

# UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PURPOSES FOR EVIL

## WHAT IS EVIL?

This is one of the fundamental questions we must face before addressing the 'problem' of evil. How does one determine if something evil? On what basis do we make moral judgments?

### 1. Secular Answers to Defining Good and Evil:

- a) Good is whatever benefits a society. Evil is whatever harms a society.
- b) Good and evil is a function of brain chemistry and evolves as humans evolve.
- c) Good is whatever makes a person happy. Evil is whatever fails to make a person happy.
- d) Good is what promotes psychological stability. Evil is what harms psychological stability.
- e) Good and evil are *generally* subjective evaluations people or societies makes.
- f) Good and evil are illusions. The world is meaningless and absurd.

### 2. Secular Answers to Determining what is Good and Evil:

- a) Good and evil is determined by societal norms or a particular era (e.g., Victorian Era).
- b) Good and evil is determined by genetics and human evolution.
- c) Good and evil is determined by each person's subjective opinions.
- d) Good and evil cannot be determined by any standard because the subjective nature of good and evil renders such evaluations meaningless. Thus, good and evil are illusions.

### 3. Biblical Answer to Defining and Determining Good and Evil

- Moral good represents the obligations morally responsible creatures have to objective commands and principles established and revealed to us by a holy (morally perfect) God). Moral evil represents the disregard of moral obligations by morally responsible creatures in violation of a holy God's moral standards (cf. Rom. 1:18-23, 32; 2:14-15; 3:9-20, 23). Good and evil are expressed in thoughts, words, and actions (Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28; 1 John 3:15).

### 4. Distinguishing between Moral and Natural Evil

- **Moral Evil** is that which is committed by personal moral creatures and causes pain and suffering for themselves and others.
- **Natural Evil** refers to adverse conditions in a fallen (cursed) world that causes pain and suffering. Natural evil includes the following:
  - Natural disasters (e.g., fires, storms, earthquakes, etc.)
  - Accidents and mishaps (due to adverse consequences of the laws of nature)
  - sickness and disease
  - Physical and mental handicaps
  - Physical toil

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## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM OF EVIL?

Throughout the ages, the notion that an all-powerful and all-good God allows evil to corrupt His good and pristine creation has been regarded as the greatest challenge for Christianity. The following is representative of the argument against God due to evil going as far back as Epicurus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and more famously by David Hume, a philosopher in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1. The Logical Problem of Evil

- (1) The God of the Bible is all-powerful (omnipotent).
- (2) The God of the Bible is all-good (omnibenevolent).
- (3) Yet, evil exists.
- (4) Therefore, the God of the Bible cannot possibly exist.

#### Hidden Assumptions in the Argument:

- (1) The all-powerful (omnipotent) God of the Bible **CAN** prevent evil.
- (2) The all-good (omnibenevolent) God of the Bible **WANTS** to prevent evil.
- (3) Yet, evil exists.

This leads to some preliminary conclusions:

- (4) Therefore, either God is not all-powerful (he **CANNOT** prevent evil)  
OR he is not all-good (he does **NOT WANT** to prevent evil).

The supposed conflict between these two conclusions lead to the same conclusion as before:

- (5) Therefore, the God of the Bible cannot possibly exist (because the Bible insists that God must be **BOTH** all-powerful and all-good).

### 2. The Problem of Extensive and Senseless Evil

Some think: Maybe God could be excused for small amounts of evil or minor evil infractions.  
BUT...

What about the Holocaust? The Nazis did not kill 60, 600 or 6,000 Jews. They killed 6,000,000.  
What about the horrific atrocities that seem to be completely senseless (gratuitous)?  
See Elie Wiesel's haunting Holocaust memoir entitled: *Night*.

### 3. The Personal Problem of Evil

For many people, evil is not a problem for their belief in God until tragedy strikes home. Even Biblical writers struggled with how God handles evil.

See Psalm 13:1-4; 44:22-25; 77:1-10; Lamentations 3:1-18

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## CONFRONTING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The Christian response to the problem of evil is known as *theodicy*. The word comes from the Greek words for "God" (*theós*) and "justice" (*dikē*). A theodicy provides a solution for the problem of evil that "justifies God"; defending His integrity and exonerating Him from the charge that He is morally culpable for evil. Christians have responded to the problem of evil in 2 basic ways. One response emphasizes the autonomy of man's free will and is associated with *Arminianism*. The other response emphasizes the sovereignty and glory of God and is associated with *Calvinism*.

## CALVINISM VS. ARMINIANISM

The 5 Points of Calvinism (TULIP)	The 5 Points of Arminianism
<b>Total (Thorough) Depravity</b> Sin has enslaved and corrupted every person. Humans are spiritually dead. They are unable and unwilling to repent and believe.	<b>Depraved but Free</b> Sin has infected every person, but their will is free. Humans are spiritually sick. They are able and may be willing to repent and believe.
<b>Unconditional Election</b> God chose the elect on the basis of His freedom and grace, not for anything seen in sinners.	<b>Conditional Election</b> God chose the elect on the basis of their foreseen faith that is freely exercised if they so choose.
<b>Limited (Definite) Atonement</b> Christ's death provides atonement only for the elect, definitively paying the price for their sin and guaranteeing their salvation.	<b>Universal (Unlimited) Atonement</b> Christ's death is a provisional atonement for the sins of the whole world which makes salvation possible for all but guaranteed for none.
<b>Irresistible (Efficacious) Grace</b> Saving grace is irresistible and efficaciously saves the elect. The Holy Spirit regenerates the hearts of the elect, enabling them to repent and believe.	<b>Resistible (Provisional) Grace</b> Saving grace is necessary but not sufficient to save sinners. It can be resisted and must be cooperated with by the free will of sinners.
<b>Perseverance of the Saints</b> God's grace preserves the elect and ensures they will persevere in faith till the end. None of the elect will finally fall away from the faith.	<b>Uncertain Perseverance of the Saints</b> God's grace cannot guarantee believers will not fall away from the faith. Not all will freely cooperate with God's grace to persevere in faith.

## THE FREE WILL DEFENSE (ARMINIANISM)

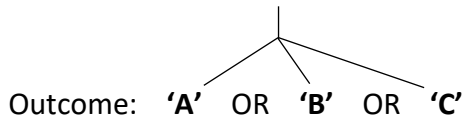
### *Defining Free Will*

- 1) For our choices to be free and morally responsible they must be made autonomously. They cannot be sufficiently determined by anyone or anything outside our independent freedom to make these choices.
- 2) Whatever choices we make, to be free and morally responsible, we must be able to have made any number of alternative choices under the same exact circumstances.

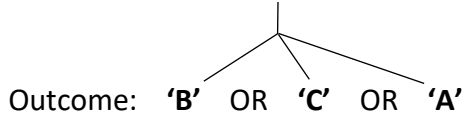
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## Arminian Freedom of Will

Circumstances 'A' can lead to:

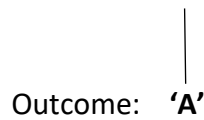


Circumstances 'B' can lead to:

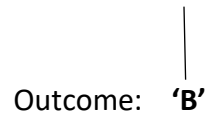


## Calvinist Freedom of Will

Circumstances 'A' can **ONLY** lead to:



Circumstances 'B' can **ONLY** lead to:



## ***Defining the Free Will Defense (FWD)***

- 1) Free will is necessary for acting good and being morally responsible for our actions. For example, if our love for God is genuine, then we must have equal freedom to hate God.
- 2) God must allow us to exercise this freedom of contrary choice otherwise we could not be blamed for acting evil nor praised for acting good.
- 3) When God grants us this moral freedom, he is taking a huge risk because of the possibility we will abuse this freedom and choose evil. But God is willing to take this risk because free will is so highly prized. The benefits outweigh any risks.
- 4) Therefore, evil is always the result of free will choices having gone in the wrong direction. God cannot be blamed for the evil choices his creatures risk making.

## ***Problems with the Free Will Defense***

- 1) ***Free Will Undermines God's Sovereignty.*** Psa. 103:19. FWD says if God interferes with our free will, then our freedom and responsibility is stripped. But God often intervenes. The question is, why doesn't He intervene all the time? See Matt. 2:12-19.
- 2) ***Free Will Undermines the Doctrine of Depravity.*** See John 8:34; Eph. 4:17-19; Rom. 3:10-18, 23; 8:7-8.
- 3) ***God does not have Free Will.*** Why/ how does God grant us something He doesn't have?
- 4) ***God could Design us to Choose Only Good.*** Such will be the case in the eternal state.
- 5) ***Free Will cannot Account for Divine Foreknowledge.*** If free will is true, then how could Jesus know about Peter's denials (Matt. 26:34)?
- 6) ***Free Will Allows Gratuitous Evil.*** "Gratuitous" means senseless/ meaningless/ devoid of any good reason for occurring. See Matt. 2:12-19 again.

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