



# The Resolved Church

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## The So Called "Problem of Evil" | Pastor Duane Smets

### I. A *Philosophical Response* (Natural Revelation)

- A. "God is dead!...The world seemed to me the work of a suffering and tormented God...Good and evil and joy and sorrow and I and You - I thought them coloured vapour before the creator's eyes. The creator wanted to look away from himself, so he created the world...This world, the eternally imperfect, the eternal and imperfect image of a contradiction - an intoxicating joy to its imperfect creator - that is what I once thought of the world. Thus I too once cast my deluded fancy beyond mankind, like all afterworldsmen...Ah brothers this God which I created was human work and human madness, like all gods!...There have always been many sickly people among those who invent fables and long for God: they have a raging hate for the enlightened man and for that youngest of virtues which is called honesty." ~ Friedrich Nietzsche

### II. The problem of evil stated in syllogism.

- A. If God is all-good he would destroy evil.
- B. If God is all-powerful he could destroy evil.
- C. Evil exists.
- D. Therefore, such a God does not exist

### III. Three "Solutions" - Eastern, Arminian/Pelagian, Augustinian/Calvinian/Edwardsean

- A. Wrong "solutions": a different type of God exists.
  1. Eastern "Solution" - Atman is brahman. Evil does not exist but is merely the working out of bad karma.
  2. Arminian/Pelagian "Solution" - God's goodness causes him to use his power not be all-powerful in the area of the human will which does evil.
- B. Responses to Wrong "Solutions"
  1. Collective critique of the Eastern and Arminian/Pelagian solution:
    - a. Both place the origin of evil in the experience of mankind, which does not adequately address how such a desire/intent/will/ability got there.
      - i. In the eastern position evil is present in all humanity because of the need to work of bad karma by realizing that there is no evil.
      - ii. In the Arminian/Pelagian position evil is present in all humanity only when mankind uses his power to act evil.
    - b. Both really deny proposition one and two and instead redefine omnibenevolence and omnipotence to the point that they lose their meaning.
      - i. God is all-good redefined by the eastern position - god is all-good because mankind is all-good and mankind is all-good because all mankind either is or is desiring to destroy evil.
      - ii. God is all-good redefined by the Arminian/Pelagian position - God's omnibenevolence is only all-goodness to mankind and not Himself, God's goodness is defines by how he treats humans.
      - iii. God is all-powerful redefined by the eastern position - God is all-powerful because mankind is God and possesses all-power if only they would realize it.

- iv. God is all-powerful redefined by the Arminian / Pelagian position - God's omnipotence is only all-power in areas where the human will does not have power.
  - 2. Further critique of Eastern position:
    - a. For the eastern position all sense-knowledge is deception therefore evil does not really exist.
      - i. This is self-refuting - such response/communication of such a response assumes there is logic in this statement, that there are words, mouths, people etc. i.e. you must accept the real existence of physical things in order to deny them.
      - ii. This is experientially untenable - no one could ever say that their suffering or the suffering of those they care about is not really happening and that they just need to realize that.
      - iii. The eastern position is stuck in a infinite chain of cause and effect regarding the origin of evil, no first cause. w/o a first cause they must deny cause and effect relationships in which meditation, realizing atman is brahman is not a possibility.
      - iv. If mankind was truly all-good it could not have the possibility to do evil because it would always choose against it. Bad karma is an impossibility.
      - v. If mankind was truly all-powerful he would have the power to choose against evil and never do it and he would end the cycle upon demand entering into nirvana.
  - 3. Further critique of the Arminian/Pelagian position
    - a. The Arminian/Pelagian position assumes that God's goodness is not first in regard to himself. Good must be whatever God determines it to be.
    - b. The Arminian/Pelagian position ends up making man more powerful than god because man has power to do something in which God does not (by his own volition) have the power to act against.
    - c. The Arminian/Pelagian position necessarily accepts dualism because it cannot accept God as the author/source of evil.
    - d. The Arminian/Pelagian position ignores the possibility that God could create and control evil for a good purpose for Himself.
    - e. The Arminian/Pelagian position necessarily makes good something that is outside of God Himself in which case there is something greater than God, which is truly God in terms creator/source/sustainer/author/cosmogony.
    - f. The Arminian/Pelagian position assumes a certain future in which any existence of evil attributed to God cannot be good.
    - g. The Arminian/Pelagian position also necessarily denounces God's omniscience because He cannot know the future free decision of humans, which he cannot interfere with, control, or influence.
- C. The correct Solution - An Elenctical Argument
  - 1. The "problem of evil" is a secondary question to why are things the way they are?
    - a. The answer to the problem of evil is found in the question: "if there is an all-powerful, all-good God then why does he ordain that evil be?"
    - b. The Eastern response and the Arminian/Pelagian response demonstrate the correctness of the "problem of evil" syllogism because they both deny God as the proper author of evil in which case the syllogism is correct, such a God does not exist.
  - 2. Wrong answers to why God created a world with evil:
    - a. God was obligated out of his goodness - how can the first and therefore free cause of all things have any obligation? Such an idea assumes something greater than God and if so then that is God and we are stuck with the same problem.

- b. God was bored or lonely - a perfect being with all power, all goodness, all knowledge etc. cannot by definition be insufficient in any way or he does not possess all the "all" qualities and there is than something greater than God (infinite regression again). Perfect love cannot be lonely.
  - c. God was suffering - suffering from what? if something outside of God than that is really God and we pose the same questions to that being/thing. If from His creation and their acts, then He is really not God because He didn't really know their evil acts would happen (not all-knowing) and is able to do anything about it (not all-powerful).
  - d. God wanted to be loved so He had to create the potential of evil so people could freely choose to love Him. Love isn't real if it isn't a free choice, God can't make us love Him.
    - i. The idea that the reason for God creating was a desire to be loved assumes that His reason for creating was that he was lonely (see II. C. 2. b. above).
    - ii. The idea that God merely created a potential of evil assumes that there are future events in which God does not know exactly what will happen, thus He is not all-knowing.
    - iii. The idea that free choice is intrinsic to love wholly discounts the fact that all love has a host of things, which influence and cause it to take place. The choice to love is caused.
    - iv. The idea that love is a purely a choice discounts that any act of love springs from an affection of love in the heart which is not a choice (you can't command your self feel things).
    - v. Humanity's only hope is that God would make us love Him because otherwise no one would. in addition, no one would ever pray for someone to become a Christian because that is a prayer that God would make them love Him.
  - e. Satan is the cause of evil not God.
    - i. This response is classic dualism. Resulting in two gods, Satan (the bad god) and God (the good god).
    - ii. There can only be one first cause of everything, which only leaves room for one God, not two or more.
    - iii. If this answer is accepted then Christianity must be placed within the same category of Zoroastrianism and Gnosticism, which embrace a cosmic battle between good and evil.
3. The right answer to why God created a world with evil begins with the reason God created at all.
- a. Wrong reasons why God created at all.
    - i. God was deficient in some way and therefore needed to create.
      - God's sufficiency begins and ends in His own pleasure and ability of self-activity, therefore whatever God does shows that He is not deficient because He can act (has the power to) and does act (delights in choosing to act).
    - ii. God created for humans for themselves
      - No human being would ever ascribe the purpose and source of the whole universe as themselves individually, that is, name themselves the first cause. Creation reflects creator and therefore owes its existence and purpose to Him. in addition, whatever enjoyment a human may experience is also a reflection of God's creative power.
  - b. Right reason why God created: for His own glory.

- i. God creating for His own glory is God, in His ability and right to do anything that pleased Himself, felt like enjoying Himself in doing so.
- ii. Support:
  - 1st. God by definition is first cause (cosmological argument), therefore, nothing precedes Him and thus there are no requirements/restrictions upon Him.
  - 2nd. God as the first cause therefore possesses all greatest qualities, it is proper for such a being to enjoy the use of all His qualities, the effects of which all naturally reflect back to Him.
- iii. Objection: God creating for His own glory is selfish and selfishness is bad/wrong/sinful etc.
 

Response: the problem with selfishness is because it improperly ascribes worth where it ought not. if God is truly all-powerful, all-knowing, everywhere present, and all-good, all to the infinite degree in everything then it is the most right and proper thing to for Him to value/glorify Himself above all things (the one being whom self-centeredness is proper).

#### IV. An Existential Nod

- A. Existentialism as a World-view Fails
  - 1. It is self-refuting. It claims there is no objective truth, that truth is individual yet that claim itself is an objective claim.
  - 2. Moral actions are purely based one's own subjective feelings which cannot provide for any consistency in behavior nor any relationship with other humans when their feelings differ.
- B. The development of existentialism as a philosophy responding to the neglect of human emotion/feelings demonstrates the need for objective positions to take into account the weight and importance of human experience. In regard to the problem of evil particularly, suffering.
- C. The failure of the eastern position and Arminian/Pelagian position in its attempt to deal with human suffering
  - 1. The Eastern position merely tells the person suffering that they simply need to forget it about it. Suffering is only in the mind. Free yourself by realizing that atman is brahman, that is you are everything and everything is you.
 

This position is not only self-refuting because it acknowledges real suffering in its very claim, but it is also experientially degrading for it intentionally requires one to inflict more pain on themselves and to disregard the pain of others.
  - 2. The Arminian/Pelagian position tells the person that their suffering is real but that suffering is because we live in a fallen world where natural disasters and the sinful actions of humans causes pain to people, which are all out of God's control because of His supposed inability to interfere with free will and a fallen world.
 

This position is experientially troublesome because it tells the person that their suffering is pointless/purposeless/not-intended, which is not comforting but despairing. Such an out-of-control world depicts God as a weak being whose hands are tied, longing to do something but can't, and didn't foresee all these sufferings happening. This solution neglects the deep pain of human suffering.
- D. The Augustinian/Calvinian/Edwardsean solution to the so-called "problem of evil" presented above, takes human suffering seriously.
  - 1. Human suffering is real and extremely painful.

2. Suffering demonstrates in a small picture the great offensiveness of despising and breaking the universal moral law of God, which all humans have participated in.
3. Suffering shows that God truly is all-good because of His intensive infliction of justice in response to defying His moral requirements.
4. God understands the pain of human suffering most intimately because of His own participation in it (experienced through the God-man Jesus Christ).
5. Human suffering is intended/ordained by God for a great and meaningful purpose, which overshadows and outweighs the pain of suffering with the hope incomparable exceeding joy, which may not be experienced w/o suffering.
6. Response to the suffering of others... sacrosanct.

#### I. A Scriptural Response (Specific Revelation)

- A. "The Lord hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." ~ Solomon Son of David (Prov. 16:4)
- B. "I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God...that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create evil, I am the LORD, who does all these things." ~ Isaiah the Son of Amoz (Is. 45:5-7)
- C. "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And *He did so* in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory..." ~ Paul of Tarsus (Rom. 9:22-23)

#### II. God's control over all things including evil

##### A. Natural Evil

##### 1. Life and Death

- a. Job 1:21;2:10 "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD...Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?' In all this Job did not sin with his lips."
- b. Deut 32:39 "See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal; And there is no one who can deliver from My hand."
- c. 2 Sam 12:15,18 "So Nathan went to his house. Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah's widow bore to David, so that he was *very sick*... Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died."
- d. James 4:14-15 "Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, 'If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that.'"

##### 2. Disease

- a. Ex. 4:11 And the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Or who makes *him* dumb or deaf, or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?"
- b. Satan always involve but power not decisive, cannot act without God's permission or God's inciting
  - i. Acts 10:38 "*You know of* Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and *how* He went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him.
  - ii. Job 2:3-7 And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause." And Satan answered

the LORD and said, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. "However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face." So the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head...

- c. God's Purpose with Satan
    - i. Js 5:11 Behold, we count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful.
    - ii. 2 Cor 12:7 ...to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me--to keep me from exalting myself!
  - d. No Reason to Believe Satan Ever out of God's Control
    - i. Mark 1:27 And they were all amazed, so that they debated among themselves, saying, "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him."
    - ii. Lk 4:36 And amazement came upon them all, and they *began* discussing with one another saying, "What is this message? For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out."
3. Natural Disasters
- a. Ps. 104:4 He makes the winds His messengers, Flaming fire His ministers.
  - b. Ps. 105:16 And He called for a famine upon the land; He broke the whole staff of bread.
  - c. Ps. 135:7 He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; Who makes lightnings for the rain; Who brings forth the wind from His treasuries.
  - d. Ps 147:18 He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.
  - e. Ps 148:8 Fire and hail, snow and clouds; Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
  - f. Mk 4:41 And they became very much afraid and said to one another, "Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"
4. Destructive Animals
- a. 2 Kings 17:25 And it came about at the beginning of their living there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them which killed some of them.
  - b. Dan 6:22 "My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths..."
5. All Other Calamities
- a. Is 45:7 The One forming light and creating darkness, Causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD who does all these.
  - b. Amos 3:6 If a trumpet is blown in a city will not the people tremble? If a calamity occurs in a city has not the LORD done it?
  - c. Job 42:2 "I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted."
  - d. Dan 4:25 ...the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes.
  - e. Eph 1:11 ...according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will..."
6. No Chance or Luck

- a. Prov 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.

Charles Spurgeon comments, "I believe that every particle of dust that dances in the sunbeam does not move an atom more or less than God wishes – that every particle of spray that dashes against the steamboat has its orbit, as well as the sun in the heavens – that the chaff from the hand of the winnow is steered as the stars in their courses. The creeping of an aphid over the rosebud is as much fixed as the march of the devastating pestilence – as the fall of leaves from a poplar as the fully ordained tumbling of an avalanche."

## 7. Fatalism

- a. Stoic Fatalism - there is no reason to ever do anything because everything is already and always preordained.
- b. Biblical providence - God's purposeful preordination accomplished through His governing the decisions of men.
  - i. 1 Pet 2:8 The stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.
  - ii. Phil. 2:12-12 ...work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

(This is a clear example of the biblical doctrine of *compatibilism*: that the will of man is a compatible one which make decisions and choices and yet God governs those choices both through His ordering of external circumstances and through His governing of the heart.)

- c. Spurgeon on Fatalism: "What is fate? Fate is this – whatever is, must be. But there is a difference between that and Providence. Providence says, whatever God ordains, must be, but the wisdom of God never ordains anything without a purpose. Everything in this world is working for some great end. Fate does not say that... There is all the difference between fate and Providence that there is between a man with good eyes and a blind man."

## B. Moral Evil - God purposefully governs the sinful choices of people.

1. Gen 50:20 And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.
2. Ps 105:17 He sent a man before them, Joseph, *who* was sold as a slave.
3. Acts 4:27-28 For truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur.
4. Rom 9:17-18 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "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." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires.
5. Prov 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, But the counsel of the LORD, it will stand.
6. Prov 20:24 Man's steps are *ordained* by the LORD, How then can man understand his way?
7. Prov 21:1 The king's heart is *like* channels of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever He wishes.
8. Jer 10:23 I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself; Nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps.
9. Eph 1:11-12 ...we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the

end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

### III. Is God the Author of Sin?

#### A. God cannot Sin.

1. Deut. 32:4 The Rock, his work is perfect; For all his ways are justice: A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, Just and right is he.
2. Mt 5:48 ...your heavenly Father is perfect.
3. Ps 145:17 The LORD is righteous in all his ways

#### B. Whatever God does is good and is for His glory.

##### 1. For Good

- a. Gen 1:31 "And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.
- b. Ge 50:20 "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good."
- c. 2 Chron 17:3 Truly He is good, truly His lovingkindness is everlasting."
- d. Ps 145:9 The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.
- e. Ps 100:5 For the LORD is good; His lovingkindness is everlasting, And His faithfulness to all generations.
- f. Jer 33:9 'And it shall be to Me a name of joy, praise, and glory before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear of all the good that I do for them, and they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the peace that I make for it.'
- g. Ro 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

##### 2. For His Glory - All Creation

- a. Ps 19:1 "The heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."
- b. Is 42:8,11 "I will not give my glory to another."
- c. Rev 14:7 " Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."
- d. Col 1:16 "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things were created through him and for him."

##### 3. For His glory - Distinctly the People of God

- a. Is 43:7 "everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."
- b. Is 43:21 "The people whom I formed for Myself, Will declare My praise."
- c. 2 Cor 4:15 "For all things *are* for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."
- d. Jn 17:24 "Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me before the foundation of the world.
- e. Eph 1:11-12 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all thing according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory."

#### C. Never directly does God sin, for indeed he cannot, but He established a world and creatures where sin will necessarily come. In this sense He is the author of evil.

1. God often in the Bible expresses His will one way and then acts to bring about a different state of affairs. Historically theologians have understood these two wills

in God calling one the “will of decree” or “sovereign will” and the other “will of command” or “moral will.”

- a. God opposed hatred toward His people (Gen 12:3) and then ordained hatred in Egypt (Ps105:25).
- b. God hardens Pharaoh’s heart (Ex 4:21), then commands Him to let the people go (Ex 5:1; 8:1).
- c. God incites David to take a census (2 Sam 24:1) then convicts David of sinning (2 Sam 24:10).
- d. Ex 20:14; & 2 Sam 12:11 God opposes adultery then ordains Absalom’s.
- e. Romans 13:1; 1 Sam15:23; & 1 Ki 12:15-16 God forbids rebelling and insubordination against the king then ordains Jeroboam and 10 tribes to rebel Rehoboam.
- f. Ex 20:13; Act 4:28; Is 53:10 God opposes murder but murders His Son.
- g. 1 Tim 2:4; 1 Cor 1:26-30; 2 Tim 2:26 God Desires all saved but only effectually calls some.

D. Edwards—“Sin is not the fruit of any positive agency or influence of the most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of His action and energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the want of His influence.”

E. Edwards—“God may hate a thing as it is in itself, and considered simply as evil and yet...it may be His will it should come to pass, considering all the consequences....God doesn’t will sin as sin for the sake of anything evil; though it be His pleasure so to order things, that He permitting, sin will come to pass; for the sake of the great good that by His disposal shall be the consequence. His willing to order things so that evil should come to pass, for the sake of the contrary good, is no argument that He doesn’t hate evil, as evil: and if so, then it is no reason why He may not reasonably forbid evil as evil, and punish it as such.”

#### IV. Why does God ordain that evil be?

A. Edwards—“Is it a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God’s glory should be complete; that is, that all the parts of His glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionally effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested, and another not at all...Thus it is necessary, that God’s awful majesty, His authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God’s glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also of His goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay they could scarcely shine forth at all. If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God’s holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in His providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God’s grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness soever He bestowed, His goodness would not be so much prized and admired... So evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which He made the world; because the creature’s happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and the sense of His love. And if the knowledge of Him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionally imperfect.

B. Piper—“God is more glorious for having conceived and created and governed a world like this with all its evil. The effort to absolve Him by denying His foreknowledge of sin or by denying His control of sin is a fatal error and a great dishonor to His Word and His wisdom...If you would see God’s glory and savor His glory and magnify His glory in this world, do not remain wavering before the Sovereignty of God in the face of great evil. Take His book in your hand, plead for His Spirit of illumination and humility and trust, and settle this matter so that you might be unshakable in the day of your own calamity!”