

## The Problem of Natural Evil

*Natural Evil*: The problem of natural evil involves pain and suffering that results from natural disasters, diseases, or genetic defects, including that of animal pain and suffering. Like the problem of moral evil, the problem of natural evil examines whether the existence of natural evil is compatible with an all-perfect, all-knowing, loving, and powerful God.

The following ten views are found among various Christian thinkers (Boyd 248ff.):

1. "Natural evil fulfills a higher divine purpose." Pain, suffering, and disorder in the natural world are ultimately part of a larger good plan of cosmic order. (Augustine)
2. Natural evil is the result of human sin. God subjected or cursed the natural world to decay and death because of human rebellion. In doing so, God brings about a world where we are no longer comfortable in our present moral autonomy from the Creator.
3. Natural "evil" isn't evil per se. It is simply a function of the world of time. Only moral evil is truly evil.
4. "Natural evil is the inevitable by-product of God's aim of developing souls with moral character." (John Hick) There must exist between imperfect, immature humans and the perfect God an "epistemic distance" that makes our growth possible. As such, the world has an imperfect character.
5. "Natural evil is nature's way of participating in the self-sacrificial life of God" (Murphy & Ellis). All of life has a *kenotic* or cruciform quality to it—some must give their lives that others might live.
6. Natural evil exists because nature is imperfect, having been created and being sustained by a God who limits himself to persuasion (Process Theology). In process thought, the world may resist God *at every level*, including the natural one.
7. Natural evil results from the potential hazards in a world that makes morally significant choices possible. We cannot conceive of a world which would allow for moral evil without natural evil because natural evil is part of an orderly system with consequences (Richard Swinburne, Peterson).
8. Natural evil results from the random spontaneity that the natural world must have in order to be a changing system that is separate from God (John Polkinghorne).
9. Natural evil is the nothingness or non-being that results whenever God creates something and that continues to try and encroach on creation (Karl Barth).
10. Natural evil is the result of demonic forces who control matter in part and oppose God's will for creation (Gregory Boyd).