

# Classical Theism (11): Being biblically honest with God's Sovereignty 1 and the Problem of Evil



and a Good God

# Classical Theism (11): Being biblically honest with God's sovereignty and the Problem of Evil

## Bible Doctrines (The True-Good-Beautiful )

### T/G/B

Eschatology  
Thanatology  
Ecclesiology  
Israelology  
Dispensationalism  
Doxology  
Hodology  
Soteriology  
Hamartiology  
Natural Law  
Anthropology  
Angelology  
Pneumatology  
Christology  
Paterology  
Trinitarianism  
Cosmology  
Theology Proper  
Bibliology  
Natural Theology

Opening passages: Psalm 100; 73:24-25.

Preparation for the Word of God, John 8:12; 12:46; 1 Cor. 3:2, 11.

**3 Parts to Bible Class:** Each part is designed to ground the believer in realism to grasp reality and POE.

Part I: Spiritual basics: Love and the nature of the human will and virtue: libertarianism, compatibilism, or determinism?

Part II: Philosophical foundations. POL: Ludwig Wittgenstein and our modern "death" of God age.

Part III: Doctrinal development: Classical theism 11: Being biblically honest with God's sovereignty and POE.

**Part I: Basics: Anything that is not done out of love for God defaults to some form of legalism or religionism.**

1. Love is the root, hinge, and fruit of all virtues. Consider the power of love in creating virtuous Christians in 1 Cor. 13.
2. Is there any other directive or command in the Word of God that promises so much virtue as love?
3. Can you think of one command in the Word of God, the Law or the NT, that is not fulfilled by love?
  - Mat 22:40 "On these two commandments (**love**) depend the whole Law and the Prophets."
  - Romans 13:8 Owe nothing to anyone except to **love one another**; for he **who loves his neighbor** has fulfilled the law. . . 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law.
  - Gal 5:14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."
  - Jam 2:8 If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law, according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.
4. Can you think of one failure, in angelic or human history, that love for God would not have prevented?
5. Love for God is the only love that has the stability to guarantee all other loves.
6. There are three options regarding a person's character and the human will.
7. Option #1: Libertarianism. This is the view that man has a free will that is free of any antecedent factors, like character or inherent desires. In libertarianism, man's choices and thoughts are not really tied to his character or nature. So, in theory a person could choose never to sin since his fallen nature or character is not tied to his free will. As far as the plan of God, Peter's threefold denial was not related to his character. He just chose to deny the Lord. Or take the case of the apostle Paul, his commitment to the Lord had nothing to do with him seeing the risen Lord or his background in legalism. Note the failure of libertarianism in Romans 7:14-25.
8. Option #2: Compatibilism. This is the view that man's free will is tied to the antecedent factors such as a person's character and his view of what is good. As far as the plan of God, Peter's three fold denial was related to his weak character. What Peter *will do* was guaranteed by God according to what Peter *would do*. Note the realism of compatibilism in how we habituate our character. Through sin and evil we actually become slaves to sin and vice.
9. Option #3: Determinism. This is the view that man has no free will. God simply determines every event arbitrary. He decides who will believe and who will not believe, for example.

5: Hermeneutics

4: Language-91

3: Epistemology 32

- Existence 50
- History 50

2: Metaphysics 32

- Trans. 50

1: Reality

- Logic 32,
- Truth 32

## Part 2: Philosophy of Language (91)

3

### Outline

- ✓ Introduction
- ✓ What is philosophy of language?
- ✓ Theories of meaning
- ✓ Plato's *Cratylus*
  - Hermogenes
  - Cratylus
  - Socrates
- ✓ Aristotle (384-322 BC)
- ✓ Transition to modern philosophy of language
- ✓ Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913)
- ✓ Gottlob Frege (1848-1925)

**Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951).**

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).

W. V. O. Quine (1908-2000).

Noam Chomsky (1928-)

Realist view of meaning.

Foundation of meaning.

Communication of meaning.

Elements of language.

Function of language

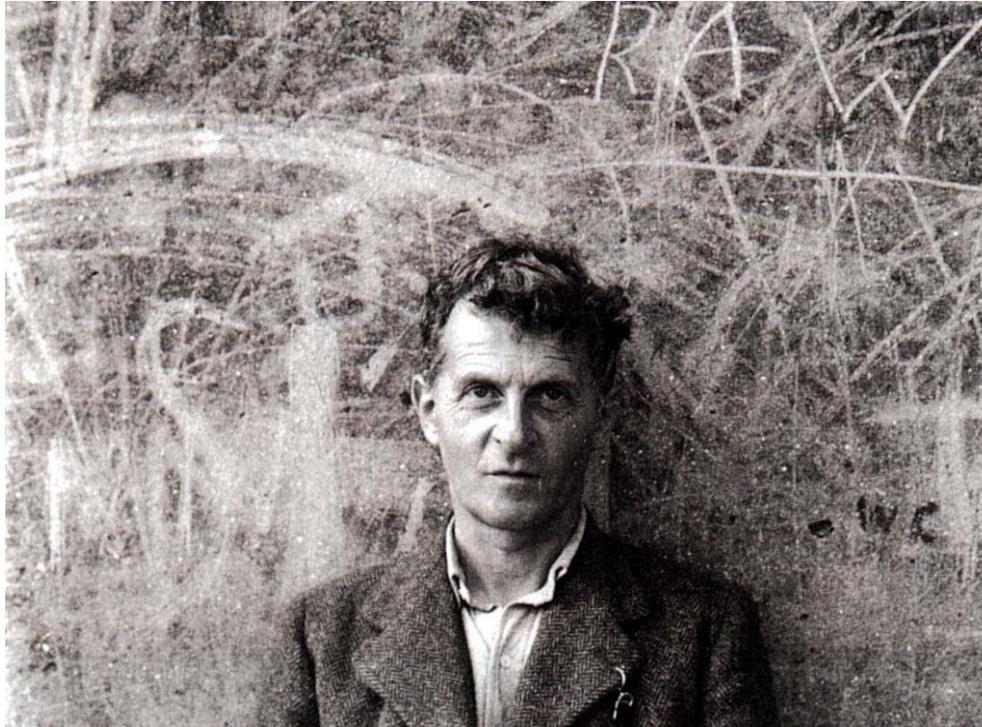
Meaningful God-talk.

Analytic Philosophy

Conclusion.

Analogy.

Metaphysical analogy.



### Ludwig Wittgenstein

*“The sense of the world must lie outside of the world. In the world everything is as it is and everything happens as it does happen. In it no value exists. God does not reveal Himself in the world. Feeling the world as a limited whole it is this that is mystical.”*

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein was born in Vienna into an extremely wealthy family.
2. He possessed unparalleled genius in mathematical logic.
3. He is considered one of the greatest *modern* philosophers.
4. His is in the modern age, which is marked by the “death of God” (Nietzsche) as modern mechanistic science replaced the anthropomorphized God of modern Christianity, the God who moved all things.
5. It was the rejection of metaphysics and classical theism that created the perfect storm for the “death of God,” as science replaced God as ultimate explanation of the world and the only body of true knowledge about reality. Modern science no longer supported belief in God (mechanical).
6. Faith in God becomes very personal matter on a spiritual level. Replaced the cosmic God with one in the heart.
7. Wittgenstein seeks CT, but rejected Aristotle’s essences & properties.

## Part 3: Classical Theism (11): Being biblically honest with God's Sovereignty and the Problem of Evil 4

1. We need to honestly look at the “dots” before we can connect them all through philosophical realism in order to avoid special pleading and false views of the Bible, God, evil, sin, logic, and goodness. Do we really understand the nature of God or come to grips with the horrendous evil's of God's predestined world? Have you really connected the horrors of this world to the God who is omnipotent, all-knowing, and all good—for all that happens just as God put it together. Is this world not filled with horrendous evils? Is God the Playwright? Can you not think of how you would have written a better story, like with less evil? Would you not have warned the parent who backed over their child in the driveway? Can you not imagine a world with more free and happy people?
2. Overview of God' Story and evil: Lev. 26:14-29; Deut. 30:15-20; 1 Sam 16:14-23; Job 1:12-22; Isa. 46:9-10; Matt. 6:26; Acts 2:23; 4:24-28; Eph. 1:3-6, 11; Col. 1:16-17; 2 Thess. 2:1-12; Rev. 13:8.

3. Discussion of the POE and theism by David Hume through the fictional characters of Cleanthes, Demea, and Philo (“Natural Religion”).



**Cleanthes:** It seems strange to me, said Cleanthes, that you, Demea, who are so sincere in the cause of religion, should still maintain the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the Deity, and should insist so strenuously, that He has no manner of likeness or resemblance to human creatures. The Deity, I can readily allow, possesses many powers and attributes, of which we can have no comprehension: But if our ideas, so far as they go, be not just, and adequate, and correspondent to his real nature, I know not what there is in this subject worth insisting on. Is the name, without any meaning, of such mighty importance? Or how do you Mystics, who maintain the absolute incomprehensibility of the Deity, differ from Sceptics or Atheists, who assert, that the first cause of all is unknown and unintelligible? Their temerity must be very great, if, after rejecting the production by a mind; I mean, **a mind, resembling the human (for I know of no other)** they pretend to assign, with certainty, any other specific, intelligible cause.

**Demea:** (after charging Cleanthes with “anthropomorphism”) New opinions, new passions, new affections, new feelings arise, which continually diversify the mental scene, and produce in it the greatest variety, and most rapid succession imaginable. How is this compatible, with that **perfect immutability and simplicity, which all true Theists ascribe to the Deity**? By the same act, say they, He sees past, present, and future: His love and his hatred, his mercy and his justice, are one individual operation: He is entire in every point of space; and complete in every instant of duration. No succession, no change, no acquisition, no diminution. What He is implies not in it any shadow of distinction or diversity. And what He is, this moment, He ever has been, and ever will be, without any new judgement, sentiment, or operation. He stands fixed in one simple, perfect state; nor can you ever say, with any propriety, that this act of His is different from that other, or that this judgement or idea has been lately formed, and will give place, by succession, to any different judgement or idea.

**Cleanthes:** I can readily allow, said Cleanthes, that those who maintain the perfect simplicity of the Supreme Being, to the extent in which you have explained it, are complete Mystics, and chargeable with all the consequences which I have drawn from their opinion. They are, in a word, Atheists, without knowing it.

Principles.

1. For Cleanthes God is like us. He is not the simple immutable being of classical Christianity (Church Fathers, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, Church councils).
2. The God of Cleanthes is the God of modern evangelicalism (Swinburne, Nash, Morris, Craig). This is called personalism. Moreover, they tend to be empiricists when it comes to epistemology.

3. In personal theism, the Cleanthian view of God, God's goodness is like man's. There is no doubt that this is the Achilles heel in the contemporary debate. The moment one places God in moral categories, he is in real trouble. You will not only have trouble with Mackie's four propositions, you will have trouble with much of the Bible. If God is good like you, then He can be bad like you. And you can be "better" than Him.
4. Personal theism is also based on perfect being theology, which begins with the mind and the idea of perfection. However, this is not the classical position.
5. The view of God that Hume, Mackie, and all moderns, both atheists and evangelicals is one of personalism—not the classical God of orthodox Christianity.

6. The God of Cleanthes is that God's difference from us is only one of degree, not kind.
7. The classical view of God does not engender any of the problems in problem of evil.
8. Given these two views of God, the problem of evil will look much different.

## (Continuation of the discourse)

**Philo:** I am indeed persuaded, said Philo, that the best and indeed the only method of bringing everyone to a due sense of religion, is by just representations of the misery and wickedness of men. . . In this point, said Philo, the learned are perfectly agreed with the vulgar; and in all letters, *sacred* and *profane*, the topic of human misery has been insisted on with the most pathetic eloquence, that sorrow and melancholy could inspire. The poets, who speak from sentiment, without a system, and whose testimony has therefore the more authority, abound in images of this nature. From Homer down to Dr. Young, the whole inspired tribe have ever been sensible, that no other representation of things would suit the feeling and observation of each individual.

## (Continuation of the discourse)

**Demea:** And why should man, added he, pretend to an exemption from the lot of all other animals? The whole earth, believe me, Philo, is cursed and polluted. A perpetual war is kindled amongst all living creatures. Necessity, hunger, want, stimulate the strong and courageous: Fear, anxiety, terror, agitate the weak and infirm. The first entrance into life gives anguish to the new-born infant and to its wretched parent: Weakness, impotence, distress, attend each stage of that life: and 'tis at last finished in agony and horror. . . Man alone, said Demea, seems to be, in part, an exception to this rule. For by combination in society, he can easily master lions, tigers, and bears, whose greater strength and agility naturally enable them to prey upon him.. . You have to answer this. If religion does not have an adequate explanation, or just representation of the misery, there is a disconnect. How does it look at human evil and suffering? Can it make sense of it. Can it be intelligible?

**(Continuation of the discourse)**

**Philo:** On the contrary, it is here chiefly, cried Philo, that the uniform and equal maxims of Nature are most apparent. Man, it is true, can, by combination, surmount all his *real* enemies, and become master of the whole animal creation: but does he not immediately raise up to himself *imaginary* enemies, the daemons of his fancy, who haunt him with superstitious terrors, and blast every enjoyment of life? His pleasure, as he imagines, becomes, in their eyes, a crime: his food and repose give them umbrage and offence: his very sleep and dreams furnish new materials to anxious fear: and even death, his refuge from every other ill, presents only the dread of endless and innumerable woes. Nor does the wolf molest more the timid flock, than superstition does the anxious breast of wretched mortals.

## (Continuation of the discourse)

**Philo:** And is it possible, Cleanthes, said Philo, that after all these reflections, and infinitely more, which might be suggested, you can still persevere in your Anthropomorphism, and assert the moral attributes of the Deity, his justice, benevolence, mercy, and rectitude, to be of the same nature with these virtues in human creatures? His power we allow infinite: whatever he wills is executed: but neither man nor any other animal is happy: therefore he does not will their happiness. His wisdom is infinite: he is never mistaken in chusing the means to any end: but the course of Nature tends not to human or animal felicity: therefore it is not established for that purpose. Through the whole compass of human knowledge, there are no inferences more certain and infallible than these. In what respect, then, do his benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men? Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?

1. What about argument from design? Is not the universe intricately designed? Does not the beauty of sunsets and flowers tell us something about God? However, there are also vicious designs in the world. Special pleading?
2. Unlike a volcano God or Zeus, everything in the universe is under the control of the God of the Bible. There is only one author. The whole fabric of all that exists is woven together by divine existence. Every atom, every electron, every cancer cell is there by divine decree; God decides it all. We do not tell God what part we will play. From beginning to the end. It is all determined and fashioned exactly the way He wants it. It is all put together for Him. So, is the atheist is right in charging God with horrible acts? What about Adolph Hitler? What about moms drowning their babies? Babies with cancer? Jeffrey Dahmer?
3. Of course, we can start modifying God's control of all things, but this makes the problem worse. To remove God from the horrendous acts is far worse. How in the world can anyone solve these issues without understanding the metaphysics of God, goodness, power, morality, evil, etc.?

#### 4. Discussion of the logical problem of evil (Epicurus, Philo/Hume, Mackie)

1. God is all-powerful.
2. God is all-loving.
3. God is all-knowing.
4. Evil exists.



Atheist  
J.L. Mackie  
1917-1981

#### 5. Does it seem like there is incompatibility here? If 1-3, then why 4? Common responses

- a. “The Fall.” However, who allowed the Fall? Why Satan?
- b. “Free will.” However, God created the creatures with free will. Impossible for God to not create some beings, like Hitler, to avoid massive evil?
- c. “Means to end.” Does God not have the power to get certain goods without evil? So, God needs evil?
- d. “Accept 1-4 by faith.”
- e. “Mystery.” Stuck with problem due to human standpoint.
- f. “Voluntarists.” He just wants it, so it is not a philosophy problem to reconcile (Descartes).
- g. There is a solution to Mackie’s logical problem of evil. However, one must understand at least 7 metaphysical realities to connect the dots.