

# “Doubts because of Evil”

## Room For Doubt Seminar – March 1-2, 2014 Christian Church of Clarendon Hills

(This document has answers for the blanks IN YELLOW.)

Event webpage: [www.worldvieweyes.org/clarendonhills.html](http://www.worldvieweyes.org/clarendonhills.html)

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### I. The Reality of Evil

#### A. Forms of evil

1. Natural
2. Moral
3. Mixed

#### B. Evil is not only a problem for Christianity but a major problem for Atheism as well.

1. How can Atheism (Naturalism) account for “evil” to begin with?
2. Pain and suffering might occur, but why is anything “evil”?
3. If evil objectively exists, then this is actually an argument in favor of God’s existence.

“The problem of evil is known as ‘the rock of atheism’” (Loftus, *Why I Became an Atheist*, 228).

VS.

“If evil does exist, such a fact would point us in the direction of God’s existence ....” (Paul Copan, *That’s Just Your Interpretation*, 91).

“Rightly understood, evil surprisingly point us to a good God rather than away from him, to a confidence that goodness *must* exist, to hope rather than despair” (Copan, *Loving Wisdom*, 127).

#### C. Buddhism and Suffering:

1. The Four Noble Truths of Buddhism
  - a. All is *dukkha* (suffering).
  - b. Suffering is caused by desire.
  - c. Cease desire in order to cease suffering.
  - d. Following the 8-fold path to cease desire.
2. Contrast Buddhism’s approach to suffering to that of the \_\_\_\_\_ CHRISTIAN God.

### II. The Classic Problem of Evil for Christianity: It is contradictory or highly improbable that the Christian God exists in light of evil.

#### A. Evil exists.

B. If God were all-good (omnibenevolent), He would *want* to eliminate evil.

C. If God were all-knowing (omniscient), He would *know how* to eliminate evil.

D. If God were all-powerful (omnipotent), He would *be able* to eliminate evil.

E. Since evil exists, God must either not exist or not be all-good, all-knowing, or all-powerful.

### III. Prominent Types of Apologetic Responses (“theodicy” = *theos*, God + *dikaios*, justice)

“The time to discuss the problem of evil is when someone is not staring it in the face” (R. Knopp).

#### A. Free Will Theodicy.

1. God granted free will to humanity.
2. Even an omnipotent God CANNOT literally do \_\_\_\_\_ **EVERYTHING**.
  - a. Even God cannot create a rock so big that He cannot lift it.
  - b. Even God cannot create a round square.
  - c. God cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18).
  - d. God cannot look on wickedness with favor (Hab 1:13).
  - e. God cannot deny Himself (2 Tim 2:13).
3. Even God could not create humans with free will and guarantee that they would not inevitably sin.
4. When human sin occurred, it adversely affected all of the following:
  - a. Our relationship with GOD (spiritual death).
  - b. Our relationship with SELF.
  - c. Our relationships with OTHERS.
  - d. Our relationship with NATURE (including physical death).
5. This helps explain much of “moral evil” and “natural evil.”
6. In general, the Free Will defense:
  - a. Suggests a \_\_\_\_\_ **GOOD** \_\_\_\_\_ **REASON** for God to create a world with evil.
  - b. A world with evil would be better than a world that did not include significantly free creatures. (“Significantly free” creatures can genuinely choose between moral good and moral evil.)
  - c. Acknowledges that even God cannot grant significant human freedom and guarantee that humans will always do what is good, without depriving them of that freedom.

#### B. Natural Law Theodicy.

1. There is a natural order in the universe.
2. This natural order is a necessary condition for moral good and for moral evil.
3. Both moral good and evil require \_\_\_\_\_ **ACCOUNTABILITY**; and accountability requires that we be able to predict consequences and make rational decisions based on an orderly context.
4. Such natural order invariably leads to suffering and death (e.g. walking off a cliff).
5. A Natural Law response helps to explain much of “natural evil.”

#### C. Soul-Making Theodicy.

1. The virtues take time to develop (e.g. reliance on God; patience; forgiveness).
2. Humanity “learns” righteousness (Isa 26:9-11; Lk 13:4-5) through pain and suffering.
3. Humanity experiences \_\_\_\_\_ **FINITENESS** with pain and evil.

“Pain plants the flag of truth within a rebel fortress” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 120).

D. These theodicies are very helpful but not adequate in themselves.

#### IV. More Distinctively *Biblical* Perspectives on Evil Are Needed.

A. More focus on the \_\_\_\_\_ **BIBLICAL** God.

“The God in whom the nineteenth and twentieth centuries came to disbelieve had been invented only in the seventeenth century” (Alasdair MacIntyre, in *The Religious Significance of Atheism*, ed. A. MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur, 14; cited in A. McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God*, 101).

B. More appeal to distinctive Christian doctrines.

- “‘Christianity entered into the defense of the existence of the Christian God without appeal to anything Christian.’ Under the influence of Descartes, this approach to apologetics would prove to have devastating results” (McGrath, *Intellectuals Don't Need God*, 101; citing Michael Buckley, *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, 67).
- “Philosophical responses to evil must be placed within the broader theological framework of God’s revelation and work in Jesus Christ” (Paul Copan, *That’s Just Your Interpretation*, 92).
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C. More emphasis on what God \_\_\_\_\_ **HAS DONE**.

A. Plantinga: “As the Christian sees things, God does not stand idly by, cooling [sic] observing the suffering of his creatures. He enters into and shares our suffering” (cited by Copan, *Loving Wisdom*, 134; Plantinga, “A Christian Life Partially Lived,” in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (IVP, 1993, 71).

1. Sin is real and has consequences.
  - a. God’s righteousness demands righteousness.
  - b. Sin necessarily separates from God.
  - c. Spiritual death and physical death are consequences of sin.
2. God *has acted* to eliminate sin and evil!
  - a. God’s redemptive work throughout human history.
  - b. God’s incarnation and crucifixion.
    - (1) Based on Mt 26:9 (“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me”), it was apparently not possible for humanity to be redeemed without the death of Jesus.
    - (2) An all-loving and righteous God still could not forgive without the presence of suffering—even the death of His own Son.
  - c. God gives forgiveness for moral evil.
  - d. God gives grace to overcome temptation and evil.

“... more important than a logical answer to the problem of evil theoretically is a personal answer to the problem of evil practically. More important than an apologist is a Savior” (Kreeft & Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, 143).

D. Any suffering must be understood in the context of an eternal, righteous, and merciful \_\_\_\_\_ **JUDGMENT**.

1. Implications of “natural law”: An orderly universe cannot have a God “jumping in” every time someone is e.g. about to get killed or die of cancer.
2. E.g. Rom 8:18 “The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

## V. An Additional Consideration Regarding the Very Purpose for God's Creation.<sup>1</sup>

A. Satan is real and a “\_\_\_\_\_” **COSMIC STRUGGLE** with God has existed since *before* the creation of this physical universe.

1. **Is 14:12-15** (cf. Lk 10:18; Rev 12:4): “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, you who have weakened the nations! <sup>13</sup> But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north. <sup>14</sup> I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’” (NASV)
2. **Lk 13:16**; Mt 17:14-21 Satan & the demons inflict disease.
3. **2 Pet 2:4** “For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment.”
4. **Jude 6** “And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day.”
5. **Eph 6:12** “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.”
6. **I Jn 3:8** “<sup>8</sup> the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.”
7. **Mt 25:41** “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

B. How might be background help to explain a primary purpose for God creating this universe—a universe that He knew would have evil?

C. One suggestion: God is performing a **COSMIC** \_\_\_\_\_ **DEMONSTRATION**. He is demonstrating His righteousness and His mercy.

### 1. Rom 1:17

17 “For in it [the gospel] *the* righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith ....”

### 2. Rom 3:24-26 (cf. Rom 5:8; 9:17)

Rom 3:24 “being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; <sup>25</sup> whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup> for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Rom 5:8 “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Rom 9:17 “For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth.”

Ps 22:31 “They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it.”

### 3. I Pet 3:18-20

18 “For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; <sup>19</sup> in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits *now* in prison, <sup>20</sup> who once were disobedient, when the patience of

<sup>1</sup> This section is more speculative on my part. However, I find these considerations personally helpful as I wrestle with the reality of evil.

God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through *the* water.”

**4. Col 2:15**

15 “When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him.”

**5. Eph 3:8-10**

8 “To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, 9 and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; 10 in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly *places*. 11 *This was* in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

**6. Isa 26:9**

“When the earth experiences Your judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.”

D. Intriguing questions and some tentative answers:

1. Why did God give “pre-fallen” humanity the capacity to do evil?
2. If God could not have created a world with human freedom without inevitable sin, how can He create a “new” heaven and earth without the same inevitability?
3. Will we be “significantly free creatures” in heaven?

E. Summary: I believe that God created our universe as He did (with human free will and eventual evil and suffering) *for good reasons* and that these reasons are connected to His ultimate resolution to this “cosmic struggle” with Satan.