



## Introduction

- Theodicy seeks to justify a good and sovereign God in the face of evil
- Greek philosopher Epicurus posited that God is good, and God is powerful, yet evil exists
- Scottish philosopher David Hume said, “Is [God] willing to prevent evil but not able? This he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? From whence then is evil?”
- Many question God’s justice
- Some question God’s omniscience
- Some question God’s wisdom
- Some question whether God cares
- The fact that creatures question the character of God demonstrates the sin of the creatures

## Common Theodicies

1. Free-will defense. God is limited by, or chooses to be limited by, the free choices of those he has created.
2. Natural-law defense. When God created the world he created orderly, repeatable, and predictable laws to govern the world. Good results from the proper use of these laws, and bad results from the improper use of these laws.
3. Greater-good theodicy. God has multiple good purposes for evil existing in the world. The greater good outweighs the evil that the good overcomes.
4. Soul-making theodicy. Humans are born immature and must experience pain and adversity to mature.
5. Best-of-all-possible-worlds defense. An omnibenevolent God would only create the best possible world that could exist.
6. Divine-judgment defense. God’s punishment of evildoers results in pain and suffering, ultimately the pain and suffering of hell. However, good in the form of rehabilitation, deterrence, societal protection, and retribution results from judgment.

## Common Theodicies Examined

### Free-Will Defense

- Free-will is libertarian free will
- Compatibilism – human choice is compatible with divine determinism
- God is the one who works all things according to the purpose of his will (Ephesians 1:11)
- The free-will defense is based on an unbiblical understanding of free will.



### Natural-Law Defense

- God will not suspend his natural laws to prevent suffering because we would then have an unstable world in which our choices don't matter
- Presents God as imprisoned by his own laws
- Fails to take into account that the pre-fall world was stable without suffering, and the new heavens and the new earth will be stable without suffering
- Both the free-will defense and natural-law defense promote the general good

### Greater-Good Theodicy

- James 1:2–3
- Seems to present the idea that the ends justify the means – it makes God the author of evil
- Gratuitous evil is evil that seems pointless – to know for certain that an evil was gratuitous we would have to prove a universal negative
- If God always has a greater purpose for evil then we should not fight or pray against evil
  - Romans 3:8
  - Isaiah 53:10
  - Acts 2:23
- Only God knows the purpose for everything that happens
- Job 42:2

### Soul-Making Theodicy

- We must undergo trial and adversity to mature
- There must be adverse consequences to evil behavior
- Dismisses the notion that God created the world so we would live pain-free, blissful lives
  - 1 Peter 1:6–7
- God uses evil and adversity to grow those in Christ, but not those not in Christ
- Sometimes the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer

### Best-Of-All-Possible-Worlds Defense

- An omnibenevolent God would only create the best possible world that could exist. However, this world is imperfect and full of evil. Therefore, evil is necessary for this to be the best possible world
- Based on the essential attributes that God would have by necessity – because God is infinite and omniscient, he knows every possible scenario
- Never explains how evil specifically contributes to this being the best possible world
- We can conceive of a better world – the new heavens and the new earth
- Limits God's freedom – implies God had to create this world and only this world

### Divine-Judgment Defense

- Good results from the judgment of evil and evil-doers
- The good is the vindication of divine righteousness



- Salvation shows God's grace and mercy as a manifestation of his love, and damnation shows his justice as a manifestation of his righteousness
- Neither grace nor justice could be displayed without the entrance of evil in the Garden of Eden
- Not all instances of evil are the result of a specific sin
- Explains why evil should be punished but it cannot justify the existence of evil in the first place
- Nothing demands God allow evil so he can show forth his justice.

## God's Character

- God is transcendent so he must reveal himself for us to know him
- His transcendence is seen in his holiness – Isaiah 57:15
- God is sovereign – Daniel 4:34–35,
- God's sovereignty includes his eternal decree, his providence, and his omnipotence – Isaiah 46:8–11

## The Conditions for Evil

- God did not simply make evil possible, he willed that it would happen
  - God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden and commanded Adam not to eat its fruit
  - God could have prevented the serpent from tempting Adam and Eve
  - God could have made Adam and Eve with a nature that could not sin

## Greater-Glory Theodicy

Attempts to show where God's glory is most magnified – what brings God the greatest glory is the greatest good.

There are three premises and a conclusion.

1. God's ultimate purpose in freely creating the world is to supremely magnify the riches of his glory to all his creatures, especially human beings, who alone bear his image.
2. God's glory is supremely magnified in the atoning work of Christ, which is the sole means of accomplishing redemption for human beings.
3. Redemption is unnecessary unless human beings have fallen into sin.
4. Therefore, the fall of humanity is necessary to God's ultimate purpose in creating the world.

## Magnify His Glory

- Acts 17:24–25
- Psalm 115:1
- Psalm 19:1
- Isaiah 48:11
- Romans 11:36



- Romans 1:18–23

### Glorified in Christ

- John 17:1–5
- Philippians 2:8–11
- Acts 4:12
- Romans 8:19–21
- Ephesians 1:10

### Redemption is Unnecessary Without Sin

- Romans 9:22–23
- God wants to show the riches of his glory – God is glorified in his wrath, but the riches of his glory are seen in redemption
- Restored to a new and better state

### The Fall was Necessary

- The Fall was necessary to God’s ultimate purpose in creation
- There was no greater way to do it than through the redeeming work of Christ
- God ordained the Fall to supremely manifest his glory.

## Conclusion

Greg Welty in his book *Why Is There Evil in the World (and So Much of It)?* proposes two criteria for a faithful theodicy.

1. The first criterion says the good God pursues in the face of evil must be dependent on those evils. The good cannot come about unless the evil in question is necessary for those goods to occur. That is what we find in the greater-glory theodicy. The glory that God receives through redemption, which includes Christ’s incarnation, death, resurrection, exaltation, and return in glory to banish sin, death, evil, and the devil, is dependent on the Fall and its results.
  2. The second criterion says the good pursued in the face of evil must be weight and important enough to justify the evils that produce the good. What we find in Scripture is that even the most horrific evils are not outside of God’s purposes. In fact, the greatest evil, Christ’s death on the cross, produced the greatest good.<sup>1</sup>
- We are finite in our existence and our thinking so we cannot fathom the depths of God’s thoughts and actions
  - We can only rely on what he has revealed
  - God uses evil such to show forth transforming grace
  - The depth of God’s mercy could not be known without the horrors of evil

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Scott Christensen, *What About Evil?: A Defense of God’s Sovereign Glory* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2020), 287.



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- God is glorified in his justice and wrath
    - Romans 9:22
    - Revelation 19:1–4
  - Even though God ordained evil, he is not the author of evil. God is always and ever righteous and good.