

Addressing the Problem of Pain in the Soul-Making World of Job



And the God Who Ordered It

Robert Morrin

Journey Community Church

Richmond, KY 40475

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INTRODUCTION

The point of this paper will be to show that Job's suffering was a justifiable allowance of evil on God's part and that God personally provided oversight in his suffering for the bettering of this man of God. It will be shown that suffering with Job was indeed connected with the free will of God's creation and also brought about the greatest good achievable with this man of Uz as a part of this best possible world.

At the end of his suffering the good in life for Job is most certainly perceived at a higher level of appreciation following his trial. He was doubly blessed, vindicated and restored. The evil in his situation came as a result of the free will of created beings such as Job's friends, Job himself and the supernatural being referred to as Satan in the book of Job. The traditional idea that God allowed Job's evil as a consequence of his sin, as presented by his friends, is not supportable. This is plainly seen in the dialogue of these friends on this topic and God's eventual response to them for asserting this particular idea. However, the idea that evil produces occasion for moral and spiritual growth will indeed be seen by the final result of the trial of this righteous man named Job.

This paper will outline a soul-making theodicy by reviewing the thoughts of Augustine, Irenaeus and Aquinas. It will be seen that a world with evil as a consequence of free will is a best possible world as far as can be discerned by creatures of great limitations in perception and knowledge given the vastness of reality. It will further be shown that the God behind the difficulties of life works goodness in all things as an answer to the problem of evil.

I. A Soul-Making Theodicy

Augustinian Theodicy

Augustine was said to have written more about the problem of evil than any other theist, possibly because of his own early struggles. His position rests largely on the assertion that evil does not qualify in itself as an actual thing. It is not a thing in itself that can then, as a part of creation, be attributed to the Creator. Augustine's assertion that evil is not a thing (but is a privation or lack in things) is a logical and supportable supposition. A summary of his position is as follows:

- God is the Author of everything in the created universe.
- Evil is not a thing or substance; it is a privation or lack in things.
- Therefore, it does not follow that God created evil.¹

The possibility of sin in a human life then, involving a moral failure of any kind that we would call sin, is a privation resulting from the gift of free will built into God's creatures for their highest possible good. God knew this evil would occur but made man in spite of this knowing that He would work redemption and knowing further that, as quoted by Dr. Martin, "that creature is greater who sins, having free will, over a creature who does not sin having no free will." With Augustine then, it was the fall of man that was the origin of at least moral evil in this world and that fall brought about a universal carnage in nature.

Irenaeun Theodicy

The theodicy of Irenaeus as developed from his seed thoughts and elaborated through the centuries by others is considerably different than that of Augustine. His approach is known as a soul-making theodicy where evil is allowed by God and is even considered essential for moral

development and growth. As Dr. Martin stated in the seminar, “Adam was thoroughly made as to the potentialities of morality but not complete, not mature. God built certain things in him but with much more potentiality for further development in being like God.” John Hick cultivates this view of Irenaeus with his own presuppositions and develops this line of thought into degrees of evolutionary progress in man which leads to the growing up of perfected finite persons.² Aside from ideas regarding evolutionary progression, Irenaeus theodicy does hinge upon the sense that man is an immature creation designed with potential for growth in goodness and virtue and that this growth and virtue is gained via wrestling with the evils of a planet designed for just such a help. The world is therefore seen as a person-building world if seen through the eyes of Irenaeus.

Aquinas and Theodicy in Job

Thomas Aquinas in his theodicy as particularly noted in his exposition of Job, sees evil neither in the light of necessity as does Irenaeus nor in the light of “not a thing” as does Augustine. Aquinas sees evil and suffering as something that although not good in itself, is yet a thing that might have certain goodness with regard to particular circumstances. As C.S. Lewis says explaining Aquinas, “if evil is present, pain at recognition of the evil, being a kind of knowledge, is relatively good; for the alternative is that the soul should be ignorant of the evil, or ignorant that the evil is contrary to its nature, either of which is manifestly bad.”³ Suffering then is conditionally good as a means to an end. It serves as something medicinal for the woes of humanity whose souls possess a terminal leaning toward evil. One example that is given for this is in our contemporary use of chemotherapy.⁴ In chemotherapy actual toxins are administered into the human body to kill the bad cells. Clearly good cells are attacked as well and destroyed but for the greater benefit of eliminating the bad cells that if left alone will bring premature death. The chemo agent which is

¹ Norman L. Geisler, “The Roots of Evil,” (Grand Rapids, Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), page 46

² Stephen T. Davis, “Encountering Evil,” (Louisville, Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), page 48

³ Clives Staples Lewis, “The Problem of Pain,” (San Francisco, Harper Publishers, 2001), pages 123, 124

essentially a poison to the human body is *understood to be a good thing as applied*, not because it is pleasant in itself but because it is intended to bring about eventual good through continued living. In the same way, when difficulty assails an individual and that individual utilizes that difficulty to bring about spiritual, emotional and character development, the difficulty or suffering is seen as a good thing allowed by God for longer-lasting personal benefit. In this “theodicy” the goal of Aquinas is not so much to define or prove anything about evil itself. His goal instead is simply a better understanding of God and His interaction with His creation.

Combinationalism

In Theodicy, since the very definition includes the paradoxical idea of justifying God for evil in a good world then the subject is decidedly a broader and deeper subject as a paradox than what might be accurately explored by strict linear thinking. Linear thinking, following one line of thought to its logical conclusion, is simply too one-dimensional for a subject matter such as theodicy which is clearly multi-dimensional. A deeper viewpoint then can be established through a thorough combinationalism of at least these three basic theodicy’s of Augustine, Irenaeus and Aquinas.

An example of this combinationalism can be found in the realm of science with the famous $E=MC^2$ of Albert Einstein. It is known in scientific circles that Mr. Einstein developed this formula by bringing together ideas from two separate fields of science that no other scientist had combined before. He took two seemingly unrelated areas of scientific thought and in bringing the two together established an entirely new and revolutionary manner of thinking about reality. The same thing must be done to satisfactorily develop a full and logical theodicy. At the very least, the theodicy’s of Augustine, Irenaeus and Aquinas when put together and seen as a holistic

⁴ Daniel Howard Snyder Editor, “The Evidential Argument from Evil,” (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1996), page 58

approach to the problem of abundant evil in a good world should give us a much more complete picture toward solving this dilemma. Since it may be shown in theodicy that all evil contributes to the best possible world then it will take many lines of reasoning including the line of time, to adequately reflect this reality. Combinationalism then presents the best possible scenario for accomplishing this.

With regard to Job, the parameters of God's Word must be the all-important point of control as a sufficiently rationale for understanding the seeming paradox of evil in a good world. Job himself presents this challenge where he asks the question, "Where do I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand?" (Job 13:14). In this idiomatic question, Job cries to the heavens and asks why he is so afflicted and exposed to danger. At the very same time after voicing the paradoxical opposite of trust and dependence in verse fourteen he shouts out the well known expression of trust and confidence with, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust him" in verse fifteen and yet again in the following phrase clings to his own ways. It is notable that this paradox is not resolved until the end of the story

II. Why Job's World Was the Best Possible World

Best Possible Worlds

Upon consideration of what is the best possible world it must first be determined what the nature of *best* refers to; what the proper definition of "best" should be. A common mistake here is to simply define the term in the manner in which we personally prefer. Most individuals then would define "best" in terms of a world that consists of comfort and ease, freedom from pain and suffering. That would be the most generally accepted idea of what the *best* world to live in would look and feel like. An understanding of what is "best" need not be that simple and it is questionable to assume that man is qualified to make such a definition at all. Gaining a sense of

reality for what is “best” must look to the Maker and therefore Definer of that reality for proper definitions and determinations. To define a “best possible world” from the vantage point of our finite perspective of ease and comfort seems to be shortsighted at best and self-deceiving at worst. If we then take into consideration the fact that although all other worlds were logically possible but this particular world was brought into being by the nature of the Creator, then the world that we now find ourselves a part of *must be* the best possible world. The argument follows as such:

- God is the best of all possible beings.
- The best of all possible beings cannot do less than His best.
- God’s nature as best demands that He make the best possible world if He will to make a world.
- This world is the world that God made.
- Therefore, this is the best of all possible worlds.⁵

This line of reasoning as set down by Leibniz presents a rationale necessarily dependent upon the originator of reality and eliminates the common presupposition that a pain free environment is the best possible world since we do not live in a pain free environment.

The antithetical idea that the notion of a best possible world is incoherent, as presented by Stephen T. Davis since we can always think of a better possible world, seems to be a non sequiter argument. It is presumably contingent on the idea that one may always think of a better possible world. This could only be true if one was increasing in knowledge and with the increase then considered a best possible world in accord with what would always be a limited knowledge base regardless of how much knowledge had been added to the previous body of knowledge. One would only come to the end of the consideration of an ultimate best possible world when one gained access to all information, all knowledge and all possibilities in that world. This One would

⁵ Geisler, “The Roots of Evil,” page 44

then of necessity have to be God. Only God can then determine with any sense of certainty what might constitute a best possible world.

Free Will

With the best possible world in which we live, given the brief argument above as determined by the only One who could determine this world in His omniscience, the issues of free will plays prominently into the makeup of such a world. Can God make a free will world in which men can choose only good and only good may occur? The answer is no. Such a world would be a contradiction between “free” and “only good” and God most certainly cannot contradict Himself. Free will as a precursor to evil is important with Job since the entire scenario of suffering begins with the dialogue between God and a creature of free will and of His making. This dialogue between God and Satan is well known and need not be recounted here.

The idea of Stephen Davis that free will may account for moral evil but not the presence of natural evil⁶ is objected to here in the strongest of terms. The evil of Job was certainly natural but also certainly moral having originated with the devices and desires of a creature of free will (Satan) who used free will immorally. It is asserted by Davis that natural evils like pain and suffering caused by earthquakes, disease or famine are not covered by the free will defense. This seems to be a questionable assumption. Since creation itself was ordered and brought into being by a moral Creator then it is of necessity a moral creation in its entirety. Any immoral action within the parameters of a moral creation then will have deleterious effects in some manner. The rationale follows this line of reasoning – “Men do not want war, but neither do they will to eliminate what causes it.... A wino doesn’t want a hangover, but he wills himself one when he drinks.”⁷ So it is with sin in a world created moral. With regard to natural evils on a large scale

⁶ Davis, “Encountering Evil,” page 78

⁷ Geisler, page 88

one dare not get more detailed than this assertion in a general sense. Such specifics are simply beyond our means to calculate. It is however notable, for example in the terrible tsunami natural disaster around the Indian Ocean, that moral debauchery and degradation reign in that area of the world. It is notable that Phuket for example is a city known for its pervasive sex trade with its enslavement of children. We are instructed by the Creator regarding this world that he watches over the widow and the orphan. Might there not then be some connection between a tsunami where the world itself retches to cast out the filth that threatens and violates its moral nature as originally created? This is at least feasible. Natural disasters are not necessarily eliminated from a free will defense.

The possible activity of fallen beings behind the evil in this world is also a real possibility. With Job it is certainly true that such a thing had occurred and by the end of the story we also see purpose and soul-making in the mix. Curiously, Job himself wondered how God could allow such a thing to happen to him. Job's friends were firmly convinced that in one way or another the free will of Job, in some manner of hidden sin, had contributed to the evils that befell him. The fact that free will played into the scenario is undeniable when considering the role of Satan but the soul-making aspect to follow must also be considered in the light of Job's responses to God through his dilemma. Job at first was quite trusting with his "the Lord gives and the Lord takes away, blessed be the Name of the Lord," (Job 1:21) outlook but as his trial proceeded without apparent resolution and with the compounding of social repercussions, he began to question God himself and cried out for God to be his advocate or at least explain the reason behind the suffering. Thankfully, we are not left to guess at the outcome. God indeed responds to Job, although not as Job desired or requested. God did appear on the scene of that situation and therefore presented an answer for all who would honestly query regarding the purpose for apparent irrational suffering whether it fall in the category of a moral evil or a natural evil.

It can be seen then that the free will choices which included the responses of Job actually contributed toward the soul-making of Job as he later repented of such rash choices of questioning God. Whether evil here is seen through the eyes of Augustine where evil involves the rust of bad choices from free will or the bad which becomes in the hand of God a purposeful event such as posited by Irenaeus or yet something simply allowed by God and purposed to bring about the good of a closer relationship with God as seen by Aquinas, free will plays heavily in the scenario and it can be said that each of these three perspectives reflects a portion of truth when considering the outcome of Job.

III. The God Behind the Scenes

Defining Goodness

Upon consideration of the best possible world and a soul-making theodicy, the consistence of goodness must be considered. The ultimate goodness that consists of the sum and substance of what this world produces plays heavily into the starting point in any theodicy. At the bottom line of every theodicy lie certain presuppositions that each individual brings into the mix of calculations and expectations regarding what *good* may or may not be produced by the allowance of evil in this best possible world. What is truly good? Of what does it consist? Is it merely ease and comfort unqualified and does it consist only or even mostly of what humans typically consider good in terms such as happiness or liberty to do whatever one desires? This is a common notion of goodness for man and although such notions do have merit when considering eternity and things to come, it must be admitted that to possess such things in totality now in this world would not be retainable; would not be possible given the freedom of all individuals to all vie for the same ease and freedom from care. A supposed world of billions of individuals who want to live life like gods poses a billion plus difficulties.

It is C.S. Lewis who wisely points out in the consideration of divine goodness that, “By the goodness of God we mean nowadays almost exclusively His loving-kindness.... What would really satisfy us would be a God who said of anything we happen to like doing, ‘What does it matter so long as they are contented?’”⁸ Our desire for life to actually work out this way reflects what it is that we consider goodness. It very much runs along the lines of getting our own way. Children call their parents tyrants when they do not get their way and employees criticize their bosses as incompetents when their own comforts and desires are thwarted by higher purposes. Such is the way of man in considering what is good and what is evil.

It is important then that we question our own self-centered definition of what it is that good consists. If goodness is much more than ease and comfort and happy living then a redefinition is in order so that goodness might be grasped in its raw nature. It is the argument of this paper that soul-making is the ultimate good of this present world and further that soul-making, in the final assessment, is the purpose for all evil in the world. This soul-making purpose of life answers any objections to the goodness or omnipotence of God when considered in light of the need of man to have his soul made or helped to be more mature. Simple by observation of this world notes mankind’s need for further maturity.

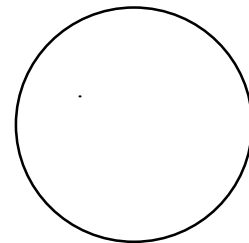


Figure 1

⁸ C.S. Lewis, “The Problem of Pain,” page 31

Beyond our Ken

It has once been observed that if this circle (see figure 1) represented the sum total of all knowledge in totality and the pinpoint within the circle represented all the knowledge any one person might possess, then the amount of knowledge that one does not possess is unfathomably greater in volume and depth than the singular point of knowledge as possessed by any one individual. Any argument that points out the ignorance of man is a strong argument against any attempt of theodicy given such a vacuum of individual knowledge in the context and consideration of all the knowledge that exists. Theodicies of necessity with the limits inherent in the mind of mere men tend to follow paths of limited knowledge and simple linear thinking when what is attempted to be explained is multidimensional and as incomprehensible as a sphere would be unfathomable to a one dimensional line. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle points out the utter unknowability of much in reality. Creation itself in quantum mechanics reveals that our very observance of subatomic particles actually changes the way those particles react and exist. The vast amount of untouched knowledge and the ability of mankind to know anything that he observes for certain pose a considerable barrier for any theodicy. What is actually knowable then is questionable at best.

It is Wykstra who gets close to the reality of the matter when he states that "God's wisdom is to ours as an adult human being's is to a one month old infant."⁹ One might easily suggest that Wykstra has understated the case. In consideration of the best human being with our cognitive handicaps, our myopic self-serving perspective and our tendency toward one-dimensional reasoning, the case is understated considerably with a comparison between an infant and an adult, with a human made from clay and the Eternal Almighty. Further, even if an individual possessed all the knowledge that it is possible to possess, it is wondered just how the human mind might

⁹ Howard-Snyder, "The Evidential Argument from Evil, page 209

even begin to categorize and conceptualize a best possible world let alone put all the parts together for the allowance of gratuitous evil by an all good and all-powerful Creator.

This one dimensional reasoning and perspective is the very same process-thinking pattern of Job's friends, Zophar, Eliphaz and Bildad who reasoned that Job simply had to have committed some heinous crime for such evil to come upon him. After some debate and consideration, Job laments his plight and after demanding an audience with God himself concludes that there is no good reason for his suffering. When God finally does so graciously enter the veil of time with Job He does not stop to answer Job's questions and what He does say is quite satisfactory to Job who responds by closing his mouth (Job 40:4). God basically states how little Job knows next to God. It is a simple but effective comparison to which Job eventually responds, "I have spoken of great things that I have not understood" (Job 42:3). Job then repents of his presumption on God, a turn that stands as a good example to much linear reasoning in theodicy.

Just before God enters the final scene of the Job Tragedy, Elihu speaks simply of the wonder of God. It is notable that Elihu was not rebuked for his words by God when Job's other friends were soundly rebuked. Elihu's words therefore take on great significance and so they should. Elihu simply lifts up God as one we are not capable of questioning. He rebukes the others for the fact that God had not been the center of their dialogue; men's ideas were the center of the dialogue. This was a correct and laudable position held by Elihu. He also spoke of the wonders of God beyond man's grasping and rebuffed all four of the others for not making the case of God's sovereignty the main issue.

We are no match for grasping God's ways in creation, let alone grasping He Himself. Hume through Philo points out that if we admit that God is incomprehensible then there is no problem

understanding evil at all ¹⁰It was further pointed out in cassette number thirteen of this lesson by Dr. Edward Martin that Kant in his “grounding” tells us that only omniscience can figure out what goods and evils we need in life. Rawl’s “veil of ignorance” then seems to possess great merit here as a very real position held by humanity.

Job’s Evidential Problem

Very generally speaking, the evidential problem of evil says that some quality or quantity of evil potentially questions the reality of God’s existence. It is thought that the existence of evil, particularly gratuitous evil (from the perspective of man), warrants rational grounds for rejecting a belief in a good God. The line of reasoning here is of particular note from the standpoint of Job. In some sense at least, Job himself questioned the existence of God’s goodness and justice. He was following this same line of reasoning during his trial after some initial optimistic stages. It is further interesting that from the standpoint of Eliphaz the Temanite who believed in the law of compensation (or cause and effect) that evil in Job’s life was an argument against the goodness of Job as a righteous man. It is finally notable that both of these lines of reasoning were condemned by the maker of these men when he came on the scene. Both Job and Eliphaz then were rehearsing the argument of Epicurus on the issue of how an all-good, all-knowing, all-powerful being can allow any evil in our world, or in this case in the world of a righteous man.

It must again be asserted that as William Alston said (tape #12) *As far as we know*, God is restraining evil at a certain threshold. This was certainly the case with Job where God commanded Satan to spare his life (Job 2:6). The whole matter of “*as far as we know*” is the hinge upon which all theodicy must rest. There was much that Eliphaz did not know and he was rebuked for asserting knowledge that he did not have. There was much that Job did not know and he was silenced by the obvious assertion of the same. There is much that all men simply do not

¹⁰ <http://sparknotes.com>

know. Judgment regarding all evils in the world then must be held in reservation until that which is perfect is come. All the evidence is not yet in. To make any judgment based on insufficient data is considered inept in any circle of rational thought. The evidential problem of evil is simply lacking too much evidence to even pose a problem. We simply do not know enough to fully assess the problem of evil.

It is here then that the surpassing thoughts of Thomas Aquinas become all the more valuable. So much of the problem with theodicy is simply a consequence of too much focus on evil and not enough focus on God. Aquinas, in his assertions regarding Job begins with God's rightness in what happens in His creation and he thereby poses a different set of questions along the lines of seeking to understand the nature and operations of divine providence, not question them. How does God direct His creatures?¹¹ Our days of life here on earth are short while the afterlife is unending. The natural supposition is that the afterlife is then much more important than this life. Since God is good and since suffering happens, then the suffering must produce benefit for the sufferer whether we can see it or not, understand it or not, etc. This line of reasoning draws the gaze upward instead of downward. It seems logical to prefer this good God who reigns supreme in goodness despite any evil in the world. It seems logical to prefer Him to the small and weak God of Griffin, the partly demonic, partly human God of Roth, the finite God of Hume and John Stuart Mill or the irrational God of Mackie.¹²

CONCLUSION

It would appear that every theodicy originates from the standpoint of each individual's presupposition. Honesty dictates that each individual has certain biases, prejudices and convictions from which a great deal of his/her belief system is developed. Attempts then to solve

¹¹ Howard-Snyder, pages 50,51

the dilemma's of evil in a world created by an all-powerful all-good God are basically defenses of positions already held dear by token of already established presuppositions. In that light true objectivity escapes each position as presuppositions already possessed actually reign supreme. Given our innate lack of a full understanding of life, reality, eternity and God, it seems rational to begin such a quest at the loftiest position possible, God's position. It is from that particular presupposition that this point is argued so the accusation of circular reasoning could be used as a stopper to such logic but the rationale seems from this vantage point to be inescapable.

From such a position, in arguing for this best possible soul-making world of Job, the question must be posed; do we see a better Job at the end of his suffering? The answer is unequivocally yes. A man is presented who himself admits to his need for repentance at the end of his trial (Job 42:6) and one is not left without clues as to what exactly Job was repenting from. It is notable that initially in his trial he was haunted by some uncertain fear (Job 3:25). Although Job was a righteous man he was not altogether perfect. Fear of any kind reflects a lack of trust in a sovereign God and Job was wrestling with this fear that is unmistakably absent following his trial. We further note that although Job was indeed a righteous man, in the course of his trial he shows himself to go beyond that and reveal that he was also a self-righteous man. His demands for justice and a hearing before God Himself as well as his periodic suicidal thoughts (Job 3:3) attest clearly to that. Repentance is always a step up in virtue and through the suffering of Job his soul was purged of some dross and he was made a better man. It should also be noted that in this divine showcase of suffering and benefit, there is a wide disparity between the long life and good experiences of Job and the very brief trial of suffering by comparison that he experienced. Taking into consideration the probable timetable presented by the dialogue with his friends and their seven days of mourning after having traveled some time before that, we can assess that the entire

¹² Davis, pages 96, 101, 125-129

trial of Job was something that lasted only a few months (at most) during a lifetime that lasted one hundred and forty years.

The classic statement of C.S. Lewis that God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience and shouts to us in our pains¹³ is a very true statement with the life of Job. Job's life represented a poem God was writing as His special workmanship (Ephesians 2:10) and He would not be satisfied with something less than He could further perfect in this good and moldable man. The world of Job then, at least, is the best possible world in which God could form and perfect him. Job is very much the better man at the end of the story having traveled through heartache and pain rather than at the beginning of the story with only ease and comfort. Job's lack of humility and lack of full trust in God (shown by his fears mentioned earlier) was to some degree emolliated through the evils he suffered in his ordeal of loss.

This best possible world was only possible through the allowance of free will conducted by God's creatures. Satan's evil designs initiated the trial for Job's purging. Job's threatened social status through the slanderous accusations of his friends brought him low to deplore himself even while he was attempting to defend himself. Job's choice then to challenge the Almighty Himself was something God even used to bring about a repentance and subsequent humility that could not have been designed aside from pain. What Job possessed through ease and comfort as a wealthy man included fear and self-righteousness. His soul needed bettering and only difficulty could shape him correctly by removing some of these evils. In this case it can be seen clearly that a world where evil never occurred could never produce the greater good for an individual. How can patience be produced without the pain of waiting? How can graciousness be produced without the sense of a personal need of more grace? How can fear best be conquered but by losing all and noting in the end that the fear was worse than the losing?

This drama of Job in presenting to mankind a model of suffering and consequence only gives a template for possibilities with gratuitous evil. As Geisler has said, “Ultimate justification for some suffering may be beyond this world.... It is possible that the suffering we observe will one day be seen as part of a larger plan for good and thus justified when the entire plan unfolds.” Imagine the entire universe as a philharmonic orchestra and certain individuals and times in history as various parts of the score. Parts sound discordant when played alone. Only the whole played out together makes sense and sounds melodious.¹⁴ Who is to say when the soul is completely made? Not us. The bottom line again is beyond our ken. Much in life is simply and factually beyond our ken. *Most* of life is beyond our ken. To those who challenge God regarding the presence of evil in this world made good and why it exists if God is all-good and all-powerful, the answer is simple. Just wait. He will most certainly remove all evil, in His time and no others time. The jury is still out. There is too much simply beyond us but we can take hope in Job as a model for us all. God is good and we have no position to challenge Him. We know that our Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter day on the earth. Theodicy will be unimportant then.

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¹³ Lewis, page 91

¹⁴ Geisler, page 37

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