moral "good" within a materialistic

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[156] Romanus Cessario, *Introduction To Moral Theology (Catholic Moral Thought)*, Washington D.C. The Catholic University of America Press, 2001, xxi, Kindle

[157] "Christian moral theology proposes specific views about the place that the created order holds in moral reasoning, about the nature of theological doctrine, and about the ultimate destiny that belongs to each human person. For these reasons, sound moral theology always points to Christ. The doctrine of the Incarnation stipulates that the individual human nature of the incarnate Logos remains the principal agent of divine action in the world. In the hypostatic union, Christ's human nature provides a real, living principle for his human activity. When he acts, Christ restores creation to the pattern of its divinely established constitution. When he teaches, Christ himself illustrates that human language can communicate divine truth. When he dies on the cross, Christ restores the human race to its supernatural destiny and provides for each human being the means to obtain it." Ceassario, *Introduction To Moral Theology,* 6, Kindle.

worldview; it is illegitimate because it has no ground since God does not exist within that

particular worldview. Good can exist only if the transcendent God exists.

Figure 1. Illegitimate Use Of Moral Good By Materialism
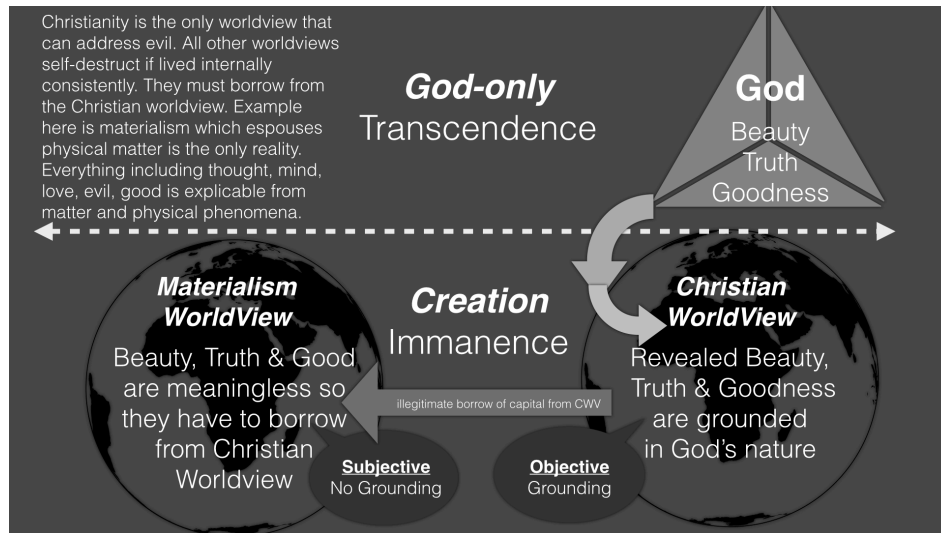
In the worldview of naturalism, morality is both illusory and arbitrary.[158] Without a

transcendent ground for good, nothing is certain and everything is up for grabs. "Woe to those

who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness" (Isa 5:20).

The willful suppression of the truth of God that is universally available to everyone via both

creation and the conscience inevitably results in the loss of understanding of moral good and a

corresponding tendency for people to "become inventors of evil" (Rom 3:20). On the other hand,

embracing transcendent truth as revealed by God enables one to distinguish good from evil (Heb

5:14).

God is the supreme good who not only "does good" but *is* good, and thus the standard

by which all grades of "goodness" are assessed.[159] Doug Groothuis reminds us that "God, and

God alone, certifies and establishes an objective moral order, which is necessary for orienting

ourselves ethically in ways that transcend matters of mere legality, opinion and culture."[160] John

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[158] Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense in a World That Doesn't,* 138, Kindle

[159] McKim, *Westminster Dictionary Of Theological Terms*, 136, Kindle

[160] Groothuis, *Truth Decay,* 2141, Kindle

Frame points out that goodness is "first of all, God's own character."[161] Donald Guthrie explains that good is linked to the moral holiness of God, making clear that the character of God "is itself the standard that should determine all human notions of goodness."[162] All good is ultimately derived from God. Every *good* gift originates with the transcendent God (James 1:17-18).

Baggett and Walls forcefully argue for what they term *theistic activism*—the view that good is not independent of God but ultimately depends upon God, for God "is at the root of all that is"; God sustains all reality and absolutely everything apart from him is dependent upon him.[163] God is the architect of all reality (and necessarily then for all *truth* which by definition must reflect reality) whether it be physical, spiritual, aesthetic, philosophical, mathematical, scientific, musical or moral. God alone has the attribute of *aseity* (absolute independence); everything else—without exception—is dependent upon him. God and moral good are ontologically inseparable.[164] In other words, moral good is defined solely by the nature of God such that to even understand moral good is to grasp a glimpse of God. I have argued elsewhere that true beauty is objective (not subjective) and grounded in the triune God; the same is true for moral good.

Cornelius Van Til explicitly declares in *The Defense Of The Faith*, "The principles of truth, goodness, and beauty are to be thought of as identical with God's being; they are the attributes of God."[165] Stephen Wellum similarly affirms, "Christ as universal Logos is the source of truth, beauty and goodness."[166] Frame notes in a footnote to his *Systematic Theology* that "Thomas Aquinas equated Being and Truth, developing his equation between God and Being. For him, being, unity, truth, beauty, and goodness are all ultimately the same, both in God and in

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[161] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 234, Kindle

[162] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1981, 108

[163] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 87, Kindle

[164] Baggett & Walls, *Good God*, 92, Kindle

[165] Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense Of The Faith*, (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Co), 1955, 12

[166] Stephen J. Wellum, *God The Son Incarnate, The Doctrine Of Christ*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 2016, 271, Kindle

the creation. These are the 'transcendental' concepts that frequently enter his theology."[167]

Scripture indeed paints a close relationship between beauty, truth and goodness. Miravalle

writes, "beauty is the same thing as goodness and that both are the same as truth."[168] He draws a

distinction between the three as to which faculty is engaged, "When we engage reality through

the clear abstract of the *intellect*, we talk about reality as *true*. When reality is the target of our

will, we pursue it as a *good*. And when reality enthralls not only our minds and wills, but also our

senses and *feelings*, we call it *beautiful*."[169] The church fathers recognized the connection

between truth and beauty with Ambrose speaking of the "beauty of divine truth."[170]

In the 17th century, Stephen Charnock wrote that "Pure and perfect goodness is the

only royal prerogative of God . . . he is good, he is goodness, good in himself, good in his

essence, good in the highest degree."[171] The early church recognized and emphasized this truth.

Gregory of Nazianzen, commenting on Mark 10:18, wrote that complete goodness belongs to

God alone.[172] John Frame explains,

> Unless God's standards govern our concept of goodness, there can be no talk of good or evil at all. If there is no personal absolute, values must be based on impersonal things and forces, such as matter, motion, time, and chance. But values cannot be based on any of these. They arise only in a context of personal relationships, and absolute standards presuppose an absolute person. Thus, the Christian may turn the tables on the unbeliever who raises the problem of evil: The non-Christian has a problem of good. Without God, there is neither good nor evil.[173]

John Mark Reynolds presents the existence of moral good as one of his reasons for

believing that God exists. He writes that "morality persuades me that God exists. The long

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[167] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 1150, Kindle

[168] John-Mark L. Miravalle, *Beauty, What It Is And Why It Matters*, (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press), 2019, 32, Kindle

[169] Miravalle, *Beauty, What It Is And Why It Matters*, 33, Kindle

[170] Ambrose, (Philip Schaff editor)*, On The Holy Spirit, The Complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post Nicene Collection of Early Church Fathers*, (Toronto, Canada: Public Domain), 2016, 338, Kindle

[171] Stephen Charnock, *The Existence And Attributes Of God*, Grand Rapids, MI: BakerBooks, 1996, 214

[172] Gregory Nazianzen, *Theological Orations, On The Son*, Ancient Christian Commentary On Scripture, New Testament II, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1998, 141

[173] Frame, *Systematic Theology*, 291, Kindle

trajectory of human history demonstrates a common morality behind the blind spots of any particular culture. There is a common way that most people in most places and most times have followed. This law suggests a lawgiver."[174] William Lane Craig regards the moral argument for the existence of God as the most powerful and effective of all apologetic arguments for the existence of God even though his favorite argument is the cosmological argument.[175] "The moral argument for the existence of God implies the existence of a Being that is the embodiment of ultimate moral good which is the source of the objective moral values we experience in the world."[176] (I too regard the moral argument as the most powerful classical apology.) Craig details the important distinction between objective and subjective values, what the existence of objective values necessitates, and the inevitable consequences if there are no objective values. He remarks, "In a world without a divine lawgiver, there can be no objective right and wrong, only our culturally and personally relative, subjective judgments . . . in a universe without God, good and evil do not exist."[177]

Anselm's brilliant ontological argument for the existence of God shows "that we need God (which would follow because we need good that must come from outside us, and God is found to be the unified source of all that is good—if God were not, I could conceive of a greater being who is the unified source of all good) and would show the other omniproperties of God too."[178] The ontological argument "fills in every good-making property" in God.[179]

J. P. Moreland argues that "Values exist, they come from God, they can be known through intuition in the natural law and through inspection of Holy Scripture."[180] In his

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[174] John Mark Reynolds, *Why I Believe In God*, https://www.firstthings.com/blogs/firstthoughts/2009/10/why-i-believe-in-god

[175] Craig, *On Guard*, 144

[176] William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith, Christian Truth and Apologetics*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008, 103, Kindle

[177] Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, 75, Kindle

[178] Forest, Chatraw, McGrath (editors), *The History Of Apologetics*, 225, Kindle

[179] Forest, Chatraw, McGrath (editors), *The History Of Apologetics*, 228, Kindle

[180] J. P. Moreland, *Scaling The Secular City, A Defense Of Christianity*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

exposition on Anselm's arguments for God, Levering writes,

> Anselm concludes that all good things are good by sharing in goodness. On this basis, he seeks to identify what goodness is. It must be, as he says, a great good. It must also be good of itself, rather than being good by sharing in the goodness of another. In short, it must be self-subsistent goodness, having its goodness through itself rather than requiring an external source of goodness. Such a thing must be "supremely good and supremely great—in other words, supreme among all existing things."[181]

Objection - Good is subjective and has no objective transcendent grounding

As evil unmasks, postmodernism is now rapidly infecting our culture that is increasingly marked by a rejection of any kind of objective truth.[182] Greg Epstein, humanist chaplain at Harvard argues in his book *Good Without God, What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe* that people can be good without believing in God. However, the real question is not whether people can be good without believing in God (of course they can); rather does the concept of "good" even exist without God? Epstein admits his book is not about "whether one can be good without God, because that question does not need to be answered—it needs to be rejected outright"; he goes on to write the belief that one "can't be good without belief in God is not just an opinion, a mere curious musing—it is a prejudice."[183] Epstein admits "if values were timeless and objective, either the early Christian saints who believed in it were horribly wrong, or values change" and concludes "we cannot ever be confident that objective values exist."[184] Is he correct? Or is he wrong and the concept of "good" is not even possible without a transcendent God?

William Sorely, professor of moral philosophy at Cambridge argued in 1918 that God must be the ground of all morality.[185] Epstein admits that if there is no eternal morality, there are

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Academic, 1987, 128, Kindle

[181] Levering, *Proofs of God*, 50, Kindle

[182] McKim, *Westminster Dictionary Of Theological Terms*, 243, Kindle

[183] Greg M. Epstein, *Good Without God, What A Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*, Harper Collins e-books, 2010, location 42, Kindle

[184] Epstein, *Good Without God*, 35, Kindle

[185] Craig, *On Guard*, 161, Kindle

no easy and obvious answers to such questions as euthanasia and abortion.[186] Without a transcendent grounding for moral good, anything goes. Hans Urs Von Balthasar prophetically warned in 1982 that "Our situation today shows that beauty demands for itself at least as much courage and decision as do truth and goodness, and she will not allow herself to be separated and banned from her two sisters without taking them along with herself in an act of mysterious vengeance."[187] Rejecting the transcendental grounds for truth, beauty and good has plunged our culture into an abyss of moral relativism where good becomes evil and evil becomes good.

The understanding of good as subjective must be rejected. If good is indeed objective, by definition it is grounded in the one, eternal, transcendent God. Athenagoras recognized this in the second century writing of "the good that is in God, which belongs of necessity to Him, and co-exists with Him, as color with body, *without which it has no existence*" (emphasis is mine).[188] Jonathan Edwards writes that God "is, in the most proper sense, a moral Agent, the source of all moral ability and Agency, the fountain and rule of all virtue and moral good."[189] Commenting on James 1:17, Edwards writes that "the apostle means to assert that all moral good is from God."[190] "The nature of good is by definition theocentric, for the triune God alone defines what is good. Only God is good (Matt 19:17)."[191] In other words, objective moral good cannot exist without God. Stephen David argues, "The vast majority of human beings believe and presuppose that they are under obligation to an objective moral law . . . the source and fountain of the moral law must be God or a Godlike being . . . if (CS) Lewis and others are right that God is needed as the foundation of objective morality, then the moral argument is onto something important."[192]

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[186] Epstein, *Good Without God*, 36, Kindle

[187] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *The Glory Of The Lord, A Theological Aesthetics, Vol 1: Seeing The Form*, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982), 180, Kindle

[188] Athenagoras, *The Writings Of Athenagoras*, 37, Kindle

[189] Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volumes I&II*, Edward Hickman (editor), Devoted Publishing, 2011, 12866, Kindle

[190] Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 85986, Kindle

[191] William D. Mounce, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary, Old & New Testament Words*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006, 609, Kindle

[192] Stephen T. Davis, *God, Reason & Theistic Proofs*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing

The third premise of my proposed syllogism is true: *Good is grounded in God.*

The End Game

Fourth Premise: The resolution of evil requires God.

Is there an ultimate resolution to the problem of evil? Will mankind ultimately prevail over evil or are we doomed to endless suffering like the Greek mythological figure Sisyphus who was forced to roll an immense boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down every time it neared the top, repeating this action for eternity? The New Testament book of Revelation warns against the futility of earthly utopian dreams.[193] Yet, there is a never-ending quest for Utopia in our fallen world with many naively believing that the resolution to evil lies in better education, more sophisticated technology, more advanced medical care, better communication technology and an unending host of other areas. Yet history decrees otherwise. Advancements in knowledge, technology, medicine, communication, etc.—while all capable of tremendous good—also always seem to inevitably result in yet more ingenious ways of germinating evil. Nuclear technology is a prime example; it is capable of extraordinary good not only in power generation but also in medicine, consumer products, food and agriculture, industry, scientific research, transportation, water resources and the environment.[194] Nuclear powered submersibles (submarines) are capable of indefinite submersion limited only by the food onboard, generating oxygen and fresh water from sea water through nuclear power. Yet, the same power is used in thermonuclear devices capable of destroying an entire city in seconds and causing unimaginable devastation, pain and suffering.[195]

Peter Leithhart cautions us that "If you try to build a heavenly city on earth, you're liable to turn totalitarian, forcing imperfect people to conform to your ideal of perfection.

Company, 1997, 147-149

[193] Schreiner, *The Joy of Hearing*, 46, Kindle

[194] https://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/non-power-nuclear-applications/overview/the-many-uses-of-nuclear-technology.aspx

[195] Tyler Bamford, *The Most Fearsome Sight: The Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima*, 2020, https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/atomic-bomb-hiroshima

Utopians minimize or ignore the tenacity of evil, especially in themselves. Utopian dreams end in dystopian thuggery."[196] Attempts throughout recorded history by mankind to resolve the problem of evil have proved futile. Instead of creating Utopia, mankind ingeniously creates new forms of evil. When communication was exponentially improved via the Internet and the ubiquitous cell phone, enabling new good, the same technology also served very dark purposes with the global proliferation of such nefarious activities as pornography, terrorist operations, illegal drug activity, smuggling, blackmail, identity theft, embezzlement, and larceny. Is there a resolution to evil or are we doomed to a hopeless existence of evermore powerful and proliferating evil?

The Old Testament account of Sodom and Gomorrah warns us that God will only tolerate so much evil before executing judgment and destroying it. Friesenhahn offers hope: "The New Testament solution—both philosophically or theologically and existentially—to the problem of evil is the loving self-sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. The Cross of Christ contains at the same time the greatest suffering and the fullest expression of love."[197] Friesenhahn elaborates on the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar,

> Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88), provides us with the best framework in which to answer this question from a Christian theological point of view. Balthasar's theology of the immanent Trinity (God in Himself) as a communal life of interpersonal, kenotic (self-giving) love and his grounding of the economy of salvation, especially the Cross, in the Trinity enable us to see that human suffering, joined to the suffering of Christ, becomes a mode of participation in the Trinity in a way that resolves the problem of evil.[198]

And just what is this "mode of participation in the Trinity" that resolves the problem of evil?

> The possibility of entering into God's trinitarian life of love makes suffering transcendently meaningful and solves the problem of evil in that God can be understood as permitting innocent suffering, not from any malice or weakness, but as a pathway by which man, though born into a world of sin, can come by the grace of Christ to God the Father.[199]

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[196] Peter Leithhart, *Two Cheers For Utopia*, 2021, https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/12/two-cheers-for-utopia

[197] Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy,* 138, Kindle

[198] Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy,* 102, Kindle

[199] Friesenhahn, *The Trinity and Theodicy,* 143, Kindle

Douglas Farrow elaborates on the eternal victory over evil inherent in the crucifixion,

> Evil is real, in its way and for its time, because some creaturely agents really do pervert the gifts of God and seek to prevent them from fulfilling their purpose. But the triumph of the Crucified is real, not merely in its way and for its time, but absolutely and eternally real, in every way and for all time, for it is the triumph of God. Not merely as a metaphor is it real. Not even as a true "event" preserved in some Eternal Now. It is real as a person, as a living man who stands on his own two feet, who can breathe on us the bracing Breath of Eden, who can touch us and tell us to stand: "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.[200]

The New Testament book of Revelation focuses on the ultimate victory of God over evil; it is Christ's blood and conquering of death that seals the fate of evil itself.[201]

Christus Victor[202]

The Atonement can be thought of as a multi-faceted diamond. Examining the Atonement through the various facets reveals different insight into the almost-unfathomable truth of what happened on the cross. In 1930, the Swedish theologian Gustav Aulen penned *Christus Victor* wherein he offered what he terms "the classic view of the Atonement"—defined as "a strong delineation of the view of the Atonement which is summed up in such phrases as 'Christus Victor,' and 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself'—the view that sets the Incarnation in direct connection with the Atonement, and proclaims that *it is God Himself who in Christ has delivered mankind from the power of evil"* (emphasis is mine).[203] The church father Irenaeus, whom Aulen argues represents the main line of patristic thought, wrote that Christ came because God was resolved to "destroy death."[204] Aulen views the death of Christ as

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[200] Douglas Farrow, *The Real Victory Over Evil*, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/78966048/The_Real_Victory_Over_Evil

[201] Constantine R. Campbell and Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture (Reading Christian Scripture): A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey*, Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2020, 366, Kindle

[202] In the theology of Christus Victor, the atonement is viewed as divine conflict and victory over the hostile powers that hold humanity in subjection. Aulén argues that the classic Ransom theory is not so much a rational systematic theory as it is a drama, a passion story of God triumphing over the powers and liberating humanity from the bondage of sin. https://www.theopedia.com/christus-victor

[203] A. G. Herbert (translator) in the Preface to *Christus Victor* by Gustaf Aulen, London, SPCK, CrossReach Publications ebook, 2021, 7, Kindle

[204] Irenaeus, *The Writings of Irenaeus*, Edinburgh, Aeterna Press, 2015, 47, Kindle

the "final and decisive" battle against evil.[205] What the onlookers of the crucifixion took for humiliating defeat, was in fact cosmic triumph over evil whereby God decisively delivered mankind from the powers of evil. Aulen emphasizes the close relationship between salvation and the Atonement and its shattering of evil,

> It is important, above all, at this point to see clearly that this work of salvation and deliverance is at the same time a work of atonement, of reconciliation between God and the world. It is altogether misleading to say that the triumph of Christ over the powers of evil, whereby He delivers man, is a work of salvation but not of atonement; for the two ideas cannot possibly be thus separated. It is precisely the work of salvation wherein Christ breaks the power of evil that constitutes the atonement between God and the world.[206]

While Aulen's argument for the understanding of the Atonement as *Christus Victor* has powerful merit, his rejection of the doctrine of Vicarious Substitutionary Atonement—which he classifies as the "juridical" view—must be dismissed as erroneous. As earlier argued, the Atonement is best understood as a multi-faceted diamond with each facet representing a different perspective on what Christ did. Both Christus Victor and the Vicarious Substitutionary Atonement are correct understandings of the Atonement from differing perspectives where Christ's death and resurrection is the final, decisive battle against evil, resulting in deliverance from evil for those who willingly follow him. Ambrose argues that Christ died "to deliver us from this evil world."[207] The death and resurrection of Christ represent both Vicarious Substitution and Christus Victor.[208]

But if Christ defeated evil, why is there still evil in the world? Aulen clarifies that Christ's "victory is the starting point for his present work in the world of men, where He, through His Spirit, ever triumphing continues to break down sin's power."[209] Aulen elaborates, quoting Irenaeus,

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[205] Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*, London, SPCK, CrossReach Publications ebook, 2021, 29, Kindle

[206] Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 54, Kindle

[207] Ambrose, *On The Death of Satyrus,* The Complete Ante-Nicene, Nicene And Post-Nicene Collection of Early Church Fathers: Cross-Linked to the Bible (Philip Schaff, editor), (Toronto, CA: Public Domain), 2016, 750, Kindle

[208] Campbell & Pennington, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture,* 118, Kindle

[209] Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 37, Kindle

The Resurrection is for him first of all the manifestation of the decisive victory over the powers of evil, which was won on the cross; it is also the starting-point for the new dispensation, for the gift of the Spirit, for the continuation of the work of God in the souls of men "for the unity and communion of God and man." "The passion of Christ brought us courage and power. The Lord through His passion ascended up on high, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men, and gave power to them that believe in Him to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy—that is, the prince of the apostasy. The Lord through His passion destroyed death, brought error to an end, abolished corruption, banished ignorance, manifested life, declared truth, and bestowed incorruption.[210]

Aulen is echoing the "already but not yet" theology of inaugurated eschatology. The kingdom is inaugurated but awaits consummation at the eschaton with the return of Christ. Evil is defeated with the back of sin broken, but final judgment and vindication await the end of the age.

Is there Scriptural support for *Christus Victor*? Col 2:15 speaks of the triumph of Christ over evil at the cross—"He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him." Regarding this verse, Leo the Great (440-461, the Bishop of Rome) commented, "As renowned victor over the devil, and most powerful conqueror of hostile spirits, in an admirable spectacle, he (Christ) carried the trophy of his victory."[211] Augustine, commenting on this verse, wrote that Christ "openly exposed the principalities and powers, confidently triumphing over them."[212] The reformer Gasparo Constarini elucidated that Christ "tore apart his (the devil's) vessels, thus plundering the powers and supremacy of the demons . . . carrying us over from darkness into the wonderful light, triumphing over them."[213] The reformer John Devenant expounded that Christ "plundered demons, then he made a show of them and triumphed over them on the cross, when to fleshly eyes he seemed to be conquered and triumphed over them."[214] Commenting on the phrase "nailing it to the cross" in Col 2:14, Philip

[210] Aulen, *Christus Victor*, 29-30, Kindle

[211] Leo the Great, *Sermons 59.4,* Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IX, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2000, 36

[212] Augustine of Hippo, *On The Trinity*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament IX, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2000, 36

[213] Gasparo Constarini, *Notes on Paul's Letters—Col 2:15*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2013, 197

[214] John Devenant, *Exposition of Colossians 2:15*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2013, 197

Melanchthon observed that Christ "erected a trophy so as to inscribe or paint his victory on it. Moreover, the figure has the meaning that Christ has conquered and has made his victory plain."[215] 1 John 3:8b echoes that "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil." John Stott bemoans the "neglected truth" of *Christus Victor* as articulated by Aulen.[216] He writes,

> Gustav Aulén was right to draw the church's attention to the cross as victory, and to show that by his death Jesus saved us not only from sin and guilt but from death and the devil, in fact all evil powers as well. His thesis was relevant too in a century torn apart by two world wars and in a European culture aware of demonic forces. He was also correct in pointing out that "the note of triumph," which "sounds like a trumpet-call through the teaching of the early church," was largely absent from the cool logic of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*. Luther, on the other hand, struck this note again.[217]

The resolution to the problem of evil is located in the person of Jesus Christ and centered in his crucifixion and resurrection and the subsequent annihilation of evil that occurs at the eschaton in the fruition of the kingdom of God and the final judgment of all evil. All other attempts at resolving evil will necessarily fail.

The Natural Law

(This section draws upon my earlier paper entitled "Natural Law Theory" that was penned in March 2022.) From Paul in Romans 1 to Augustine and Aquinas, natural theology is central.[218] Why do we have a conscience? What purpose does it serve if the cosmos is strictly materialistic? While a guilty conscience may not persuade one of the truth of the gospel, it can certainly alter behavior. Scripture affirms that the conscience is a universal gift from the Creator that gives inherent knowledge of moral wrongdoing (Rom 2:14-15) to everyone without special revelation. The conscience, unless seared, provides moral direction and is powerful evidence of the *imago dei*. God—the very definition and standard of "goodness"—graciously imparts his image-bearers with a moral compass, giving them an innate ability to differentiate between good

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[215] Philip Melanchthon, *Notes on Paul's Letter to the Colossians 2:14*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament XI, Downers Grove, IL, InterVarsity Press, 2013, 196

[216] John R. W. Stott, *The Cross Of Christ*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006, 224

[217] Stott, *The Cross Of Christ*, 225

[218] Levering, *Proofs of God*, 6, 2016, Kindle

and evil. A universal moral compass of good versus evil implies a transcendent lawgiver; materialism cannot explain it. Why do people instinctively know good from evil?

Paul Copan argues that "the common argument from evil launched against belief in God still takes for granted a fundamental standard of goodness or a design-plan, which is difficult to account for if God does not exist and the material universe is the sum total of reality."[219] As asserted earlier, Natural Law theory affirms that God embedded His moral law into creation such that rational creatures intuitively know of its existence and can differentiate moral good and evil to some degree. The Natural Law that is implanted in creation derives from the divine eternal law that resides in the mind and nature of God and exists for all eternity. Knowledge of the Natural Law is part of the general revelation that is universally available to everyone, independant of special revelation. Thomas Aquinas is the best known proponent of Natural Law theory and defines it in The Summa Theologica this way,

> ... this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law ... the light of natural reason, by which we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than the imprint on us of the Divine Light. It is therefore evident that the natural law is nothing else than the rational creature's participation of the eternal law.[220]

C.S. Lewis characterizes the implanted moral law as "inside information," writing,

> The other bit of evidence is that Moral Law which He has put into our minds. And this is a better bit of evidence than the other, because it is inside information. You find out more about God from the Moral Law than from the universe in general just as you find out more about a man by listening to his conversation than by looking at a house he has built.[221]

Wayne Grudem, reflecting on the universality of Natural Law, states "the value of the study of natural law is evident when we realize that every person ever born has been given a conscience by God and therefore has some knowledge of right and wrong."[222] We find in Genesis that at the completion of creation God declared a moral judgement of "very good" on His

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[219] Paul Copan, *The Moral Argument*, Christian Apologetics, 176, Kindle

[220] Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologica*, (William Benton, 1952), II-I, q. XCI, a. 2, co.

[221] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 29, Kindle

[222] Wayne Grudem, *Christian Ethics, An Introduction to Biblical Moral Reasoning*, (Crossway, 2018), 96, Kindle

creative work, implying that the natural law represents a real "moral fiber" built into the Cosmos. There is in effect a moral grain to creation, the adherence to which enables and produces human flourishing.

Scripture confirms the existence of Natural Law. Paul argues in Rom 2 that the Gentiles, without special revelation, do what the law requires by nature because it is written on their hearts with their conscience bearing witness. The early church interpreted Rom 2:12-16 this way with Ambrosiaster commenting on v. 12 that "the gentiles are also under the judgement of the natural law."[223] Ambrose remarks on v. 14 that "Gentiles show the work of the law written in their hearts. There is therefore something like the law of God which exists in the hearts of men."[224] The Reformers also understood this passage as referring to the Natural Law. Regarding v. 14, Heinrich Bullinger observes "that which seems to have been implanted in us by God as part of our nature is therefore called the 'law of nature'."[225] Erasmus Sarcerius notes on the same verse "while it is true that the Gentiles do not have the written law, they nevertheless do possess the law of nature."[226]

There are other references to Natural Law in Scripture. In 1 Cor 5, Paul accuses the church at Corinth of tolerating sexual immorality of a kind that even the pagans recognize (through Natural Law) is morally wrong. In Genesis 12, after Abraham lies about his relationship with Sarah, the pagan Pharaoh confronts him in righteous anger over his immoral behavior. J. Budziszewski regards Natural Law as "the nearest approach to the truth about the 'law written on the heart'."[227] Calvin uses the phrase *Sensus Divinitatis* (sense of divinity) to expound upon the natural knowledge of God that all possess,

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[223] Heinrich Bullinger, Gerald Bray (editor), *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VI, Romans*, (Intervarsity Press, 1998), 64

[224] Ambrose, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, 67

[225] Gwenfair Walters Adams (Editor), *Reformation Commentary on Scripture, New Testament VII, Romans 1-8,* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019), 101

[226] Erasmus Sarcerius, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture,* 101

[227] J. Budziszewski, *Written On The Heart, The Case For Natural Law*, (Intervarsity Press, 1997), 10, Kindle

That there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity, we hold to be beyond dispute, since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.[228]

We see indisputable evidence of the Natural Law in creation all around us with every culture embodying similar laws against murder and theft. There is a universal recognition that some acts are inherently wrong and others are morally right. As a universal, the Natural Law is a moral standard for everyone everywhere, both believers and unbelievers. The overwhelming vast majority of people do not worry that their neighbor is going to murder them in the middle of the night and burn down their house; people intuitively know it is wrong. As Paul reminds the Corinthian church, even the pagans know what is wrong. While the law written on the conscience may be suppressed with a seared sociopathic conscience, exceptions do not invalidate the rule. The Natural Law, which differentiates between moral good and evil, has a transcendent origin, originating in the divine law that resides in the nature and mind of God before creation and exists for all eternity. In Romans 1, Paul warns of the consequences of the willful suppression of the universal innate knowledge of God. The Natural Law points to God.

Evil as an Argument for the Existence of God

Kreeft and Tecelli point out that "The fact that we judge something evil might even be developed into an argument for the existence of the standard of Perfect Goodness implied in our judgment, and thus for the existence of the God of perfect goodness whom evil's existence seems to disprove."[229] The four premises of the proposed argument are true and the resulting conclusion logically follows as the most likely.

Most atheists and secular philosophers now acknowledge that the reality of evil is not contradictory with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

Evil cannot exist without good. Satan, a murderer and the father of lies (John 8:44), is

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[228] Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 7, Kindle

[229] Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, 123

the epitome of evil. Created by God, he would not exist without God; his being necessitates the existence of God. In fact, good *defines* evil. As C.S. Lewis remarked, "A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."[230] Neither good nor evil exist within a materialistic worldview. Postmodernism has no objective definition of either good or evil; using a common euphemism, evil and good are whatever "floats your boat." To be truly objective, moral good must be transcendent beyond space and time and eternally immutable. Only God is transcendent, beyond space and time and eternally immutable. Good must therefore be coexistent with God—a truth that Scripture affirms, defining moral "good" as God's inherent nature.

Good is grounded in God and not in any philosophical treatise or cultural norm. A world without a transcendent grounding for good inevitably descends into nihilism where all meaning is ultimately lost, and anarchy and chaos prevail.

Finally, the ultimate resolution to evil in a fallen cosmos requires intervention by the transcendent God.

If the premises are true and the logic is sound, the conclusion follows. *The presence of evil necessitates the existence of God.*

God Sees Evil and Is Doing Something about It

Robert Jastrow, the agnostic physicist and astronomer, acknowledged the implications of theological truth writing, "For the scientist who as lived by his faith in the power of reason, the story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries."[231] In the book of Job, it is noteworthy that the existence of God is never questioned despite horrendous evil—only God's goodness is challenged. The church fathers and most medieval theologians believed that humans can

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[230] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 37-38, Kindle

[231] Ortlund, *Why God Makes Sense*, 20-21, Kindle

rationally demonstrate the existence of God.[232] Neither good nor evil exist without a transcendent God, for there would be no moral objective standards. Yet, in keeping with skeptical theism, "the basic certainty of the existence of God was and is always accompanied by a sense of its being an immense riddle."[233]

How do we understand and explain evil and the assertion that it is incompatible with the existence of God? Both faith and reason enter the fray. Faith and reason can never contradict each other. Kreeft and Tacelli elaborate on the contrast between faith and reason,

> Truths of faith alone are things revealed by God but not understandable, discoverable or provable by reason (e.g., the Trinity or the fact that Christ's death atoned for our sins). Truths of both faith and reason are things revealed by God but also understandable, discoverable or provable by reason (e.g., the existence of one God, or an objective moral law, or life after death). Truths of reason and not of faith are things not revealed by God but known by human reason (e.g., the natural sciences).[234]

The logic of abduction circumvents the riddles of induction and the inaccessibility of certainty.[235] My proposed syllogism abductively argues that evil necessitates the existence of God:

1 The reality of evil is not contradictory with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

2 Evil cannot exist without good.

3 Good is grounded in God.

4 The resolution of evil requires God.

5 Conclusion: The presence of evil necessitates the existence of God.

C. S. Lewis reveals that what he originally believed was evidence *against* God—the presence of evil—became an argument *for* the existence of God since evil is relative without an objective standard rooted in a transcendent God.[236] Evil is never attributed to God in Scripture

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[232] Levering, *Proofs of God,* 27, Kindle

[233] Levering, *Proofs of God,* 11, Kindle

[234] Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook Of Christian Apologetics*, 37

[235] Baggett & Walls, *Good God,* 149, Kindle

[236] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 38-39

but always to the creature. God stands behind evil in a much different way than he does good. We must hold two truths simultaneously when wrestling with the problem of evil. First, we are finite creatures and incapable of grasping everything an infinite God is and does. Second, God does not reveal everything to us (Deut 29:29). There will always be an element of mystery (skeptical theism) regarding evil.

The British philosopher Cyril Edwin Mitchinson Joad (1891-1953) was an agnostic who viewed evil as a psychological and sociological "maladjustment"; Richard E. Simmons III chronicles Joad's story in his book *Reflections On The Existence Of God*.[237] Joad's view of human goodness, reason and progress was obliterated by two world wars and he ultimately became a Christian writing his story in *The Recovery Of Belief* (unfortunately, the book is long out of print and difficult to find). In the end, Joad concluded that evil was real and that the reality of evil is a powerful argument for the existence of God.[238]

Pascal wisely observed that "God can bring forth good out of evil and without God we bring forth evil out of good."[239] Horrific evil has the capacity to make one painfully aware of the transcendent, pointing to a reality beyond time and space. The psalmist wrote "Before I was afflicted, I went astray" and "It was good for me to be afflicted" (Ps 119:67, 71). But as Richard Simmons asks, "Where does the goodness scale come from that enables us to identify evil? Where is the standard of good that makes this notion of evil to be intelligible?"[240] Ganssle argues that evil is central to Christianity; evil is no surprise. Christianity *requires* there to be evil—a moral evil so significant that the highest sacrifice is warranted.[241] Evil is a compass inevitably pointing towards God.

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[237] Richard E. Simmons III, *Reflections On The Existence Of God*, Birmingham, AL: Union Hill Publishing, 2019, 218, Kindle

[238] Richard E. Simmons III, *God and the Presence of Evil*, 2021, https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reliabletruth/2021/10/god-and-the-presence-of-evil/

[239] Pascal, Pensees, 173, Kindle

[240] Simmons, *God and the Presence of Evil,* https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reliabletruth/2021/10/god-and-the-presence-of-evil/

[241] Ganssle, *Evil As Evidence For Christianity*, 221, Kindle

We wrestle with evil wondering with the Psalmist why we are repaid with evil for good (Ps 35:12). We struggle like Job, when confronted with horrendous evil. Ultimately, like both the Psalmist and Job, while we may not understand evil and what God is doing, we can know that God exists for we find evil silently and implicitly marking his divine existence. Much as a thermonuclear explosion wreaks unimaginable devastation, and yet at the same time provides irrefutable evidence of an awesome power behind it, so too evil is a compelling witness of a sovereign God who orchestrates *everything*, including evil, to accomplish his good purposes.

Evil cannot exist without the good that is grounded in a transcendent God, thereby necessitating his existence. If all apples were rotten, we would not understand what a bad apple is for good apples enable us to make the distinction.[242] In his masterpiece *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis insightfully observes that "the powers which enable evil to carry on are powers given it by goodness."[243] He goes on to offer a jolting conclusion, "Good people know about both good and evil; bad people do not know about either."[244] William Lane Craig rightfully concludes,

> In a world without God, who's to say whose values are right and whose are wrong? There can be no objective right and wrong, only our culturally and personally relative, subjective judgments. Think of what that means! It means it's impossible to condemn war, oppression, or crime as evil. Nor can you praise generosity, self-sacrifice, and love as good. To kill someone or to love someone is morally equivalent. For in a universe without God, good and evil do not exist—there is only the bare, valueless fact of existence, and there is no one to say you are right and I am wrong.[245]

From the perspective of a progressively tumultuous culture forty years later, Hans Urs Von Balthasar was indeed prophetic as beauty, truth and goodness are now increasingly scarce commodities. The ancient philosophers viewed beauty, truth, and goodness as transcendentals meaning timeless, universal realities that exist beyond the space-time cosmos. Unlike evil, goodness is a transcendent eternal commodity. Theologian John-Mark Miravalle affirms that "truth, goodness, and beauty get the most attention of any of the transcendentals and the most

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[242] Campbell, *Worldviews & The Problem Of Evil*, 20, Kindle

[243] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 45, Kindle

[244] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 93, Kindle

[245] William Lane Craig, *On Guard*, Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2010, 35

emphasis on their relationship."[246]

Something may be regarded as evil by one culture in this fallen world and yet good by another (i.e., the genital mutilation of young girls). But that does not mean that evil and good are subjective; both are objective and ultimately defined by a transcendent, eternal God. Without a grounding in God, everything is up for grabs. As our culture pushes God out of the public square, we are witnessing a dizzying descent down the rabbit-hole into Wonderland; things generally acknowledged as evil a few years ago are now increasingly celebrated as good. The words of Isaiah 5:20 ring true—"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter."

Twisting evil to become good and vice-versa foretells an inevitable coming judgment. When evil finally progresses past the point of no-return from God's perspective and judgment ultimately falls, the adjudicated evil becomes undeniable evidence of a righteous God. Consider what happened to Nazi Germany in 1945 after the collapse of the Third Reich. The emergence of a dystopian society that has cut loose from any moral anchor graphically demonstrates that good can exist *only* if a transcendent God exists. If we eject the transcendent God from our worldview, the floodgates for evil are open. That still does not mean though that evil no longer necessitates the existence of God; in fact the inevitable judgment and obliteration of evil requires God . . . even if God is absent from one's worldview. The elimination of God from one's worldview does not resolve the problem of evil.

Michael Obanla argues in his thesis that "the existence of evil is a logical and necessary outcome of the doctrines of God's sovereignty and human freedom, the transcendence, and the righteousness of God . . . the existence of evil and its manifestation in pain and suffering has a purpose in the divine economy and that human beings can experience justice only by developing personal and intimate relationships with God."[247] Evil, particularly the existential

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[246] Miravalle, *Beauty, What It Is And Why It Matters*, 32, Kindle

[247] Michael Olaseni Obanla, *The Problem Of Evil, Modern Calvinism And The Doctrine Of Free Will: Is John Feinber's Theodicy A Coherent Resolution To The Problem Of Tragic Moral Evil?*, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1249&context=masters&httpsredir=1

problem, can suddenly flash into our lives with unexpected ferocity precipitating a real crisis of faith. Like Job, while we may not understand *why*, we can ultimately take comfort in the assurance that the unwelcome manifestation of evil is powerful evidence for a transcendent omnibenevolent God ordering everything to its consummation for his glory and our good. As Ronnie Campbell reminds us, "God is in the midst of the evil that is taking place in the world, and he is doing something about it."[248]

The Argument From Evil is not offered as an end-all apologetic, but as support for an eclectic approach to apologetics.[249] There is historical precedent for eclectic apologetics with Augustine, Anselm and Pascal using this approach.[250] As Edward Carnell wisely observed, "There is no 'official' or 'normative' approach to apologetics…. The approach is governed by the climate of the times. This means, as it were, that an apologist must play it by ear."[251]

Finally, we must heed the warning of John Warwick Montgomery, "Apologetics does not save; only Jesus Christ is able to do that. But apologetics can—and should—serve as a John the Baptist, making the paths straight, facilitating routes to the cross of Christ."[252] As powerful as the Argument From Evil is, it is not sufficient in and of itself; its proper and most powerful function is to serve as a springboard into the good news of the gospel, without which the argument merely becomes "clouds and wind without rain" (Prov 25:14).

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[248] Campbell, *Worldviews & The Problem Of Evil*, 236, Kindle

[249] Eclectic apologists may prefer one approach over others but will not see their approach as the only viable one. "Much as one can produce 16 million different colors just from blending the three primary colors, one can employ a chromatic metaphor to explain the dizzying diversity of approaches to apologetics in terms of the emphasis each places on these three fundamental intuitions." James K. Beilby, *Varieties of Apologetics*, Christian Apologetics, 37, Kindle

[250] Beilby, *Varieties of Apologetics*, 37, Kindle

[251] Beilby, *Varieties of Apologetics*, 37, Kindle

[252] John Warwick Montgomery, *A Short History Of Apologetics*, Christian Apologetics, 28, Kindle

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