

# THE ROOTS OF EVIL

*REVISED, THIRD EDITION*

With a response to Rabbi Kushner's  
*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*

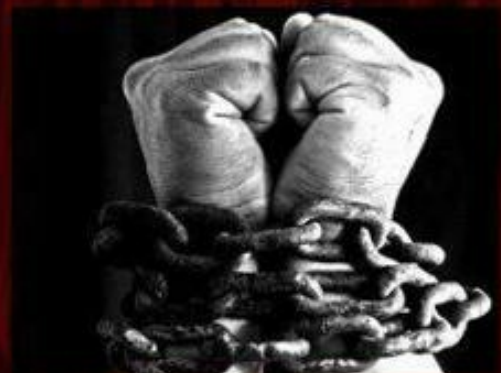


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*Third Edition, Revised*

Norman Geisler

2013

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*Third Edition, Revised 2013*

By Dr. Norman L. Geisler

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AT SOME TIME OR ANOTHER, EVERYONE WONDERS about the existence of evil and suffering in the world. Its presence has touched all, ravaged many, and perplexed the thinking people throughout the ages. Surely, if there were a God in the universe, He would have both the desire and the power to rid the world of evil!

In his book *The Plague*, Albert Camus confronts the reader with this dilemma through the character of Paneloux, the priest of the village. As his community is overwhelmed by the horror of the plague, Paneloux is forced to make a crucial philosophical decision. Either he must have faith that God will bring good out of the evil situation, or he must stand with Dr. Rieux and Tarrou and condemn the evil situation as unbearable and unredeemable. To them, the situation declares either that there is no God, and man is left to struggle in futility, or that if there is a God, He must be the supreme, evil enemy of human beings. The tension of this personal dilemma is the captivating force in Camus's powerful story.

Not all who have considered the problem of evil have been driven to these two extremes. Some have sought to fit God into the universe by changing the traditional view of His character. They have suggested that if God exists, He might not be all-powerful and therefore not able to rid the world of evil. Others have argued that God is not all-loving but instead is generally unconcerned about the personal tragedy that man faces. This view considers God to be like the professor in Thomas Carlyle's essay *Sartor Resartus*. As the professor looks out upon the masses of people beneath his window and sees them huddled and struggling, he finds himself becoming more and more removed from their problems and tragedies. He is no longer involved with and experiencing their toils and anguish. It is as if he has ceased to be a member of the human race, for now he views their world with compassionless detachment. Similarly, some men think of God as detached and isolated from human beings, as uninvolved as the professor in Carlyle's essay.

It is not difficult to recall times of tragedy, personal or close at hand. At such times, answers about God and evil seem elusive or unsatisfying. The dilemma is not only intellectual, but also existential. Must one believe that God is cruel, compassionless, impotent, or nonexistent in order to deal with the reality of evil in the world? This is more than an abstract, philosophical question. It touches each and every one of us where we live. And sooner or later, either deliberately or inadvertently, each of us adopts a view with regard to evil.

In this book we will examine some philosophical options that have been proposed to answer the apparent contradictions between evil and a good God. We will look at such systems as Illusionism, Dualism, Finite Godism, Atheism, Open Theism, and Theism. Each will be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses. It is obviously impossible to cover every aspect of these systems in rigorous detail in this short work; therefore, those who are interested in further detail are encouraged to refer to the list of references under the Bibliography for further reading located at the end of the book.



THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEMS that have been developed to deal with the problem of evil. These can be roughly broken down into two major categories: those that deal with the nature of evil and those that deal with the nature of God. In this chapter we will discuss the options dealing with the nature of evil.



One of these systems, which will be called illusionism—solving the problem of evil by denying its existence. In this system, evil ceases to be a philosophic problem because all of material reality is considered an illusion. Rocks and trees, as well as pain and suffering, are taken to be only illusions. Illusionism thus becomes the basis for a number of religions and philosophies in both the East and the West.

Some Eastern religions, such as certain forms of Hinduism, have a doctrine called monism, which states that all diversity in the world is an illusion. Ultimate reality is both one and good. Therefore, things that appear in this world to be many and evil are actually an illusion. The illusion of the external world is called *maya*, and the illusion of diversity is called *mithya*.

Monists would acknowledge that we may “feel” that such a view of reality is false. Each of us “seems” to experience the world as being diverse and evil, but according to this view, our senses are deceiving us. The famous ninth-century Hindu thinker, Sankara, argued that *Brahman* (Hindu name for God) is the sole reality. The external world only *appears* to be something in the same way a rope appears to be a serpent, until we get closer. Likewise, when we examine the world more closely, we see that the only reality behind the illusion is *Brahman*. *Brahman* “causes” the world to appear diverse and evil only in the sense that the rope “causes” the serpent to appear.

In the Western world, illusionism has taken a number of different forms. The first proponents of illusionism in the West were the Greek thinkers Parmenides and Zeno. Parmenides (b. 515 B.C.) was one of the first philosophers to focus his attention on the area of metaphysics (the nature of real being). He argued that our senses could not be trusted. Parmenides believed that although things may appear to be many and evil, they are in fact, ultimately one and good. Furthermore, he said that a person's senses are easily deceived, and consequently man's present perception of the world as diverse and evil is a false perception. Our mind can be trusted and it reasons thus: Everything must be one for if there were two or more things, they would differ. But they could only differ by something (being) or by nothing (non-being). But to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. And they can't differ by being for being is the very thing that everything has in common, and they cannot differ by the very thing that have in common. Hence, our mind tells us that there can only be one Being, Monism (Parmenides, “The Proem”).

One of Parmenides' pupils, Zeno (b. 490 B.C.), attempted to prove this view through logic. One of his arguments centered around the classic “Race Course Argument” that denied the true existence of motion. A runner starting at point A cannot reach point B, except by traversing a successive number of halves of the distance. In order to travel from A to B, one must travel past the midpoint ( $M_1$ ). But in order to travel from A to  $M_1$ , one must travel past the midpoint ( $M_2$ ) of *that* distance. And in order to travel past midpoint  $M_2$ , one must travel past the midpoint ( $M_3$ ). Thus in order to travel in any direction, it appears that we must travel across an infinite number of midpoints ( $M_1$  to  $M$  infinity), but an infinite cannot be traversed. If that is true, then, according to Zeno, motion is impossible and is therefore just an illusion.

A modern form of illusionism in the West is Christian Science. According to Mary Baker Eddy, “Evil is but an illusion, and it has no real basis.” That is, evil is not a real entity, but is instead a false perception; it is the “error of the mortal mind.” Christian Science maintains that God is truth and that “there is no pain in truth, and no truth in pain.” Sin, sickness, and death, therefore, are mortal illusions that do not exist in reality (Eddy, *Science and Health*, p. 113, 289, 480). Christian Science

therefore approaches the problem of evil in exactly the same way as Hinduism and the teaching of Zeno—Evil is an illusion.

An analysis of illusionism can be summarized by a number of questions that have been posed to followers of this system. First, if evil is an illusion, where did the illusion come from? Further, why does everyone experience it? And why can't we get rid of it? In fact, how do we know it is an illusion (not-real) unless we know reality by which we judge it to be not real?

What is more, we might ask, if evil is only an illusion, why does it *seem* to be so real? It was Edward Lear who wrote:

A certain faith-healer of Deal Asserted:

“Pain is not real.”

“Then pray tell me why,” Came the patient's reply,

“When I sit on a pin, And puncture my skin, Do I hate what I fancy I feel?”

Finally, we can ask whether or not there is any *practical difference* between viewing pain or evil as illusion or viewing it as actual reality. Pain or evil is part of the human experience and is encountered by all. Regardless of whether it is viewed as illusory or real, the experience is the same. It could just as easily be said that those who view pain or evil as illusion are actually participating in an illusion themselves: not the illusion or experience *of* pain or evil, but the illusion (or wishful thinking) *that* pain or evil is not real.

In conclusion, it must be noted that although this position is a philosophic option, few consistently hold to it. Those who believe that evil and the world are illusions do not actually function as if this were so. They may maintain that all is an illusion, but if one were to pour scalding hot water on their head, they would quickly “warm up” to the reality idea!

There is much to suggest that this position of illusionism is less than satisfactory. Both our reason and personal experience appear to deny this view. This leads us to a second philosophical option concerning the nature of evil: dualism.

Dualism as a philosophical system does not deny the existence of evil (as does illusionism), but instead it attempts to explain the presence of both good and evil by positing that both have been here forever. It can be found in various kinds of religious thought. Zoroastrianism, a religion based on the teachings of the prophet Zarathustra, was the dominant religion in Persia for more than one thousand years. Followers of this religion pictured the universe as a cosmic struggle of the Good *Ahura-Mazda* against the evil *Angra Mainyu*, who was the chief agent of The Lie. One of the movements within this religion held that both of these agents issued from the first principle (called *Zurvan*) at the beginning of time and have coexisted since (Hiriyanna, *Essentials of Indian Philosophy*, p. 153-154).

Perhaps the most classic form of dualism is Manichaeism, the philosophical system developed by the Persian prophet Mani (A.D. 216—276). The chief characteristic of this system is that it rejects any possibility of tracing the origins of good and evil to one and the same source. Evil must exist as a separate and completely independent principle from good. Two primal principles of Light and Darkness have existed coeternally, but independently, each dwelling in its own realm (St. Augustine, *Anti-Manichaeon Writings*).

We can extract two fundamental arguments from these dualistic positions that hold there are two coeternal, if not coequal, substances locked in conflict. The first argument can be summarized in this way:

1. Good and evil are opposites.
2. But a thing cannot be the source of its opposite. Hence, both good and evil must have existed as eternal opposites.
3. Good and evil also are substantial and real.
4. Therefore, both good and evil are eternal, but opposite realities.

The first premise in the argument seems obvious enough; evil is opposed to good and vice versa. Likewise, the second seems to follow from the first. How can evil come from good? How can good come from evil? A thing cannot produce its opposite. If this is the case, then both good and evil must have existed independently forever. Since both are equally real, the dualists conclude that there are two eternal but opposite principles and that dualism must be true.

A second argument by dualists is aimed at theism (which denies the eternality of evil) and holds that God is the author of everything, including evil. The argument against theism can be formulated as follows:

1. According to theism, God is the author of everything.
2. But evil is something, i.e., evil is real.
3. Therefore, God is the author of evil.

Theists cannot object to the first premise. To do so would sacrifice the sovereignty of God. Neither can the theist avoid the second premise, since to deny the reality of evil would be to accept the basic tenet of illusionism. But the theist *cannot* accept the conclusion that God authored or created evil (at least in the direct sense), for that would make God evil. The dualist does not have this theistic dilemma. He simply denies the first premise that God authored everything and portrays evil as a

reality outside of God and His sovereign control. Evil is thus eternally there, and God must work the best He can.

Theists have responded to these objections with two points (Aquinas, *Basic Writings, Summa Theologica* 1.48.3). First, not every opposite has a first principle. Small is the opposite of large, but it does not follow that there is something that has eternally existed as small. Second, evil can be real without being a substance or thing. Evil could be a real privation or lack of some good thing. For example, we acknowledge that blindness is real. We don't refer to it as a real thing. Blindness is the lack of something. It is the *real lack* of sight. Being maimed is a reality. It is the *real lack* of a limb. Nevertheless, a lack in something is not a substance or thing. Evil exists in a good thing as a lack or imperfection in it, like a hole in a piece of wood. Thus it seems quite possible for evil as lack or imperfection to exist in a system where no evil was ever authored.

Modern philosophical attempts to overcome and synthesize the tensions created by the strong irreconcilability of the dualistic system can be found in contemporary process theology. The proponents of this theology, Alfred North Whitehead (A.D. 1861—1947) and Charles Hartshorne (A.D. 1897—2000), provide excellent examples of this Panentheism or Process Theology (Whitehead, *Process and Reality*). They incorporate God and the world into a bipolar God. One pole of God is the world (God's body), and the other pole is God's mind. God is related to the world as a mind is to the body; God is in the world in the sense that God's body is the world. But since the world is God's actuality (i.e., His body), the view is called pan-en-theism (meaning, “all-in-God”).

This view holds that the world, with all of its evil, is not really *outside* God. It is one of God's poles. God is directly and intimately related to all there is. Evil is simply the incompatibility of some given factors within the ongoing growth of God. It is this growth that is the “process” of process theology. God is always in the world working for good and harmony. To the degree that we cooperate with God and make available for Him the potential for achievement, there is growth in the “body” of God. Since all moral achievement is stored in God, it is available for future use by others in the ongoing world process.

One of the implications of this view is that God is finite and is in the process of struggling with evil. The final chapter of this struggle, then, has not been written. The outcome is not certain. It may just go on forever. The triumph of good over evil really depends on man's cooperative interaction with God in this epic struggle. Man's actions, not God's, become the decisive and determining factors. Thus, there is no assured hope. There is no final state of perfection wherein good vanquishes evil. Rather, there is a continual, albeit progressive, and cumulative growth in the amount of achieved value in the universe as realized in the world, with the hope that someday (provided man cooperates) good will triumph. Whitehead calls this growth in value “God's consequent nature” (*PR*, p. 353, 523-533).

Critics have been severe in their comments on contemporary process theology (Madden, *Evil and the Concept of God*, chap. 6). First, in view of the apparent permanence of natural law and the persistence of evil, they have rightly asked what assurance this process theology can offer. If there is a finite God as proposed, there seems to be no guarantee that the outcome of the battle of good and evil will ultimately end in victory for good. Second, why does this finite God, who cannot overcome evil, bother to engage in such a useless project? If evil is never going to be overthrown and overcome, what is the purpose of His involvement? Certainly, if this is the true view of reality, it is most unsatisfying, especially in the light of man's desire to relieve suffering throughout the human

experience.

A third question would be How can such a strange, dualistic combination of opposites as good and evil be absorbed into the nature of God? If that has indeed happened, how can we still consider God good? It would seem that if such a God did exist, then He must be the Devil. We would be forced to relate to a very strange God indeed—one repugnant to most men. Fourth, how could one worship a God so impotent that He cannot even call off the whole process? Isn't this God so paralyzed that He is perilous? Man is called upon to rush to His aid to save Him. Fifth, how could this panentheistic God be considered morally worthy when He allows the sum total of human misery in order to enrich His own nature? Sixth, why does God engage in such a wasteful project in His efforts at self-character building? It would seem to be totally at man's expense.

Seventh, how can a better world be achieved if human activity must bring it about and if so few are aware of their important responsibility? Even if men became aware of the plan and were willing to cooperate, what personal value would it bring to an individual to participate in a process that only *may* bring cumulative value over the next millions of years? A last question that must be asked is how proponents of this theology can avoid making evil illusory when they hold that our victory over evil is really God's vicarious triumph in us. Since we do not experience the triumph of good over evil, how would we know it has even taken place? If the world is mostly illusion, why does it seem so real and why is the illusion so universal? Thus, the problems that plague illusionism discussed earlier also affect this form of dualism expressed in contemporary theology.

In conclusion, it could be stated that although dualism seeks to deal honestly with the reality of evil—rather than avoid it—it is still unsatisfactory. Not only is it a system fraught with problems, but it also fails to provide any sure hope for a better world. Good and evil are locked in an eternal struggle. We are left with the alternatives of leaving good and evil unresolved forever, or with an uncertain, ambiguous hope that it might someday be resolved if we come to God's aid and do our part.

In short, both Illusionism and Dualism fall short of a satisfying answer to the nature of evil. Realism seems to demand that evil is real but not eternal. How then did it arise? If there is a God, why does he allow it? This leads us to examine the question of what kind of God would allow such an evil world?

HAVING DISCUSSED THE NATURE OF EVIL, we now turn to options that deal with the existence and nature of God. If evil is not an illusion and not an eternal entity (as in dualism), then we need to examine the options that deal with the nature and character of God. Pantheism (monism), as we have seen claims that evil is real but God is not. By contrast, atheism contends that evil exist but God does not. If there is a God, then he is either finite (Finite Godism) or infinite (as in Theism). Let's look at Atheism first.

Many atheists deny God because of the problem of evil. They insist that the evil in this world is the very reason that God does not exist. For if there is a God, then surely he would eliminate evil. Let's examine first the arguments that atheists offer from evil to deny God.

### *The Argument from God Willing the Moral Law*

The first example comes from Bertrand Russell (A.D. 1872—1970), whom atheists the world over have looked to as one of their major spokesmen. Although he did not offer them in just this way, some of his thoughts may be reformulated into a disproof of God.

1. If there is a God, then He willed moral law.
2. If He willed it arbitrarily, then He is not essentially good.
3. If He did not will it arbitrarily, but willed it according to some ultimate standard beyond Himself, then He is not God.
4. In either case, argued Russell, God does not exist.

### *A Theistic Response*

The traditional theist points out that there is a third alternative to Russell's proposed dilemma, namely, God could have willed the moral law in accordance with his own unchanging moral nature. This view is called Essentialism in contrast to Voluntarism which claims that God was arbitrary in willing a moral law. So, in contrast to Russell, God could be essentially good and ultimate at the same time.

Voluntarists, like William Ockham (A.D. 1288—1348) must take the full brunt of Russell's criticism that their theistic God is arbitrary. If the moral law is merely what God willed, and he could have willed otherwise, then it is possible that God could have willed that hate, not love, is the universal moral standard. Likewise, God could have willed that rape, cruelty, bigotry, and genocide are the right things to do. Such a view is morally repugnant to our most basic moral instincts. This is to say nothing of the fact that the Bible describes that "it is impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18) and that He "cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim. 2:13).

### *The Argument from God's Omnipotent and Omnibenevolence*

Perhaps the most famous argument from evil against a theistic God can be put in this form:

1. If God is all-powerful, then He could destroy evil.
2. If God is all-good, then he would destroy evil.
3. But evil is not destroyed.
4. Therefore, no such God (who is omnipotent and omnibenevolent) exists.

### *A Theist Reply*

Traditional theist point to several problems with this argument. First, in its strong form, evil cannot be "destroyed" (totally obliterated) without doing away with free will—something which atheists cherish and defend. For since free will makes moral evil possible, then to destroy the possibility of evil God would have to destroy all free acts. But most atheist themselves rebel against this thought since they fancy themselves as free thinkers. So, their position is internally inconsistent since they want the very freedom that they protest God would have to destroy in order for Him to solve the problem of evil they want Him to solve by intervening in the world.



The second problem with this argument from evil against theism is that even in the weak sense of “destroy,” namely, to defeat evil without destroying free will, the argument still does not follow. For the third premise omits an important word—“Yet”—without which the argument does not follow. For the fact that evil is *not yet* defeated does not mean that it *never will be*. And the only way the atheist can fill in this gap in his argument is to add “and never will be.” However, this would assume omniscience on his part to know that evil never will be defeated. So, the atheist cannot eliminate God without assuming he is God, namely, omniscient.

The third problem is that, at best, the argument would only eliminate a theistic God (one who is omnipotent and omnibenevolent). This still leaves open the possibility of a Finite God (which we will address below). But in any case, the atheist has not established Atheism. He has not even eliminated Theism.

### *The Argument from Injustice*

Some atheists have attempted to argue against God from the injustice in the world. But former atheist C. S. Lewis (A.D. 1898—1963) shows the futility of this attempt. He wrote: “[As an atheist] my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line.” He added, “Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too. . . .” (*Mere Christianity*, p. 45).

In short, the atheist’s arguments against a theistic God boomerangs. They either are groundless or else they are self-defeating.

As intimated earlier, there is yet another alternative to Theism implied in the atheist's argument. The presence of evil does not disprove that there is a God; it only shows, at best, that there is no theistic God. That is, there might be a God who is not all-powerful and/or is not all-good. It is precisely this alternative that Finite Godism embraces. One form of Finite Godism maintains that God is all-loving but not all-powerful. Another form claims that God is neither. There were ancient Finite Godists like Plato (428/427—348/7 B.C.) and Aristotle (384/383—322/321 B.C.), and there are modern forms of it like John Stuart Mill (A.D. 1806—1873) and, more recently Rabbi Harold Samuel Kushner (A.D. b. 1935, see Appendix 3). Others believe this finite God is in the process of perfecting Himself, such as Alfred North Whitehead (A.D. 1861—1947) and Charles Hartshorne (A.D. 1897—2000).

### *Response*

Critics have pointed out several flaws in the argument of Finite Godism. First, while it is a possible solution to the problem of evil, it is not a good one since it offers not certainty that evil will be defeated. If God is finite and struggling to defeat evil, then how can we be sure that He will succeed. Since He is not all-powerful (omnipotent), He may either lose the battle or else the struggle could go on forever with no real winner. In either case, there is no assurance for the believer struggling with evil that good will win in the end. In short, there is no ultimate solution to the problem of evil. We could spend our whole life fighting evil only to find he was not on the winning side. One is reminded of the legendary beings of Mount Olympus who were held to be gods by the Greeks, but were merely amplified humanity. Second, how can a finite God guarantee the overthrow of evil and the final triumph of good? Only an infinite God in sovereign control of the universe can really guarantee the defeat of evil. William James (A.D. 1842—1910), himself a finite-Godist, unwittingly put his finger on the problem when he said, "The world is all the richer for having a Devil in it, *so long as we keep our foot upon his neck*" (*Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 55). This may be true, but the only guarantee that there is a firm foot on the neck of the devil is an omnipotent God.

Second, many Finite Godists, such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, believe God is in the process of perfection but is not absolutely perfect. He is getting better as the process goes on but he has not fully attained ultimate perfection. Some believe He never will. But we cannot know that God is getting more perfect, unless we have an absolutely Perfect standard by which we compare it. In short, better implies a Best. But if there something more ultimate and more perfect than God, then the process God is not really the Ultimate (God) by which he is measured. So, here too finite Godism must assume a theistic God or the equivalent in order to ground its own limited view of God.

Finally, there is a basic problem with the very concept of a finite God. One of the fundamental laws of thought, the law of causality, demands that every finite being has a cause. But if every limited being has an Unlimited Limiter, then a finite God is not really God at all. He is only a finite creature in need of a Creator. For example, if a Finite God is limited in duration (i.e., not eternal), then He must have had a beginning. And since everything that has a beginning had a Beginner, then it follows that a Finite God is not really God at all; He is really a creature in need of a Creator. Further, if this Finite God is limited in his being, then he must have the potentiality which limits his actuality. But the potential for being cannot actualize itself. (For example, bricks have the potential to be a house, but they cannot build themselves into a house. Some actuality must do that.) Hence, there must be some Actuality outside a finite being which actualized its potentiality. This Pure Actuality, then, would be

God, and the Alleged Finite God would only be a creature whose being was actualized by God (Pure Actuality).

Of course, Finite Godism claims to have a more personal and relatable God. In fact, it claims a God who actually needs us in the struggle with evil. This means our actions really count for eternity. We are really doing something for God. We are adding to his very nature as he progresses through time. But on the flip side, theists note that a finite God is neither existentially nor morally satisfying, since we are called on to make an ultimate commitment to something that is not really Ultimate. We are asked to be good, when the good we are asked to be like is not ultimately Good itself. At best a Finite God only *has* goodness, whereas an infinite Theistic God *is* Goodness itself. As for being more personal and relatable, surely there is no contest. A personal relation with a God who is unchangeably Good—one on whom you can count on every time—is the most relatable of all Beings.

### *Other Problems with a Finite God*

Critics have pointed out a number of serious problems that should be considered. First, why did God create a world in the first place if He knew He could not control the evil in it? Man can perhaps be forgiven for setting out on plans that eventually overwhelm him because of unforeseen circumstances. But what about God? If He did not know what would happen, then we must assume that He is also not all-knowing. If that is the case, are we really not talking about a God at all but just a finite creature?

Second, what evidence is there (empirical or historical) to show that good is *really* winning out over evil? All things appear to be continuing on from the beginning of the world with no significant signs of moral advance. If good is winning, certainly our daily newspapers don't show it.

Third, although supporters of finite-Godism claim that their system encourages social action and resistance to evil, the system can just as easily promote an entirely opposite reaction. For example, a brief review of man's history of resisting evil—an unbroken record of futility, defeat, and misery—might prompt a sense of the uselessness of the whole endeavor. The natural response might be: What's the use? or, Why bother to fight at all?

In conclusion, it must be noted that finitism does not offer satisfactory answers to the question of God and evil. It does not answer why God brought the world into existence if He knew it would be evil. It fails to explain why evil does not appear to be destroyed nor does this view even guarantee that it will. It posits a finite God who is unable to defeat evil or even control the activities of a devil. Therefore, if God is not limited in power, perhaps He is limited in love. This is the philosophical option we will consider next.

### *What About Sadism?*

Sadism is the belief that God is relatively unconcerned about evil that is inflicted upon His creation. The sadistic God is decidedly lacking in love or is even hateful. Sadism is not a widely held position. Most adherents of this position are either bitter theists or satirical atheists.

While some thinkers (including the finite-Godists) have held that an all-loving God is limited in power, many sadistic God is just the reverse: God is limited in power, yet lacking or limited in love. It is not surprising that few thinkers hold this position. The view has little to commend it beyond the bare and bitter fact that, if true, it would at least "explain" the problem of evil. The French philosopher, Rene Descartes (A.D. 1596—1650), hypothetically proposed that behind the world there is a malevolent demon who totally deceives men (*Meditations* I). A number of atheists have

attacked the idea of God by using the satire of sadism. It is rare to find a serious person who believes in sadism. Serious sadism leads naturally to atheism.

Nevertheless, it is important to discuss sadism as a theoretical position on evil so that we can determine whether it is possibly true. According to sadism, men suffer evil because God is lacking in goodness toward them. God could deliver us from our woes, but He simply does not care to do so. In fact, some say that God receives a delight from inflicting evil upon us. It is not difficult to see the inadequacies in this sadistic hypothesis.

### *Critiques of Sadism*

The first question we might pose relates to our understanding of what is moral. If God is limited *in* love, He must also be limited in His moral nature. If we are faced with a morally imperfect God, how would we know it? This problem is seen in the inconsistent position of Dr. Rieux in the novel *The Plague* by Albert Camus (A.D. 1913—1960). If we do not allow ultimate reality to be moral, we cannot morally condemn it. In the same way, we would know that God was morally imperfect only *if* there were an ultimate moral standard *beyond* God by which moral imperfection could be measured and found wanting. A theist might argue that by definition the ultimate moral standard beyond this sadistic “god” would be the real God. The evil “god” would be no more than a finite “devil.”

Even if we grant the possible existence of a morally imperfect God, there is a second question that should be raised. Charles Hartshorne has observed that the activities of a sadistic God are incompatible with one another (Hartshorne, “The Necessary Existent,” p. 127). He would have to be both creating and destroying the world at the same time. He would be intimately loving and savagely opposing His creation simultaneously. Human beings would be everywhere faced with the dilemmas of fighting plagues by killing God's creatures (the rats). Such a situation is indeed contradictory.

In summary, it must be stated that although sadism is a philosophic option, it is one that has few proponents. In addition to its inability to provide any base for a significant religious experience, it faces serious philosophical difficulties. If it is unlikely that God lacked the power to deal with evil as we saw in our discussion of finitism, and if it is also unlikely that God lacked the love to rid the world of evil as we have discussed in the foregoing section on sadism, we are left with the alternative that it is impossible for God to foresee or deal with evil.

Some who deny that God is finite offer another solution to the problem of evil. The view is called Free Will Theism or Open Theism (Clark Pinnock, A.D. 1937—2010, *The Most Moved Mover*). While acknowledging that free will is the cause of moral evil in the world, they deny that God could have foreseen it coming. They insist that even though God is infinite in power and love (in contrast to Finite Godism), nevertheless, they believe that it impossible for Him to have foreseen what free creatures would do with their freedom. They argue as follows even an omniscient Being cannot know everything. He can only know what is possible to know. But it is not possible for even an omniscient being to know what free beings will chose in the future. Their argument goes as follows:

1. The future can be foreseen only where there is a necessary order of causes and effects.
2. But a necessary order of causes and effects is contrary to human free choice.
3. Hence, in a world of free creatures it is impossible to foresee evil.

Critics have found problems with both premises. First, it is not impossible for an omniscient Mind to know for sure what will happen only where there is a necessary order of causes and effects. If God is eternal (non-temporal) and above time, then the future is present to Him in eternity. For example, a man on the top of a hill can see the whole train below at once right now, but those in a tunnel below him can see only one car in the train at a time, even so, God can see past (the cars that have already passed the tunnel of time), present (the cars visible through the tunnel of time, and the future (the car not yet up to the tunnel of time. He can know the whole train (past, present, and future to the tunnel of time) at once in His one eternal Now. From this perspective, the problem of Open Theism is viewing God as in time rather than as eternal and beyond time.

The second problem with the Open Theism argument is in assuming that necessity eliminates human freedom. Just because an omniscient Being knows for sure that a future free act will occur does not mean it is not free. Consider the following:

1. God (an omniscient Being) knows everything that will happen.
2. God knew from all eternity that Judas would betray Christ.
3. Hence, Judas Iscariot must (of necessity) betray Christ (For if Judas did not betray Christ, then an omniscient Being would have been wrong about what He knew. But an omniscient Being cannot be wrong about anything He knows).
4. Therefore, Judas was not free not to betray Christ (i.e., he must betray Christ).

However, point number four does not follow from one through three. Why? Because God can know for sure (=determined) what Judas was going to do freely (=freely chosen). One and the same act can be determined from the vantage point of God's omniscience, yet free from the vantage point of human choice. There is no contradiction in both being true. For example, I sometimes record a football game that I could not watch when it occurred and replay it when I get home. When I am watching the game every play and the outcome is absolutely determined. No matter how many times I replay it, nonetheless, it will always come out the same. However, the plays occurred, ever action on the field was freely chosen. No one forced anyone to do anything. So, one and the same set of free actions are completely determined at the same time. Of course, we are looking backward at the events and God is looking forward, but an omniscient mind knows the future with the same certainty as the past since an omniscient Mind cannot be wrong about anything it knows.

It is evident, even from human experience that not everything we foresee is caused by us. We can and do sometimes foresee crashes out our window that we did not cause. We can foresee that when a person jumps off a cliff that he is going to crash at the bottom. Of course, we don't foresee these with the same certainty that an omniscient Mind does, but these events do illustrate that not everything foreseen is fore-caused by the one who foresees it. Thus, when God foresees our free acts, He is not thereby fore-causing them.

Whatever God foresees must come to pass, since God cannot be wrong. If God foresees that a murderer will kill his victim, then the murderer must kill his victim. But the act of foreseeing this murder does not mean that the murder was not done freely.

### *What is Meant by Free Choice?*

Of course some strong determinists (Calvinists) see another solution to the problem. They reject the view of freedom assumed above (by both sides) that claims of free choices in the present world involve the power of contrary choice. This is called a Libertarian concept of free will. That is, whatever free acts we perform, we could have done otherwise. By contrast, some strong determinists define free choice as "doing what one desires." Then they proceed to say, "but it is God who give us the desire." Of course, this has serious implications. Does God give us the desire to sin? Did God give Lucifer the desire to rebel against Him. In this case God is working against God. Further, if we do not have the power of contrary choice, then neither Lucifer nor we are responsible for what we do. Further, if God only gives the desire to do good, then why doesn't He give it to everyone. Then everyone would be good and no one would be evil. For if we do not have the ability to do otherwise, then we are not responsible, are not culpable, and are not subject to just rewards or punishments for our actions.

### *Why Doesn't God Stop Evil Now?*

Another point critics of Open Theism make is this: Even if it is granted (for the sake of argument) that God could not foresee all the evil actions of His free creatures, nonetheless, this in no way would exonerate Him. Surely, it would not be beyond God's knowledge to foreknow what evil *might* occur if He created free creatures. Although He might not have known the precise amount of evil that *would* occur, He would certainly know that evil *might* occur in the world. Thus God would still be responsible for making the world, which He very well knew might be as evil as this one actually is.

Even if He did not know all this evil would occur when he created the world, nonetheless, He does know now, and this still leaves us with three questions: Why did He created this world knowing what *could* have happened?, and why, now that it *has* happened, does he not do something about it without destroying the free will he made. That is, granted their Libertarian concept of free will, how can God defeat evil without destroying free will? Seeking the answers to these questions leads us to the next chapter: The Theistic Explanation of Evil.

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER we examined Illusionism, Dualism, Atheism, and Finite Godism as answers to the problem of evil and found all of them wanting. The remaining explanation is Theism which affirms that God is real and evil is real. But evil is not eternal. How then did it begin?



Theistic answers to the problem of evil can be classified into two different systems of natural theology called theodicies. The first is attributed to the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (A.D. 1646—1716). It will be called “the greatest world” theodicy. The second form is implied in various theistic works from Saint Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225—1274) to the present and will be labeled “the greatest way” theodicy.

### *The Best of Possible Worlds Explanation*

According to the greatest-world theodicy, this present world is “the best of all possible worlds.” There are many elements of the theodicy of Saint Augustine (A.D. 354—430) that are in accord with this view. He saw evil as a necessary ingredient in life just as an ugly piece in a mosaic is part of the total beauty of a whole work of art. Likewise, strikingly beautiful highlights in a work of art are striking precisely because surrounding background areas are painted to recede. According to St. Augustine, even adultery, rooster fights, and the very flames of hell are all part of an overall portrayal of good (*On the Nature of the Good*, XXXVIII).

Gottfried Leibniz (A.D. 1646—1716) amplified and popularized this thesis in his now famous “this is the best of all possible worlds” view (Leibniz, *Theodicy*). Other worlds were logically possible, but this world was morally necessitated by the nature of God. The reasoning behind this view goes like this:

1. God is the best of all possible beings.
2. The best of all possible beings cannot do less than His best, since it is evil for God to do less than His best.
3. God's nature as best Being possible demands that He make the best world possible (if He wills to make one).
4. This world is the world that God made.
5. Therefore, this is the best of all possible worlds.

In this argument, it is difficult to determine the precise meaning of the words “this world.” *It* may mean “this present world,” “the world at any stage of its development,” or “the whole course of world history.” For the sake of philosophical clarity (not necessarily historical accuracy), we will take the words “this world” to refer broadly to a part of or to the whole of human history.

If this is what is meant by “this is the best of all possible worlds,” then surely Francois-Marie Voltaire (A.D. 1694—1778) was right in his classic satire *Candide*. One does not have to be the misfortunate Candide in order to conceive of numerous ways in which this world could be improved. One less rape, one less war, one less cancer victim would have improved the world at any stage. But if the world is actually improvable, then it is not the best. In fact, it could be easily said that if this world is the “best possible,” then the best is downright rotten! This system simply redefines evil as good. For like an ugly single piece in a over beautiful mosaic, evil is actually viewed as part of the good.

The theist, however, need not be caught in the best-world theodicy. He need not either pronounce evil as good or attempt to justify the evils of this world in view of some alleged overall good they allegedly portray. There is certainly a more viable and satisfying alternative.

### *This World is the Best Way to the Best World*

The second theistic approach, the best-way theodicy, does not claim that this is the best of all possible worlds. On the contrary, it admits that the world *is* evil and is perhaps nearer to being the worst possible world than the best. However, this view also holds that this evil world is the best possible *way* to the best world.

Perhaps there is no better way for an all-loving, all-powerful God to defeat evil and produce a greater good than for Him to permit this present evil world. For example, there is no way to produce a great football player without the preconditioning of painful practice. So also, there is no better way to have good muscle tone than to endure the painful experience of physical exercise. Evil may be a precondition for greater good. (This is often true presently and individually. It may also be true ultimately and collectively.) In the following chapters, we will propose this and elaborate on this as the most tenable approach to the problem of evil in the world.

### *The Origin of Evil in a Theistic World*

The best way to describe and analyze the greatest way theodicy is to apply it to the metaphysical, moral, and physical dimensions of the problem of evil. Let's look first at the metaphysical problem of evil. The question can be posed in the following way:

1. God is the author of everything in the world.
2. Evil is something in the world.
3. Therefore, God is the author of evil.

Most theists are unwilling to accept the conclusion that God is in any meaningful way the direct “author” of evil. The absolute source of all good cannot also be the fountainhead of evil. Furthermore, since God is good, He cannot do evil. Therefore, it is to the second premise that most theists take objection.

### *Evil is a Privation of a Good Thing*

St. Augustine had personally struggled with this problem, and it is not surprising that he wrote more about it than any other theists. A summary of his position is as follows:

1. God is the author of every thing or substance in the created universe.
2. Evil is not a thing or substance; it is a privation (or corruption) in a good things.
3. Therefore, it does not follow that God created evil.

By privation, Augustine means a lack of something or an absence in something that should be there. Sickness can be considered a privation (lack) of good health. Rust is a corrosion of iron, and rot is a corruption of wood.

### *Evil is the Lack of Good not the Reverse*

Augustine advanced two arguments in favor of this view that evil is not a substance. First, God is good and the author of all good. Hence, whatever He created is good like Himself. Nothing can be the source of its opposite. But God is good and is the creator of everything. It follows, then, that everything God made is good and that there are no evil *things*. The evil that exists does not exist in and of itself but only in it as a corruption or privation of good things, which were made by God.

Augustine's second argument goes like this: When what we call evil is not present in a thing, then the thing is better. But when all of what we call good is taken away, then there is nothing left at all. Therefore, Augustine concludes that “if after the evil is removed, the nature remains in a purer

state, and does not remain at all when good is taken away, it must be good which makes the nature of the thing what it is, while the evil is not nature, but contrary to nature.” Hence, “no nature as far as it is a nature is evil; but to each nature there is no evil except to be diminished in respect to good” (Augustine, *On the Nature of the Good*, XXVII). To be born without sight for a human being is an evil. The evil is the lack or privation of sight- something that belongs to the natural order. Evil does

The  
Theistic  
Explanation  
Of Evil

Evil Is Not  
a Mere Absence  
of Good

God Is Not  
the Author  
of the  
Privation

not exist in itself but only in another as a corruption of it. Evil is therefore an ontological parasite [in its being].

*Privation vs. Absence*

To say that evil is a privation is *not* the same as saying that it is a mere absence or negation of good. The power of sight is found neither in a blind man nor in a rock. But it is a privation for the blind man, whereas it is a mere absence in the rock. A privation is the absence (or lack) of something that ought to be there.

*Privation vs. Negation*

As well, metaphysical evil is not a mere negation or unreality. Privations are real. Blindness is a real lack of sight. Being maimed is a real lack of a limb. Sickness is a real physical lack of good health. A rusty car, a moth-eaten garment, and a wounded body are physical examples of real corruptions in otherwise good things. In each case, there is a real lack that leaves what remains in a state of corruption.

If God is the creator of everything that exists and if everything He made was good, then where

did the privations in the natures come from? What or who caused the corruption of their natures? Augustine's answer to this question is twofold.

First, God is the supreme and incorruptible good. Augustine stated, "For the chief good is that than which there is nothing better, and for such a nature to be hurt is impossible" (Augustine, *On the Morals of the Manichaeans*, IX, 14). As the source and standard of all perfection, God cannot be less than absolutely perfect. God is simple perfection, and an absolutely simple being cannot be destroyed. Since God is infinite and without composition, He cannot be torn apart or decomposed. But with creatures, this is not so. Every created thing is composed and is therefore by nature decomposable. For Augustine, anything *of* God is God, and there is only one [Christ]. All other things are *from* God but not *of* God. "For *from* Him are heaven and earth, because He made them; but not *of* Him because they are not of His substance." (*Nature of the Good*, XXVII). So creation is not *ex Deo* (out of God), it is *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). It is for this reason that created beings carry within their very nature the possibility (but not necessity) of nonexistence. Creation makes evil possible, since anything that is created can be destroyed or deprived. But the very nature of God is such that He *cannot* be the author of creaturely corruption.

### *The Moral Problem of Evil*

If by nature evil is not a thing or substance but a privation in a good thing, then the question is; How did the privation get there. What is the origin of moral evil? Augustine's answer to this is free will. God as the absolutely perfect One could not be the cause of evil. Nor could he make evil beings. Everything God made was good when he made it. How then did evil arise? It arose when God made some good beings with a good thing called free will, and these free beings willed to do evil. As Augustine put it, "For as far as they are corruptible, God did not make them; for, corruption 'cannot come from Him who alone is incorruptible'" (*Against the Epistle of the Manichaeans*, XXXVIII, 44).

For Augustine, the ultimate solution to the metaphysical problem is moral. Free choice is the cause of the corruption of the good world that God made. One of the good things an absolutely good God made was the power of free choice. It is good to be free, but with that freedom comes the capability of actualizing evil. Augustine wrote, "Sin is indeed nowhere but in the will" and "justice holds guilty those sinning by evil will alone. . ." If we asked Augustine what caused the choice of evil, he would reply, "What cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing . . . ? Either will is itself the first cause of sin or the first cause [i.e., a free creature] is without sin" (*On Free Will*, I, 1, 1). Or to restate it, free choice is the first cause of evil. It is meaningless to ask what caused the *first* cause (free choice) to choose evil. If free choice is the first cause, then there is no going beyond the first cause for an explanation. The *fact* of free choice is good, but the *act* of choosing evil is bad. God gave moral creatures the *power* of free choice, but they *exercised* this power in an evil way. So the question of why evil arose is answered only by the fact that free creatures chose to do evil. It is meaningless to ask for any prior reason. It is like asking who caused the First Cause of the universe. No one did. God is the first Cause of the being of everything that exists. To ask what is the cause of the First Cause is as meaningless as asking what comes before the first.

### *How Did Evil Arise?*

It is meaningful, however, to ask *how* evil arose. For Augustine, evil is the corruption that arises when a good but potentially corruptible creature turns away from the infinite good of the Creator to the lesser good of the creatures. "For evil is to use amiss that which is good." Free choice

is good, but the misdirection of free choice is evil. Evil “is not the striving after evil nature but the desertion of better [nature].” Evil occurs when “the mind being immediately conscious of itself, takes pleasure in itself to the extent of perversely imitating God, wanting to enjoy its own power [and], the greater it wants to be the less it becomes. Pride is the beginning of all sin. . .” (Ibid., III, XXV, 76). While evil is not metaphysically caused, we must conclude that metaphysical evil comes about when moral pride occurs; when the creature considers its own finite good more important than the Creator. Pride is the ultimate source of privation.

The question now might be: Why did an absolutely good God make creatures with free choice when He knew they would choose evil? The answer to this question arises out of who God is. For traditional theism God is absolutely good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God. Each one of these attributes is important to the theistic answer to evil.

For instance, if God were not all-knowing, then He might be exonerated for not foreseeing that evil might occur. But Open Theism has already been discussed and rejected. Likewise, if God were limited in love and/or power, one could understand why He allows evil to continue. But both Sadism and Finite Godism were examined and found wanting. The view, which we will call necessitarianism, suggests that God was forced to or needed to create.

### *It Was not Necessary that God Create this or any World*

Necessitarianism is not an essential characteristic of a theistic view. Most theists reject the view. It is usually associated with Pantheism. For pantheists, creation flows necessarily from the very nature of God. Plotinus (A.D. 205—270), the founder of Neoplatonism, felt that creation was as necessarily connected to God as rays are to the sun. “Try all you will,” he said, “to separate the light from the sun or the sun from the light, forever the light is the sun” (*Enneads*, I, 7, 1).

Likewise, Benedict Spinoza (A.D. 1632—1677) held that “from the necessity of the divine nature must follow an infinite number of things in infinite ways” (*The Ethics*, Part 1, Proposition XVI). Thus, theists have sometimes unwittingly bought in pantheistic solutions to the question as to why God created. This kind of reasoning is both unfortunate and unnecessary. The theistic answer to why God created is the same as to why man sinned: free will. God freely chose to do so.

### *The Cause of Creation is God's Free Choice*

The cause of creation is God's free choice. This is not indeterminacy but self-determination. For every action is either determined (caused) by another, not caused at all, or determined (caused) by an agent. But there is nothing outside God that can lay necessity upon Him to create anything. The God of theism is the absolute sovereign power in the universe. Nothing or no one can dictate anything to Him. Further, creation cannot be an uncaused event for everything that comes to be had a cause. Nothing cannot produce something. Hence, the act of creation must be a self-determined act, namely, it must be an act determined by God Himself.

The only thing the theistic God must do is to will His own absolute goodness. Everything else he may or may not do. More precisely, the theistic God need not *do* anything. He simply must *be* God. For the theist the *cause* of creation is free choice, and to ask what *caused* the first cause to do this is meaningless. It is, nevertheless, meaningful to ask for the *purpose* of creation. But even here, theists sometimes borrow from pantheists.

### *What is the Purpose of Creation*

The theistic God did not create because He *needed* to do so for His own self-fulfillment or for

other alleged needs. An absolutely perfect being does not *need* anything. Likewise the God of biblical theism did not create because He was lonely and needed fellowship. The interpersonal fellowship in the tri-unity of the theistic God of the Bible is presented as absolutely perfect. The Trinity is an eternal and essential community of person in perfect and intimate fellowship.

Why then (i.e., for what purpose) did God create? A more consistent theistic answer would be: Because He wanted (i.e., willed) to do so. It is sufficient to answer that God is love and like a loving father, He wanted a family with which to share His love. God does not *need* love, but if He is love, it is understandable that He would *want* to love and to be loved. Many theists also believe that God created so that He could be worshiped and enjoyed by man forever for who He is. This surely is not incompatible with His desire to give and to receive love.

Whatever the case, Necessitarianism is not a viable solution for theism because it is based on some lack in God and His nature. The God of biblical and traditional theism was free not to create at all. But herein resides a severe test of theism on the problem of moral evil. If God freely chose to create a world that He knew would turn against Him and would bring upon itself and others untold human misery and woe, then why did He do it? Since God was free, there were other alternatives open to Him, some of which seem better. If so, then why did he choose this one?





GIVEN THE OPTIONS, it would seem that the theistic God made the worst possible choice of at least four alternatives. (1) The theistic God could have chosen not to create any world at all. (2) He could have chosen to make a world without free creatures in it. (3) He could have brought about a world where creatures were free but would never sin. (4) He could have created a world where men are free and do sin. These four possibilities can be called: No World, A Non-moral World, a Morally Sin-Free World, and Morally Fallen World. Now of these four possibilities, it seems that God chose the only one where evil would occur, and this seems to be a contradiction to His nature as described by theists.

### *Option One: No World at All*

Briefly stated option one (No World at all) is not a morally better choice for God for two basic reasons. First, it makes no sense to say nothing is better than something; non-being cannot be better than being. Non-being is not better than being since it is nothing, and nothing and something have nothing in common by which they can be compared. This is not comparing “apples and oranges.” This is comparing apples with no apples! But this is absurd.

The second reason that the choice of God to create this world is not morally superior to the choice to create this world is that one is a non-moral world and the other is a moral world. But a non-moral world cannot be said to be morally better than anything. For it is not even a moral world. So, it cannot be morally better than anything.

But didn't Jesus say that it would have been better if Judas had never been born (Mark 14:21). Would it not, likewise, have been better if this sinful world had never come into existence? Wouldn't it be better not to have any world than to have this evil world? First of all, the statement of Jesus about Judas was meant to be a moral comparison; it was not a comparison of the merits between nonbeing and bad existence. It was probably a hyperbole indicating the severity of Judas's sin. Elsewhere such statements are made to describe the severity of the sin that was in question. In one instance, Jesus simply called Judas's act a “greater sin” than other sinful acts (John 19:11). In parallel thoughts, Jesus used the same type of hyperbole to indicate severe judgment by using the phrases “it would have been better if” and “more tolerable for” (Luke 17:2; 10:14). Thus, it is safe to say that this statement was not intended to imply that no world is better than the present world. No world is not better morally than the present world, since a non-world has no moral status. Technically, Jesus statement did not say “It would have been better if Judas has never *existed*.” He existed in the womb before he was born (cf. Psa. 139:13-16). Of course, it would have been better for Judas if he had never lived the life he did, denying Christ. Finally, as we will see later, the statement about Judas does not apply to this point for it is not speaking about a world where all are lost (like Judas) but one where many are saved (and where the greater good is achieved). One might rightly question a world where all are lost compared to one in which some or all are saved. Happily, biblical theism knows no such world where all are lost.

In brief, no world at all is not a morally better than this world. For no world is not a moral world because it is not even a word. There is no common element between nothing and something. The objection reduces to this statement: “It would have been *better morally* for God to have chosen a non-moral alternative.” A non-world has no moral status, nor metaphysical status. We are not even comparing apples and oranges, since both are fruit and can be compared as such. However, no world and a morally bad world have nothing in common.

### *Option Two: An a-Moral World.*

Some have suggested that a world that has no moral creatures in it would be better than this evil world in which we live. That is why didn't God create world with only plants and animals? Or, one with only robots but no human beings? In such a non-moral world, there would be no moral corruption. Instead God made a moral world of creatures who could sin and perpetrate all kinds of evil. Unlike option one where a world does not even exist, this world would actually exist and, thus, it would seem that it can be compared with the one we have.

The response to this view is similar to the previous example. There is no moral comparison that can be made between a moral world and an a-moral world. It is not meaningful to say that an animal world is *morally* better than a human world because an animal world is a non-moral world. And a non-moral world cannot be morally better than a moral world because it is not even in the class of moral worlds. It is a gigantic category mistake to think otherwise.

To be a moral world there must be moral beings in it. And moral beings must have rational and moral capacities which animals do not. A moral world is also one where the rational-moral creatures have free choice. But none of these characteristics exist in an animals, robots, or puppets. Such a world is not superior to the one we have where all these rational and moral characteristics.

### *Option Three: A Free World where No One Sins.*

Certainly, a world where people are free is logically possible. For freedom in this world means the ability either to sin or not sin. So, it is logically possible that everyone would chose not to sin. Indeed, according to the Bible this is what it was like before Adam and Eve sinned. They were in a state of innocence where no one had yet sinned. What is more, there will be no sin in heaven, even though it will be filled with free moral agents—the saved. So, a word where no one sins is not only possible but such a world has and will yet exist. Why then did God allow sin in the world?

All this granted, the main point is missed, namely, not everything *logically possible* is *actually achievable*. Of course, a world where no free creature decides to sin is logically possible, but this does not mean it is actually achievable. Adam and Eve did not last long in a state of innocence; they sinned and God foreknew they would (Rev. 13:8; Eph 1:4). Besides, they were in a state of untested innocence, not permanent righteousness. And it can be argued that the later is superior to the former for two reasons: first, innocence is untested and righteousness is tested. Second, righteousness is permanent, not temporary. In short, heaven is a place where sin is no longer possible. But as long as human freedom (in the Libertarian sense of the ability to do otherwise) is being tested, sin is still possible. Once the test is over and permanent righteousness is attained (heaven), then it will no longer be possible to sin. More about this later . . .

For now we can say that it is possible that God knew in his omniscience that no world of (Libertarian) free creatures, who really could sin but no one ever chose to do, so would ever occur. While it is logically possible that one *could* have occurred, nonetheless, the omniscient God knew that it *would* not occur. After all, if millions and even billions of people truly have the freedom to sin or not to sin, it would be unbelievable if not a single person ever chose to sin. Indeed, it would like the dice were loaded in favor of not sinning by their very nature. Certainly, while coins are not free creatures, nevertheless, if one gets heads (not tails) every time he flips a penny (for a hundred times or more), he would suspect that there is not really a fifty-fifty chance he could get tails. He would think the coins are loaded. So, if humans are really freed to sin or not to sin and no one ever sinned, it would seem unlikely they were not truly free to sin. At any rate, odds or not, it is possible that God in

his omniscience know that of all possible worlds are free creatures he could have created that not a single one would ever have materialize where someone did not sin. This is so, for the simple reason that not everything *logically possible* is *actually achievable*. This leads us to our final option: A world where sin did occur and where the greatest good was achieved.

Finally, a world where evil never occurred is morally inferior because it would never provide occasion for achievement of the highest virtues or the highest degree of other goods. The highest goods are dependent on the preconditioning of evils. Where there is no tribulation, patience cannot be produced. Courage is possible only where fear of evil is a reality. If God created a world where evil never occurred, He couldn't produce the greatest good from it. No pain, no gain. Tribulation works patience (Rom. 5:3-4). The best way to the Promised Land is through the wilderness. So, it may be that for God to achieve the greatest goods, He had to permit evil. As Joseph said to his brothers who sold him into bondage, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

#### *Option Four: A World Were Sin Did Occur*

Thus, no world God could have created is morally superior to this one were sin does occur but is eventually defeated. Such is our present world. But does this mean it is the best of all possible (i.e., achievable) worlds? It all depends. Actually, granting that Adam would sin, there are still several possibilities: (1) no one would be saved; (2) some would be saved and some not; (3) all would be saved in the end.

Clearly, granted a world were sin occurred, the best option would be one where everyone is eventually saved. But here again, it may be that this is only the best world *conceivable* but not the best one *achievable*. Indeed, according to the Bible, this is exactly the case. For while God is longsuffering, "not wishing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9) and "who desires all people to be saved" (1 Tim.2:4), it may be that not all will believe and be saved. As C. S. Lewis aptly observed, "When one says, 'All will be saved,' my reason retorts, 'Without their will, or with it?' If I say, 'Without their will,' I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say, 'With their will,' my reason replies, 'How, if they will not give in?'" (*The Problem of Pain*, p. 106-107).

The fact of the matter is that not everything *desirable* is *achievable*. It is desirable that there would have been be less crimes in the country today, but given what people have actually chosen to do that is not achievable. So, without doubt, a world were sin occurred but eventually everyone was saved would be the most desirable. And, according to the Bible, God desires all to be save, but he cannot do it unless they repent. Thus, if some are ultimately unrepentant, then cannot force them to accept Him. Force freedom is not freedom; it is coercion. But God is a God of love (1 Jn. 4:16), and love works only persuasively but not coercively. So, given the nature of God, one thing is certain: He will save as many people as a willing to be saved. No other achievable world has been demonstrated to be better than the one described in the Bible, namely, one where sin occurred and where God rescued as many people as were willing to be rescued.

To put it another way, it may not be possible, without tampering with human freedom, to produce a free world where sin occurs but where everyone chooses to be saved. If a person decides to sit on the back porch but is chased by hornets to the front porch, did they freely choose to go? Not really. They were coerced by physical threat against their real choice. And in this sense, it would be less than perfectly loving for God to coerce someone against his real choice. Love is persuasive but

not coercive. Forced love is not really love at all.

Some believe that it is possible for God to create a world where all men would always choose the good by programming them (like behavior conditioning) so they would never *want* to do evil. But it must be noted that such programming would truly go “beyond freedom and dignity.” And this itself would be a violation of the freedom of persons which is contrary to both God and creatures made in His image (Gen. 1:27). Freedom is an absolute essential to a truly moral universe. Love cannot be programmed. Love is personal and subjective, and no amount of programming can automatically and inevitably produce a loving response. We can program computers but not persons. Some divorces will occur no matter how loving and desirous one partner is of reconciliation.

But we might also ask, why permit evil in cases where there are those who do not respond positively? Pain and evil make some people better people, but they also make others bitter (Yancey, *Where is God When It Hurts*). In response, we might point out that it is a greater good to at least have the opportunity to achieve the highest virtues and pleasures even though those goods are not always attained by everyone. As Peter Koestenbaum observed with splendid insight, this world is not the best possible world for man but “the world as he finds it offers him the maximum possible opportunities . . . for ultimate satisfaction.” An evil world offers opportunities for the experience and expression of goodness and love not possible without the presence of evil (see Joni Erikson, *A Step Further*).

In short, a hypothetical world where everyone is saved may be logically possible but it may be not be actually achievable, and, further, it is morally less desirable. A world without sin is not the best of all possible worlds. The best possible moral world is where men are fully free and yet where the higher goods are achievable and a final cure is realized. This fallen world is not the best possible world, *but* it is the best *way* to obtain the best possible world. And by the “best possible world” we don't mean the best world conceivable but the best world *achievable* with fully free creatures.

Some theists have argued that God's love will never let men go until He wins them over to His side (see John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*). There are two fatal flaws in this view from the standpoint of biblical theism. First, it is not in accord with the teaching of the New Testament. The New Testament does speak of a time when men will be separated like sheep from goats and it does tell us that there will be those who will be cast into hell. Certainly the doctrine of hell is not pleasant, but it would be dishonest to say that the New Testament does not teach that some men will go there forever. It certainly cannot be argued that belief in hell is an illusion, for even non-theists, like Walter Kauffmann (A.D. 1921—1980), have admitted that “it neither follows that everybody who believes in hell is prompted by wishful thinking nor does it follow that the belief originated *in this way*” (Kaufman, *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, p. 135). The biblical theist believes in hell and not without some good justification, as the next point will indicate.

Second, theists who argue that all men will eventually be saved do so on what seems to be a misunderstanding of divine love. Love is not coercive. Love allows the loved to respond freely. If the loved does not want to be loved, divine love does not force itself upon the one loved. As C. S. Lewis aptly put it, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘*Thy* will be done.’ All that are in hell, chose it” (*The Great Divorce*, p. 69).

The mistake in the soul-making theodicy is to assume that God will change man at any and all costs. Love does not *make* souls but it allows them to choose for themselves. A gigantic soul-making theodicy would not be a theodicy of love. It would be more like a cosmic behavioristic modification that goes “beyond freedom and dignity.” If it costs man's free choice (which is essential to his humanness), then the cost is too high. Without freedom to decide for oneself he is robbed of his humanity. As an Old Testament prophet put it, there comes a time when God must say, “Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone” (Hosea 4:17). God will not continue to disturb men with manifestations of a love they do not desire. As Lewis states elsewhere, “The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is hell.”

Theism would be better advised to stick with the biblical concept of a God so loving that He

granted His creatures the ability to say no to divine overtures of love. This is a *soul-deciding* theodicy, and it seems more congruent with perfect love. What frustrates good men is evil, and what frustrates evil men is good. Heaven is a place where there will be no more evil to frustrate good men, and hell is the place where there will be no more good to frustrate evil men. God is simply saying to each, “Be it *as* you wish, forever.” Heaven and hell, then, are merely a permanentizing of what men freely will on earth. As the French atheist Jean Paul Sartre (A.D. 1905—1980) correctly observed in his play *No Exit*, the door of hell is locked on the inside by man's free choice. Man is condemned to his own freedom.

No mortal man can see God and live (John 1:18). “For now we see in a mirror dimly, then fact to face” (1 Cor. 13:12). But John says of the redeemed in heaven, “They will see his face” (Rev. 22:4). This is called the beatific (blessed) vision where in we see an infinite Good (God) directly and will never be able to sin again. Given that the redeemed have freely chosen to see God face to face, their confirmation in righteousness (and consequent inability to sin from that point on) is in accordance with their human free choice, but it move us to a higher state of freedom (like God has), namely, the freedom from sin, not the freedom to sin. For God is free, but he is freed from all sin, not free to sin. With regard to free choice, earth is to heaven what courtship is to Christian marriage. On earth (courtship) we have the freedom to choose this or that spouse. But in heaven (as in marriage) we are confirmed in that free choice forever. Once marriage, we are not free to date others, because we have freely chosen not to do so by virtue of our marriage vows. But marriage is not a negation of our freedom; it is the fulfillment of it.

Likewise, when we chose to forsake all other gods and cling to the true God alone and see him face-to-face, we do not lose our freedom. Actually, we gain a higher freedom. We are longer free to love other gods because our freedom is fulfilled in the true God. It is like seeing an infinitely beautiful painting wherein we lose all desire to see finitely beautiful paintings since they are all subsumed in the infinite Beauty of God.

It is in this way that God defeats evil without destroying our freedom. We are allowed to chose good or evil (Libertarian freedom) here on earth. Once this decision is sealed by death and we see the infinite God we desired to see, that is, we see God fact-to-face we no longer desire and lesser goods, to say nothing of evil. Our freedom moves from the freedom to sin to the freedom from all sin. Sin becomes impossible because we freely chose it to be that way. In this way, God permanentizes good and freedom in the Good so that evil is no longer possible. This is the greatest possible victory over sin in a free world.



## BUT WHAT ABOUT THE CHOICE TO DO EVIL?

It too is permanent. For, as Lewis said, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end. ‘thy will be done’” (*The Great Divorce*, p. 69). This too will be permanent. For the door of hell is locked on the inside, but it is locked! And just as in heaven there will be no more evil influences to hinder good people in doing good, even so, in hell there will be no more good influences to hinder evil people from doing evil. Both states—Heaven and Hell—are permanent, fixed, and final (Heb. 9:27). Thus evil is quarantined and not allowed to spread anymore. Good is triumphant and permanent in heaven, an evil is defeated and permanent in hell. This is the best of all achievable world for free creatures because: (1) All persons were allowed to freely chose their destiny; (2) Good is triumphant and permanent; (3) Evil is defeated permanently. In short, the greatest good in a free world has been attained without negating or fettering freedom (see Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*).

### *Why Create a World with Hell in It?*

Because God is love and humans are free. In such a world, God knew that not all would choose heaven. And since love—even God’s love—can’t force anyone to love them, there must be a place where they can do their “thing” forever. In fact the wicked are so unprepared for heaven, that it would be worst than hell for them. If they can’t stand being in church where people are praising God for an hour, just think of what it would be like to be in a place where they were force to do it forever! Why a hell? Because it is the part of the best world achievable in a free world. So even though it is hypothetically possible that all would be saved, given the free choices of moral creates, it was not actually achievable.

## WHY DID GOD CREATE A WORLD WHERE HE KNEW THAT NOT ALL WOULD BE SAVED?

The answer is simply that God would have if He could have. But not everything logically possible is *actually achievable* with free creatures. Why won't some young women marry some young men who propose to them? The answer is simply because they do not will to do so. Likewise, some creatures do not will to love God. In no world that God could create would *all* men freely choose to love God. The Christian is assured by Scripture that God will produce the optimally good world in accord with human freedom. He will save as many as He *can*—*all* those who desire to do His will freely (John 7:17).

Of course, no world at all is not a morally better world than this one (as shown above). For nothing is not morally better than something, especially when it is a world that attains the highest goods achievable, as the one will according to the Bible. Certainly, no one can effectively argue no world at all is morally better than that the morally best world achievable.

The fact that some people refuse to be saved does not veto the right of others to go God's way nor does it veto the right of God to make a world in which all may choose the way they will go. God is not morally responsible if some refuse to eat; He has graciously provided the Bread of Life for all (John 6:35). From God's standpoint, too, it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. It is better to have created creatures and to have given them the offer of eternal life—knowing some would accept and some would refuse it—than not to offer it at all. To use a sports illustration, it is better to have played in the Super Bowl and to have lost than not to have played in it at all.

So, why did God create a world where he knows a Hell would be necessary? Because no one needed to go there. Because all are there of their own free choice. And because those who are there cannot negate the happiness of those who are there. As C. S. Lewis observed it is morally wrong to demand that unless all “consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy . . . that Hell should be able to *veto* Heaven.”

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

In conclusion, we have seen that there is a coherent theistic solutions to the problem of moral evil. Of all the worlds that could be created, there is no better one than this one, namely, a world which is the best way to obtain the best possible world, i.e. “one where the greatest number of persons are given the maximal eternal joy and where the freedom of all creatures is respected, even those who reject God’s love.” To repeat, this is the best of all possible world achievable for free creatures because: (1) All persons were allowed to freely choose their destiny; (2) Good is triumphant and permanent; (3) Evil is defeated permanently. In short, the greatest good in a free world has been attained without negating or fettering freedom.

THE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEMS of metaphysical and moral evil does not, in and of themselves, solve the problem of physical evil. The solution to the problem of metaphysical evil (i.e., evil is a privation) merely shows how evil is possible in a perfectly good, finite world created by an absolutely perfect God. The answer to the problem of moral evil merely shows how good creatures could activate evil by freely choosing their own finite preferences above the infinite good of God.

But neither of these as such indicates why there are many *physical* evils in the world that do not appear to be the result of any free choices. For instance, why do many innocent people suffer from floods, earthquakes, and tornadoes? There seems to be no connection with their own free choices nor any justification for their innocent suffering. If nature were an independent entity operating autonomously apart from God, the theist might have ready recourse to an answer. But the problem is made more acute for a theist since he believes God is in sovereign control of the natural world.

One of the most famous examples of an objection to theism from the point of physical evil can be seen in the example used previously from *The Plague* by Albert Camus. The logic may be summarized as follows:

1. Either one must join the doctor and fight the plague God sent for man's sin, or else he must join the priest and not fight the plague.
2. But not to fight the plague is inhumane.
3. And to fight the plague is to fight against God who sent it.
4. Hence, if humanitarianism is right, then theism is wrong.
5. Humanitarianism is right, and it is right to work to alleviate suffering.
6. Therefore, theism is wrong.

There are several assumptions the theist would challenge in Camus's argument. First, according to the Bible, one cannot conclude that people who suffer tragedy through natural disaster are suffering because they are more wicked than those who are not likewise suffering. Jesus clearly repudiated this idea (see Luke 13:3, 4). Second, if the “plague” is viewed broadly as the curse of sin on the whole fallen world, then it might be better to describe it as what man brought on himself by his own free choice (Gen. 3:14; 5:12; 8:19, 20). Third, it is not wrong for a theist to work against unjust suffering. In fact, because it was a human being who brought the fall to the world, humans can work to remove the effects of that fall (i.e., suffering) without fighting against God. Fourth, although the biblical theist is concerned for the plague's victims, he works against the general plague of evil at the most effective level—the *cause* of the plague, not merely the *results*. Evil is the ultimate cause of plague, even physical evils, and the life-transforming message of the cross of Jesus Christ is the most effective cure for evil known to man. It is not wrong—in fact, it is good—to treat symptoms and put bandages on suffering men, but it is even better to treat and cure the disease that is causing the sickness. Christian theism offers exactly what is needed—an internal change in man that enables him to overcome evil.

The objection has been raised by H. J. McCloskey that the theist is morally obligated not to work against suffering because:

1. The theist is morally obligated to promote the greatest good.
2. But according to theism, the greatest good cannot be achieved if suffering is

eliminated.

3. Hence, the theist is morally obligated to promote suffering.

The theist may respond to this argument by pointing out that certain evils are only to be *permitted* but not to be promoted. The theist is not obligated to promote evil means in order to attain good ends. Hence, he is not duty bound to promote suffering to attain greater goods. For example, a parent may *permit* his child the pain of the dentist's drill in order to promote the pleasure of better teeth. The biblical theist is" in fact, admonished to *promote good* in the world and to relieve the suffering of those who are afflicted (Luke 10:30-37).

Furthermore, if the theist works to eliminate suffering, he will not destroy the possibility of a great good being achieved by the preconditioning presence of evil. God knows that men will not be able to abolish evil and that there will be enough suffering to occasion the greater good. God does not have to promote or produce the suffering, since it is already present in sufficient quantities to achieve the greater good.

The most pressing objection to theism in the area of physical evil is the existence of unjustified suffering in the world. The argument can be formulated in this way:

1. There are many occurrences of unjustified suffering in the world.
2. But even one instance of unjustified suffering shows there is no perfectly just God.
3. Therefore, there is no God.

The strength of this argument is based on two points: the obvious fact that not all suffering is self-inflicted or deserved and the fact that only one instance of unjustified suffering would disprove the God of theism. Who could argue that the suffering of every cancer victim, every earthquake casualty or every child orphaned by disease was justified? Thus it would appear that God has allowed an injustice, and, therefore does not exist or, if He does, He is not really just.

Before some possible justifications are presented for physical evil in the world, it is important to make several points. First, just because *we do not know* an explanation for some evil does not mean that *there is none*. It may just prove our ignorance. Even if all the greatest theists in the world collectively could not find an explanation for all evil, it would only prove the theists were *dumb*, not that God is *dead*. The Bible is clear that "the secret things belong to our God" (Deut. 29:29), and Paul declared of God, "How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways" (Rom. 11:33).

Second, the fact that some suffering cannot be explained now does not mean that it will not be explained later. Most of us have had the experience of seeing no justification for a tragic even when it occurred, but after time were able to see a satisfactory explanation for it.

Third, no everything that remains unjustified in this life will remain such in the life to come. Justice is not always attained in this life. But there is a life to come in which proper justice will be achieved. "Vengeance is Mine, says the Lord, I will repay" (Rom. 12:19).

Fourth, not every particular evil event must be justified before there is an adequate answer to the problem of physical suffering. Like a just war, there can be collateral damage in God's efforts to achieve good. For example, some evil is a byproduct of a good process. Amputation may be necessary to save a life. In a tubal pregnancy, the baby will die as a result of attempts to save the mother. The blacksmith, when making a plow for the farmer, may make a spark that burns down his barn. There are many like illustrations where some evil (unjustified in itself) is a necessary byproduct

of a good process.

Having said all of this, there are nonetheless many good explanations for much, if not all, of physical evil in the world can be accounted for in connection with morally free individuals. Consider the following:

1. *Some physical evil comes to us directly from our own free choices.* It is good to be free, and freedom is an essential part of a moral world. A puppet creation is not a moral one. But if one is free, then he is free to bring certain evils on himself. Abuse of one's body, for example, will bring sickness. Overeating will bring obesity, and under exercise may result in heart problems. Smoking contributes to lung cancer. It is said that when one man read in his newspaper that conclusive evidence had linked smoking with lung cancer, he canceled his subscription. These are all part of the evils one may directly bring on himself by his own free choices. These and many other forms of suffering are part of the possible pains that accompany the privilege of being free.

2. *Some physical evils come to us indirectly from the exercise of our freedom.* Suffering might come from choosing to do nothing. Free creatures have the option of being lazy. But poverty often results from laziness and so "in this way" the pain of being poor may be indirectly caused by one's own free choice to remain idle. The same is true of numerous other problems we face in later life because of the choice not to plan ahead properly. Even cultivating bad habits, such as driving while tired" may involve free choices that may cause later suffering.

3. *Some physical evils come to us directly from the free choices of others.* It is often true that we suffer at the hands of other free creatures (and they at our hands). In a free world, child abuse is possible, as is spouse abuse and mugging. In a physical world of more than one free being, conflict is possible. Given the nature of free choice and a significant number of persons, one might suspect that conflict and pain were inevitable. In these cases, there is certainly innocent suffering and even immediately unjustified pain. However, this is all a part of the price we pay as free creatures to exercise our choices in individual autonomy. C.S. Lewis estimated that four-fifths of all evil comes from people being nasty to other people (*Problem of Pain*, p. 86). Hugh Sylvester (*Arguing with God*, p. 32) believed that it may be nineteen-twentieths of all evil. Whatever, it is a significant amount.

4. *Some physical evil comes to us indirectly from the free choices of others.* Improper prenatal care has caused many sicknesses and handicaps for children. Likewise, parental laziness can cause child poverty. Even more remotely, ancestral choices (of occupation, location, or political affiliation) have long-range consequences on generations to come. In fact, it might be said that *all* of the rest of physical evils both in man and nature are connected with our ancestors' freedom of choice. These first four reasons alone may account nearly all the suffering in a free moral world.

5. *Of course, the Bible declares that much suffering and all human death are the result of Adam's sin.* For "...sin came into the world by one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men" (Rom. 5:12). Further, "the creation was subjected to futility...[and] bondage to corruption..." (Rom. 8:20-21). In short, this is a fallen world. It is not the Paradise that God made originally (Gen. 2). Not until Paradise Lost becomes Paradise regained will "...death be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

6. *Some physical evil may be a necessary byproduct of other good activities.* In a physical world where there is water for boating and swimming, some will drown. If there are mountains to

climb, there must also be valleys into which one may fall. If there are cars to drive, collisions can also occur. Tornadoes, lightning, hurricanes, and other natural disasters are likewise by-products of a good physical world. For instance, the *purpose* of rain is not to flood or drown, but the result of rain may include these disasters. Likewise, hot and cold air are essentials and a purposeful part of the physical world, but under certain conditions they may combine to form tornadoes. Earthquakes are known to surface minerals essential for life. An unfortunate byproduct of these good forces is that some people will be injured and killed. Weapons are needed for defense of "life, liberty, and property (Fourth and Fifteenth Amendments), but in the hands of the wrong people can be used to kill innocent persons.

7. *Some evils may come upon us as the result of the choices of evil spirits.* In a world that widely believes in beings on other planets, as well as various kinds of spiritual phenomena, it is not difficult to believe there are spirits who visit this planet. According to the Bible, there are evil spirits who not only visit this earth but have also been known to inflict physical evil on men who live here (Mark 9:20, Luke 13:10-16). Job's sufferings are so attributed to Satan (Job 1:6-7). Also there were people in Jesus' day who were said to be oppressed and afflicted with diseases from the devil (Matt. 17:14-15). Jesus himself encountered the devil and resisted his temptations (Mat. 4:1-11).

8. *Some physical evils are God-given warnings of greater physical evils.* Not all pain is bad. Warning pains, like alarm systems are good since they help prevent greater ills. Toothaches can help prevent future tooth decay, and chest pains, if heeded, may prevent needless death. Hunger pains can lead not only to the avoidance of pain but also the pleasurable experience of eating and the resulting stability of health. In these senses, some physical pains are not without explanation.

9. *Some physical suffering may be used by God as a warning about moral evils.* God may use (or even sometimes send) physical pain as a moral warning. Many people have testified to the purifying and perfecting work of pain in their lives. Paul wrote, "For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Cor. 4:17). C. S. Lewis hit the nail on the head when he wrote: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world" (*Problem of Pain*, p. 81). This is no argument for stoicism or sadism. However, much of the physical pain of the world can be a very effective means of alerting men to danger and thereby promoting the avoidance of moral evil and the attainment of vastly higher moral good.

10. *Some physical evil may be permitted as a condition of greater moral perfection.* There is undoubtedly an overlap here with many of the functions of pain already stated. That is to say, where finite free choice is the cause of the evil, God may still use it as an instrument of moral perfection. Without tribulation there would be no virtue of patience, and without sin there would be no enjoyment of forgiveness. Of course, we do not promote sin as the means to virtue. Nevertheless, God is able to overrule man's intentions and use our evil to fulfill His own good purposes. As Paul wrote, "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom. 8:28). Even when men intend evil by their acts, God can accomplish good through those acts. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave. But later when he was able to punish his brothers, he forgivingly rescued them saying: "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

11. *Finally some physical evil occurs because higher forms live on lower ones.* In this kind of world, the early bird gets the worm and eats it. While that might be good for the bird, it isn't so good for the worm! Plants and animals die so that man may live. One life form is sacrificed for

another life form in order to provide food energy for the survival of the higher form. Since we live in a physical world governed by physical laws of energy, it is possible that this is the only way a physical world could be constructed in which redeemable moral beings could operate. For regular laws are necessary as a backdrop for rational and moral choices. And change is necessary for moral progression. Beings that are pure spirits (like angels) do not have this possibility and, hence, once they make their decision to accept or reject God, they are sealed in their doom for eternity (2 Peter 2:4; Heb. 2:16).



## WHAT ABOUT GRATUITOUS EVIL?

What about physical evils like cruelty to children, child sacrifice, and torture for which there seems to be no good purpose? Are there some evils for which there is simply no good reason or justification. If so, then how do we answer the objection that if there is an all-good God, then there must be a good purpose for all evil? In response, several distinction should be made.

First, we must repeat that because *we do not know* a reason for God permitting and evil and *God not knowing* the reason are two different things. We must always reserve the reasonable probability that God knows more than we do about the reason for permitting certain kinds of evil actions.

Second, there is a difference between a *particular act* and *general* kind of act. So, evil if there is no good purpose for a particular evil occurring, nonetheless, the permitting these kinds of evil may be a necessary part of allowing this kind of free world. Even in a just war, given the finitude and fallibility of the agents involved in it, there will be unjustified individual acts in it. Likewise, governments need law enforcement in general, but given the fallibility of law enforcer there will particular cases of abuse in the application of their authority.

Third, the distinction (made above) between *good purpose* and an *evil byproduct* gives rise to what some call gratuitous evil. Collateral damage does occur, even in a justifiable action. Innocent people will be killed no matter how accurately the bombs or bullets are directed. Even the best of surgeons make mistakes.

So, while some particular act of evil may be gratuitous, nevertheless, they may be a necessary concomitant or byproducts of a generally good purpose and end in allowing evil to occur. For example, one can justify the permission of police force to restrain evil, even though such force may be abused and unjustified in given cases. And even when it is not being abuse, evil byproducts may occur, as for example, shooting a mass-murder in a school could result in an innocent child being killed by the law-enforcers gun. In short, gratuitous evil does occur in particular, but there is a good purpose for allowing it to occur in general.

In conclusion we can say that much, if not all, the physical evil in the world is directly or indirectly connected with moral free choices. So, while not every individual evil can be completely explained now, nonetheless, all the evil is ultimately explainable. This does not mean that there is no gratuitous evil and that each individual evil can be explained in isolation of the whole process by which God is defeating evil. But it does mean that an explanation of all evil is possible and that it is connected to a world where moral free choices are possible as well as moral progress toward a better world. In short, this present world is not the best of all possible worlds, but it may very well be the possible ways to reach the best of all possible worlds.

One final objection to the proposed solutions to the problems of physical evil demands attention. Why doesn't God miraculously intervene and prevent all physical evil from occurring? For example, why doesn't God intercept the murderer's bullets but not the hunter's? Why not turn the assassin's knife to jelly but not the butcher's? Why not transform the rioter's rocks to cotton and the strangler's noose to a noodle?

There is no question that God has the power to do so. An omnipotent Creator is in sovereign control of His creation and has the ability to perform miraculous events. Anyone who can make something from nothing has no trouble turning water into wine or effecting any other such transformation. If God does not lack the power, then He must lack the will. But why? Consider the following reasons.

### *Unbelievers Do not Want God to Stop Every Evil Act of Thought*

First, evil men do not really want God to intercept *every* evil act or thought. No one wants to get a headache every time he thinks against God. No one want God to fill his mouth with cotton when he speaks evil of God nor does he really desire God to explode his pen as he writes against God or destroy his books before they come off the press. So, the atheist or unbeliever is caught in a contradiction. On the one hand, he complains that God is unjust in not stopping the evil in this world. But on the other hand, he recoils at even the thought of God taking away the kind of liberty that makes these evils possible. But he cannot have it both ways.

At best, people really want God to intercept only *some* evil actions. But theists may argue that God is doing precisely that. He is intercepting *some* evil actions by the influences for good He has placed in the world (such as the moral law, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Christian influence, etc.).

### *God Has Intervened in the World to Stop Evil*

God's primary intervention in the world was to defeat and destroy evil in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ who came to defeat the devil, death, and destruction. John declared that "the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Hebrews adds that Jesus came "through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb. 2:14). And by his resurrection from the dead believers are able to proclaim, "O death, where is your victory O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55). Of course, salvation does not come in one shot; it is a process deliverance from the penalty of sin (justification) in the past, the power of sin (sanctification) in the present, and the presence of sin (glorification) in the future (see Romans 4-8). Further, God not only miraculously intervened in the great acts that make salvation possible, but He intervenes any time he deems it necessary to keep his overall process of salvation going. For Hebrews informs us that "God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will" (Heb.2:3-4). So, God does intervene miraculously in the world whenever he deems it necessary for His great plan of salvation.

The Holy Spirit is also in the world convicting people of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). Also, believers are salt and light restraining evil (Mat. 5:13-14). The worldwide publication of the Bible also restrains evil. The psalmist said, "I have store up your word in heart, that I might not sin against you" (Psa. 119:11). There is also the natural law "written on the hearts" (Rom. 2:15) that restrains the evil of all men. In short, God has and is intervening in the world in many ways to stop evil, including direct miracles. And any more regular interruption that limits human freedom and prohibits moral activity and progress would be counter-productive.

### *Regular Divine Intervention Would Make Moral Actions in this World Impossible*

Third, given the above, the question then boils down to why God does not intervene more often. The answer to this lies in the very nature of a miracle. A miracle is a disruption of a natural law. If nature did not operate in a regular manner, then a miracle as an irregular event would not be possible. So, continual interference would disrupt the regularity of natural law and make life impossible. Everyday living depends on physical laws such as inertia or gravity. Regular interruption of these would make everyday life impossible.

But the regular operation of nature is what makes the moral life and moral progress possible. Rational decisions cannot be made unless there are natural (regular) laws on which one can depend. In short, morality is dependent on a rational being making moral choices. And rational choices depend on there being regular laws. For example, unless one can depend on the regular laws of gravity and motion he cannot know whether a bullet will kill or cure someone. Or, whether a knife will cut or heal. Or whether driving a car off a cliff will crash or take flight, etc. Without a context of regular natural law, moral behavior becomes impossible. So, continual interruption of natural law would negate the possibility of moral actions in the physical world.

### *Regular Divine Intervention Would Make Moral Responsibility Impossible*

If human freedom and responsibility were removed, then there would be two major difficulties in this hypothetical world that happily we do not have to experience in the best of all ways to the best possible world. First, if God were to prevent all evil acts from occurring. He would have to interfere with the full exercise of free choice—leaving us with a world something less than fully moral, if it could be considered to be moral at all. Second, in a world of constant divine intervention of evil actions, all moral learning would cease. Men would never learn by the evil consequences of bad choices. If all evil actions were stopped, then men would not learn the consequences of evil thoughts or actions. And if all moral learning ceased, then redeemability and perfectibility would also vanish. Who would want to live in a world where there is not potential for moral progress or achievement?

In summation it should be noted that all physical evil is either a consequence, a condition, or a concomitant of free choice. Further, physical evil is not desired by God but is used by Him, nonetheless, to occasion the full exercise of free choice and to maximize the opportunity for attaining the greatest good achievable in a fully free, moral world.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL is a difficult philosophical question. The sheer number of philosophic options regarding evil testifies to the continuing quest to create a philosophic system that answers the major questions posed by the existence of evil. Illusionism seeks to bring resolve by denying the reality of evil. Dualism seeks to answer the question by positing an eternal existence of both good and evil. Finitism Godism seeks explanations by altering our notions of God's attributes or abilities. Atheism denies the dilemma itself by denying the existence of God. And Open Theism denies that God could have foreseen what would happen when He made free creatures. All are insufficient answers, and most are self-defeating.

The one philosophic system that *does* provide the most satisfactory answers is the greatest-way theodicy, and in particular, biblical theism. It is of even greater to note that as we come to know more about the true nature of reality, we discover that the view of reality portrayed in biblical theism is remarkably similar to the nature of reality as observed. This is curious simply because biblical theism claims to be more than simply a philosophic system devised by an ancient Hebrew people. It claims to be revelation from an intelligent, personal, all-knowing, all-loving, all-powerful God. Its similarity to reality is not surprising since the historic Christian position holds this reality to be the result of the Creator.

The historic Christian position states that human beings were created in the image of God and was placed on earth with the power of free choice. Through his willful and free creatures, evil was brought into the world. Our moral nature is a testimony to the reality of a moral structure within the universe, and our cruelty is a testimony to the sinful nature within man. It also explains the basic frustration, loneliness, and alienation felt by man, who is cut off from a higher reality since he is no longer in a normal state. Man can work against evil in the world without fear that he is working against God, since evil in the world is a result of our free choice, and it is present only by God's permission as the way to the best of all possible worlds.

As we noted in the section on Atheism, it is impossible to deny God without implying that God exists. In order to complain about unjustified suffering, one must suppose an ultimate moral standard within the universe. As we have shown, these arguments have a boomerang effect that actually supports the claims of biblical theism. In fact, it is impossible to sustain philosophically any human values at all from the position of atheism.

We are right to ask about the existence of God and we are right to ask the moral question. The Christian position does provide answers to these questions because we do live in a world created by a moral, loving, and powerful God. Since there is an all-powerful God who *can* defeat evil without destroying free choice, and since there is an all-loving God who *wants* to defeat evil without destroying free choice, then there is the assured hope that He *will* destroy evil in the future. The ultimate optimism of Christianity is that in the future there will be a time when evil is rendered null and void.

But Christianity holds more than just the ultimate hope of the eventual destruction of evil. It provides immediate satisfaction and power to deal with the sinful nature of man. The historic Christian position is that God *desires* to restore man to a vital personal relationship with Himself through man's faith in God through the death of Jesus Christ for man's sin. The debt of sin and evil has been paid and man has only to receive it. For "to all who receive him, who believe in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).



A DISCUSSION ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL (see Chapter 5) often leads to another question that should be answered: What happens to those who have not heard anything about God and the way they might be saved? Space does not permit a comprehensive answer here. There are, however, certain principles that may be applied to gain a perspective on this question.

First, it should be noted that from the perspective of biblical theism that God never intended hell for any person. It was “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:21). God is holy and loving and wishes that every person would come to repentance (Exod. 34:6, 7; Jonah 4:10, 11; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Tim. 2:4). Though the God of the Bible is a God of justice and righteousness, He is also portrayed as a God of love. And He loves everyone (John 3:16; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Jn. 2:2).

Second, the very nature of God prevents Him from being unfair. He will do right in His judgment and execute it with equity (Gen. 18:25; Psa. 7:11; 9:18; 1 Peter 1:17). He is very different from a judge we might go before in an earthly court since His very character causes Him to be fair to those before Him. It is impossible for him to change his moral character (Heb. 6:18; 2 Tim. 2:13).

Third, we see from biblical theism the claim that people are *not* left in total spiritual darkness. There are numerous verses that state that man has an awareness of God and an awareness of eternity (Psa. 19:1-4; Eccles. 3:11; John 1:9; Acts 14:15-17; Rom. 1:18-21; 2:15). It was Seneca, the Roman sage, who said, “God is near you, is with you. A sacred Spirit dwells within us, the Observer and Guardian of all our evil and all our good. There is no good man without God.” The universal human sense of morality, in fact, would seem to imply an ultimate moral standard beyond man.

Fourth, biblical theism is very clear in its statement that anyone who wishes to establish a relationship with God will receive the necessary information on which to make a decision. God is described as the rewarder of those who seek Him (Heb. 11:6), and the claim is repeatedly made that God gives the essential guidance required to lead a person to Himself (1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 15:2; Psa. 9:10; 146; 17-20; Prov. 8:17; Jer. 29:13; Acts 8:30-31). God sent Jonah to Nineveh to save those who would repent (Jonah chap. 3). He sent Peter to the Gentile Cornelius and Peter confessed, “Truly, I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35).

Fifth, the responsibility for a decision concerning salvation is in the hands of each person. Each of us is ultimately responsible for the course he chooses. In this context, C. W. Hale Amos wrote, “From what we do know, respecting the terms of our own salvation, we are led irresistibly to the conclusion that no man can perish except by his own fault and deliberate choice.”

Sixth, while it is true that no one can be saved apart from the work of Christ (John 14:6; Acts 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5), it is also true that all who sincerely seek to know the God will find him. God has many means at his disposal to reach people with the message of salvation. In times past he has spoken to people, often on less important topics than their eternal salvation: (1) through preaching (Rom. 10:14-17); (2) through the Bible (Psa. 119:130; Heb. 4:12); (3) Through angels (Rev. 14:6); (4) through visions (Dan. 4:5, 35); (5) through dreams (Dan. 2, 7); (6) through an audible voice (Acts 9); or (7) through an inner voice (Hosea 1:1, etc.). And there is no reason to believe God would not do the same if their eternal destiny was at stake.

Even though Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the other Old Testament saints did not all know that

Christ would die for their sins and rise again (which is the heart of the Gospel in the New Testament—Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 15:1-3), nonetheless, God was able to save them by grace through faith (Gen. 15:6; Heb. 11:1f) based on the work of Christ yet to come. Indeed, in God's mind the work of Christ was accomplished before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8; Eph. 1:4).

We are limited in the means of salvation; Christ is the only way (John 14:6; 8:23; John 3:18, 36), but God is not limited in the way he can get the message to us. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Peter added, "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). And Paul declared, "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5). Nonetheless, though there is only one way to God, namely, through Christ, nevertheless, there are many ways to hear about Christ. And we know that "whoever draws near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb. 11:6).

In conclusion, there is no one anywhere at any time who sincerely sought the living a true God and did not get the message of the Gospel from Him by which they could be saved. For God is patient toward us, "not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). God said through Jeremiah, "You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Any lost in total darkness that saw one spec of light would go for it. And as one approaches light it becomes brighter. But those who turn their back on it and find themselves in total darkness lost forever do not have anyone to blame but themselves. And the Bible reminds us that "people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil" (John 3:19).

EVEN GRANTING THAT GOD IS LOVING and has provided a way of salvation for all person, the questions about hell still linger in the minds of many. Some of the more important ones will be addressed here.



For those who believe in Jesus and in his worlds recorded in the Bible, the answer is clear. Jesus had more to say about hell than he did about heaven. He declared in Matthew 10:28, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” In Matthew 10:28, he warned, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” Again, in Matthew 11:23 he said, “And thou, Capernaum, which are exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.” In Matthew 13:49-50 Jesus added of those who reject Him, “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” In Matthew 13:49-50 it declares, “This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” Finally, Matthew 22:13 affirms: “Then the king told the attendants, ‘Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’” Matthew 23:23 asserts: “You serpents, you generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?” Jesus also spoke of hell as a place of conscious punishment. He declared in Luke 16:24 that the man in hell said, “Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.” Paul described it as a place of “eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thes. 1:9). John said it is a “lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever” (Rev. 20:10) and where all persons whose names are not in the book of life will join them forever (Rev. 20:15).

If Jesus was the Son of God (which he claimed to be), then there is a Hell. Who is more likely to know and speak with authority about the topic of our eternal destiny than the eternal Son of God.

### *Is Hell Eternal?*

To many the doctrine of eternal punishment of the wicked seems cruel and unjust. Why eternal punishment be given for temporal sins. Isn't that a gigantic case of overkill? The Bible provides a negative answer for several reasons.

First, Hell will last as long as God is holy and just—which is forever. The same Greek word (*aionion*) for eternal or everlasting that is used for God and heaven is also used of Hell (Mat. 25:41; 2 Thes. 1:9; Rev. 20:10). As long as God hates sin, hell is necessary. For God is so holy that he cannot even look on sin with approval (Hab. 1:13). He is just and cannot approve of the unjust—ever. So, hell must exist as long as a holy and just God exists.

Second, God loves everyone and has provided a way of salvation for them (John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9). Every rationally and morally responsible being is given the way of salvation by which he can avoid hell (see Appendix 1). No one has to go to hell. They have a choice to avoid it—by accepting God's gift of salvation (Rom. 6:3).

Third, the door of hell is locked on the inside. Those who are there chose to be there by rejecting the way of salvation. C. S. Lewis wrote, “I willingly believe that the damned are, in one sense, successful, rebels to the end; that the doors of hell are locked on the inside. . . .” (Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, p. 115). Those who are there do not *want* to be there (It is an extremely undesirable place), but the *willed* to be there. And they were unwilling to accept the only way to avoid it—repent

of their sins. Even the atheist Jean Paul Sartre saw this truth in his play *No Exit* where the door of hell is opened and no one chooses to leave. His point: we are condemned to our own freedom. The door of hell is locked on the inside, and the rebels refuse to leave.

Fourth, the Bible makes it clear that Hell is not annihilation. For it speaks of “eternal destruction” (2 Thes. 1:9), whereas annihilation is immediate destruction. Further, there are degrees of punishment in Hell (Rev. 20:12), and there cannot be degrees of nothing. Also, according to Jesus (see above) the fires of hell never go out. Indeed, the beast and the false prophet were still conscious in hell after a thousand years of being there (Rev. 19:20; 20:10). Hell is a place of eternal darkness, but there is no darkness in nothingness.

### *What If Someone in Hell Changed Their Mind?*

First of all, according to the Bible God is omniscient, and an all-knowing God knew in advance that some would never change their minds. Otherwise, he would never have allowed them to go there in the first place.

Second, the choice of eternal destiny is permanent and irreversible. The reckless driver who “totals” his car may not wish it to be wrecked, but he has willed the permanent condition. So it is with man's life. A man can “totally” wreck his soul too. If a whole life time of God wooing the soul in the light of conscience, Scripture, and the conviction of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8)—with all the light God could shine upon him is not sufficient, is not sufficient to persuade the unrepentant, then how much more unlikely would it be when all these persuasive forces are gone and someone finds themselves in utter darkness! C. S. Lewis understood the nature of a depraved heart well when he wrote: “I believe that if a million chances were likely to do good, they would be given. . . Finality must come some time, and it does not require a very robust faith to believe that omniscience knows when.” (*The Problem of Pain*, p. 112).

### *Wouldn't It be Better for God to Snuff the Wicked Out of Existence?*

Another question is whether it would be better for God to annihilate men rather than punish them forever. First of all, it would not be the loving thing to do. It would be like a father who was disappointed that his son became a plumber rather than a doctor and killing him. God does not renege of the life and freedom he gives to his creation just because they don't do what he wants them to do.

Second, if God had given the famous atheist Friedrich Nietzsche the choice to: (1) renounce his atheism, (2) be swept into nonexistence, or (3) go on willing the eternal recurrence of the same meaningless state of affairs forever (a possible description of hell), Nietzsche made it clear that he would have chosen number (3). “Man,” he wrote, “needs a goal—and he would rather will nothingness than not will at all.” When faced with the real choices of submitting to God, losing one's freedom by annihilation, or retaining one's free choice to reject God, many would agree with the Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: “Here we may reign secure, and in my choice To reign is worthy ambition though in hell: Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven.”

Finally, if God snuffed the rebellious out of existence, he would have been attacking humans made in his own image. In essence, God would be attacking God. Love does not crush its opponents; rather, it wills their right to make their own decision and chose their own destiny—even if it is eternal.

### *How Can the Blessed be Happy in Heaven Knowing Loved Ones are in Hell?*

Another objection is often raised about the possible happiness one could have in heaven

knowing that a loved one is suffering in hell. However, this question is based on the assumption that people are more merciful than God who knows they are here. But they are there justly like a criminal is in prison because he deserves to be there. Further, if the happiness of the good were dependent upon the will of the wicked, then those evil forces could “blackmail the universe.” No unselfish person should feel guilty for enjoying his lunch simply because there are starving people in the world. This would be particularly true if he had offered to share his goods with the others, but they had refused to eat. Clearly, once the saints are beatified (perfected in heaven), they will see things from a perfect heavenly point of view in which Hell is compatible to both the love and justice of God. As Lewis put it, “The demand of the loveless and the self-imprisoned that they should be allowed to blackmail the universe: that till they consent to be happy (on their own terms) no one else shall taste joy: that theirs should be the final power; that Hell should be able to veto Heaven” is invalid (Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 124).

### *Why Would God Create People He Knew Would Reject Him And Go To Hell?*

First of all, it is better to offer good even knowing that some will reject it, than not to offer it at all. As the saying goes, “It is better to have loved and to have lost than not to love at all.” Second, many people, like ourselves, have lost a child by a premature tragic death. But if we had known this in advance we still would have had her knowing she had the opportunity for a long and good life. Third, there is always a risk in love—the risk that it will be rejected. God took that “risk,” since it was better to create a world where the greatest good possible *could* be attained by all, even though some would willfully reject it. In doing so, the net result is the greatest good *achievable* by all in a free universe. Fourth, we know in advance that so many people are going to be killed on the highway this year, but we still allow cars and drivers on the road (with all the precautions we can). Fifth, the assumption of the question is unfounded, namely, the nothing would have been better than something. But as we saw (in Chapter 5), this is a category mistake since there is nothing in common by which they can be compared. Finally, “If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it” (Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, p. 106). Even before the Super Bowl, both teams know that only one will win and the other will lose; one will be happy and the other sad. But they both still wish to play the game.

### *How Can Evil be Defeated if there is a Hell?*

Is not the existence of Hell a proof that God’s plan did not work? Not, not in a universe of free beings because it was part of the plan not to force anyone against their free choice. As C.S. Lewis wisely noted, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All that are in Hell, choose it.” (Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, p. 69). In a free society, jails are not a sign of defeat but of victory. They are proof that the society is free and that there is just due for the misuse of freedom. God knew from the beginning that not every free creature would go his way, and he provided for both according to their will. Those who wish to follow Satan and say, as he did in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, “Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven,” will be able to do so.

So, Hell is a sign of God’s victory over evil in the universe for several reasons: (1) It is an eternal quarantine and isolation of evil from good. (2) It is a victory over evil that even the evil have freely chosen—thus manifesting the love and justice of God and yet preserving the freedom of his creatures. (3) By its separation of good from evil it guarantees that evil will never corrupt the good again. What frustrates good people here on earth is evil. And what frustrates evil people is good. Ultimately, the Great Divorce of heaven and Hell provides a permanent state where evil will never

again frustrate good people. And Hell will provide an eternal place where good will never frustrate evil people. Even love is frustrating to those who refuse it. In fact, the only place in the universe where a person can be free from the divine perturbations of love is hell. (4) Finally, since God can bring good out of evil (Gen. 50:20), we can be assured that all the evil he permits will be used by him to achieve the greatest good achievable (see Chapter 5).

### *How Can Hell be a Victory When So Many People Go There?*

First of all, the Bible does not say precisely what percent of people will be saved and what percent will be lost. Using the analogy of angels, only one third will be lost (Rev. 12:4). The verses used to show that the vast amount of the race will be lost because “wide is the gate that leads to destruction” (cf. Mat. 7:13-14) may be unjustified since B. B. Warfield argued that these verses refer only to immediate and temporal response to Jesus’ message and not the final statistics of heaven and earth. Whatever the ultimate ratio we can be sure of one thing, namely, God will save everyone he possibly can without violating their free will since he is not willing that “any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9) and that “he desires that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). But God will not save them “at all cost” if that means the cost of their free and dignity as human being which God gave them when he created them in his image (Gen. 1:27). For as Lewis noted, “But you now see that the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of His scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will . . . would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo” (Lewis *The Problem of Pain*, p. 106, 107). Whether few, many, or most will be saved, we know it will be all that God possibly can save without violating the free will he gave them. For it is against God nature as love and our as free that he would force us to freely love him. Forced love is not love; it is rape. And God is not a divine rapist!

### *If the Wicked Desire to Go to Hell, then it must be a Desirable Place?*

Hell is a not desirable place. It is not what the wicked *want* (desire), but it is what they *will* (decide to have). People do not *want* war, but neither do they *will* to eliminate what causes it. Unless we begin to will conditions of peace we will continue to have war. A drunk doesn't *want* a hangover, but he *wills* himself to have one when he drinks too much. So it is with hell. Those who go to Hell choose the conditions but do not relish the consequences. It is, after all, described as a place of “weeping and grinding of teeth” (Mat. 8:12). Most persons have had the experience of desiring something, but when we get it we find that it is undesirable.

RABBI HAROLD KUSHNER made popular the Finite God solution to evil in his book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (NY: Schocken, 1981). Until the premature death of his son from *progeria* (rapid aging), Rabbi Kushner believed, as many do, that God was all-good and all-powerful. This tragic death caused a reexamination of these traditional beliefs and resulted in his best-selling book. Using the book of Job as a background, Rabbi Kushner suggests there are three things all of us would like to believe:

- God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens.
- God is just and fair, giving everyone what they deserve.
- Job is a good person.

As long as Job is healthy and happy one can believe in all three of these. But in view of Job's righteousness and suffering Rabbi Kushner concludes we cannot hold both to premises one and two. For no good person should be subjected to such terrible misfortunes as was Job.

What then is the solution to Job's tragedy? Why do good people suffer such bad things? The Rabbi's answer is that "God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about." (p. 43). Why? Because God Himself "is not perfect . . ." (p. 148). If God were all-perfect the world would not be so imperfect as it obviously is. An imperfect world indicates an imperfect God.

Of course it is always possible that God would like to do better but that He is hampered by His limitations in power. As a matter of fact, says Kushner, "there are some things God does not control. . . ." (p. 45). Thus, the world is out of whack because it is out of control.

For Kushner, this news is not necessarily all bad. For there "is a sense of relief in coming to the conclusion that God is not all-powerful or all-perfect. For if this is so, then our misfortunes are none of His doing" (p. 44). Thus Kushner insists: "I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason" (p. 134).

What is the source of misfortune, then? Why do bad things happen to good people? One thing the Rabbi is sure of is this: "God does not cause our misfortunes. Some are caused by bad luck. Some are caused by bad people, and others are simply an inevitable consequence of our being human and being mortal, living in a world of inflexible natural laws" (p. 134). But they are not "punishments," and there is no "grand design" for our suffering. (p. 134). We turn to God "for help in overcoming it, precisely because we can tell ourselves that God is as outraged by it as we are" (p. 134). For "there is no reason for those particular people to be afflicted rather than the others. These events do not reflect God's choices. They happen at random . . ." (p. 53). So we must learn to "accept the idea that some things happen for no reason, that there is randomness in the universe" (p. 46).

In view of these conclusions Rabbi Kushner tackled the important question: Why did God not strike Hitler dead in 1939 and spare six million Jews? Does God whimsically choose to intervene at some times but not at others? He answers: “God was with the victims, and not with the murderers, and He does not control man's choosing between good and evil.” In short, man is free and the laws of nature are fixed. Hence, divine intervention is ruled out.

The Rabbi “finds proof of God precisely in the fact that the laws of nature do not change. . .” (p. 57) Thus “the unchanging character of these laws . . .” means that the “laws of nature treat everyone alike. They do not make exceptions for good people or for useful people.” (p. 58) “A bullet has no conscience; neither does a malignant tumor or an automobile gone out of control.” (p. 58)

So “God does not reach down to interrupt the workings of laws of nature to protect the righteous from harm.” As a result, nature is morally blind and without values. It simply rolls along on its own laws, not concerned about who or what gets in the way (p. 59).

What should our response to innocent suffering be for which there is no good purpose and over which God has no control? According to Rabbi Kushner, our response should be “to forgive the world for not being perfect, to forgive God for not making a better world, to reach out to the people around us, and to go on living despite it all” (p. 147).

Above all we must realize that “bad things that happen to us in our lives do not have a meaning when they happen to us. They do not happen for any good reason . . . However, we can give them a meaning. We can redeem these tragedies from meaninglessness by imposing our meaning on them” (p. 136).

We must also remember that “God, who neither causes nor prevents tragedies, helps by inspiring people to help” (p. 140). For instance, God shows His opposition to cancer and birth defects, not by eradicating them (this He cannot do), but by calling forth friends and neighbors to ease the burden caused by them (p. 140).

The Rabbi sees prayer, not as a means to invoke supernatural intervention, but as a way to overcome loneliness. For he believes we cannot ask God to change the laws of nature for our benefit or to make fatal conditions less fatal or to change the inevitable course of an illness (p. 116).

Even when “miracles” do occur Kushner insists that we should not think that our prayers contributed to their occurrence (p. 116-117). So the primary purpose of prayer is “not to put people in touch with God, but to put them in touch with one another” (p. 119). In other words, prayer, if it is offered in the right way, simply redeems people from isolation (p. 121). Quoting Harry Golden's charming story, Kushner concludes that Jews go to the synagogue for all kinds of reasons. Garfinkle, who is Orthodox, may go to talk to God, but his friend who is not may go to talk to Garfinkle (p. 122).



## IS GOD A HEDONIST?

Rabbi Kushner's view rings a responsive chord in many suffering hearts. Maybe we should conclude after all that there is no perfect God in complete control of the world. Perhaps this is the most reasonable position.

Before we discard the traditional Jewish-Christian belief in an all-perfect God, let us examine the Rabbi's reasoning more carefully, taking a careful look at the assumptions on which it rests. First, notice that Kushner assumes a kind of universal hedonism. That is, he seems to believe that unless everyone is happy, God has not done His job properly. But is God a Cosmic Hedonist? Is it His all-consuming preoccupation to make everyone happy all the time? Or does God desire other good things for His creatures as well, even more important things?

Furthermore, Kushner demands a specific kind of happy life as a condition for there being an all-good, all-powerful God, one that provides sufficient peace, prosperity, and good health for all. Of course this hedonistic desire is merely an assumption for which he offers no proof. Freud would call it an illusion, since it is based simply on a wish that it be so.

## DOES GOD DESIRE COMFORT OVER CHARACTER?

Kushner does not seriously consider the possibility that God may be more interested in our character than in our comfort. He does not allow that God may be more concerned about our being morally good than in our simply being physically healthy.

Since Kushner uses Job as the example, let us ask Job about the purpose of suffering. In spite of his complete loss of health and wealth, Job cried out, “The LORD gave, the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). “And the LORD blessed the later days of Job more than his beginning . . .” (Job 42:12). As the New Testament puts it, “You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and have seen the outcome of the Lord’s dealings, that the LORD is full of compassion and is merciful” (James 5:11). In short, Kushner's views about Job's dilemma do not accord with Job's own words. For Job realized that the diamond of his character, formed under the pressure of adversity, more than compensated for the wealth he lost, He recognized that suffering, while taking away from his prosperity, added to his personal character what could not be taken away.

A careful reading of Rabbi Kushner's book reveals that his argument against the all-powerful, all-perfect God is based on a rejection of the Bible. Kushner's reasoning goes like this:

- God is all-powerful and causes [controls] everything that happens.
- God is just and fair, giving everyone what they deserve.
- Job is a good person.
- Job did not get what he deserved.
- Therefore, either God is not all-powerful or else He is not all-just (or both).

Now there is an assumption in the Rabbi's argument which is contrary to the text of his own Bible (the Old Testament). The statement in premise four is at odds with the biblical story of Job. For, contrary to Kushner, Job did eventually get what Kushner feels he deserved. According to the biblical record, in the end Job was rewarded amply. In fact, he received twice as much as he possessed initially (see Job 42:10). Kushner, however, treats the biblical record as a "fable" and arbitrarily dismisses the last chapter of Job as a later inauthentic addition (p. 143-146).

Further, one of the main names for God in Job is "the Almighty" (e.g., 5:17; 6:4, 14; 8:3, 5; 11:7; 13:3, etc.) which means God is all powerful. This contradicts Kushner's view that God is limited in power, namely, finite.

In short, the Rabbi rejects the biblical text as it is and as it has always been known to be in the most ancient manuscripts. In place of the biblical text Kushner offers his own mutilated version of Scripture. But since Kushner has rejected the story of Job as presented in Scripture, it's not surprising that he rejects the God presented in those Scriptures. The two are intimately connected. In summary, Kushner creates his own concept of God as well as his own Bible. But, the book of Job presents an almighty, perfect God (see Job 8:3), and a good man, Job, who served Him. And the God of the Scriptures eventually gave Job what he deserved and more. Thus Rabbi Kushner's point about Job is unfounded.

Of course not everyone who suffers misfortune eventually does as well in this life as Job did. So Kushner's main point must still be addressed. His argument can be reworded this way:

- God is all-powerful and causes [controls] everything that happens.
- God is just and fair, giving everyone what they deserve.
- John Doe is a good man who did not get what he deserved in his lifetime.
- Therefore, either God is not all-powerful or else He is not all just (or both).

But even though most will readily admit that not all persons have their bad fortune reversed in his lifetime as Job did, a problem remains in Kushner's logic. In order for the argument to be complete Kushner must add an important phrase:

John Doe is a good man who did not get what he deserved in his Lifetime nor will he get it in an afterlife.

In short, Kushner's argument is credible only if he knows for sure there is no afterlife wherein ultimate justice is achieved for all. But Kushner offers no proof for this. Instead he simply expresses an unsubstantiated and dogmatic assertion that “we cannot know for sure” if there is such a life after death (p. 29). How he knows for sure that we cannot know this for sure the Rabbi does not say.

On the other hand, if we interject the concept of immortality into the argument, then Kushner's conclusion crumbles. In fact, it backfires into an argument in favor of ultimate justice:

- There are some injustices in this life.
- Those who suffer unjustly will be duly rewarded by God.
- An all-powerful, all-just God does not allow any injustices.
- Therefore, those who suffer the injustices in this life will be rewarded in the next life.

In view of this becomes clear that Kushner's conclusion—that God is neither all-perfect nor all powerful—is premature. The burden of proof is his to demonstrate that man is not immortal. In order to counter this criticism, Kushner's argument must be revised like this:

- There are some injustices in this life.
- An all-powerful, all-just God would not allow injustices to go on forever.
- But some injustices will go on forever.
- Therefore, God cannot be all-powerful and all-just.

The problem with this argument is found in the accented words. How can Kushner know that injustice will go on forever? One would have to be omniscient (all-knowing) to know this for sure. But in this case he would have to be God in order to disprove this kind of God. Thus Kushner's argument backfires either into an argument for an all-perfect God or else, in flying to disprove God, he must assume that he himself is God.

IS THERE SOME SUFFERING WITHOUT A PURPOSE?

Kushner claims to be neither a theologian nor a philosopher (p. 5), but he engages in theology and philosophy nonetheless. Hence, he cannot escape philosophical criticism.

Kushner philosophizes that God is finite (limited) in His perfections. His reasoning flows like this:

- There is no good purpose for some suffering.
- An all-perfect God would have a good purpose for everything.
- Therefore, an all-perfect God does not exist.

## THE IMPERFECT IMPLIES THE PERFECT

First of all, Kushner could not know God was imperfect unless there was Perfect standard by which he was measuring God. But if there were a Perfect standard outside of God, then this standard would be God (i.e., the Ultimate). In which case, Rabbi Kushner finite god would not be God but merely a finite creature.

Further, there is a problem with this argument in the first statement. It can mean one of two things. It can mean either:

- There is no good purpose known to man for some suffering.
- Or else it can mean:
- There is no good purpose known to God or man for some suffering.

If Kushner means only the first, then his conclusion (that no perfect God exists) does not follow. On the other hand, if he is claiming that neither God nor man knows a good purpose for suffering, then his claim, is arrogant. How does he know that God has no good purpose for suffering? Again, Kushner would have to be all-knowing (like God) in order to disprove that such a God exists.



DOES GOD HAVE A GOOD PURPOSE FOR SUFFERING?

Kushner overlooks another point in this regard. If God is all-knowing and all-perfect, then a good explanation for permitting suffering automatically follows—even if we do not know what it is. The reasoning can be summarized as follows:

- An all-knowing God knows everything. An all-good God has only good purposes.
- There is suffering for which we know of no good purpose.
- Therefore, God has a good purpose for everything (even the suffering for which we know of no good purpose).

## WHAT ABOUT GRATUITOUS EVIL?

Of course, not all things turn out well. Some events never result in good things as such. There is gratuitous evil. However, these are evil byproducts of permitting a good world in which God is working to achieve a better result. The blacksmith, who is forging a plow for the farmer to till the soil and provide food for his family and others, may cause a spark that burns down his shop. But such an evil is a necessary byproduct of a good process to produce a good result. So, while the byproduct is not good in itself, God has a good purpose for permitting it. Even just wars have collateral damage. A policeman defending innocent life may accidentally kill an innocent bystander. Nonetheless, God has a good purpose for policemen and police action, which sometimes necessarily includes the evil byproducts of such action.

Not only does God know a good purpose for suffering, but if He is all-powerful He will accomplish that good purpose. For an all-powerful being can accomplish all that He wills. Hence, the very God Kushner rejects—an infinite one—is the only guarantee that an ultimate solution for evil exists.

William James said the world is better for having the devil in it, provided we have our foot on his neck. But the only real guarantee that there is a stranglehold on evil is the existence of an infinitely good and infinitely powerful God. For if God isn't infinitely powerful, then He might be unable to defeat evil. And if He is not infinitely good, then He might be unwilling to defeat evil. Hence, only an infinite God, not Kushner's finite God, guarantees that evil will be defeated and that all injustices will be rewarded. The argument can be summarized this way:

- An all-powerful God can overcome all injustices. An all-good God will overcome all injustices.
- But injustices are not always overcome in this life.
- Therefore, all injustice will be overcome in another life after this one.

How do we know this will occur? Because an infinite God both can and wants to do it, and it is not yet done. Therefore, it will yet be done in the future. His infinite resources assure us it will be done.

## ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION?

Another problem remains in Rabbi Kushner's insistence that God is limited in perfection and power. He asks the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? But formulating the question this way assumes that people are essentially good and, hence, they do not deserve the suffering which befalls them. But the very Scriptures from which the Rabbi quotes give quite a different view of human nature.

King David said, "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Psa. 51:5).

In the Law of Moses it is written, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5).

Jeremiah the Prophet added, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9).

Solomon in his wisdom observed that "there is not a righteous man on earth who continually does good and who never sins" (Ecc. 7:20).

And the Psalmist concluded, "they have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one" (Psa. 14:3). So Kushner's question wrongly assumes that people are good when his own Bible gives evidence to the contrary.

## WHY DO GOOD THINGS HAPPEN TO BAD PEOPLE?

So, there is a biblical sense in which all people are sinners and deserve worse than they get. In this sense the question should not be: Why do bad things happen to good people? Rather, it should be: Why do good things happen to bad people? The historic Judeo-Christian answer to this question has always been the mercy of God. If all are sinners then there is no merit in man which places a demand on God to save us from undesired suffering. Rather, we should be grateful to His grace for not giving us what we really deserve, which is more suffering.

Rabbi Kushner shows a reluctance to accept the depravity of man and the deserved punishment which follows from this fact. It is because of the failure to understand that death, sickness, and suffering are the result of Adam's sin (Gen. 3:16-19), that he confesses, "I don't have a good answer to the question of why our bodies had to be made vulnerable to germs and viruses and malignant tumors in the first place" (p. 64). Further, he admits, "I don't know why people are mortal and fated to die . . ." (p. 69). Surely he has read many times in the Torah God's warning to Adam, "in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:17).

Evidence of Kushner's failure to understand human depravity is found in statements such as “I deserve better” (p. 5). And Kushner's self-descriptions are reminiscent of Jesus' statement about some rabbis of his day. Kushner said, “I had been a good person. I had tried to do what was right in the sight of God. More than that, I was living a more religiously committed life than most people I knew. . . .” The Rabbi in Jesus' story put it this way: “I thank God that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers . . . I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess” (Luke 18:11, 12).

At the root of Rabbi Kushner's problem with God's infinity is his failure to understand man's depravity and, in the light of it, to recognize his own condition before God in true humility. Jesus' response to both of the aforementioned self-appellations is appropriate. “Everyone that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted” (Luke 18:14).

## WHO SHOULD FORGIVE WHOM?

Indeed, it would seem that the Rabbi far oversteps his bounds when he concludes that in view of our suffering we need “to forgive God for not making a better world. . . ” (p. 147). Surely, it would be more in keeping with the status of mortal man to confess with the Jewish psalmist: “What is man, that thou are mindful of him; and the son of man that thou visitest him?” (Psa. 8:4). David's prayer in Psalm 19 would be even more apropos for a Rabbi: “Who can understand his [own] errors. Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins” (v. 12, 13).

But it is argued that if God is all-powerful, then He could intervene and stop more evil. Why allow six million Jews to be killed by Hitler. Certainly God could have accomplished His purposes to achieve a greater good with far less evil than this.

In response, there are in fact good reasons why God does not perform miracles all the time in answer to every prayer. First, some of our prayers are selfish and self-destructive (Jas. 4:3). In short, they are not for our good, and God knows it, even if we don't. God is our heavenly Father. As such He will no more give us a stone if we ask for bread than He will give us a stone if we ask for a stone when what we need is bread (Matt. 7:9).

Further, miracles are by nature rare and unusual events which depend upon the background of nature's regularity for their very existence. And it is self-evident that the rare cannot happen regularly. If it did then it would no longer be rare.

The question as to why God chooses to perform miracles at some times and not others is known only to Himself. After all, a miracle is by definition unpredictable and done only "according to His will" (Heb. 2:4). But our finite inability to know God's infinite purposes is by no means a telling argument against the possibility of miracles occurring. Otherwise, a child's inability to understand why his parents would not give him everything he wanted would be a telling argument against parental love. In fact, if God is all-powerful, all-good, all-wise, then we know there is a good reason for His choice to perform miracles on some occasions and not on others. For:

- There are some miraculous events for which we have no explanation as to why God chose to do them as opposed to others He did not do.
- But an all-wise God has a sufficient reason for everything He does.
- And an all-good God has a good reason for whatever He does.
- Further, an all-powerful God can do anything possible that He chooses to do.
- Therefore, God has a good and sufficient reason as to why He chooses to do some miracles and not others, even if we do not know it (see our book, *Miracles and the Modern Mind*, [www.BastionBooks.com](http://www.BastionBooks.com)).

Just because one cannot discern God's purpose in performing only select miracles does not mean that there is no such purpose. The Judeo-Christian Scriptures show God has a purpose for what he chooses to do whether man recognizes it or not. If God is infinite then "His ways are unsearchable and His judgments are past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). Again, "the secret things belong unto the LORD our God; but those things which are revealed belong to us. . ." (Deut. 29:29).

The only way to avoid this conclusion as to what an infinite God can do is to add a premise such as this:

- Whatever mortal man has no explanation for, there is no explanation for.

However, this premise is not only presumptuous, but it contradicts the self-evident truth that an all-wise, all-good God must have a good purpose for everything He chooses to do. So contrary to Kushner, it is possible to believe that God is all-good and all-powerful even if He did not choose to intervene and save Kushner's son. After all, according to the Bible and other historical evidence, this same God chose not to intervene and save His own Son from suffering. For "God spared not His own Son, but delivered him up for us all. . ." (Rom. 8:32). And as it turns out, the Scriptures say God had

a very good purpose for His Son's suffering: to provide salvation for all mankind!



Even though we do not understand the reason for each act of suffering in particular, God has revealed the value of suffering in general. And there is value in permitting a world where some suffering is a byproduct of a good purpose. At times Kushner evidences an awareness of the redemptive value of suffering. He admitted, as a result of the suffering he underwent with his child, that others accepted his consolation because now “I was their brother in suffering, and they were able to let me help them” (p. 112).

Kushner acknowledged another purpose for undesired suffering when he confessed, “I am a more sensitive person, a more effective pastor, a more sympathetic counselor because of Aaron's life and death that I would ever have been without it” (p. 87). In this connection, perhaps the Rabbi unconsciously provides insight into why pain and suffering is beyond our control. For he adds, “I would give up all of those gains in a second if I could have my son back. If I could choose, I would forego all the spiritual growth and depth which has come my way. . . But I cannot choose” (p. 133-134).

Perhaps in the infinite wisdom of God this is precisely why suffering is beyond our control. Maybe God is more interested in our spiritual character than our personal contentment. Perhaps He knows we will be helped more by helping others than by seeking to be helped by them. Maybe the Creator knows that our true happiness comes as a byproduct of holiness, not as a replacement for it. Could it be that God is more interested in our character than our mere contentment? The Scriptures consistently show that God is more concerned about a person's holiness than her happiness. After all, the Scriptures do not say, “Be ye happy as I am happy.” Rather, the Scripture states, “Be ye holy as I am holy, says the LORD” (Lev. 11:45).

Of course not everyone gets better as a result of suffering; in fact, some get bitter. What then? Here Kushner unwittingly answers the question when he quotes a survivor of Auschwitz who said:

“It never occurred to me to question God's doings or lack while I was an inmate of Auschwitz. . . I was no less or no more religious because of what the Nazis did to us; and I believe my faith in God was not undermined in the least. It never occurred to me to associate the calamity we were experiencing with God, to blame Him, or to believe in Him less or cease believing in Him at all because He didn't come to our aid. We owe our lives to Him. If someone believes God is responsible for the death of six million because He didn't somehow do something to save them, he's got his thinking reversed. We owe God our lives for the few or many years we live, and we have the duty to worship him and do as He commands us. That's what we're here on earth for, to be in God's service, to do God's bidding.”

Certainly no one can impugn this sufferer's credibility to speak to the point of suffering and to suggest an appropriate response of man to God in view of it. In light of his comments, one thing seems clear. It is an inverted reasoning which suggests that we humans need to forgive God. In view of humanity's initial and continual rebellion against God, it is God who needs to forgive each person for such pride and not the reverse! Indeed, God has provided forgiveness for all proud and rebellious creatures who will confess their sin and trust the Savior. For “God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8).

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