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Article

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56315/PSCF12-22Emberger>

The Nonviolent Character of God, Evolution, and the Fall of Satan

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The evolutionary creation model of origins best matches the scientific evidence for evolution with common descent. However, the violence and harm associated with the evolutionary history of life may be viewed as incompatible with religious traditions such as Anabaptist that understand God to be nonviolent as revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus. This article argues that malevolent wills such as fallen angels opposed God's will in the evolutionary process and that explanations for natural evils that do not recognize the corrupting activities of fallen spirit-beings make God culpable for evil and non-Christlike in moral character. In this light, the rejection of the angelic-fall thesis by many writers is surprising. Consequently, a number of common objections to the thesis are examined. The angelic-fall approach to natural evil has biblical support, a long history in the church, support of theologians, the ability to resist objections, and many useful outcomes.

Key Words: Anabaptism, natural evil, evolution, evolutionary creation, theistic evolution, God's moral character, theodicy, angelic fall, God's sovereignty, nonviolent, Christocentric hermeneutic, Satan, demons, free will

Three basic models of origins exist that recognize God as Creator: young-earth creation, old-earth creation, and theistic evolution.¹ The models and their variations differ in their acceptance of the geological time scale and evolutionary common descent. Young-earth creation rejects both, old-earth creation accepts the geological time scale but not common descent, and theistic evolution accepts both.

Due to the strength of the scientific evidence for the geological time scale and evolutionary common descent, many Christians believe that God brought about the diversity of life on Earth

through evolutionary processes over millions of years. For example, one of the central beliefs of BioLogos,² an organization dedicated to the integration of God's Word and God's World, states:

We believe that the diversity and interrelation of all life on earth are best explained by the God-ordained process of evolution with common descent. Thus, evolution is not in opposition to God, but a means by which God providentially achieves his purposes. Therefore, we reject ideologies that claim that evolution is a purposeless process or that evolution replaces God.³

The specific model of origins reflected in this statement is termed "evolutionary creation," the BioLogos preferred term over "theistic evolution."⁴ Although I agree that evolution with common

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descent is God's creative process, I do not agree that millions of years of evolutionary violence is an accurate reflection of God's ideal will for creation, or of God's character. My disagreement derives from the nonviolent character of God⁵ as revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus⁶ and as understood in Anabaptist thought and practice.⁷ I write as a biologist (not a theologian) with a long association with the Brethren in Christ, one of the historic peace (i.e., practicing nonviolence) denominations in the Anabaptist tradition. But by no means is this article an attempt to delineate *the* Anabaptist view of evolution and animal suffering. Anabaptists hold no single view on these topics. Although some of the early Anabaptists wrote on topics related to this article, that history is tangential to the goal of this article.⁸ The views expressed here are *compatible* with current views of *all* faith groups that hold to a nonviolent conception of God's character.

Evolutionary harms such as predation and disease are often described as natural evils. When I taught at a Christian university, I explored topics such as natural evil, theodicy, and the significance of death before human sin—although not from a specifically Anabaptist point of view.⁹ A major goal of this article is to evaluate explanations for evolutionary natural evil from the perspective of the nonviolent moral character of God.

Because I assert that evolutionary suffering is not attributable to God, the theological value is highlighted of an angelic-fall approach to address the violence associated with evolution. In brief, this approach maintains that evolutionary suffering is to be attributed to spirit-beings in opposition to God's will. Gregory Boyd expresses surprise that Christian thinkers rarely "appeal to these opposing powers as they attempt to make sense of the horrors found in the evolutionary process and throughout nature today."¹⁰ Indeed, a review of pertinent *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith (PSCF)* articles reveals that appeals to malevolent spirit-beings as a source for evolutionary harms are usually ignored, dismissed, or vigorously rejected. Common objections to the angelic-fall approach thesis will be addressed.

Finally, in claiming that God's nonviolent moral character is incompatible with the violence inherent in the evolutionary process, I offer a few speculative thoughts on the plausibility of a nonviolent evolutionary process of creation.

God and Natural Evil

The present world is replete with beauty, an amazing diversity of living things, astounding complexity, mutually beneficial symbiotic relationships, and intricate ecological interdependence. But there is also *harm*. This harm occurs via a bewildering array of biological manifestations including pathogens, parasites, and predators as well as cancers, genetic diseases, and birth defects. In addition, living things may also be harmed or killed by storms, earthquakes, volcanoes, droughts, fires, and other abiotic causes. Natural causes of harm are usually categorized as "natural evils" to distinguish them from "moral evils" which are harms brought about by free agents such as humans.

Of particular importance in the evolutionary creation model evaluated in this article is the recognition that natural evils occurred throughout the entire history of life on Earth, long before humans and human sin.¹¹ If God is nonviolent and God's character is the same throughout all time, we are compelled to ask whether God would create through such a process.

How have theologians made sense of a world containing natural evils? This question is the basis for what is often termed "the problem of evil." The "problem" is often presented as three premises and a conclusion: (1) God is omnipotent and able to prevent evil; (2) God is perfectly good/loving and will want to prevent evil; and (3) evil events occur; and therefore, God does not exist or one of the premises is inaccurate.¹²

Attempts to explain the apparent contradiction between God's power and goodness on the one hand and the presence of evil on the other, are called theodicies or defenses. Bethany Sollereeder differentiates between these by explaining that theodicies intend to give the actual purposes of evil in God's creation whereas "a defense sets the less ambitious goal of simply trying to show that genuine evil and God's existence are not logically incompatible."¹³ Sollereeder offers a useful guide to theodicies and defenses, featuring a delightful flow chart and a terrain map encouraging the reader to "pick your own theological expedition" through many of the common approaches to the problem of evil.¹⁴

The next section of this article evaluates proposed theodicies or defenses in light of God's character as revealed by Jesus. In this regard, so important is

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the truth that Jesus makes God's character known, that Anabaptists and some other Christians¹⁵ adopt a Christ-centered hermeneutic by which to understand all portrayals of God.¹⁶ This Christocentric interpretative key means that nothing should qualify or compete with the revelation of God as revealed in Jesus. If God is portrayed in a manner (e.g., violent, or sanctioning violence) contrary to Jesus's life and teaching, that portrayal is considered inaccurate. In parallel fashion, Michael Lloyd employs a set of "Christological criteria for disentangling the will of God from the unintended phenomena of creaturely occurrence" when evaluating explanations for natural evil.¹⁷ Lloyd's criteria include the divine hostility to suffering revealed in Jesus's healing miracles and the attack on death in the resurrection of Jesus.

Approaches to Evolutionary Suffering

It is not within the purview of this article to explore the vast literature on theodicies and/or defenses. Rather, I will present an overview of general approaches to natural evil. Not all approaches to natural evil specifically address the evolutionary suffering of animals, but as Gijsbert van den Brink suggests, if "some particular type of theodicy or defense works for natural evil in general, it is not clear in advance why it should not work for the problem of the evolutionary suffering of animals."¹⁸

One approach is to simply **dismiss evolutionary evil** with the claim that animals do not suffer.¹⁹ While some animals may experience pain, they do not experience suffering. This *neo-Cartesian* approach harkens back to Descartes in the seventeenth century who claimed that animals do not experience pain and could not suffer. This approach is deeply problematic on evidential and moral terms.

Another approach claims **inscrutability** or **skeptical theism**, that is, our capacity is too limited to understand the reasons God might have for allowing evolutionary suffering and evil.²⁰ Indeed, all attempts to fathom the existence of evil in God's good creation involve mystery. While recognizing mystery as both inescapable and necessary, there remains value in discussing and debating specific approaches to the problem of evil.

Deism presents a distant, uninvolved God. This God is all-powerful in bringing the universe into being, but this God is simply not interested in our lives or

in intervening in any way with the creation.²¹ Deism explains the existence of natural evil at the expense of the loving, good, and personal nature of God revealed in the Bible and in believers' lives.

A **human fall** approach attributes natural evils to human sin, "the Fall" causing not only moral evil to become a reality, but also introducing natural evil to mar God's originally perfect creation.²² Human sin produced a cosmic fall. When once there were no predators, parasites, or tsunamis, creation was radically reconfigured/cursed. This approach is the basis for the young-earth creation model of origins. In addition to biblical concerns, this model suffers from tremendous problems including problematic biological reconfigurations such as instantaneously changing herbivores into predators, and scientific challenges from geology, paleontology, and astronomy.

The following approaches are more applicable to the issue of animal suffering during the long evolutionary history of life on Earth.

Process theology offers an approach in which all entities have *essential* freedom, freedom that is not a divine gift. God has as much power as it is possible to have, but God's only power over any entity is persuasion. God may wish that a non-violent world existed; however, God can only woo it or lure it, he cannot coerce it.²³ Some versions of open and relational theology align with the "persuasion" aspect of process theology. An example is Thomas Jay Oord's *essential kenosis* model of God.²⁴ Among other things, this model states that God's eternal nature is self-giving love. God *must* love and because of love, God provides freedom and agency to all creatures in every moment of their existence. God cannot coerce or control creatures or overcome their freedom and agency. Likewise, God cannot affect inanimate matter by interrupting or overcoming the "regularities of existence" such as natural laws given to creation out of love. God calls and inspires creation toward love, well-being, and flourishing. God invites creatures to co-create, but creatures may not cooperate. Applied to evolution, God cannot unilaterally determine which evolutionary paths are taken. The evolutionary process with its extinctions, harmful creatures, and creaturely suffering is accepted as a consequence. God is not culpable for evolutionary evil because by God's very essence, God cannot unilaterally prevent evil.

Process theology and Oord's essential kenosis model defend God's goodness but at the expense of God's omnipotence. Further, because God cannot unilaterally control animate creatures or inanimate matter, there seems little grounding for eschatological hope, Jesus's miracles, or his resurrection.²⁵

A **Christological** approach suggests that the "manner in which life feeds on life throughout nature reflects the cruciform character of God and was necessary given God's cruciform goals for creation."²⁶ Similarly, "the 'cruciformity' of nature should not surprise those who have the cross of Christ as the center of their faith."²⁷ In response, Boyd finds it hard

to interpret the manner in which many creatures survive only by stealing the life of other creatures to be a reflection of the cruciform character of the Creator. While the cross reveals a God of *self-sacrificial* love, predators *force* their prey to be sacrificed.²⁸

It may be further questioned whether the cruciformity of nature should be looked to as the basis for evolutionary values such as greater complexity, beauty, and diversity. Is there a unique creativity associated with violence? Is this the message of the cross? Michael Lloyd writes:

Surely a religion built on the cross of Christ would shrink from allowing violence such a monopolistic role in the creation of values. Does not the cross of Christ suggest that, contrary to all perception to the contrary, it is the *refusal* of violence that is most creative of value? Where the extinction of one species has led to the rise of another, should we not attribute that more to the extraordinary fertility of a God who brings good out of evil within a fallen creation than to the fertility of violence per se?²⁹

Only way, greater good, package deal, and best of all possible worlds approaches to natural evil all indicate that animal suffering throughout evolutionary history was either necessary to God's plan and purposes or in some manner unavoidable. Thus, the only or necessary or at least unavoidable way for God to bring about a world containing the incredible beauty, complexity, and diversity of life which we see was through an evolutionary process of chance events along with competition and natural selection with its associated pain, death, predation, and extinction.³⁰ For example, only through the gazelle's deadly interaction with the lion could its admired fleetness develop. Or, only by the extinction of dinosaurs did mammals have the opportunity to diversify.³¹ On the

human level, it is suggested that evolutionary struggle was the only way to create moral beings like us with "the capacity to know good and evil."³²

John Polkinghorne's *free-process* defense is in this category of approaches. Here, God gifted creation with the freedom to make itself. He states:

The created order looks like a package deal. Exactly the same biochemical processes that enable cells to mutate, making evolution possible, are those that enable cells to become cancerous and generate tumours.³³

Likewise, tectonic plates, essential to life on Earth, may slip, causing destructive earthquakes. God does not desire natural evils but allows them to happen in a creation given the gift of being itself.³⁴

All *only way* approaches have serious challenges. As addressed earlier, should such creativity be uniquely granted to violent processes? Are the goods great enough to outweigh the eons of suffering? Couldn't an omnipotent God devise a creative path with less involuntary suffering on the part of so many organisms?³⁵

Lloyd brings a further series of challenges:

The Christian theologian ... has to ask why disease and death are so assaulted in the ministry of Jesus, if they are so instrumentally necessary to the purposes of God.

If it is God's will to create a natural order that is inherently predatory for the instrumental goods that that order will enable, then some account needs to be given of how that may be reconciled with the prophetic vision of a future in which predators and prey lie down together. If natural evil in general and PANE [pre-Adamic natural evil] in particular are so necessary to the enrichment brought about by the higher-order goods, will a healed and harmonious new creation be thereby diminished and impoverished? ... The challenge to instrumental accounts here is to demonstrate why that which is desirable in the beginning will not be desirable at the end.

Instrumental accounts are vulnerable to the charge that they diminish the praiseworthiness of God, for he who brings an end to pain, loss, and disharmony at the eschaton remains the one who established them in the first place.³⁶

Concerning the free-process approach in particular, Lloyd asks how the "freedom of the evolutionary

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process” constitutes a good.³⁷ Freedom applied to *personal agents* in relationship carries meaning. It is not clear what freedom means when applied to a *process* populated by nonpersonal entities. Is it different from randomness? Polkinghorne argues that the “great good” is that “creatures are allowed ‘to make themselves’” and that “all of created nature is allowed to be itself.”³⁸ Lloyd concludes:

It seems invalid to use the word “create” of a non-personal entity. Does not the word “create” imply an element of intentionality? It is unclear what exactly is the good here for which God would be warranted in allowing the possibility—or probability or well-nigh certainty—of such terror and torment.³⁹

A further challenge exists. The same Christocentric “measuring rod” used to reject sub-Christlike violent portraits of God in the Bible calls into serious doubt any theodicy or defense in which God is responsible for evolutionary violence—where eons of animal suffering was either necessary or unavoidable to God’s purposes.

But, if *God* is not to blame for evolutionary natural evil and if *human sin* is not to blame, what’s left? Read on.

One final approach to natural evil to consider is that of an **angelic fall**. For God’s purposes, God gifted angels with moral freedom. Satan rebelled against God and has been wreaking havoc in creation ever since. Given that natural evil occurred long before humans existed, the rebellion of Satan and other fallen spirit-beings long predates human sin. The critical feature of the angelic-fall thesis is that unlike the previous approaches, the source of evolutionary harms is found in the wills of malevolent spirit-beings opposed to God.

Among the scholars who employ an angelic-fall approach to natural evil,⁴⁰ Boyd constructs a trinitarian warfare theodicy around the reality of Satan’s rebellion and attack on God’s creation. In this theodicy, God creates the world out of the triune love experienced by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with the goal of creating a people who would say yes to this love, embody this love, and reflect this triune love back to God.

Among the theses that form the basis of the theodicy, one is that love must be *freely* chosen. Humans and angels possess self-determining freedom (incom-

patibilistic freedom). This means, though, that love may be rejected. Another thesis is that love entails *risk*. The freedom given to agents (humans, angels) means that God’s free creatures might actively resist God’s will. A further thesis is that the freedom given agents must be, within limits, *irrevocable*. In part, this explains why God cannot prevent evil acts God would otherwise prevent, including those associated with evolutionary harms.

Interestingly, Boyd’s theses are similar to elements of Oord’s essential kenosis model. But whereas Oord claims God, *by God’s very nature*, cannot unilaterally prevent evolutionary evil, Boyd claims that *opposition from malevolent spirit-agents* underlies God’s inability to unilaterally prevent all evolutionary evil.

Readers interested in Boyd’s theodicy should consult the given references. The three theses I mention serve only to help explain why God’s creation could include beings with wills in opposition to God’s will. An examination of his full theodicy or any other theodicy or defense is beyond the scope of this article even though additional insights to evolutionary suffering are found among them and in approaches not mentioned here. My more-modest goals are to offer, in the next section, biblical support for satanic influence in the natural world and to respond, in the section after, to a number of common objections to the angelic-fall thesis.

Satan and the Natural World: God at War

Why did Jesus come to Earth? Among the possible responses to this question, does the following verse come to mind?

The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)⁴¹

What are the works of Satan? Satan is described as holding the power of death (Heb. 2:14), as a tempter (Luke 4:2; 2 Cor. 2:11; 1 Thess. 3:5), as blinding the minds of unbelievers (2 Cor. 4:4), as an enemy planting weeds in the wheat field of God’s kingdom (Matt. 13:24–30), and as a lion seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8). Jesus describes Satan as the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31). Paul refers to Satan as “the god of this world” (2 Cor. 4:4), and 1 John 5:19 tells us “the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.” The gospel writers tell us many people were possessed by demons (Mark 1:32–34; 9:20–29).

Jesus *rebuked* the wind and *quieted* the sea (Mark 4:39) in the same manner in which he *rebuked* and *quieted* the demon in Mark 1:25.

Jesus came to destroy Satan's works. Hebrews 2:14 tells us that Jesus through his death "might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil," and in John 12:31, Jesus says he came to drive out the ruler of this world. John 16:11 declares "the ruler of this world has been condemned." Jesus's healing ministry was a direct assault on Satan's rule as evidenced when he healed a woman crippled by a spirit for eighteen years (Luke 13:10–17). Peter tells us that Jesus went about "healing all who were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38). In healing a man of leprosy (Mark 1:40–42) and a woman of a bleeding disorder (Luke 8:43–48) and a mute boy suffering from convulsions (Mark 9:25–26), Jesus was freeing them from satanic oppression. When the seventy returned to Jesus, they said, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!" In response, Jesus said, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning" (Luke 10:18).

Boyd makes the following observation:

In short, Satan and his legions are directly or indirectly behind all forms of "natural evil." Satan turns the neutral medium of the natural order into a weapon just as human agents sometimes use rocks, sticks, or water as weapons when they choose to do so ... Jesus always considered "natural" infirmities and diseases as directly or indirectly the work of Satan's kingdom.⁴²

Paul describes the Christian life not as a struggle against "enemies of blood and flesh" but against "the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). In the first-century worldview, the spiritual forces of evil included many classes of fallen spirit-agents such as rulers, principalities, dominions, authorities, and others (collectively called the "powers").⁴³ C.S. Lewis said, "There is no neutral ground in the universe: every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counterclaimed by Satan."⁴⁴ I argue that every "split second" includes the temporal battleground of eons of evolutionary time.

On the surface it may seem that God's omnipotence and sovereignty is diminished in this warfare portrait of evolutionary time. But as Lewis states:

If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will—that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when he pulls the strings—then we may take it it is worth paying.⁴⁵

Lewis suggests that the more powerful an agent is (e.g., Satan), the more severe will be the consequences of evil choices. This thought corresponds to another of Boyd's trinitarian warfare theodicy theses: that the greater the potential an agent has for love, the greater the potential the agent has for harm—in reference to the great blessing Satan may have been, as opposed to the great harm he has brought.⁴⁶

In some circles, though, Satan is not a particularly attractive hypothesis. But, as Lewis notes:

The doctrine of Satan's existence and fall is not among the things we know to be untrue: it contradicts not the facts discovered by scientists but the mere, vague "climate of opinion" that we happen to be living in.⁴⁷

Boyd states that the "current 'climate of opinion' regarding the disbelief in spirit-agents is nothing more than an assumption shared by a relatively small cadre of Western scholars."⁴⁸ Further, he suggests that Western culture is beginning to relearn that "the cosmos is a veritable society of intelligent interacting beings, some of whom are not physical."⁴⁹

Still, for many scholars writing for *PSCF* and elsewhere, significant consideration of an angelic fall is absent in their approach to natural evil. For example, Denis Lamoureux considers what are called natural evils to be "necessary components in a normally functioning biosphere,"⁵⁰ a view not too dissimilar from Luke Janssen, John Wood, and George Murphy.⁵¹ Other writers such as Keith Miller, David Snoke, Christopher Southgate, Bethany Sollereeder, Loren Haarsma, and Jon Garvey object specifically to the angelic-fall thesis.⁵²

What concerns underlie the downplaying of the angelic-fall thesis? I am reminded of the well-known comment by C. S. Lewis:

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.⁵³

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As is true of many issues involving a spectrum of positions, it is usually wise to avoid the extremes. Does the angelic-fall thesis come perilously close to the “unhealthy interest” extreme end of the spectrum—seeing a demon behind every undesirable aspect of creation? On this question, Lewis made his position clear:

It seems to me, therefore, a reasonable supposition, that some mighty created power had already been at work for ill on the material universe, or the solar system, or, at least, the planet Earth, before man ever came on the scene: and that when man fell, someone had, indeed, tempted him.

...

If there is such a power, as I myself believe, it may well have corrupted the animal creation before man appeared. The intrinsic evil of the animal world lies in the fact that animals, or some animals, live by destroying each other.⁵⁴

Lewis was apparently not concerned that an angelic-fall approach to animal suffering represents an “error.”

The most commonly offered concerns and/or objections to the angelic-fall thesis are examined in the next section. Additional objections, involving dualism, God’s omnipotence, and creational fragility, are discussed by Boyd.⁵⁵

Six Objections to the Angelic-Fall Approach

1. God calls the completed creation good and very good

If creation had been corrupted by fallen angels, would there not be some mention or warning that it was not good? This objection centers on the meaning of “good.” As John Walton argues, “good” in Genesis 1 is a reference to creation being functional, not its moral goodness: “When we think of ‘good’ in connection to being functional rather than moral, we don’t have to explain how predation can be part of a morally good world.”⁵⁶

Lloyd maintains that, in contrast to pagan assumptions that creation was an accidental by-product of cosmic violence between the gods, it was rather “intended, willed, and valued by its Creator.” In this manner, Genesis 1:31 declares the “ontological goodness” of creation. Even a creation, fallen due to

angelic sin, “remains ontologically good in the estimation of its Creator.”⁵⁷ By no means is it required to understand the goodness declared in Genesis 1 to be that of moral perfection.

The planting of a garden in Eden, a special place *distinct from the rest of creation*, the command to *subdue* the earth, and the presence of the *serpent* are additional elements of the Genesis narrative that imply creation is something other than morally perfect.

2. All of creation, even the violent aspects, is claimed as God’s work

Lions seek their food from God (Ps. 104:21), and God hunts prey for the lion (Job 38:39). God takes the breath away from living creatures and they die (Ps. 104:29). Psalm 104:32 tells us that God looks on the earth and it trembles (i.e., earthquakes), and touches the mountains and they smoke (i.e., volcanoes). If these events are due to Satan, why are they pictured as God’s work? This objection does not recognize ancient Israel’s theological worldview in which God is the *sole* divine causal agent.⁵⁸ God controls natural events—rainfall, the fruit of the womb, the fruit of the ground, the fruit of livestock, death, and life. God controls personal fortune and misfortune, and victory and defeat in battle. God rewards the obedient and punishes the disobedient. This worldview preserves God’s sovereignty but compromises God’s morality by attributing evil to God.⁵⁹

Jewish thought concerning evil and their political plight underwent considerable development during the intertestamental period. A type of apocalyptic worldview developed that saw good and evil engaged in a cosmic struggle. Jesus and the writers of the New Testament saw Satan as head of a satanic army. The Kingdom of God which Jesus inaugurated came to vanquish Satan’s kingdom. Of great significance in this development was that God was no longer considered the sole spiritual causal agent behind good and evil. Jesus demonstrated this reality throughout his ministry as he went about defeating the kingdom of Satan.⁶⁰

A further note about God feeding carnivores: out of love, God maintains the integrity of ecosystems and the organisms in them, even the corrupted elements. In an analogous manner, God sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous (Matt. 5:45).

3. Values come from disvalues

Sollereeder maintains that the angelic-fall thesis is problematic because it denies the central insight of Darwin, that *values* such as the “fleet-footedness of the deer” or the “coordination and strength of the orca” emerge from *disvalues* such as competition and violence between predator and prey.⁶¹

A distinction is made between the term “disvalue,” meaning harm intrinsic to and necessary to God’s good creation but carrying no moral content, and the term “natural evil,” meaning harm originating from a moral agent in opposition to God.⁶² In Sollereeder’s usage, the harms, violence, and suffering arising from the evolutionary process give rise to values. By contrast, the angelic-fall thesis considers evolutionary violence to be a natural evil, the result of angelic sin.

It is difficult to justify as a *value* the predatory actions of a pod of orcas surrounding a living blue whale, slowly killing it by ripping off chunks of skin and blubber with one orca feeding on the tongue of the still-living whale.⁶³ Likewise, not all animals are fleet-footed enough to escape prolonged, painful deaths as revealed by any YouTube search for hyenas eating large prey animals alive. I consider these acts of violence to be in stark contrast to God’s ideal will for animals as discussed in this article under “Evolution without Violence?”

In Jesus’s ministry, natural phenomena such as disease, deformity, and birth defects were considered the result of Satanic activity and signs that creation was not functioning as God intended. These phenomena are natural evils, not disvalues. Boyd writes, “Far from revealing God’s character, such ‘natural’ phenomena reveal the character of his archenemy, Satan, according to Jesus and the gospel authors.”⁶⁴ It is entirely reasonable to suspect that the same “powers” behind the physical illnesses Jesus healed are also exercising a corrupting influence on nature through the evolutionary process.⁶⁵

4. Satan cannot be a co-creator with God

Related to the previous objection is the concern that Satan, not God, becomes credited with the production of evolutionary values. Sollereeder asks:

Would we then be forced to honor the fallen angels for the fleet-footedness of the deer or the coordination and strength of the orca? Satan would end up being the ... originator of the diversity generated

by cellular mutation and all the speciation events arising from predation or natural disasters.⁶⁶

Karl Giberson and Francis Collins state the concern more bluntly:

To ascribe the creation of *anything* in nature to Satan is to elevate Satan from a *creature* to a co-creator of the world with God. This claim is quite heretical from a technical point of view. No distortion of Christian theology can accommodate the idea that Satan created portions of the world.⁶⁷

In response, the angelic-fall thesis maintains that demonic beings did not create; rather, they corrupted what God created. Violent animals, destructive parasites, deadly bacteria, and genetic diseases are distortions of God’s creatures. Interestingly, in a perverse sort of way, corrupted evolutionary pathways lead to significant biological diversity. Something similar occurs in human society when sin leads to a greater diversity of activities, such as that of drug dealer, prostitute, and warrior, than would otherwise occur in a sinless world.

Throughout evolutionary time, Boyd claims that

the Creator creates, Satan and the powers then corrupt what the Creator created, but God always wisely finds a way to bring good out of evil and to turn the enemy’s corruption to God’s advantage by using it to advance the evolutionary process.⁶⁸

It should be clear that while God works to bring good out of evil, God does not create the evil in order to bring the good.⁶⁹ Evils are not part of God’s design.

5. There is little scriptural support for the view of Satanic corruption

Granted, the Bible does not come right out and declare that Satan corrupted evolution, but should we expect it to? After all, the Bible is not a book of science or systematic theology. It is also worth noting that the Bible is the story of God, not Satan, and God has no reason to give undue attention to a defeated enemy. To return to the objection, I believe that there are two questions to address. First, is the Bible’s view of reality sufficiently supernatural to include fallen spirit-beings? Second, is Satan able to affect matter so as to corrupt creation in evolutionary time?

To the first question: the supernatural worldview of the biblical writers and their readers is often underappreciated in our heavily secularized Western

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world. Michael Heiser has extensively explored the supernatural worldview of the Bible.⁷⁰ He writes:

Many Christians resist or feel uneasy with the supernatural worldview of the Bible. I've written a good deal about the unseen realm and its place in the biblical worldview. My goal has been to help people rediscover the Bible for what it is—a supernatural epic—and to stop reading it like it's a textbook. I've tried to convince people that the content of the Bible is either presented as story or framed by story and that the Bible's story is inescapably supernatural.⁷¹

Concerning evil spirit-beings, he notes:

This overview of the evil forces in the Bible shows that the world contains an army of unseen sinister intelligences, guided by a superintelligent malevolence, collectively watching humanity through a thin preternatural veil, waiting for opportunities to dominate and decimate human lives.⁷²

Jesus and demons spoke to each other (Matt. 8:28–32; Mark 3:11–12; Luke 4:33–35; 8:26–33) with “no hint that Jesus was ‘playing along’ with a deluded, mentally ill individual who only thought he was possessed.”⁷³ A Christocentric hermeneutic validates the reality of Jesus's recognition of demons as wills in opposition to God and capable of corrupting human health. Nicola Hoggard Creegan, although ambivalent about identifying Satan as the cause of natural evil,⁷⁴ asks, “Why discard the element of the demonic when the scriptures are so full of it?”⁷⁵

The Bible's picture of reality is thoroughly supernatural. Whether Satan can affect matter in such a way as to corrupt the evolutionary process is examined as a separate objection.

6. Satan cannot manipulate matter so as to corrupt evolution

As documented by Boyd, early church writers such as Origen and Tertullian did not hesitate to ascribe natural evils such as famine, tempests, and diseases of plants, animals, and people to Satan and demons. Athenagoras, a second-century apologist, describes Satan as the “prince of matter” and wrote that Satan was originally “the spirit which is about matter who was created by God, just as the other angels were ... and entrusted with the control of matter and the forms of matter.”⁷⁶

The Job narrative is noteworthy in attributing to Satan, deadly fire and wind and loathsome skin

sores (Job 1, 2). God and two angels appeared to Abraham “in the flesh” and ate a meal (Gen. 18:8). The two angels went on to Sodom, physically took hold of and moved people, shut a door, and caused blindness (Gen. 19:10–11, 16). Physical ailments are attributed to Satan (Matt. 12:22; Luke 13:10–17). The stone was rolled away from Jesus's tomb by an angel (Matt. 28:2). An angel spoke to the women at the tomb, creating sound waves to be heard (Matt. 28:5). An angel opened a prison door in Acts 5:19. Another angel tapped Peter on the side to wake him, and then removed his chains (Acts 12:7).

What is extraordinary about all of these accounts is the profound concept that nonmaterial spirit-beings, seemingly inhabiting another dimension, are able to assume material form and affect matter or remain in nonmaterial form and affect matter. But from the Bible's perspective, this is to be expected: the material universe is the creation of the immaterial Trinity. As material beings, the natural world we inhabit is experienced as full reality, but we must remember our status as “created.”

Meghan Larissa Good describes “Reality” using the image of a small cabin (our material world) within an immense and wild forest (“the infinite, eternal Life of God”). The cabin has a window (the Bible) offering us “glimpses of the strange and wonderful Really Real.”⁷⁷ Reality beyond the window is beyond our imagination. For all we know, it may be extraordinarily easy for spirit-beings, both good and evil, to affect the material world, including DNA at the molecular level. Exactly how does Satan affect matter? We don't know, but neither do we know exactly how God affects matter, and yet we believe that God does. Satan's ability to corrupt the evolutionary process is likely limited but there is no biblical reason to dismiss the possibility.

God's Sovereignty and Free Will

A question associated with attributing natural evil to satanic actions is whether moral agents are actually free to act in opposition to God's will. In the minds of some, this question could be formulated as another specific objection to the angelic-fall thesis. I present it as a separate section of this article.

Although the expressions “God's sovereignty” and “human responsibility” are not found in the Bible, the Bible teaches doctrines reasonably described by

these terms.⁷⁸ The two expressions occupy the end points of a continuum with the two usually held in tension. When the tension is resolved exclusively in favor of divine sovereignty, theistic determinism is the result. In this view, everything, absolutely everything, is under God's direct control: from the movement of molecules, to our thoughts and behaviors, to the occurrence of good and evil,⁷⁹ God would be less glorified if it were not so.⁸⁰ Movement toward the other end of the spectrum recognizes both God's sovereignty and God's gift of free will to moral agents (humans, angels) capable of making real choices of moral significance, sometimes against God's will.⁸¹

Three booklets, written at the beginning of the current-day COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate various theological points along the sovereignty/free-will continuum. For example, John Piper's view is 100% divine determinism when he states: "The coronavirus was sent ... by God ... God governs it. He will end it."⁸² In contrast, John Lennox maintains that God is not the author of evil such as COVID-19 and we do not live in a deterministic universe.⁸³ N. T. Wright mentions "the dark power that from the start has tried to destroy God's good handiwork," alluding to a will in opposition to God.⁸⁴

The question of God's sovereignty and the free will of other agents is critical. Only a view on the continuum at some distance from theistic determinism offers the possibility for moral agents, such as fallen angels, to freely choose to oppose God, resulting in natural evils not of God's will.

Evolution without Violence?

What if Satan had not sinned? The angelic-fall thesis links natural evils such as predation, harmful mutations, and disease to satanic corruption. But others identify these same phenomena as core aspects of modern theories of evolution. For example, many evolutionary creationists cite the grace and swiftness of the antelope as a direct effect of the power and swiftness of the lion. Would there be a lion or an antelope without predation? Was it possible for God to bring about a creation of complexity, beauty, diversity, and endless adaptations without employing violent processes?

These questions are intriguing, but answers are elusive. The Bible offers clues, but we have no unfallen

creation, no *Perelandra*⁸⁵ with which to compare.⁸⁶ I offer the following four observations and speculations for consideration.

1. The Bible offers a glimpse of God's nonviolent ideal will for creation. In the beginning, God did not give animals to humans to eat or to each other to eat. He gave green plants to *all* of them (Gen. 1:29–30). Only after the Flood was permission granted for humans to eat animals (Gen. 9:1–4). Along with this permission came the "fear and dread" of humans by animals, very unlike the imagery in Gen. 2:19 where Adam interacts with and names the animals. Isaiah offers an eschatological vision of "new heavens and a new earth" where "the wolf and the lamb shall feed together," "a little child shall lead them," "the lion shall eat straw like the ox," and "they will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain" (Isa. 65:17; 11:6–9; 65:25a).⁸⁷ "The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God ... when the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay" (Rom. 8:19, 21).

Revelation 21:1–4 reveals that on the new earth, when God's Kingdom comes in its fullness at the end of the age, "he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." Regarding this future, N. T. Wright states:

One day all creation will be rescued from slavery, from the corruption, decay, and death which deface its beauty, destroy its relationships, remove the sense of God's presence from it, and make it a place of injustice, violence, and brutality. That is the message of rescue, of "salvation," at the heart of one of the greatest chapters Paul ever wrote, the eighth chapter of his Letter to the Romans.⁸⁸

The entire cosmos will be renewed, and heaven and earth brought together.⁸⁹ Wright imagines a landscape filled with peaceful animals, the garden tended once more, and the animals renamed.⁹⁰

The creational ideal from Genesis to Revelation employs imagery that excludes predator violence. The consistency of God's creational ideal is expected given God's unchanging character. The implication is that the same nonviolence expected of people toward each other also represents God's ideal will for relationships between humans and animals and among animals.

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2. There is no warrant to assume creation *must function the way it currently does*. The angelic-fall thesis assumes Satan waged war against God's creation at all levels of life, including birth and death, reproduction, and speciation. Without satanic corruption, for example, might death have been a "natural and harmless feature of the original landscape"?⁹¹ Might animals have died a serene sort of death free of pain and disease, in which their good deaths allowed for recycling and resource availability? Death and decomposition might be necessary, given the second law of thermodynamics, but are predator-prey relationships and animal suffering *required* by that law?⁹² Will there even be a second law of thermodynamics when Christ returns to reign? Are the elevated birth-rates and death-rates of our current world satanic corruptions of birth and death?⁹³

The eons-long warfare between God and demonic forces produced a world of inextricable complexity. As a result, the functionality and species composition of *current* ecosystems unsurprisingly includes elements attributed to Satan. For example, ecosystem health and species diversity are impaired if predators are removed.⁹⁴ Likewise, perverse forms of biological diversity such as parasites and pathogens sometimes have significant roles within ecosystems.

But if Satan had not sinned, disruptive satanic elements would be absent. Modern-day lions, for example, would not exist. A lion's physical, physiological, and neurological specializations for predation are distortions of what a lion otherwise might have been. For that matter, to the extent their adaptations derive from lion avoidance, current-day antelopes would not exist either. The absence of lions and antelopes would not diminish creation. Animal strength, grace, and agility is not inexorably tied to predator-prey relationships (see below).

3. Evolutionary creation is possible in a sinless world. I offer three observations in support of the plausibility of God using nonviolent means to drive evolutionary change and speciation.

First, there is an increased recognition of sources of inherited variation and evolutionary mechanisms apart from standard models of evolutionary change.⁹⁵ A prime example is the importance and pervasiveness of species interactions described as cooperation, mutualism, and symbiosis. At the most basic level of life, for example, the origin of eukaryotic cells lies in

endosymbiotic events involving ancient bacteria that became mitochondria and chloroplasts. Bacteria and other microbes form the symbiotic microbiomes of the gut and skin of many animals. The great majority of plants exist in mutualistic associations with their underground, fungal, mycorrhizal partners. Coral reef communities are rich in mutualisms; corals, themselves, depend on photosynthetic algae living symbiotically in their cells. The pollination of flowers involves an incredibly diverse array of insect, bird, and mammal mutualistic partners. Cooperative species interactions at all levels of life are the expected evolutionary outcome of a nonviolent and loving God.

Second, the means by which God's sovereignty interacts with evolution is of great interest to Christians.⁹⁶ To this end, Peter Bussey suggests the intriguing possibility that God contacts the minds of animals (those with "mentality") to "incline individuals or groups to particular types of behavior. For example, it might be beneficial if particular pairs of animals could be induced to breed together in order to produce offspring with certain enhanced characteristics."⁹⁷ Animals might be influenced "to migrate into more challenging environments" to favor "the development of more advanced biological adaptations."⁹⁸ Such divine guidance could "induce new possibilities of evolutionary direction."⁹⁹ How God guided evolution is ultimately a mystery, but surely God could employ nonviolent mechanisms such as that proposed by Bussey.

Lastly, what if God's interest in the evolutionary development of life includes goals in addition to the creation of human beings? Psalm 104:26 tells us: "There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport [play, frolic] in it," and Job 40:20 tells of mountains where "all the wild animals play." Over the course of evolutionary time, perhaps God took delight in guiding evolution "to see" how fast animals could run, how high they could leap, how they could fly, how deep they could dive in the ocean, or how big or small the vertebrates could be. God's guidance of nonviolent "play" activities of creatures, including nonviolent forms of competition, could produce a wide array of species adaptations.

Imagination and faith allow us to see through the current creation and envision a creation brought into existence without violence and unmarred by angelic sin.¹⁰⁰ Such a creation might resemble ours in some

respects and be very different at the same time. It would be unambiguously wonderful.

4. Both science and theology are necessary to tell the whole story of life. The angelic-fall thesis is not antievolutionary or incompatible with the sciences. It makes no plea to incorporate demonic activity into scientific theories of evolutionary change. It has no expectation for science to detect supernatural interventions of any sort—either satanic or by God. It simply insists that evolution, as described scientifically, cannot encompass all that is true of the story of life.

Whereas science does not recognize supernatural purpose or guidance behind evolution, the theist insists that the story of life is incomplete apart from God's sovereignty. To this end, many theists believe that God guided evolution to ultimately bring about organisms capable of being endowed with God's image. Such an interventionist view is a recognized form of theistic evolution. For example, Gerald Rau distinguishes between planned evolution (PE) and directed evolution (DE),¹⁰¹ two models differentiated under a broadly defined theistic evolution model. PE and DE differ primarily on the issue of God's intervention in the evolutionary process with PE leaning toward no intervention and DE accepting intervention. It seems to me that the angelic-fall thesis aligns with the DE model in that it can accommodate not only God's guiding interventions in the evolutionary history of life but also the interventions of malevolent spirit-beings, the result being a good but marred creation.

Science, in contrast, is expected to form its story of the history of life through empirical study of nature using standard scientific methodologies and to develop theoretical explanations of evolution in terms of natural processes. The story of life told by either science or theology alone is incomplete.

Conclusions

Although I argue for the plausibility of satanic corruption of the evolutionary process, I do not want to imply that creation is so marred and ruined that it no longer bears witness to God. God's eternal power, divine nature, and glory are seen through the things God has made (Rom. 1:20; Ps. 19:1). And yet, while we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14), "the whole creation has been groaning" (Rom. 8:22).

Though there is no call to see Satan behind every undesirable event, creation contains elements Jesus attributed to Satan. This ambiguousness in creation is well-voiced by Philip Yancey when he observes that "we live in a good world, spoiled."¹⁰²

In this article, I posited that the violence associated with the evolutionary history of life is incongruous with the nonviolent moral character of God as revealed by Jesus. The angelic-fall approach to evolutionary violence removes culpability for such evil both from humans and from God. Culpability is assigned instead to the malevolent wills of fallen spirit-agents working in opposition to God over the course of evolutionary time.

Of course, many questions remain unanswered. But without an angelic fall, we are faced with an intractable problem of evil. Boyd states:

Our "problem of evil" is not the "problem of evil" Jesus and his disciples confronted. If, in contrast to Jesus's approach, one believes that a good and wise divine purpose ultimately lies behind sickness, disease, and all the atrocities that make the world a nightmarish place, then one subtly shifts the problem of evil from something one has to war against to something one has to think through. Rather than being a problem of overcoming the evil deeds of the devil and its army, our problem of evil has become a problem of intellectually explaining how an all-good and all-powerful God could will what certainly are evil deeds of the devil. Perhaps most tragically, in trading problems in this fashion, we have surrendered a spiritual conflict we are commissioned to fight ... for an intellectual puzzle we can never resolve.¹⁰³

The attribution of natural evil—whether current or in evolutionary time—to wills other than God's has many useful outcomes:

- It emphasizes consistency in God's moral character in all present-day relationships with creation and throughout the development of life over time. The removal of ambiguity about God's moral character brings glory to God and enhances Christian witness to the world.
- It encourages us to view evolutionary creation through the lens of the nonviolent moral character of God rather than viewing God through the lens of evolutionary creation. It recognizes that for the theist, the scientific story of life is not the complete story. At the same time, it accepts the scientific

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evidence for an ancient Earth and for evolution with common descent, and it welcomes ongoing investigations into the mechanisms of evolutionary change.

- It accords with the Bible's teaching that Jesus is nonviolent, that Jesus best reveals God, and that Jesus came to destroy the Kingdom of Satan. In contrast, the Bible is silent about concepts such as "only way" or "greater good" explanations for evil.
- It fosters a pastoral perspective by allowing us to recognize natural evils for what they are—harms originating in wills in opposition to God. The warfare model explains why God cannot prevent all occurrences of evil. In that sense, referring to natural catastrophes as "acts of God" is a misnomer. Indeed, Boyd regularly places "natural evil" in quotes to highlight that to the extent they are caused by fallen free agents exercising their will, there is nothing natural about them.¹⁰⁴ And, from an eschatological perspective, all evil, whether moral or "natural," will be removed and redeemed.
- It promotes a version of evolutionary creation that is interventive, in which God's sovereign will and God's purpose for creation are accomplished despite opposition from evil wills. Creation bears the scars of satanic conflict just as human history is littered with the effects of human sin. But just as Christians believe that God intervenes in human lives and exercises sovereignty throughout the messy history of humanity, this view maintains that God *acts* in creation to bring about as much good as possible out of satanic distortions and to sovereignly accomplish God's ultimate will for creation.
- It reminds us that the Bible presents reality as profoundly supernatural. One of the challenges facing all believers, including scientists, living in a heavily secularized culture such as ours, is to resist the pressure to minimize the supernatural reality behind the thin veil separating the material and immaterial realms.
- It aligns our efforts with God reflected in the earthly ministry of Jesus to fight "misery-inflicting" natural evils such as diseases, parasites, deformities, and other things "that do not reflect the loving character of God that was definitively revealed on Calvary."¹⁰⁵

Mystery remains in all approaches attempting to explain natural evil, but God's moral character should not be part of that mystery. ►

Notes

¹Gerald Rau, *Mapping the Origins Debate: Six Models of the Beginning of Everything* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

²⁴"About Us," BioLogos, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://biologos.org/about-us#our-mission>.

³⁴"What We Believe," BioLogos, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://biologos.org/about-us/what-we-believe>.

⁴BioLogos, "Evolutionary Creation" is distinct from "Theistic Evolution," accessed May 31, 2022, <https://biologos.org/common-questions/what-is-evolutionary-creation>.

⁵In defining orthodoxy, the ancient creeds took care to establish the doctrine of the divinity of Christ—that Jesus is God. But of more radical significance is that the doctrine also means that Jesus reveals God, a truth sometimes expressed more informally as *God is like Jesus* or *God looks like Jesus*. See Brian D. McLaren, *A New Kind of Christianity: Ten Questions That Are Transforming the Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 114. Few doctrines are as well supported biblically as the claim that God's preeminent self-revelation is Jesus, God incarnate. Given this, we may be confident that God's moral character is accurately displayed by Jesus and that the same nonviolent, loving, self-sacrificial life that Jesus lived also characterizes God: John 1:1, 14, 18; 14:8–9; Col. 1:15–16, 19; 2:9; Heb. 1:1–3. The Bible also describes the centrality of love in understanding the character of God and our relationship to him and to others: Mark 12:30–31; 1 John 3:16; 4:8, 16b.

⁶A distinctive of Anabaptism was their commitment to peace and nonviolence modeled on the life and teaching of Jesus: Matt. 5:9, 38–39, 43–45a; 7:12; 26:52; Luke 6:27–29; Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:11–12; James 3:17–18; 1 Pet. 3:9. Jesus's command to love one's enemies was understood to be normative for the Christian life, as was his teaching that enemies were not to be fought with the weapons of this world (John 18:36). Violence was renounced.

⁷John H. Redekop, "Anabaptism: The Basic Beliefs," Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://www.mennonitebrethren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Anabaptism-The-Basic-Beliefs-v.1.pdf>; "Anabaptism," Messiah University, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.messiah.edu/info/20265/the_three_traditions_that_shape_our_mission_and_why/326/anabaptism; and Palmer Becker, "What Is an Anabaptist Christian?," Mennonite Mission Network, accessed May 31, 2022, <https://assets.mennonites.org/Downloads/DL.MissioDei18.E.pdf>.

⁸For those interested in exploring this history, a reviewer recommends Tom Finger's text *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* and the writings of Hans Denck, an early Anabaptist "theologian" from southern Germany.

⁹Gary Emberger, "Theological and Scientific Explanations for the Origin and Purpose of Natural Evil," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 46, no. 3 (1994): 150–58, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1994/PSCF9-94Emberger.html>; and Emberger, "Theological Analysis of Selected Recent Creationist Assertions," *Perspectives on Science and*

- Christian Faith* 52, no. 3 (2000): 160–68, <https://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/2000/PSCF9-00Emberger.html>.
- ¹⁰Gregory A. Boyd, “An Enemy Did This: A Cosmic Conflict,” in *All Creation Groans: Toward a Theology of Disease and Global Health*, ed. Daniel W. O’Neill and Beth Snodderly (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 205.
- ¹¹The old-earth creation model, while rejecting evolutionary common descent, nevertheless carries some of the same concerns about natural evil and the character of God as does evolutionary creation. But because the question of the compatibility of God’s character with evolutionary suffering is maximized with the evolutionary creation model, my article is limited to that model. Briefly, though, in old-earth creation, natural evils are viewed as creation design features in God’s very good creation, “optimized by God to enhance the well-being and minimize the suffering of his creatures” and meant to enhance “the free-will capacity of redeemed humans.” See James Dew, J. B. Stump, and Hugh Ross, “Death, Predation, and Suffering,” in *Old-Earth or Evolutionary Creation?*, ed. Kenneth Keathley, J. B. Stump, and Joe Aguirre (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 74, 77, 84.
- ¹²Thomas Jay Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God: An Open and Relational Account of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 64.
- ¹³Bethany N. Sollereeder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering: Theodicy without a Fall* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 3.
- ¹⁴Sollereeder, *Why Is There Suffering?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 138–41.
- ¹⁵A Christocentric, or Christological, interpretative key is not exclusive to Anabaptist hermeneutics. For example, New Covenant Theology shares this distinctive. See A. Blake White, *What Is New Covenant Theology? An Introduction* (Frederick, MD: New Covenant Media, 2012). A reviewer of this article recommended including quotes or examples of how a Christological approach was used in early Anabaptist thought and praxis. However, because a Christological approach is not restricted to Anabaptism and because I am not attempting to present the Anabaptist perspective on theodicy, such a historical analysis is beyond the scope of this article.
- ¹⁶Eric A. Seibert, *Disturbing Divine Behavior* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 185–86; Erv Wiens, “An Overview of Anabaptist Hermeneutics: A Summary of Stuart Murray’s book *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition*,” Mennonite Church Canada, accessed May 31, 2022, https://www.commonword.ca/FileDownload/13623/An_Overview_of_Anabaptist_Hermeneutics.pdf; and Becker, “What Is an Anabaptist Christian?” The common alternative hermeneutic to a Christocentric hermeneutic is a *flat* view of the Bible, where all portrayals of God are considered equally authoritative. The choice of hermeneutic has tremendous consequences. For example, Christians often say we should desire a more biblical world. If biblical means “flat” as defined above, a totally flat reading of scripture describes a world in which war, genocide, women as property, slavery, polygamy, concubinage, bizarre death penalties, and other violent actions are all accepted as normative. Rather, our desire should be for a more Christlike world where such violence is discerned as a distortion of God’s will. See Keith Giles, *Jesus Unbound: Liberating the Word of God from the Bible* (Orange, CA: Quoir, 2018), 26.
- ¹⁷Michael Lloyd, “Theodicy, Fall, and Adam,” in *Finding Ourselves after Darwin: Conversations on the Image of God, Original Sin, and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Stanley P. Rosenberg et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 249–50; and Michael Lloyd, “The Fallenness of Nature,” in *Finding Ourselves after Darwin*, 262, 271, 279.
- ¹⁸Gijsbert van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 131–32.
- ¹⁹Sollereeder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering*, 45–46; and van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*, 106–110.
- ²⁰Sollereeder, *God, Evolution, and Animal Suffering*, 47; and van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*, 132.
- ²¹Sollereeder, *Why Is There Suffering?*, 45–47.
- ²²Van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*, 110–19.
- ²³Lloyd, “Theodicy, Fall, and Adam,” 251–52.
- ²⁴Oord, *The Uncontrolling Love of God*, 94–95, 167–75; Thomas Jay Oord, “An Open Theology Doctrine of Creation and Solution to the Problem of Evil,” in *Creation Made Free: Open Theology Engaging Science*, ed. Thomas Jay Oord (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), chapter 2, 101; and Thomas Jay Oord, *God Can’t Q & A* (Grasmere, ID: SacraSage Press, 2020), 134.
- ²⁵Boyd, “An Enemy Did This,” 196–97.
- ²⁶*Ibid.*, 197.
- ²⁷Van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*, 132.
- ²⁸Boyd, “An Enemy Did This,” 199.
- ²⁹Lloyd, “Theodicy, Fall, and Adam,” 254.
- ³⁰Van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*, 119.
- ³¹Lloyd, “Theodicy, Fall, and Adam,” 253–54.
- ³²Dew, Stump, and Ross, “Death, Predation, and Suffering,” 72, 73, 81.
- ³³John Polkinghorne, *Quarks, Chaos and Christianity: Questions to Science and Religion* (London, UK: The Crossroad Publishing Co., 2005), 59.
- ³⁴*Ibid.*, 60–61.
- ³⁵Van den Brink, *Reformed Theology and Evolutionary Theory*, 119–23.
- ³⁶Lloyd, “Theodicy, Fall, and Adam,” 249–50. Lloyd employs a three-part classification of approaches to accounting for pre-Adamic natural evil (PANE): PANE as *instrumental* where PANE is built into creation as a design feature in order to accomplish God’s purposes for creation, PANE as *inevitable* where God does not want PANE to be in creation but God cannot unilaterally remove or prevent it, and PANE as *inimical* to God’s purposes where PANE is due to the choices of creatures given free-will as part of their God-given purpose. *Ibid.*, 248–55.
- ³⁷Lloyd, “The Fallenness of Nature,” 269.
- ³⁸Polkinghorne, *Exploring Reality: The Intertwining of Science and Religion* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 143.
- ³⁹Lloyd, “The Fallenness of Nature,” 270.
- ⁴⁰Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Dan Kent, “Must We Believe in Satan? As a Personal Agent?,” ReKnew, March 15, 2022, accessed May 31, 2022, https://reknew.org/2022/03/must-we-believe-in-satan-as-a-personal-agent/?utm_source=Website+Signup&utm_campaign=5b53093a53-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm

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- _term=0_0de6226b5c-5b53093a53-52352921; Lloyd, "The Fallenness of Nature," 270–79; C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962); and Robert Wennberg, "Animal Suffering and the Problem of Evil," *Christian Scholar's Review* 21, no. 2 (1991): 120–40.
- ⁴¹All scripture quotes in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible.
- ⁴²Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 318.
- ⁴³Boyd, "An Enemy Did This," 205.
- ⁴⁴C. S. Lewis, *Christian Reflections* (1967; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 41.
- ⁴⁵C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 38.
- ⁴⁶Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 169–73.
- ⁴⁷Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 134.
- ⁴⁸Gregory A. Boyd, "Why Creation Groans," in *All Creation Groans*, 216.
- ⁴⁹Boyd, *God at War*, 63.
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- ¹⁰⁰The importance of imagination reminds me of the 1884 book "Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions" by Edwin A. Abbott, a fanciful story of beings occupying worlds of different numbers of dimensions. In it, Sphere (a being occupying Spaceland, a 3D world) attempts with great difficulty to convince Square (a being occupying Flatland, a 2D world) of the reality of a world with three dimensions. Sphere eventually succeeds but then, itself, cannot imagine a fourth dimension, claiming it to be "utterly inconceivable." The importance of faith reminds me of Christian belief in a supernatural realm that exists all around us, seemingly in another dimension beyond empirical detection, populated by intelligent, immaterial spirit-beings that interact with us. These beings have intelligence, will, and emotion and yet lack organic brains with all the associated neuronal connections which we associate with personhood. God is one of these beings.
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