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# The Problem of Evil

The Challenge to Essential Christian Beliefs

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## CHAPTER ONE

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# The Problem of Evil: Introductory Issues

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### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY EVIL?

Christians have generally agreed that evil is not a substance or a thing but instead is a privation of a good thing that God made. A privation of a good is the corruption or twisting of a created thing's essence or substance.<sup>1</sup> Evil, since it is not a thing in itself, is parasitic on the good. There can be good without evil, but there cannot be evil without there being a good upon which it preys. The concept of evil as a privation of the good has been essential in undermining at least one argument against the existence of God from evil, namely that God *caused* evil. The thought is as follows:

- God created only actual things (or substances).
- Evil is not an actual thing (or substance).
- Therefore, God did not create evil.

As a corruption or twisting of what is good, evil is the absence of something that *ought* to be; it is the absence of what fulfills a thing's nature or essence. Evil, as such, is not a *mere lacking* of some quality or characteristic. A snake, for example, lacks arms, but we would not say a snake is deprived of arms. Aquinas explains:

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *De Malo*, trans. Jean Oesterle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burnes and Oates Publishers, 1942); Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Matter and Form and Elements: A Translation and Interpretation of the De Principiis Naturae and the De Mixtione Elementorum of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998).

As the term good signifies “perfect being,” so the term evil signifies nothing else than “privation of perfect being.” In its proper acceptance, privation is still predicated of that which is fitted by its nature to be possessed, and to be possessed at a certain time and in a certain manner. Evidently, therefore, a thing is called evil if it lacks the perfection it ought to have. Thus, if a man lacks the sense of sight, this is an evil for him. But the same lack is not an evil for a stone, for the stone is not equipped by nature to have the faculty of sight.<sup>2</sup>

The potentiality for sight is present in a human but not in a stone; accordingly, since humans have the potentiality for sight, the inability to see is expressed as a privation of sight—it is a perfection that should be in accord with the nature of a particular thing.

While the inability to see is a physical privation, moral failures such as gossiping and slander are expressions of an evil relationship—the privation of rightly relating to one another. Perversion is a state of being due to persistence in moral wrongdoing, which reveals that evil can be in a nature.

A more thorough treatment of the nature of causation and free will are forthcoming in this work. Suffice it to say at this point that the metaphysical view of evil that is expressed here is derivative of the privative view of evil found in Augustine and Aquinas, among others.

## **CATEGORIES OF THE DISCUSSION: MORAL AND NATURAL EVIL**

### **Moral Evil**

The first type of evil, and the one most discussed in the relevant literature, is moral evil. Moral evil occurs when free persons misuse their freedom in such a way that the content of their will and/or actions violates a moral standard. The first component of moral evil is the intention formed in the agent to perform an immoral action. An intention is different than a desire. A person can desire something and never intend for the contents of their desires to be a course of life for themselves. For example, having a sexual temptation is not the same thing as having formed an intention to commit an immoral sexual action. The type of desire being described is akin to what Scripture calls a temptation, and being tempted should not be considered the same thing as committing a sin;

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<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, trans. Cyril Vollert in *Light of Faith: The Compendium of Theology* (Manchester: Sophia Institute Press, 1993), 114, 125–26.

Jesus was tempted in the same way that we are, and this was not reckoned unto him as sin (Heb 4:15). Forming an intention to commit immoral actions is a hardened concept from a mere desire. A person can, for example, have a desire to act virtuously and never *decide* to act on the desire. When the agent forms an intention, she is moving from having reasons to perform an action to deciding for herself that this is the action she will take.<sup>3</sup> Moral evil is then to be understood as having occurred when an agent intends to perform an action of moral disvalue.

Simply intending to commit an action does not mean that the action necessarily occurs, for there may be an intervening factor that prohibits the action from ever obtaining. For example, when Lynette “Squeaky” Fromme attempted to assassinate Gerald Ford in September of 1975, she never worked the action of her pistol to ensure that a bullet was in the chamber of the gun. When she pulled the trigger nothing happened, as all of the bullets were still in the magazine of the gun. No doubt Fromme had a settled objective to murder President Ford but failed in the endeavor of murdering President Ford. The failure in the act does not mean that her intentions were any less immoral, as the old adage “no harm no foul” might indicate. The moral failure consisted in the forming of the intention to murder. The tactical failure consisted in her not working a gun properly. The same could be said of Sarah Jane Moore, who attempted to assassinate Ford a mere two weeks later and failed to accomplish the attempt because the sights on her gun were off by several inches.

Even though moral evil is first to be categorized as when a person forms the intention to commit an action of moral disvalue, moral evil also involves the content of the action itself when the content of the intention is not mitigated by an intervention of some kind. Suppose, for example, that Squeaky Fromme had chambered a bullet or that Sarah Jane Moore had corrected the sights on her .38. Even though a moral wrong occurred in forming the intention to murder, *suffering* is what occurs when the actions resultant from intended evil are brought about. Suffering has many manifestations. If Ford had been assassinated, his family would have experienced emotional suffering; he would have, perhaps, experienced emotional and physical suffering.

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<sup>3</sup> The topic discussed here is nuanced, and there are different views about what desires, reasons, intentions, and so forth are. My point here is to take some less controversial features of agency and flesh out their expression in Scripture. For more thorough treatment of these topics, see Hugh McCann, *The Works of Agency* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Timothy O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), or *Agents, Causes, and Events: Essays on Indeterminism and Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Randolph Clarke, *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The distinction between evil and suffering is an important one, for these terms are not coextensive. There can be evil without suffering, as when the objectives of evil intentions are thwarted. There can be suffering that is not evil, as when a person is imprisoned for committing a serious enough crime to warrant the imprisonment. So a distinction is in order. While the imprisonment of a criminal is not a *happy* state of affairs, neither is it a *wrong* state of affairs. When a person suffers for a morally sufficient reason, we can agree that the suffering is bad but are not entitled to conclude that it is wrong. Arguments to the extent that the problem of evil is one that reduces to the experience of pain or suffering are not entirely on point, for such reductionist views fail to capture this important distinction. Likewise, there are goods in states of affairs that are not necessarily right. For example, persons that commit adultery usually do so for emotional and physical satisfaction, among other things. Emotional and physical satisfactions are good things, but when they are satisfied through adultery they are *wrong*. Genesis describes the forbidden fruit as “good” for food and desirable for gaining wisdom (Genesis 3). Partaking of the forbidden fruit, though providing these goods, was wrong because it violated a divine command. Moral evil, as such, occurs when an objective moral requirement is vitiated through the intentions (free will) of a person, the *usual* result of which is the suffering of others.

### **Natural Evil**

The second category of evil typified in the relevant literature is natural evil. Natural evil is generally accepted as evil resultant from nonhuman causes such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tornados. Arguments from natural evil against the existence of God usually emphasize the *nonhuman* element in the definition, as it removes free will in the explanation of these events occurring. Such arguments then center the discussion on God’s bringing about these states of affairs rather than humans, the intention of which is to indict God for authoring evil.

This understanding of natural evil is admittedly unsatisfying. A hurricane that moves from the African coastline into the Atlantic without ever making landfall or affecting human life in any discernible way is not usually considered to be *evil*. It might be considered bad weather but not evil. So these events are not in themselves evil but take on the label of being evil when they cause human or animal suffering. It is the suffering of sentient beings resulting from these events that might be understood as evil; hurricanes or earthquake are not

evil. Perhaps a better understanding of natural evil is to redefine the categories of its expression to include the following:

- There are violent, natural states of affairs that produce human suffering, and human suffering that is not connected to one's personal misconduct is wrong.
- There are violent, natural states of affairs that produce human suffering, and human suffering that is derived from these states of affairs *that are also connected to human misconduct* is bad but not necessarily wrong.
- There are violent, natural states of affairs that never affect any human in any negative way that are caused by the misuse of human free will.
- There are violent, natural states of affairs that never affect any human in any negative way that are not caused by the misuse of human free will.

A larger taxonomy is, no doubt, available. These distinctions, however, help clear up some issues attendant to the problem of natural evil, at least as far as how natural evil is to be conceived. Nature, as an impersonal force, does not commit evil. One question concerns how nature responds to human evil, including humans abusing the earth and the effects that yields. Another question concerns other agents that might be a factor in nature's behavior that produce human suffering. For example, in Job 1 Satan causes a great wind that destroys the house Job's children are in, effectually causing their deaths. In the same chapter a lightning strike kills sheep and their attendants (v. 16). Free will must be factored in as a possible explanation of natural evil at least some of the time. When free will is at issue, then nature becomes a means by which moral evil is brought about; a hurricane in the hands of an evil agent such as Satan is as efficient for destruction as a gas chamber in the hands of Hitler.

We will return to the topics of moral evil and natural evil in later chapters. Suffice it to say at this point that the words "natural evil" are unsatisfying, for they fail to take a range of issues into consideration. The chapter on natural evil will address this problem.

## **DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN A DEFENSE AND A THEODICY**

Scholars traditionally distinguish a defense from a theodicy.<sup>4</sup> A theodicy is an attempt to justify the ways of God in light of the vast amounts of evil

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<sup>4</sup> This distinction received its clearest expression in Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

we find in the world. A theodicy, as it were, attempts to answer the question “why.” Theodicies are thus offensive rather than defensive in approach. It is generally true that when people are suffering they want an answer to the question why. Taking the approach of a theodicy implies accepting the burden of proof concomitant with the intention of the project. The theodicist is not so much claiming “it might be the case that” as she is claiming “it is the case that.” The strength of this claim reveals how high the bar is raised, for it is purporting to express God’s own thoughts about the matter and not just what the theodicist supposes are God’s thoughts about the matter. This is not to say that only one line of thought is permissible in developing a theodicy, such that, for example, the free will theodicy is the only legitimate theodicy. As will be noted in a moment, there are inferential relationships among several theodicies. The point here is simply to express the scope of the project in theodicy and why some are suspicious that such a case will never be offered on this side of heaven.

A defense, as one might guess, is not an attempt to explain what God is up to in permitting evil, but instead tries to provide rationally compelling reasons to question the soundness of the argument from evil against the existence of God. Rather than make suggestions about God’s reasons for permitting evil, a defensive strategy generally arrives at the conclusion that the atheist’s objection from evil is either inconclusive or logically fallacious. Accordingly, the primary strategy for defenses is to undermine an argument, and only secondarily is a defense interested in offering answers to the “why” question.

In the following sections I will develop the rationale behind several theodicies. It is not my intention to argue for any one of these theodicies but to provide a descriptive survey as a resource for some of the most prominent lines of thought in the Christian tradition. Indeed, my view differs from each of these in a number of respects, but that is an issue that will be taken up at a later time.

## THE PUNISHMENT THEODICY

The first theodicy we will consider is the punishment theodicy, according to which some suffering is a result of divine punishment for sin. Brief consideration of Scripture may warrant such a perspective. In Exodus we find “I will punish them for their sin”; Isaiah explains, “I will punish the world for its evil”; Jeremiah warns of God punishing Israel “as your deeds deserve.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, traditionally attendant to this view is the doctrine of hell, whereby God’s wrath is poured out on those who reject Christ. Paul says:

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<sup>5</sup> Exod 32:34; Isa 13:11; Jer 21:14. All biblical quotations are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.<sup>6</sup>

Michael Murray and Michael Rea explain that defenders of the punishment theodicy provide several reasons punishment can be good, including rehabilitation, deterrence, societal protection, and retribution.<sup>7</sup> Rehabilitation, for example, results in the sinner coming to grips with the wrongness of her actions and transforms her character from that way of life to a morally transformed life. Supposedly this is the principle under which the American judicial system functions when detaining persons for criminal misconduct. In any case, the greater good of punishment for the purpose of rehabilitation is that it benefits the wrongdoer first and secondarily the society in which he or she lives.<sup>8</sup> Through punishment moral transformation is made possible.

As for deterrence and societal protection, the punitive benefits are not for the criminal per se but for those who are harmed or could possibly be harmed by the criminal. If we take punishment to be action-detering, it could be that deterrence occurs in others who would have been likely to perform the same actions (e.g., there are death penalty arguments made on the principle of deterrence). Considering the fate that has befallen others who have invested in wrongful deeds leads the would-be wrongdoer to consider whether or not she wants the same fate to befall her if she were caught. In a literal sense, the wrongdoer that is punished is deterred as well, especially if the punishment is death. The difference between strict deterrence and rehabilitation is that deterrence is not so much directed at character formation as it is consequence avoidance.

A third benefit of punishment, like deterrence, is geared more toward the benefit of others than that of the wrongdoer. If criminals are incarcerated, and appropriate measures are taken, then presumably their ability to exact more wrongs is limited given their confinement.<sup>9</sup> An extension of this argument has an eschatological ring, in that hell is often considered a place where the

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<sup>6</sup> 2 Thess 1:8–10.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Murray and Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 170.

<sup>8</sup> See William Alston, "The Inductive Argument from Evil and the Human Cognitive Condition," in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 5 of *Philosophy of Religion*, ed. James E. Toberlin (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1991): 29–67.

<sup>9</sup> Murray and Rea, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 171.

viciousness of humanity's depravity is quarantined so that the harmful intentions of the reprobate cannot be carried out on another person. This requires, of course, that hell is a place of isolation and that the benefits of societal protection are not to include the wrongdoer himself, for presumably the wrongdoer can still harm himself in hell. The telling feature of hell is that one may make an argument from it (the greater) to other instances of lesser suffering, and in doing so undermine other arguments from evil which suggest that the amount and intensity of suffering are beyond what is needed for any divinely appointed purpose. This issue will be addressed in the chapter on hell.

As for retributive theories of punishment, when people commit crimes they usually incur in penalty more than what was taken in the act itself. Theft, for instance, often results in a fine that is greater than the amount stolen in the first place, if not resulting in incarceration.<sup>10</sup> Part of the rationale behind the retributive theory of justice is that when a criminal act occurs, more than just the obvious harm is actually done. It is not so much that \$500 was stolen from the house during the burglary, but a sense of violation and insecurity of well-being in the house after the invasion normally follows. Exacting an extra measure beyond what is directly evident in wrongdoing goes to insure justice will be served.<sup>11</sup>

The idea of punishment has explanatory power, and since an all-powerful, knowledgeable, good God is the exactor of punishment, then the pitfalls that usually attend the human judicial system do not apply. God knows how to fit the penalty to the crime. In fact, part of the argument from evil against the existence of God hinges on the problem of divine justice. Why do the wicked prosper, and why do the righteous suffer? Implicit in such questions is a principle of justice, presumably conjoined with the belief that the wicked should be punished and the righteous rewarded. If this is correct, then intense suffering that results from human sin is a live option in theodicy—the only detail is discerning its place of application.

### **THE FREE-WILL THEODICY**

The second theodicy is the free-will theodicy. According to the free-will theodicy, God is justified in permitting evil and its consequences because “he has to do so if he is to bestow on some of his creatures the incommensurable privilege of being responsible agents who have, in many areas, the capacity

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

to choose as they will, without God, or anyone else (other than themselves), determining which alternative they choose.”<sup>12</sup> When Adam partakes of the fruit in Genesis 3, the most severe charge brought against God is not that he caused Adam to sin, but that in making Adam significantly free God brought about the possibility that Adam might misappropriate his freedom and choose a course of action that is morally wrong. God is not responsible for Adam’s choices given that Adam was endowed in creation with self-determining free will. The ground for denying God’s causing evil is that human freedom is conceptually incompatible with divine determinism (not divine sovereignty). Otherwise stated, determined choices are not free.

Solidifying a free-will theodicy usually requires assent to the idea that being significantly free is intrinsically valuable rather than fleshing out the value of freedom from how people exercise it, that is, from freedom’s instrumental value. If it is intrinsically better to be significantly free than not, then questions concerning divine decisions in creation are asked and answered; objections from the abuse of freedom are derived from a category confusion regarding freedom’s intrinsic value with the ends that come as a result of misappropriating it.

Even so, we value human freedom instrumentally in that it enables us to choose a path for our lives, allows for unique contributions to the human story, and is the source and origin of relationship development. The dissonance about freedom is that we love its benefits and hate its deficits, at least as far as instrumental value is concerned. If we center the discussion on the consequences of freedom rather than what freedom is, it is far from clear that God has not faltered in his providence. After all, God could allow immoral actions and then remove the harmful consequences of those actions. Freedom is preserved, and intense suffering is avoided. While such a view agrees that freedom is valuable, it denies that allowing actions to have harmful consequences justifies permitting the free act.

For example, if I freely burn down my neighbors’ house while they are on vacation, God can miraculously rebuild the house so that my neighbors never knew or dealt with the ramifications of their house being burned down. Freedom is preserved, and consequences are avoided. Consider the rape and murder of a five-year-old girl. There is nothing logically problematic with asserting that God permits the rapist to commit the rape and to succeed in her subsequent murder, during which God disables the girl from ever being conscious of her rape and strangulation—and revives her upon her death without her ever knowing anything happened to her. Freedom is preserved, and consequences

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<sup>12</sup> Alston, “Inductive Argument from Evil,” 48–49.

are avoided. Since the visceral reaction against the free-will theodicy centers on the negative consequences of freedom's application, let us call this new construal of God's activity a "nonconsequence world."

Several problems attend a nonconsequence world. First, the objection does not address the free-will theodicy at all but questions the lack of divine intervention. Notice that each suggestion indicates something *God* can do to mitigate the effects of free decisions, which says nothing at all about the nature of human freedom or the agent performing the act in question.

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we allow the question about divine intervention to remain, and we suggest that God override the consequences of our actions while still permitting our freedom to exist full force. The scenario envisioned here makes our world much like the famous pleasure machine scenario—where all of our experiences are either directly pleasurable or transformed into a pleasurable experience. In such a world we would not have any recourse from committing horrendous evils because we would not know the seriousness of the ensuing harm from acting in such a way. Admittedly the moral status of actions is not governed solely by the ends of our actions; however, we certainly deliberate about the consequences of our actions upon the well-being of others and ourselves. In other words, the suggestion that God stamp out bad consequences, albeit a freedom preserving proposal, undermines our ability to make significant moral choices.

Proponents of a nonconsequence world should expect God to make acts such as rape a pleasure for the victim either directly through the sex act or indirectly through psychological manipulation. In doing so, another critique is leveraged; the proposal effectually strips the moral accountability between the perpetrator and his victim as well as what the definition of rape entails.

To use a less chafing example, suppose I steal my neighbor's birdfeeder after a squirrel breaks my own. Before choosing to steal the birdfeeder I recognize that my action is morally wrong—I am not confused about the moral status of the action. Sometime after I steal the birdfeeder, my conscience gets the better of me; I return the birdfeeder to my neighbor (with a bag of birdseed as a gesture). The only discernible response I should receive from my neighbor upon my returning the birdfeeder is one of utter perplexity; for if God replaces the stolen birdfeeder to prevent the material and emotional harm caused by the action, then my ability to set things right will be completely undermined. My neighbor will have no concept of ever having been wronged or perceive any need for apology or remuneration.<sup>13</sup> What is more, it is hard to see how

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<sup>13</sup> Murray and Rea, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, 174.

I could ever actually discern that my action was worthy of reproach to begin with, for if God “undoes” the negative consequences of evil choices, then presumably the wrongdoer will benefit from this undoing as well. The line of thought is as follows: one of the harmful consequences of my choices is the effects these choices have on me. Not only is it true that malformed decisions adversely affect my character; the ability to concede one evil action makes it more probable that I will make another concession in my future deliberations and choices. In an effort to stall this decline of character, God must undo the harmful effects of my own choices on me. Such an action would be a literal divine recreation of my character such that any of my future wrong decisions would have nothing to do with my previous deliberations and choices. For this suggestion to pass muster, God would have to be the ultimate revisionist historian. These reasons, and more, provide compelling grounds to question the claim that God can undo the harmful nature of free decisions while guarding the integrity of freedom itself.

### THE NATURAL-LAW THEODICY

A third theodicy is called the natural-law theodicy, according to which there is a double effect from human participation in a lawlike natural order. In his excellent work *Evil and a Good God*, Bruce Reichenbach explains that from the natural law:

The possibility arises that sentient creatures like ourselves can be negatively affected by the outworking of these laws in nature, such that we experience pain, suffering, disability, disutility, and at times the frustration of our good desires. Since a world with free persons making choices between moral good and evil and choosing a significant amount of moral good is better than a world created without free persons and moral good and moral evil, God in creating had to create a world which operated according to natural laws to achieve a higher good. Thus, his action of creation of a natural world and a natural order, along with the resulting pain and pleasure which we experience, is justified. The natural evils which afflict us—diseases, sickness, disasters, birth defects—are all the outworking of the natural system of which we are a part. They are the byproducts made possible but that which is necessary for the greater good.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Bruce Reichenbach, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 100–101.

As it were, the same fire that produces heat in our homes and cooks our food can also burn us if we put our hands in it, and as such may serve as a theodicy for *natural* evil.

It has also been argued that the natural law provides the conditions for the exercise of human freedom. The natural order can be regular enough to “provide the degree of predictability required for morally significant choice even if there are exceptions to the regularities.”<sup>15</sup> Even if God can “put aside” the regularities via miraculous intervention and save a suffering animal, he could not intervene in every instance of suffering wrought from the natural law without thereby undermining its predictability. God saving a dying fawn from being burned by forest fire started by a lightning strike by no means indicates that he could intervene in every such occurrence of natural evil; God has strong reason in each case from doing this; for if he didn’t, he would have no reason for letting nature usually take its course.<sup>16</sup> What atheists must then express is a justification for their belief that God would have a morally sufficient reason to make an exception to the natural law; providing such an account can be quite daunting, given that our range of perception on individual events and their relationship to the whole is aggravatingly limited. We can speculate about the logical possibility of God’s intervention without giving careful attention to the metaphysical implications of God’s intervention, and it is the metaphysical structure of reality that is of interest here. Consider William Alston’s clarifying point:

To use a well-worn example, it may be metaphysically necessary that the chemical composition of water is H<sub>2</sub>O since that is what water essentially is, even though, given the ordinary use of the concept of water, we can without contradiction or unintelligibility, think of water as made up of carbon and chlorine. Roughly speaking, what is conceptually or logically (in a narrow sense of “logical”) possible depends on what things are like in themselves, their essential natures, regardless of how they are expressed in our thought and language.<sup>17</sup>

Determining what is logically possible may not be too difficult. Determining metaphysically possible “alternative systems” of the natural order may be a project beyond our abilities. Can there be conscious, volitional, sentient beings that are also unable to feel pain but still appreciate those experiences that are pleasurable or produce happiness? As Alston and others propose, suggesting

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<sup>15</sup> Alston, “Inductive Argument from Evil,” 53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

that we have so much as a clue about these kinds of questions betrays our ignorance of the depths of the questions involved.

### THE SOUL-MAKING THEODICY

John Hick has championed a view known as the soul-making theodicy. Proponents of the soul-making theodicy predicate their view on the “creation of humankind through an evolutionary process as an immature creature living in a challenging and therefore person-making world.”<sup>18</sup> This assumes a two-stage conception of the creation of humankind; mankind was first created in the image of God, and later into the likeness of God.<sup>19</sup> The first stage is the progression of *Homo sapiens* through the gradual process of evolution, which produced a more complex brain, moral awareness, and more successful adaptive measures than found in other animals. This stage of human existence was a “potentiality” for knowledge of God and having a relationship with him unlike being created from the start as fully mature and moral beings.<sup>20</sup> The second stage is the current stage of *Homo sapiens*, where the process of evolution has produced an intelligent, moral, and spiritual animal that bears the likeness of God.<sup>21</sup>

Hick’s soul-making theodicy is a drastic shift from previous theodicies, for unlike the free-will theodicy, it does not start with morally responsible beings but concludes that through this process we become morally responsible beings—our souls are, as the argument suggests, *made* through trials and tribulations. So why does God create humans in this immature state? Hick contends that the hard-won virtues are the virtues worth having, and it is in the “relationships with human beings with one another, in a context of this struggle to survive and flourish, that they can develop higher values of mutual love and care, of self-sacrifice for others, and of commitment to a common good.”<sup>22</sup> The divine plan through which this occurs involves four conditions:

1. The divine intention in relation to humankind, according to our hypothesis, is to create perfect finite personal beings in filial relationship with their Maker.

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<sup>18</sup> John Hick, “A Soul-Making Theodicy,” in *The Philosophy of Religion Reader*, ed. Chad Meister (New York: Routledge, 2008), 538.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 539.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 545.

2. It is logically impossible for humans to be created already in this perfect state because in its spiritual aspect it involves coming freely to an uncoerced consciousness of God from an epistemic distance, and in its moral aspect, freely choosing the good in preference to evil.
3. Accordingly the human being was initially created through the evolutionary process, as a spiritually and morally immature creature, and as part of a world which is both religiously ambiguous and ethically demanding.
4. Thus that one is morally imperfect (i.e., that there is moral evil), and that the world is a challenging and even dangerous environment (i.e., that there is natural evil), are necessary aspects of the present stage of the process through which God is gradually creating perfected finite beings.<sup>23</sup>

The messy and time-consuming nature of this endeavor in soul making will likely not be fulfilled on this side of heaven, thus if the “unity of humankind in God’s presence is ever to be realized it will have to be in some sphere of existence other than our earth.”<sup>24</sup>

Other than some nonintuitive features of the basic argument, several ideas contained in this view are invoked on a consistent basis. The virtue of patience is developed through circumstances in which our patience is tested. The virtue of courage is developed in the face of danger. The virtue of loyalty is developed through trials that test our commitments to family and friends. The experience of evil is inextricably connected to the development of these character traits and, as such, provides a morally sufficient reason for God’s permitting the evil that pervades our world.

## CONCLUSION

It is not my intention to endorse any one of the theodicies described in this chapter but to provide the reader with some idea of the major developments pertaining to the problem of evil and the problem of human suffering. As the argument progresses in this book, each of these theodicies will have its place. Indeed, it is my contention that no one theodicy suffices to answer the problem of evil, but that each theodicy has its application in particular domains of the conversation. I will allow this line of thinking to develop with the flow of the book.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 547.