

# APOLOGETICS: GIVING A REASON FOR OUR HOPE

TRINITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (PCA)

FALL 2017

# REVIEW

- Review

- The existence of God
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ

- Preview

- The problem of evil and suffering

# OFFENSE: A CASE FOR THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

- Argument for the resurrection from the skeptic's own position

(1) Skeptic's principle for historical investigation: All ancient documents should be evaluated by the same standards.

(2) If the NT is evaluated by the same standards as other ancient documents, then it is at least historically reliable in its major claims.

(3) If an ancient document is historically reliable, then we have reason to believe its major claims.

(4) The bodily resurrection is one of the major claims of the New Testament.

(5) Therefore, we have good reason to believe the bodily resurrection is a historical event.

- Note: We are not recommending the unbeliever treat the NT like any other historical document.

- The Point: If the skeptic is going to treat the NT that way, at least be consistent about it.

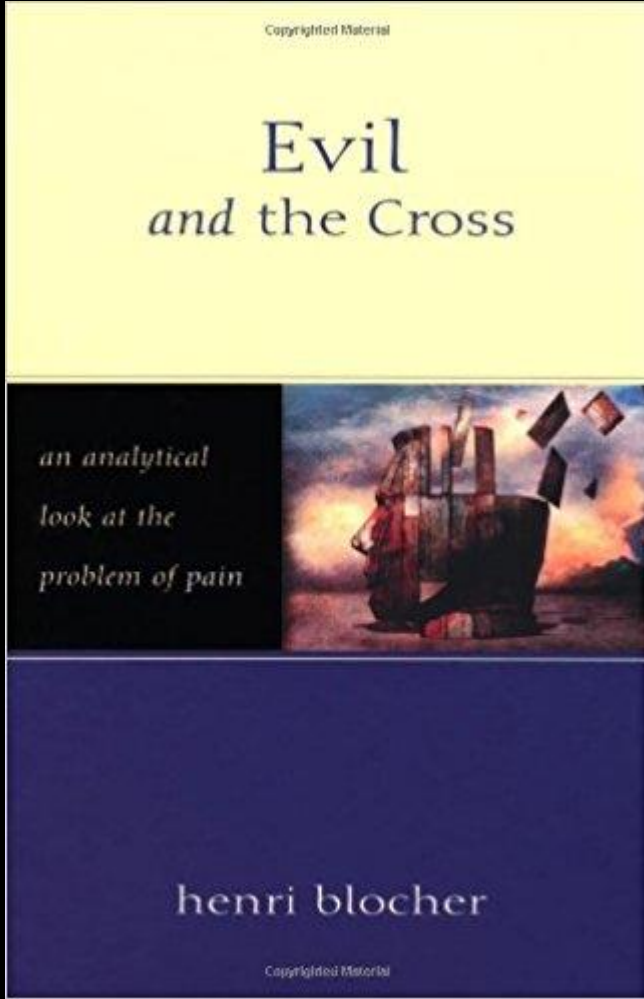
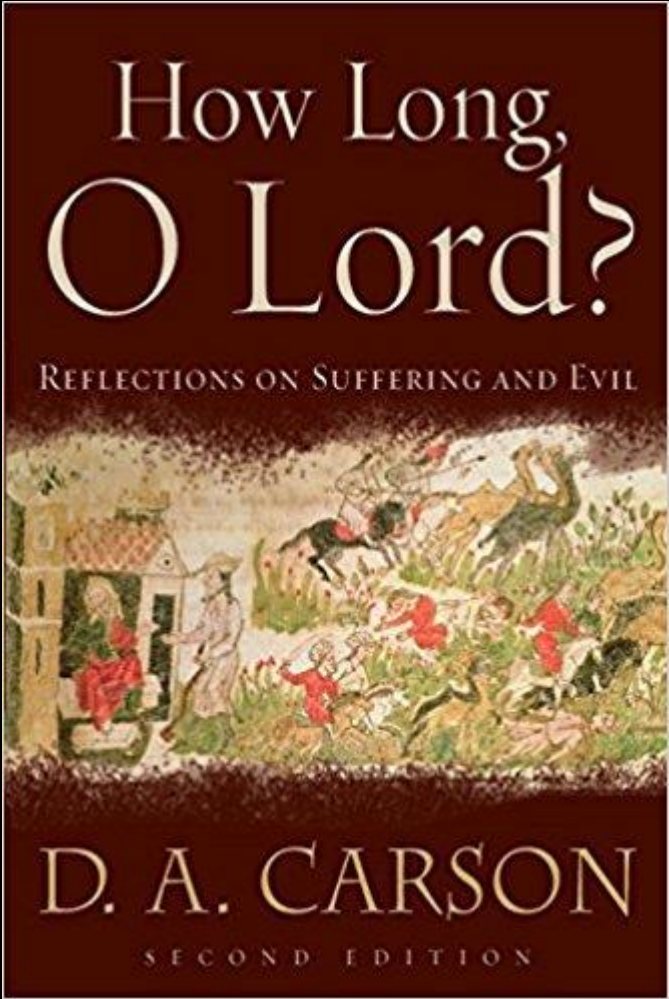
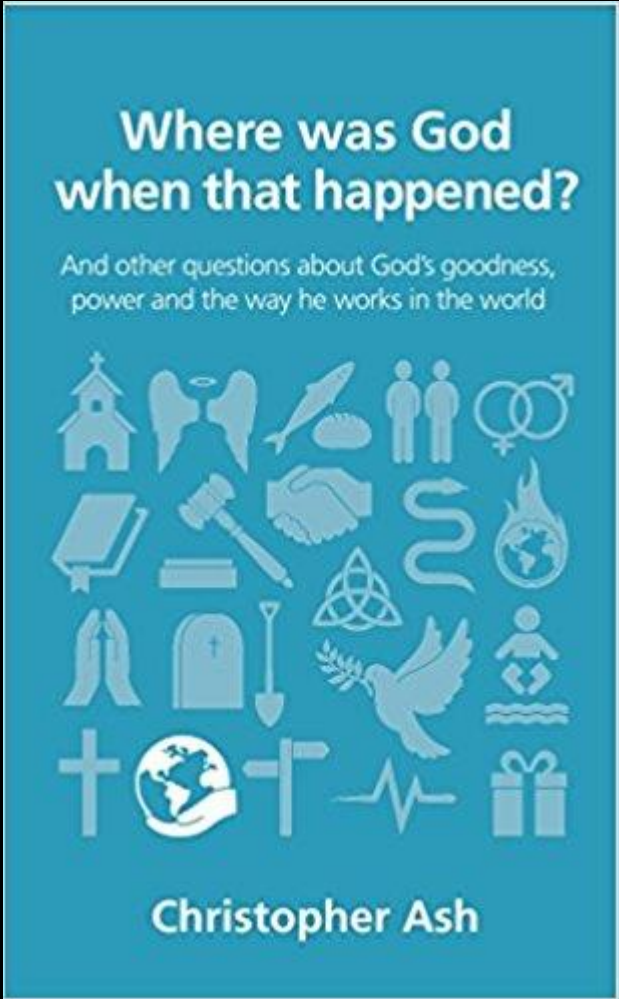
# CONCLUSION

- The only serious objection to the idea that Jesus rose from the dead is the objection that miracles *just don't happen*.
  - This objection is tantamount to denying God's existence.
  - But if we deny God's existence we can't make sense of *anything* in this world.
- So why should someone believe in the resurrection of Jesus?
  - (1) The resurrection of Jesus is an integral part of the Christian worldview, and only the Christian worldview makes sense of the things we take for granted about the universe and our place in it.
  - (2) Only the resurrection of Jesus makes sense of what we know about the life of Jesus, the lives of his earliest followers, the writings of the New Testament and the origins of the Christian church.

# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

- The most common objection people raise against Christianity
- An issue believers and unbelievers wrestle with
  - Basic intuition: If God is all-good and all-powerful, then there would not be so much evil and suffering in the world.
    - Epicurus, quoted by David Hume in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”
    - C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*: “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.”

# BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS



# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

- How should we approach the issue?
  - Acknowledge that this is a real, genuine problem; evil is not an illusion and it cannot be explained away.
    - There are cases of horrendous evil in the world.
      - Human acts of evil
      - Natural evil
  - Distinguish between the *intellectual* (head) problem from the *emotional* (heart) problem.
    - The head problem concerns things like reason, logic, truth, probability
    - The heart problem concerns how we react to, cope with, or come to terms with something that is hard for us to accept.
    - Reason for the distinction: many people think they have an intellectual problem with this issue when what they really have is an emotional problem. What presents as a head problem is often really a heart problem.

# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

- The Intellectual Problem: Does the existence of evil and suffering *disprove*, or provide *strong evidence against*, the existence of God?
- The Emotional Problem: If I believe that there is an all-good and all-powerful God, *how can I deal with* the evil and suffering in the world? *How should I deal with it?*
  - *Analogy*: little Johnny accused of stealing apples by neighbor (but no good evidence for it)
    - Johnny's mother has an intellectual problem accepting the claim because of a lack of evidence
  - *Analogy*: little Johnny accused of stealing apples (and plenty of evidence for it)
    - In her heart, Johnny's mom does not think he could do such a thing. Her problem is not an intellectual problem; it's an emotional problem.
  - When we're talking about suffering and evil a question we need to raise is this: Is this an intellectual problem that provides evidence against the existence of God or is it rather an emotional reaction to the idea of a God who would ordain such things for his purposes?
  - Only the *intellectual* problem is relevant to whether Christianity is *true* or *reasonable*.



# PROOF: AN ARGUMENT FOR GOD FROM EVIL

- Responding to the intellectual problem: Is evil and suffering really evidence against the existence of God? Is it a genuine defeater for the existence of God?
- The problem can actually be turned into an argument for God.
- Basic Idea: the problem of evil and suffering only makes sense within a Christian worldview.
  - To even raise the problem in the first place you need a certain worldview. The issue only makes sense if Christianity is true.
  - We often think the presence of evil is an issue for defense. But we can show that we only make sense of evil within the context of a Christian worldview.

# PROOF: ARGUMENT FROM THE REALITY OF EVIL

- Argument for God from the reality of evil
  - (1) The reality of objective evil presupposes an objective standard of good and evil (Examples: Nazi regime, Pol Pot, etc.).
  - (2) If there is no God, then there is no objective standard of good and evil.
    - *Question:* What are the alternative standards and why are they inadequate?
      - Societal consensus or human happiness
  - (3) Therefore, the reality of objective evil presupposes that there is a God.
    - If you believe there is objective evil, then you ought to believe that God exists.
    - The objection itself relies on the existence of God.

# PROOF: ARGUMENT FROM THE REALITY OF EVIL

- Argument from the Significance of Suffering

(1) If there is no God, then there is no ultimate meaning or purpose in the universe.

- Reason: If there is no God then ultimate reality is *impersonal*.

- Atheists recognize that there can be no ultimate meaning or purpose (next slide).

(2) If there is no ultimate meaning or purpose in the universe, then it doesn't ultimately matter whether or not human beings suffer.

(3) It does ultimately matter whether or not human beings suffer; everyone lives this way.

(4) Therefore, there is a God.

- *Discussion Question:* How do we deal with an unbeliever who denies (3)?

## PROOF: ARGUMENT FROM THE REALITY OF EVIL

Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden*: “In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won’t find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”

# PROOF

- Summary

- The argument for God from evil and the argument from the reality of evil turn the problem around.
- They show that objections made against Christianity actually rely on a Christian worldview. In other words, they assume things that are true only if Christianity is true!
- Anticipating Response: “Suppose you’re right. Evil presupposes God’s existence. Still, the Christian worldview has an internal problem. There is still a contradiction between an all-good, all-powerful God and evil and suffering.
  - We need to move to defense and show that evil and suffering is not evidence against the Christian worldview.

## DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- Basic Idea: Show that the existence of evil and suffering in the world is consistent with a Christian worldview and presents no compelling reason to abandon Christian beliefs.
  - First, we need to understand the argument being made against God from evil.

## DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- The Logical Argument against God from Evil: The existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of God. It is not logically possible for both God and evil to exist.
- Argument stated:
  - (1) If there were an all-good and all-powerful God, then he would not allow evil to exist.
  - (2) Evil exists.
  - (3) Therefore, there is no all-good and all-powerful God.
- Evaluating the Argument: *What's wrong with the argument?*

## DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- Evaluating the Argument: *What's wrong with the argument?*
  - The first premise is unproven. The burden of proof is on the atheist to prove premise (1).
  - It is plausible that God would allow some evil if it brought about greater good. Why couldn't God permit evil to bring about some greater good?



# DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- The Logical Argument Reformulated

(1) If there were an all-good and all-powerful God, then he would not allow evil to exist *without morally sufficient reasons* (i.e., without a greater good).

- *Analogy*: Sawing off someone's leg (morally justified under certain circumstances).
- *Analogy*: A soldier who dives onto a grenade to save others (in context, a morally justified act because it secures a greater good).
- The Point: (1) is improved because both the believer and unbeliever can agree that God would only allow evil to exist if he had morally sufficient reasons.
- But that means that it no longer follows from the existence of evil that there is no God.

(2) Evil exists.

(3) Therefore, if there is an all-good and all-powerful God, then he has morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil to exist.

- You can no longer conclude that God does not exist once you've modified (1).

## DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ATHEISTIC ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- Where does this leave the atheist? The atheist who wants to persist with this argument now has the burden of proving that God could not have morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil.
  - The logical argument against God from evil has fallen out favor because it's very hard to defend the first premise.
- Where does this leave the Christian? The Christian has argued that the existence of evil is not incompatible with the existence of God.
  - Anticipating the Question: What possible reason(s) could God have for allowing evil and suffering?
  - *Theodicy*: a 'positive' argument that seeks to give an explanation why God allows evil.

# EVALUATING THEODICIES

- *Question:* What morally sufficient reasons could God have for allowing evil?
  - *Qualifier:* Not advocating, just a survey of some answers given.

## (1) Human free will (as a precondition of moral responsibility or loving relationships)

- Usually a libertarian form of free will where God loses control of what man does.
- Most common explanation given by Christians today.
- Problems?
  - (1) A unbiblical understanding of free will; (2) Even if you allow for this kind of free will, couldn't God have intervened in situations like Nazi Germany? (3) Doesn't explain natural disasters; (4)? Will there be this kind of free will in heaven but without people sinning? If so, why didn't God just set things up like that in the first place?

# EVALUATING THEODICIES

- *Question:* What morally sufficient reasons could God have for allowing evil?

## (2) Soul-making (providing an environment for moral character development)

- Evil is necessary for moral character development; unless we live in a world of suffering, it's impossible for us to be a mature believer.
- Problems? (1) Suggests a moral flaw to creation, contrary to Scripture (Gen 1); (2) What about the suffering that doesn't improve a person's character?

## (3) Pain as a necessary consequence of natural laws and a stable environment

- Nature demands a universe where pain and suffering are at least possible.

# EVALUATING THEODICIES

- *Question:* What morally sufficient reasons could God have for allowing evil?

## (4) Pain as a moral learning environment

- Main idea: pain teaches us the difference between good and evil.
- Partial theodicy: yes in a certain context pain can serve a purpose, but it doesn't pass the "Eden test"

## (5) Pain as a punishment for human sin

- Another partial theodicy.
- What about Job?
- The man born blind (John 9)

## (6) Pain as "God's megaphone" (C. S. Lewis)

- When we're happy, we tend to ignore God, and so God has to get our attention. He does so by bringing pain into our lives.
- God can and does use pain for positive reasons, but it doesn't pass the Eden test. Adam did not need pain to know God.

# EVALUATING THEODICIES

- *Question:* What morally sufficient reasons could God have for allowing evil?

## (7) Evil and suffering as preconditions of the exercise of human virtues

- *Example:* no courage without fear
- *Example:* no heroism without danger
- *Example:* no compassion without suffering
- *Example:* no mercy without wrongdoing
- **Big idea:** a world without evil would actually be impoverished of virtue.
- **Problem:** We live in a world where people suffer and there is no virtuous response.

# EVALUATING THEODICIES

- *Question:* What morally sufficient reasons could God have for allowing evil?

(8) Evil and suffering as preconditions of the exercise of divine virtues

- *Example:* sin as a precondition of both divine justice and divine mercy

(9) “O Felix Culpa!” [O happy/blessed fall] (human sin as a precondition of the Incarnation and the Atonement)

- World 1: No sin, no incarnation, no atonement (Only know God as Creator)
- World 2: Sin, incarnation, atonement and the blessings that follow (Know God as Creator and Redeemer)
- Justifies God’s ordaining the fall so that may know God more fully and richly.

# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - Genesis 1-3
    - God created everything good
    - God created man in his own image and gave them moral responsibility to obey his commands
    - The doctrine of the fall – man’s rebellion has brought a curse
    - The first announcement of the gospel
  - Job 1-2, 42
    - Not all suffering is the result of personal sin; God may have other purposes for allowing suffering.
    - In Job’s case it was to vindicate Job’s trust in God regardless of his circumstances.
    - The inscrutability of God: Job doesn’t know why he is suffering.
    - God had his reasons, we may not like them, but Job’s suffering was not without purpose.
    - God is sovereign over evil; Satan was not given free reign.
    - Job lost everything, but in the end everything was restored and more.



# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - Psalm 119:67: “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word...It is good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn your statutes.”
    - Affliction can be the Lord’s tool for discipline to teach us obedience.

# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - Luke 13:1-5: tower of Siloam
    - The people who died didn't die because they were worse offenders than others
    - Events like these serve as a warning: "Unless you repent you will all likewise perish."
    - It is a good thing that God gives us warning to repent and turn to him.
  - John 9:1-3
    - Not a one-to-one corresponded between sin and suffering
    - There was a positive reason for the blind man's suffering: the works of God displayed

# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - Romans 5:3-5: “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance,<sup>4</sup> and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,<sup>5</sup> and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”
    - In the life of a believer, suffering produces fruit: endurance, character, hope. .
  - Romans 8:18-23
    - The pains of childbirth are the precursor to the joy of a child.

# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - Romans 8:28-30
    - God does not permit anything that is not good for his children.
    - God works all things together for good.
    - The great purpose: conformity to Christ.
  - Romans 9:19-24
    - To make known the riches of his glory.
    - God is glorified through vessels of mercy and wrath.

# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - 2 Corinthians 1:5-7
    - Two-fold justification for suffering: (1) We share in the comfort of Christ and (2) we are enabled to comfort others.
  - James 1:2-4
    - God uses trials in the believer's life to produce spiritual maturity.
  - 1 Peter 4:12-13
    - Solidarity with Christ in his sufferings.
    - Those who share in Christ's suffering will also share in his glory.
  - Revelation 21:1-8
    - There will be an end to the problem of evil.

# OVERVIEW OF SCRIPTURE ON EVIL AND SUFFERING

- *Question:* Which theodicies does the Bible suggest to us? Which does it rule out?
  - Summary
    - The Bible has a lot to say about God's reasons for permitting and ordaining evil and suffering.
    - We should avoid speculation.

# DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- The Probabilistic Argument from Evil: there are *particular* instances of evil that are so terrible that it seems *God could not* be morally justified in allowing them; these particular instances of evil provide *strong evidence* against the existence of God.
- Argument stated:
  - (1) There are instances of evil and suffering that appear to be gratuitous (i.e., such that God could not have any morally sufficient reasons for allowing them).
    - *Example:* the Holocaust
    - *Example:* the rape, torture, and murder of a little girl
  - (2) If there are instances of gratuitous evil and suffering, then there is no all-good and all-powerful God.
  - (3) Therefore, *most probably* there is no all-good and all-powerful God.

# DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- *Question:* What could be some initial responses to the argument?
  - There are concealed assumptions in the argument



# DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- The Argument Expanded

(1) There are instances of evil and suffering that *appear* to be gratuitous (i.e., such that God could not have any morally sufficient reasons for allowing them).

(2) If an instance of evil and suffering *appears* to be gratuitous, then *most probably* it is gratuitous.

(3) Therefore, *most probably* there are instances of gratuitous evil and suffering.

(4) If there are instances of gratuitous evil and suffering, then there is no all-good and all-powerful God.

(5) Therefore, *most probably* there is no all-good and all-powerful God.

- *Discuss:* Which is the weak premise? Why?

# DEFENSE: RESPONDING TO ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL

- The Problem with Premise (2)
  - It assumes that if God has morally sufficient reasons for allowing suffering, then we would be able to perceive them. But we are not God. We do not know all the possible goods that could come from a particular evil. Our epistemic situation is vastly different than God's, so we are not able to reliably make the judgment that just because we can't see the reasons for an evil that therefore there can't be any reasons.
  - *Analogy*: parents allowing their young child to undergo a painful medical treatment
    - Could a child say "I can't see the reason daddy is letting me undergo this; therefore, there can't be any reason?"
  - *Analogy*: examining pathology slides for cancer cells without a microscope
    - "I can't see any cancer cells; therefore there can't be any cancer cells." – That's not a reliable conclusion!
- **Conclusion**: If the Christian worldview is true, then we would actually expect there to be cases of evil and suffering that *appear* to be gratuitous. If the Christian worldview leads us to expect such things, then it can't be used as evidence against the Christian worldview.

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- Basic Idea: no other worldview offers a better solution (intellectually and emotionally) to the problem of evil.
  - Everyone has to make sense of evil. Every worldview must try to explain it.
  - Which worldview can explain our experience of evil and suffering?

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- The Darwinian-Naturalist Explanation

- There is no objective moral good or evil (because there are no objective moral norms).
- Good and evil are ultimately defined in terms of *pleasure and pain*, but the categories of good and evil are really illusions.
- All sentient animals are the products of natural undirected evolutionary development (driven by natural selection—the survival of the fittest).
- The basic solution to the problem of evil is to strive to avoid (and to ultimately eliminate) pain.

- *Question:* What are the inadequacies of this explanation of evil and suffering?

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

- The Pantheist Explanation

- There is no objective moral good or evil, since all is One and all is God.
- Our experience of evil and suffering is therefore a mere illusion.
- The basic solution to the problem of evil is to gain enlightenment (by recognizing that evil and suffering are mere illusions).

- *Question:* What are the inadequacies of this explanation of evil and suffering?

# OFFENSE: REFUTING THE ALTERNATIVES

## • The Process Theist Explanation

- God is all-good but not all-powerful; he cannot infallibly accomplish his purposes.
  - God and other moral agents (esp. humans) have libertarian free will.
  - God cannot *control* the evil in the world, but he can *strive against* evil (and he can encourage other moral agents to strive against it).
  - God is in a process of continual advancement; he is always the greatest of all beings, but he is also continually increasing in greatness as he interacts with the world.
  - Evil has always existed in some form (i.e., it has existed as long as God has existed).
  - The basic solution to the problem of evil is to work with God to overcome evil.
- *Question:* What are the inadequacies of this explanation of evil and suffering?