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Why William Rowe's Argument from Natural Evil Fails

Douglas Taylor

Liberty University, dtaylor116@liberty.edu

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LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Why William Rowe's Argument from Natural Evil Fails

Submitted to the Evangelical Theological Society

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by

Doug Taylor

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INTRODUCTION

The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.¹

It is safe to say that there have been debates over the existence of God for at least the past three and a half millennia. More recently there have been those who would have the theologian abandon their holding to any supreme spiritual deity in favor of perhaps some lesser being, if not the outright denial of any immortal now or ever having existed. If the Bible is to be considered an accurate reflection of history in general, and God's interaction with mankind in particular, then it is safe to say that people denying God's existence is nothing new. The atheist has suggested that they have greater insight into reality than the theologian, with the existence of evil being paramount to their argument, and if such allegation were found true, then it is the theologian gushing folly. It is here that the atheist would claim the theologian to be pursuing a phantom, an apparition, second cousin to Harvey the Rabbit.² The existence of evil is not an indictment against the existence of the God of Christianity. While much will be demonstrated using moral evil as a point of examination, this paper shall seek to demonstrate that the challenge brought by William Rowe and his argument from natural evil to lack viability.

¹ All Scripture references shall be from *The Holy Bible: New International Version*. 1984 (Pr 15:2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont (Toronto: Columbia Pictures, 1994). In the movie, Andy was a prisoner who was assisting the Warden in laundering money. When questioned by another inmate about fear of getting caught, Andy responded that the "person" who "owned" the bank accounts was simply someone made up out of his own head.

One significant challenge presented to the theist for the past sixty years or so has been to answer the question of evil. Admittedly, the challenge has not been restricted to the referenced time, as can be seen by the teachings of Epicurus.

You see, therefore, that we have greater need of wisdom on account of evils; and unless these things had been proposed to us, we should not be a rational animal. But if this account is true, which the Stoics were in no manner able to see, that argument also of Epicurus is done away. God, he says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?³

Thus, the question raised for the theist is that if God exists, and if He is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good, then why does evil exist? This line of argumentation has been carried forward by the likes of William Rowe who presents the following syllogism as a modern expression of Epicurus' thesis.

There exists instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.⁴

This paper shall attempt to answer both Epicurus and Rowe through a response which moves beyond a defense and provides a plausible explanation for five key questions: 1) Why is there

³ Lactantius. *A Treatise on the Anger of God* (W. Fletcher, Trans.). In A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe (Eds.), . *Vol. 7: Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, and Liturgies* (A. Roberts, J. Donaldson & A. C. Coxe, Ed., 1886). The Ante-Nicene Fathers (271). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

⁴ William L. Rowe, "The Problem Of Evil And Varieties Of Atheism," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford Press, 1990), 127-128.

any evil at all; 2) Why are there the types and kinds of evils that there are; 3) Why is there the amount of evil that there is; 4) Why is there the particular evils that there are; and 5) Why does God allow moral evils, and, natural evils, as He does? It shall be the goal of this work to attempt to follow a methodological approach espoused by Dr. Michael Licona whereby five key questions are asked of any proposed response to those critical of Christianity. The responses offered in this theodicy should be able to demonstrate explanatory scope, explanatory power, plausibility, be less ad hoc in nature, and should ultimately aid in illuminating other areas of interest as a result of the theodicy.⁵

⁵ Michael Licona. "Resurrection Course Handout, Apologetics 537" (lecture, Luther Rice Seminary, Lithonia, GA, January 2008). Dr. Licona's lecture was focused on the historical examination of the evidence for the existence, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. While the methodology presented was designed specifically for use in examining distant historical events, it appears completely suitable and appropriate for use in the development of a theodicy.

BUILDING THE THEODICY

The Bible shall be considered as viable source information, but the Bible shall not be used alone, for to do so may bring the charge of a self-referential theodicy. The Bible shall therefore be used in conjunction with five additional strata in building a theistic response to the atheistic charge. These five additional elements shall include the Free Will Defense, The Greater Good Defense, the Soul Building Theodicy, CORNEA, and Natural Law.

Culpability

The Bible reveals the first known act of moral evil committed by humanity. Turning to the disobedience of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3), a couple of key points need to be made. First, from an evangelical Christian perspective, both Adam and Eve made a conscious choice with respect to what their own actions would be with concerning their obedience to what God.

Likewise, the same can be said for their immediate progeny. Of Genesis 4 Ross says,

The subject of chapter 4 is the spread of godless society. Here is man in rebellion against God—man who did not obey and who destroyed the godly and denied his responsibility and culpability for it. The ungodly here are portrayed as living on in the world (with a protective mark of grace; cf. comments on v. 15) without being saved. Their sense of guilt was eased by their cultural development and their geographical expansion.⁶

Hence, and in considering this thought, it is interesting to note that Ross establishes the clear link between the conditions of humanity, *vis-à-vis* the presence of moral evils, and the choices made by the very same individuals who have become both the subjects and objects of that same evil. Some have argued that if God created this world and humans, He could have done so without the

⁶ A. P. Ross, Genesis. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck, Ed.) (Ge 4:1–16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985.

inclusion of moral evil. Plantinga demonstrates that such a theory is simply untenable, and offers the following rebuttal to the hypothesis:

If a person *S* is free with respect to a given action, then he is free to perform that action and free to refrain; no causal laws and antecedent conditions determine either that he will perform the action, or that he will not. It is within his power, at the time in question, to perform the action, and within his power to refrain.⁷

Consequently, according to Plantinga, man is completely culpable for not only the existence, but also the continuance of moral evils. As to the argument that God could simply have created us to only do morally good actions, Henry notes:

While the finite humans created by God are not inescapably wicked they are nonetheless structured with a capacity not only for reason and moral will but also for emotion and desire and with diverse qualities of personhood. Feinberg infers from this fact that God cannot eradicate moral evil without also eliminating the kind of human creature he has made. Unlike some moral philosophers who locate evil's ultimate source in human free will, Feinberg presses behind volition to "human desires" as its source. Appealing to James 1:13–15 ("He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each ... is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin ..." NAS; cf. Matt. 5:27 f.), Feinberg contends that not God but human desire is the cause of sin; although not intrinsically wicked, human desire is "the ultimate source of moral evil" because it permits its objects to become a lure to sin. It should be noted, however, that what Scripture affirms about the human heart as the seat of human evil is not contrary to the larger perspective that evil's ultimate source lies not in, but beyond man.⁸

Accordingly, and as a primary point, moral evil is not something extant to man, rather it is a condition generated by the very subject that ultimately becomes the object of that evil. This point would appear to be in alignment with Strong's opinion related to how Plato understood morality.

Without regard for Plato's view of matter being evil,

Plato (430–348) held that morality is pleasure in the good, as the truly beautiful, and that knowledge produces virtue. The good is likeness to God,—here we have glimpses of an extra-human goal and model. The body, like all matter, being inherently evil, is a hindrance to the soul,—here we have a glimpse of hereditary depravity. But Plato "reduced moral evil to the category of natural evil." He failed to recognize God as creator and

⁷ Alvin Plantinga, "God, Evil, And The Metaphysics Of Freedom," in *The Problem of Evil*, ed. Marilyn Mccord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford Press, 1990), 84-85.

⁸ C. F. H. Henry, (1999). *Vol. 6: God, Revelation, and Authority* (270). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

master of matter; failed to recognize man's depravity as due to his own apostasy from God; failed to found morality on the divine will rather than on man's own consciousness.⁹

Subsequently, it would appear inescapable that if one were to ask as Epicurus, "Whence comes evil," man need not look beyond himself. There is no need for a God who created evil or performed evil – man has and continues to demonstrate his full capacity for being the source of moral evil.

In consideration of the positions as proffered by Plantinga and Henry, coupled with what has been disclosed through the pages of Scripture, it is not possible to have a substantively free individual, meaning an individual who has the ability to choose the action they will or will not perform, while at the same time providing a system whereby one may only choose to execute those behaviors which are morally good. First, and perhaps too obvious to warrant discussion, is the fact that a choice of one is no choice. Second, if there are choices, then it would appear reasonable to believe that not all choices are equal, therefore if one may choose, then the door is open for possible choices that include morally neutral or negative outcomes. Therefore, based on the presence of free will and the ability to make choices, it is offered that negative outcomes are a necessary part of the system and do not serve as an indictment against the existence of God.

Growth

Why, then, might God continue to allow evil to exist? Understanding that the evangelical still subscribes to the omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God, might there be a purpose in God allowing the continuance of moral evil? Such has been the point of those who purport a Soul Building Theodicy such as Hick and Yandell. Returning to the earlier argument that how one

⁹ A. H. Strong. *Systematic Theology*. (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907) 183.

views eschatology will by necessity impact their understanding of life now, the evangelical view would reason that all will have eternal life, with the difference being qualitative.

Through man's uncompelled responses and voluntary cooperation, John Hick says, God tries to bring the mankind that he first omnipotently created from animal life (*bios*) to the higher destiny of eternal life (*zōē*) exemplified in Jesus Christ (*Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 293 f.). Hick thinks that God could have made humans who always act morally toward other humans; but not so that they always respond to God in faith, trust, love, obedience and worship (*ibid.*, p. 310). Human life, Hick maintains, "cannot be perfected by divine fiat"; the world is a disciplinary arena in which "personal life is essentially free and self-directing" (*ibid.*, p. 291).¹⁰

It has already been shown that in order for one to be substantively free there must be the ability to choose, so Hick is incorrect in his assessment of God's ability in this matter, for to make mankind such that he always responds favorably toward God would be akin to forced love, which is not love. There must be another answer. In reading further, Yandell suggests that character is built through this ongoing struggle with moral evil. "A further consideration, adds Yandell, is God's use of the struggle between good and evil to build human character."¹¹

What then may be shown from Scripture to support the idea that the presence of moral evil may be used by God to build the soul of the individual? Three examples are offered below.

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men. (Lk 2:52)

This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live²⁰ and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Dt 30:19-20)

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.³⁰ For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Mt 11:29-30)

The first example is from Jesus' personal growth. Space prevents full examination, but Jesus, being fully God and fully man, would have lived in a fallen world where moral evil

¹⁰ C. F. H. Henry. *Vol. 6: God, Revelation, and Authority*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999) 276-277.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

existed, and yet we see that He grew in favor not only with God, but also with men. The second example, from Deuteronomy, indicates that God gives man the right to choose whether to follow Him, and further outlines the corollaries of either choice. Finally, Jesus Himself says that our soul will find rest when we follow Him.

It is inescapable based on Scripture to see anything other than the idea that God wants man to choose to follow Him, and to experience personal growth as a result of that following. It is also impossible to miss the fact that because man gets to choose, and because man may choose to take a path other than following God, he is fully culpable with regard to the decisions he makes. Thus, it would appear to be a reasonable conclusion that if a man may choose to turn away from God, then God may use those circumstances, i.e. moral evils, to cause a man to reconsider his views and course, choosing instead to turn back to God. This would appear to be the message from Deuteronomy. Notwithstanding such attempts by God to have man desire to turn to Him, and again considering man to be substantively free, man ultimately gets to make the choice of whether or not to follow God, experience the building and growth of his soul, or to reject God altogether. It is recognized that this line of argumentation relies heavily on the Bible, but if God does not exist, and if the Bible is but a myth, and given the significant gaps as offered by modern Judaism and Islam as the two other theistic systems, and then the other six world views, it is suggested that there is no other basis upon which to believe that man may have a soul or that said soul should need to be built. For if such were the case, there would be nothing after death – no consciousness of the eternal darkness – so there would be nothing for which to build the soul. Given the space limitations of this work, it is simply not possible to go into detail with how each of the other six world views fail at this time.

Virtue

From the Christian point of view God is seen as an infinitely powerful and good Creator and sustainer of the world. He created man with free choice and has allowed evil for a good purpose, that is, to ultimately defeat it and to achieve the greater good.¹²

If Geisler is correct, and there is some greater good to be found in the existence of moral evil, would it be appropriate to state that in all cases of evil, and for all persons, that there is some greater good that may be found? The answer is a solid ‘maybe.’ Consider the words of Jesus:

But I tell you: Love your enemies^b and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. (Mt 5:44-45)

Here we see that the follower of God is actually seeking good for those who stand against the Christian. There is a clear distinction made between those who would follow God and those who would not. If the above is to be taken literally, then there is reason to believe that if one is alive, one receives good, even though evil exists. The morning sun rises, and rain for crops falls.

While this is a general maxim, one may also appeal to natural law to explain the sunrise and rain.

Consider Paul:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,^a who^b have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom

¹² N. L. Geisler, & P. D. Feinberg. *Introduction to Philosophy: A Christian Perspective* (286). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980.

^b Some late manuscripts *enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you*

^a Some manuscripts *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God*

^b Or *works together with those who love him to bring about what is good—with those who*

God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”^c

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^d neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Ro 8:28-39)

Based on Paul’s writing to the Romans, it would appear that there is a clear line of demarcation between the one who is a follower of Christ and all others. The use of “all things” indicates that it is inclusive of all aspects and events in the life of the believer. There is no indication in this passage, explicit or implicit, to indicate that such a promise is made to the atheist, agnostic, or the one who is simply indifferent. Therefore, based on the text it may be stated that in all cases of moral and natural evil, there is indeed some greater good for the Christian, but such may not be the case for a non-believer.

Additionally, it is important to note that once again we must turn to an eschatological framework when trying to understand exactly when all of these events will result in good. There is nothing in the text to indicate that all good things are being withheld until the eternal states, and likewise there is nothing indicating that there cannot be temporal good to come following moral evil.

For those who would consider this to be simply a theoretical claim to good, the question that must be asked is that if there is some greater good, is it reasonable to believe that we would always be able to identify that good? Not according to Wykstra. Because God is omnipotent,

^c Psalm 44:22

^d Or *nor heavenly rulers*

omniscient, and wholly good, there is a distinct difference between the mind of God and that of man. From this Wykstra draws out what he calls the Condition of Reasonable Epistemic Access (CORNEA), and explains CORNEA as:

On the basis of his seeing no God-justifying good served by the fawn's suffering, Rowe is entitled to claim "It appears that there is no such good" only if it is reasonable for Rowe to believe that, given his cognitive faculties and the use he has made of them, if the fawn's suffering served such a good, he would likely see (have epistemic access to) it.¹³

So according to Wykstra, when one wants to assess whether or not there was indeed some greater good that came from an evil event, and especially when it would seem no good could possibly have come from the event, one must ask the question of whether we would even have the ability to know the difference. Again turning to eschatology, the evangelical Christian thought is that evil will ultimately be overcome at the end of time and through the work of an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God. Additionally, based on the Bible, all things work together for good for the believer in Jesus. Nothing in either of these points provides mankind with epistemic knowledge to be able to identify exactly what those goods are. Therefore, it is plausible to believe that it may indeed be difficult if not impossible to identify a greater good in every case of evil. To use such difficulty as an indictment against God or to claim that God simply does not exist is to argue from silence, or worse yet, from ignorance.

One thing is certain, the atheist cannot press his claim that evil is *ultimately* unjustifiable—which is what he must do to eliminate the existence of God via evil. For if some evil is ultimately unjust in this world, then there must be some ultimate standard of justice beyond this world. All injustice presupposes a standard of justice by which it is judged to be not-just. And an ultimate injustice demands an ultimate standard of justice. But this brings us right back to God, the ultimate standard of justice beyond the world. In short, the only way to disprove God via the problem of evil is to posit God as an ultimate moral standard of

¹³ Stephen John Wykstra, "Rowe's Noseeum Arguments from Evil" in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 129.

justice beyond the world. In this event, if atheism were true, it would be false; its argument turns out to be self-defeating.¹⁴

Noting Geisler above, and how this relates to the search for a greater good, the question may be asked why the atheist is even concerned with the case of evil. For if there is no God, and if mankind is here by blind evolutionary forces, then there is no basis from which to complain about the evil – it would simply be nature taking its course. If there is no God and evil exists, there is no justification in asking why since this would be indicative evolution at its best. Clearly this does not rest well with the atheist, so even they must know there is more.

¹⁴ N. L. Geisler. *Christian Apologetics*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 227-228.

NATURAL EVIL

Many solid theologians have addressed the matter of moral evil, and it is not the intent of this work to revisit what others have already accomplished. However, this writer has found little if anything signifying a rebuttal to William Rowe's argument from natural evil. Rowe suggests a hypothetical scenario whereby lightning strikes some remote area of forest, a fire begins, a fawn is burned, and after days of suffering dies.¹⁵ It is at this point that Rowe argues that there is no greater good that may be identified justifying the suffering of the fawn. Here this writer submits that Rowe is guilty of a significant error in how he assesses his fictional scenario. For if one is to understand whether or not there is some greater good, Rowe cannot appeal to the end result without evaluating the scenario he both constructed and offered as a whole. Thus, it is proposed that one must look to the root cause of the incident, namely the burning of the fawn, and then decide based on the root cause if there were indeed some greater good.

In this case, Rowe appeals to the pain and suffering of the fawn. But what was the source of the pain and suffering? It was as a result of flesh being burned by the fire. The forest, however, did not spontaneously combust, so where did the fire come from in the first place? Lightning struck in a forest. It is suggested that this is indeed the root cause¹⁶ of the proffered

¹⁵ William L. Rowe, "The Problem of Evil & Some Varieties of Atheism" in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. by Daniel Howard-Snyder (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 4.

¹⁶ It is important to note that this writer has been trained in the use of the ABS Root Cause Methodology and has extensive experience investigating and identifying root causes for a host of injuries and incidents in the workplace. While Rowe would like to start with the suffering and ultimate death of the fawn, such a move is inappropriate and fails to find the root cause. The fawn was burned because of a forest fire, but lightning caused the fire. It is critical, then, to ensure that any assessment of the forest fire and suffering of the fawn include the lightning

scenario, as without the initial lightning strike, Rowe has no story to tell. Is it possible that there may be some greater good that comes from the discharge of lightning in the atmosphere?

According to the National Severe Storms Laboratory, a division of NOAA, there is.

The earth benefits from lightning in several ways. First, lightning helps the Earth maintain electrical balance. The Earth is recharged by thunderstorms. The Earth's surface and the atmosphere conduct electricity easily—the Earth is charged negatively and the atmosphere, positively. There is always a steady current of electrons flowing upwards from the entire surface of the Earth. Thunderstorms help transfer the negative charges back to Earth (lightning is generally negatively charged). Without thunderstorms and lightning, the earth-atmosphere electrical balance would disappear in 5 minutes. Lightning also makes ozone-producing chemicals.¹⁷

Based on the NOAA information, it is argued that the existence of lightning is indeed beneficial and serves a greater good for all life on earth. It is possible for Rowe to alter his scenario such that a passing motorist carelessly tosses out a cigarette, but that change would also move the example from the realm of natural evil to one of moral evil. Rowe may choose to change the scenario in light of identifying the root cause and the necessity of lightning, but at this time we need not speculate as to how he might alter this example. One point is certain; the lightning in and of itself cannot be classified as an evil. This idea is consistent with Augustine of Hippo.

I can conceive of waters without muddy commotion; but without settled continuity of parts no material form is an object of thought or of sensation in any way. Therefore even these muddy waters could not exist without the good which was the condition of their material existence. As to the reply that these evil things cannot be taken from such natures, I rejoin that neither can the good things be taken away. Why, then, should you call these things natural evils, on account of the evil things which you suppose cannot be taken away, and

strike. If one finds the true root cause, and then is able to remove that cause, it is reasonable to believe that the injury or incident would not be repeatable. It is possible, however, that the true root cause cannot be removed without causing greater harm.

¹⁷ "National Severe Storms Laboratory: Severe Weather 101: Lightning FAQ," NOAA, accessed July 4, 2014, www.nssl.noaa.gov/education/svrwx101/lightning/faq.

yet refuse to call them natural good things, on account of the good things which, as has been proved, cannot be taken away?¹⁸

It has been suggested that this proposed response, namely by relying on the root cause analysis as the means to identify the actual cause of the hypothetical fire, might be guilty of causal overdetermination. While the writer believes that to employ causal overdetermination in this case is unwarranted, the following rationale is held loosely and subject to correction.

Question: What are the causal relata? When the cue ball knocks the nine ball into the corner pocket, what are the terms of this causal relation? An account of the causal relata should reveal what sort of thing they are, how many of them there are, and what job each does. In short, it should reveal their category, number, and role.

Options: The standard view of the causal relata is that they are of the category of event, and that their number is two, in the roles of cause and effect. So on the standard view, when the cue ball knocks the nine ball into the corner pocket, there is said to be an (actual) event e1 of the cue ball striking the nine ball, and an (actual, distinct) event e2 of the nine ball sinking into the corner pocket, such that e1 is cause and e2 effect. The standard view, in short, holds that the causal relata are a pair of events.¹⁹

Note in the provided example the distinctions made between causations and effects. Schaffer provides an example of the cue ball knocking the nine ball into the pocket, and in turn reports two causations, namely the striking of the cue ball, and then the cue ball striking the second ball. This writer's understanding then of causal overdetermination is such that if one alleges that the nine ball falls into the pocket because the cue ball was struck, one is guilty of such overdetermination, for it fails to take into account the action of the cue ball striking the nine ball. While this would appear to follow, it is suggested that such a line of argumentation is unnecessary, for without the first action, more specifically the addition of energy to the cue ball

¹⁸ Augustine of Hippo. (1887). *Against the Epistle of Manichæus Called Fundamental*. R. Stothert, Trans.). In P. Schaff (Ed.), . *Vol. 4: St. Augustin: The Writings against the Manichaeans and against the Donatists* (P. Schaff, Ed.). A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (146). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company.

¹⁹ Jonathan Schaffer, "The Metaphysics Of Overdetermination," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2014, March 1). Accessed February 10, 2014, <http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/causation-metaphysics/>.

from an outside force, specifically the cue, there would not have been an event such that the cue ball struck the nine ball, and thus the nine ball would not have fallen into the pocket. If, therefore, the root cause is considered to be that action which, had it not happened, all subsequent events would not have obtained, then to claim the causation of the nine ball falling to be the striking of the cue ball does not appear to be lacking.

A second, and perhaps interesting point alone, would be that in every example this writer has found related to explaining causal overdetermination, there has been the presence of human agency. If causal overdetermination obtains only when there is human agency, then to levy the challenge of an overly simplistic root cause due to not considering causal overdetermination would appear to be a category mistake since what is under consideration is a naturalistic evil argument, an event in which there is no human agency. Thus, it is suggested that to claim the lightning strike to be the root cause, or the single event that lead to the ultimate death of the fawn, is an appropriate conclusion that satisfactorily identifies causation. Moreover, if the causation has been properly identified, and if the information related to lightning strikes is accurate, then it would appear accurate to claim that a greater good has indeed been identified for the proffered scenario.

A THEODICY – THE SUMMARY VIEW

In the opening of this paper Rowe's syllogism for the non-existence of God was presented. He maintained

There exists instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

It is here suggested that the first premise is invalid on the grounds that it places man on an equal plane with God, and therefore presumes that man would have knowledge equal to that of an omniscient, omnipotent, wholly good being. Likewise, premise two fails on the same grounds. However, based on the research presented here, it is believed that a greater good has indeed been identified as it relates to Rowe's hypothetical scenario, and as such Rowe's challenge may be answered.

P1: Evil exists in the world.

P2: Evil may be divided into acts by moral agents and acts of nature.

P3: Acts of nature involve no human agency.

P4: Lightning is an act of nature.

P5: The existence of lightning provides a greater good for life on earth than would be found were lightning not present.

Therefore, the existence of lightning does not mitigate against the existence of God.

Figure 1 gives a visual representation of the theodicy as set forth above. It is the opinion of this writer that neither the Free Will nor the Greater Good Defenses, when used alone, refute the atheistic charge. In a similar fashion, to use the Soul-Building theodicy alone necessitates the *a priori* view that souls truly exist. Because the atheist does not subscribe to life after death, it would appear to be a weak move at best to use soul building alone as a line of reasoning. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to address the specifics, it is suggested that the collection of data related to near death experiences (NDEs) since the 1970s has significant potential to address metaphysical objections to the existence of life after death, and as such may be a valid mechanism by which to overcome *a priori* rejections based on metaphysical biases.

The Bible has been offered as source information specifically for identifying the issue of evil and the timing for its defeat. What has been understood as natural law allows for order and stability, as demonstrated through at least one reason for the need of lightning. Beyond this, Wykstra has offered that it is entirely plausible that even if there is a greater good following from an evil event, it is questionable whether or not we have epistemic access to identify exactly what that greater good might be.

When these six elements are blended together, a strong theodicy emerges, and It answers the questions originally presented: 1) Why is there any evil at all; 2) Why are there the types and kinds of evils that there are; 3) Why is there the amount of evil that there is; 4) Why is there the particular evils that there are; and 5) Why does God allow moral evils, and, natural evils, as He does? It is suggested that the presented theodicy, although in its neophyte stages, has explanatory scope, explanatory power, is plausible, does not suffer from being ad hoc, and as a result, the theodicy may indeed shed light on other areas of concern or interest.

The three major elements of the theodicy, namely Free Will, Greater Good, and Soul-Building, when combined, have ability to account for all of the known facts. There is explanatory power in the blended response because the theodicy can account for the known facts without forcing those facts to fit any *a priori* position. Further, there is no ambiguity regarding why evil exists, the types of evil, the amounts of evil, the existence of moral and natural evil, and the allowance of the same by God. The theodicy is plausible, and it does not bring non-evidenced assumptions into the discussion. While some may indeed challenge the introduction of God into the discussion, it would be necessary to understand if that challenge were based on an objection to the data or a rejection (meaning an *a priori* metaphysical rejection). Finally, the theodicy provides illumination, as it does answer the five questions offered up earlier in the paper.

It is important to state again that this theodicy is only in the earliest of stages. Walls provided over 150 pages just in dealing with the issue of whether or not Hell exists. Feinberg produced just under 500 pages in expressing his dealings with the issue of evil. Plantinga offered just over 100 pages in establishing the logical argument that demonstrates the reasonableness of the Free Will Defense. It is understood that in a paper of this length one simply cannot address every possible concern that may be expressed by the skeptic, but it is a beginning, and, this beginning is built by intentionally standing on the shoulders of those theologians who have come before and have begun laying the groundwork for rebutting the argument that because evil exists, God does not. Evil is not an indictment against God or his existence.

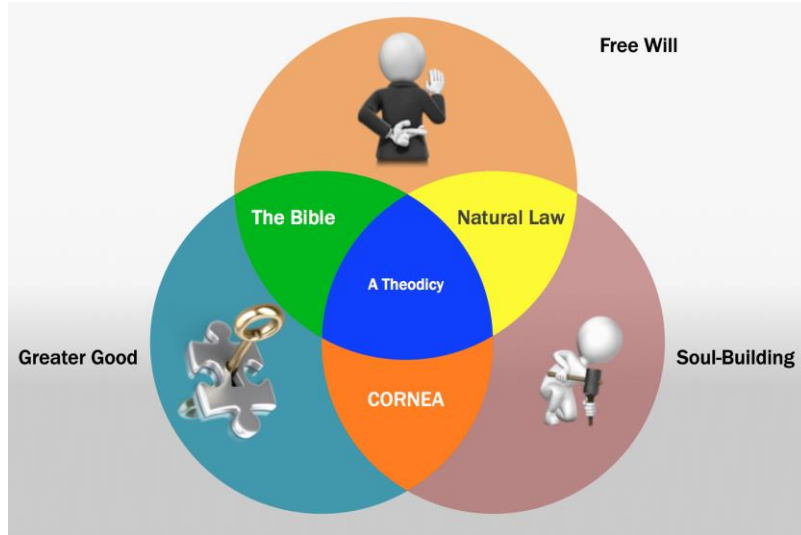


Fig. 1 – A Pictorial Representation of A Theodicy

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