

How can God allow horrific evils like school shootings? How could an all loving and all powerful God allow school shootings? This is an objection raised after every school shooting throughout social media and even on mainstream news stations, such as in J. Warner Wallace's piece for Fox News following the recent school shootings in Florida. **1** The immediate response from many Christians is to point to the fact that God has been outlawed from public schools in favor of secularism. While it is true that God being taken out of the classroom has increased immorality in children, objecting to the existence of God based upon the existence of evil is a much broader topic, and deserves a more comprehensive apologetical response from Christians.

The atheistic argument commonly known as the *Problem of Evil* or the *Theodicy*, is an old objection to the existence of God which has been dealt with in great detail by Catholic scholars throughout the centuries. A classic example of this argument is put forth by David Hume, an early 18th century rationalist and empiricist, in his work *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Hume summarizes the *Problem of Evil* in the form of a syllogism which goes like this:

"If God exists, He is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent. If omniscient, then He knows all evils. If omnipotent, then He can eliminate all evils. If omnibenevolent, then He wants to eliminate all evils. If evil exists, then an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God does not exist. But evil does exist. Therefore, God does not exist." **2**

Although, the average lay Catholic cannot be expected to give a scholarly response to the *Problem of Evil* every time it is raised in the light of some school shooting, or other catastrophic event, there are a few things that Catholics would do well to know when faced with this objection.

A critical point to remember is that the *Problem of Evil* is merely a probabilistic argument because no one can logically know for certain if a good God does not have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil and suffering. In other words, one cannot prove that a world with evil and suffering cannot bring about a greater good i.e. Heaven or even some temporal goods. As long as it is even possibly true that God might have a sufficient reason for allowing evil, then it proves that there is logical compatibility between the existence of God and the existence of evil.

The onus is on those who argue against God's existence to show that it is logically impossible for God to have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil and suffering. This is impossible to do. Therefore, as a defense of atheism, the argument from evil is not a good argument. Thomistic philosopher Edward Feser captures this point wonderfully in his book, *The Last Superstition*, saying:

"The argument from evil is worthless. For the only way the atheist can make it plausible to say that nothing could outweigh Auschwitz, etc., is if he supposes that there is no God and thus no beatific vision. But if he's supposing that there is no God, then in presenting his argument from evil he's simply arguing in a circle, assuming the very thing he's trying to prove, and thus not proving it at all. In effect he's saying: "There is no God, because look at all this suffering that couldn't possibly be outweighed by any good. How do I know there's no good that could outweigh it? Oh, because there is no God." If you think that's a good argument, you need a logic course." 3

In the *Summa Theologica*, St Thomas explains precisely why God tolerates evil in the world. The Angelic Doctor explains that God would not allow any evil to exist, "unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil" (ST, I, q.2, a.3).

St. Paul reiterates this point in [Romans 8:28](#) teaching, that "in everything God works for good with those who love Him." A clear example of this teaching can be found in the biblical story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers but then raised to great power in Egypt, which ultimately saves his family from starvation. Speaking to his brothers, Joseph proclaims a great truth about God, saying, "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" ([Genesis 50:15-20](#)).

The goodness of God and His allowance of evil are not difficult to reconcile when one realizes that the ultimate end of man is the Beatific Vision of God. At times you may find it difficult to see how God is going to bring good out of some evil or suffering. There might not be any earthly evidence. Perhaps the good may not come into effect until after someone's death, as is the case when some charitable organization is founded in honor of someone who tragically suffered; or perhaps vindication will come by the fact that the sufferer receives the crown of everlasting life.

Take for example, the death of St. Thomas More. To those with no supernatural faith, Thomas' death was a great evil; but to those with a supernatural perspective, tremendous good has come from St. Thomas More's death, namely, it has inspired countless souls to imitate his courage and fidelity to the Church, and more importantly, his death has gifted him with the Beatific Vision of God, the greatest good imaginable.

So why does God allow school shootings and what good does He bring out of them? Firstly, school shootings are moral evils which stem from an abuse of free will. God will never take away man's freedom to choose. Free will is part of the very essence of man, ingrained in human nature. One could not be human without free will. In order for God to create creatures that can love, they must be able to choose not to love. If God decided to prohibit

moral evil, He would in turn prohibit mankind's free will to love, essentially turning humans into obedient robots.

As for what greater good comes from school shootings, one cannot speak on behalf of God, but there are a number of potential goods which could be suggested. Perhaps God uses such events to warn the public about the great moral depravity among young people, thereby urging public officials to reevaluate the godless school policies; perhaps the survivors and their families are being urged by grace to realize the fragility of life, and thus amend their lives. Who knows? There are a number of lessons, as well as goods, both temporal and spiritual, which can come from school shootings. What is for certain is that we ought not to blame God for these events. These moral evils are a result of the godless immorality which is actively encouraged in American society by public authorities and individuals. You cannot teach kids that they should be free to do as they please, regardless of God's moral restraints, then turn around and blame God when a child uses their unbridled license for freedom to go in and start shooting up their school!

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<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2018/02/22/how-can-god-allow-horrific-evil-like-florida-school-shooting.html>

2 David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998), 63

3 Edward Feser, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism* (Indiana: St. Augustine Press, 2008), chap. 4, Scholastic Aptitude, Kindle Edition.