

W.E.C. 14 - Arminianism and The Free Will Defense for the Problem of Evil

Presupposition: God Decrees Most Things - Foresees All Things

- God is sovereign and in charge over everything *without controlling* all things
- Arminian scholar Roger Olson says:
 - “Nothing at all can happen without God’s permission, and *many* things are specifically and directly controlled and caused by God. Even sin and evil do not escape God’s providential governance in classical Arminian theology. *God permits and limits them without willing or causing them.*”
- God’s sovereignty is not as the Calvinist would define it
 - God being in absolute control of all things = necessary sovereignty
 - Because this would make God the author of sin – God would be blamed for it
- Arminians also view the Calvinist interpretation of God’s sovereignty as deterministic which takes away man’s freedom and ability to choose - puppets on a string
- The Classical Arminian understanding of divine providence is God being the cause of all things *except evil*
 - God permits evil to occur rather than ordaining it to come to pass
- God does not decree evil but brings good out of it
 - God permits evil to occur - but not by way of divine decree
 - Meaning – he doesn’t ordain it / decree it / predestine it / cause it
 - Rather – humanity chooses to bring it to pass
 - God sovereignly *directs* (not decrees) the evil actions of humanity to mold them in way that good will come from them
 - God is passive and allows for evil to occur – He does not decree it
 - He is able to do this without being deterministic or omni-causal
 - In Arminianism - God is not the author of sin because He only permits it
 - He does not ordain it to come pass
- Classical Arminianism holds to a *univocal understanding* of the immutability of God
- According to classical Arminianism - God emotes like humans but on a much grander scale.
 - God moves from one emotion to another.
 - It is not viewed as a change in essence, rather a change in mobility.
 - This means God is not pure actuality
 - 100% God 100% of the time
 - He is pure “being” – always Himself
 - There is potentiality within God
 - He changes from one emotion to another
 - He is “becoming” something else
 - There is a “give and take relationship” between God and humanity
 - God changes to the circumstances that are before Him – we can move Him
 - The circumstances our free will chooses to decree – bring to pass
 - Combined with God’s will

This leaves the door open for Wesleyan Arminian scholars such as Richard Watson, who believes God can grieve over sin, that God cannot be impassible, and that a God who is capable of suffering cannot be immutable

- This means humanity can change God to some degree
- This is the risk of allowing humanity to possess libertarian free will
- This is the risk God took in entering into a relationship with His creation

Arminius states:

- “Because grace is so attempered and commingled with the nature of man, as not to destroy within him the liberty of his will, but to give it a right direction, to correct its depravity, and to allow man to possess his own proper notions. While, on the contrary, **this Predestination introduces such a species of grace, as takes away free will and hinders its exercise.**”
- God created human beings with the value of free will
- The existence of evil is up to those who God created
- The existence of evil is up to God’s creation itself
- Humanity is under bondage of sin until God frees a person through Prevenient Grace
- Humanity is not necessarily bound by God’s decree
 - God can decree (active)
 - But humanity still has a choice through free will
 - This means God can also allow (passive) things to come to pass He did not decree
- Creating humans with the value of free will naturally results in *risk*
 - The risk of moral evil existing through the free will choice of humanity
 - This is a risk God was willing to accept because of the value of free will He gave to His creation
- In order for humanity to be truly free
 - We must have the free will to choose that is separate from God’s control
 - It is a value God does not violate
 - Otherwise – we are simply puppets on a string
- Evil exists because of our choice to sin
 - It is not God’s fault – He did not decree
 - God is not the one to blame for evil
 - In order for love to be genuine, humanity must be free
- In order for God to operate in this manner and for man to have free will
 - God must limit His sovereign control in order for us to be free
- Classical Arminians define God’s decree differently
 - They believe God decreed both the elect and reprobate –
 - But limited himself from making the final decision as to which particular individuals fall into each category.
 - God foresees man’s final decision without determining it
 - This allows for scenarios to occur in this world that have not been ordained by the hand of the Lord.

- **Matthew 23:37-39** - ³⁷ “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, **and you were not willing!** ³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹ For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”
- **Joshua 24:15** - *And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, **choose this day whom you will serve**, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

Questions to Consider:

- If humanity has free will that God cannot violate
 - How many sovereign wills exist in the universe?
- If God does not decree something to come to pass
 - How can God be in control of all things?
- If evil takes place that God did not want to take place
 - How can there be a plan or purpose for it?
- If God does not violate a person’s will to harm somebody else
 - And He stands by as he “permits” the evil action takes place
 - How is God not to be blamed since He could stop it if He wanted?
- If God is not sovereign over the will of humanity
 - How are we ever safe?
- What is the difference between being mostly sovereign and completely sovereign?