

# The Problem of Evil—Part Three

## The Purpose of Evil

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(from *Baker's Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker, 1999)

No evil is good, but some evil has a good purpose. Warning pains for example are painful, but their painfulness has a good purpose. Of course, not all evil seems to be of this type. What, then, of evil which seems to have no good purpose? The problem can be summarized as follows:

1. An all-good God must have a good purpose for everything.
2. There is no good purpose for some suffering.
3. Therefore, there cannot be an all-good God.

It seems evident that there is useless suffering in the world. Some people get better through suffering, but others get bitter. Broken bones are stronger when they heal, but some never heal. Many die. What about all the purposeless evil in the world?

The theistic answer to apparently purposeless evil is fourfold. First, God has a good purpose for everything. Second, we do know a good purpose for much evil. Third, some evil is a byproduct of good. Fourth, God is able to bring good out of evil

### **God Has a Good Purpose for Everything.**

The antitheist overlooks an important distinction: God knows a good purpose for all evil, even if we do not. Simply because finite minds cannot conceive of a good purpose for some evil does not mean that there is none. Since God is omniscient, he knows everything. And since he is omnibenevolent, he has a good purpose for everything. Hence, God does know a good purpose for all evil, even if we do not know it:

1. An omnibenevolent God has a good purpose for everything.
2. There is some evil for which we see no good purpose.
3. Therefore, there is a good purpose for all evil, even if we do not see it.

The fact that finite beings don't see the purpose for some evil does not mean there is none. This inability to see the purpose for evil does not disprove God's benevolence; it merely reveals our ignorance.

### **The purpose for much evil is known by us.**

In spite of the fact that we do not know everything, we do know something. And what we do know is that there is a good purpose for much evil. Warning pains have a good purpose. In fact, the ability to have pain has a good purpose. For if we had no nervous system we could destroy ourselves without even feeling any pain. Also, physical pain can be a warning to save us from moral disaster. As C. S. Lewis noted, pain is God's megaphone to warn a morally deaf world. And if we as finite beings know a good purpose for much evil, then surely an infinite Mind can know a good purpose for the rest.

### **Evil sometimes is a byproduct of a good purpose.**

Not every specific evil needs a good purpose. Some evil can simply be a necessary byproduct of a good purpose. The early bird gets the worm, but the early worm gets eaten. What is life for higher forms is death for lower forms.

Plants and animals die so that man may have food to live. Thus, evil results indirectly from good because it is the consequence of a good purpose. Hence, the response may be put this way:

1. God has a good purpose for everything he does.
2. Some good purposes have evil byproducts.
3. Therefore, some evil is a byproduct of a good purpose.

Not every *specific* event in the world needs to have a good purpose; only the *general* purpose needs to be good. The blacksmith has a good purpose for hammering the molten iron into a horseshoe. However, not every spark that flies has a purpose for its destiny. Some sparks may ignite unintended fires. Likewise, God had a good purpose for creating water (to sustain life), drowning is one of the evil byproducts. Thus, every specific drowning needs to have a good purpose, even though making the water in which they drown did. So many good things would be missed if God did not permit evil to exist. Fire does not burn unless air is consumed. Neither just retribution is inflicted nor patience is achieved, but for the evil of tribulation.

### **God can bring good out of evil.**

Of course, God is all-powerful and he is able to redeem good even from evils. A drowning person may inspire acts of bravery. Although sawdust is an unintended byproduct of making lumber, it can be salvaged to make paper. Likewise, God in his providence is able to redeem much (if not all) good out of the evil byproducts in the world. God would in no wise permit evil to exist in his works unless he were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil.

That does not mean that this present world is the best of all possible worlds. It means that God has made it the best possible way to attain his ultimate goal of the greater good. God may not always redeem good out of every evil byproduct in a fallen world. This could be true in both the physical and the moral realm. Like radioactive waste, some evil byproducts may resist reprocessing. Indeed, in view of the second law of thermodynamics, the physical world is decaying. But God has the power to recreate it (cf. 2 Peter 3:13). Human death can be overcome by resurrection (cf. Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 15). Neither of these is any problem for an omnipotent God.