



# THE THEO DISCUSSION

## FLOWCHARTS

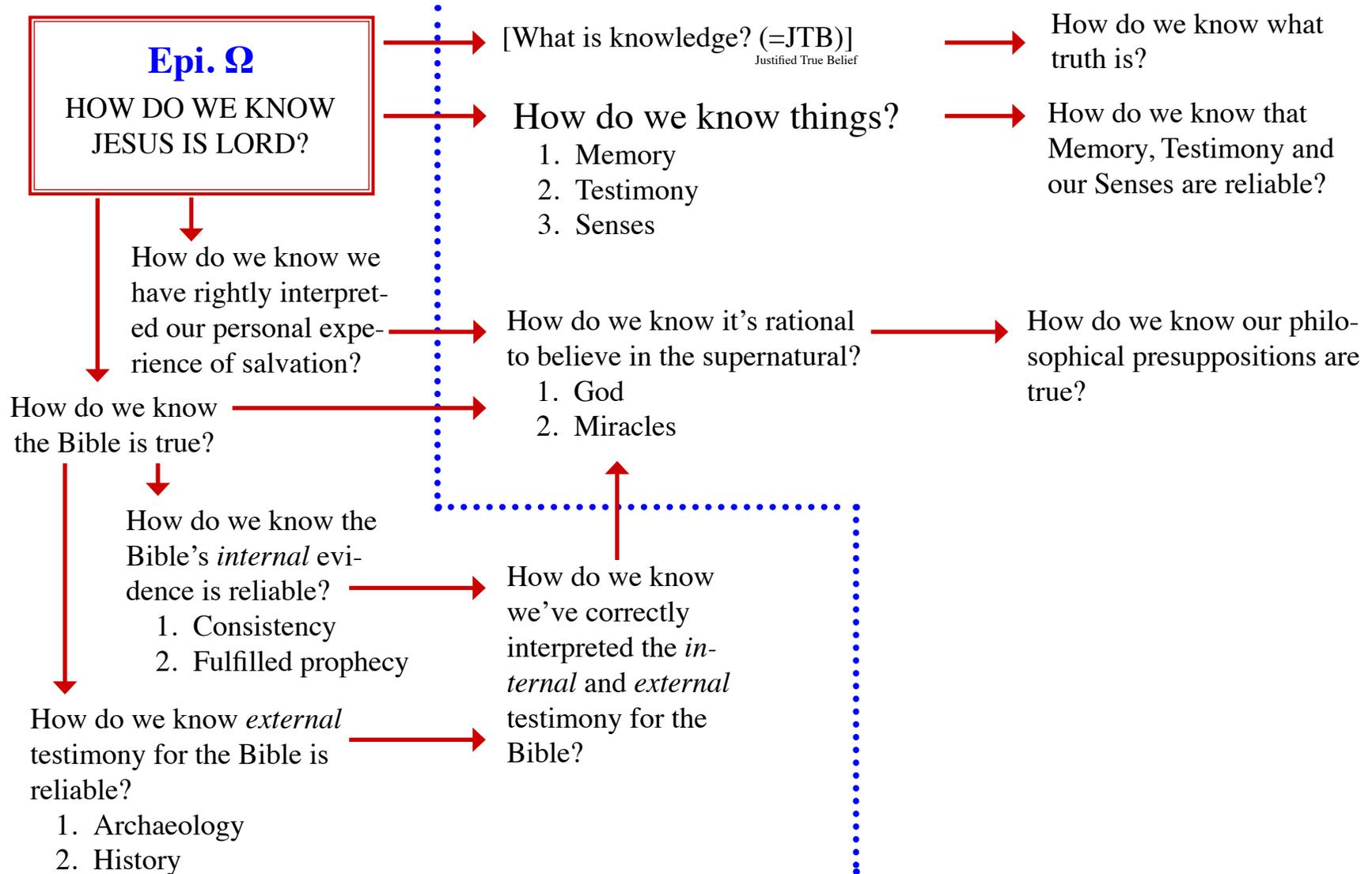
The flowcharts on the following pages document discussions we have talked out as a group at Peninsula Christian Fellowship in the spring of 2008. The flowcharts help us see the interrelatedness of key questions in philosophy and Christian apologetics. They also help us note where discussions on worldview questions cross the “philosophy boundary” (dotted line). Skeptics pretend to be the ultimate empiricists, but in fact they very quickly cross over from the examination of observable data to making philosophical pronouncements. Philosophical propositions may be true or false, but it is important to recognize a philosophical argument for what it is and not feel limited to empirical data when responding to it.

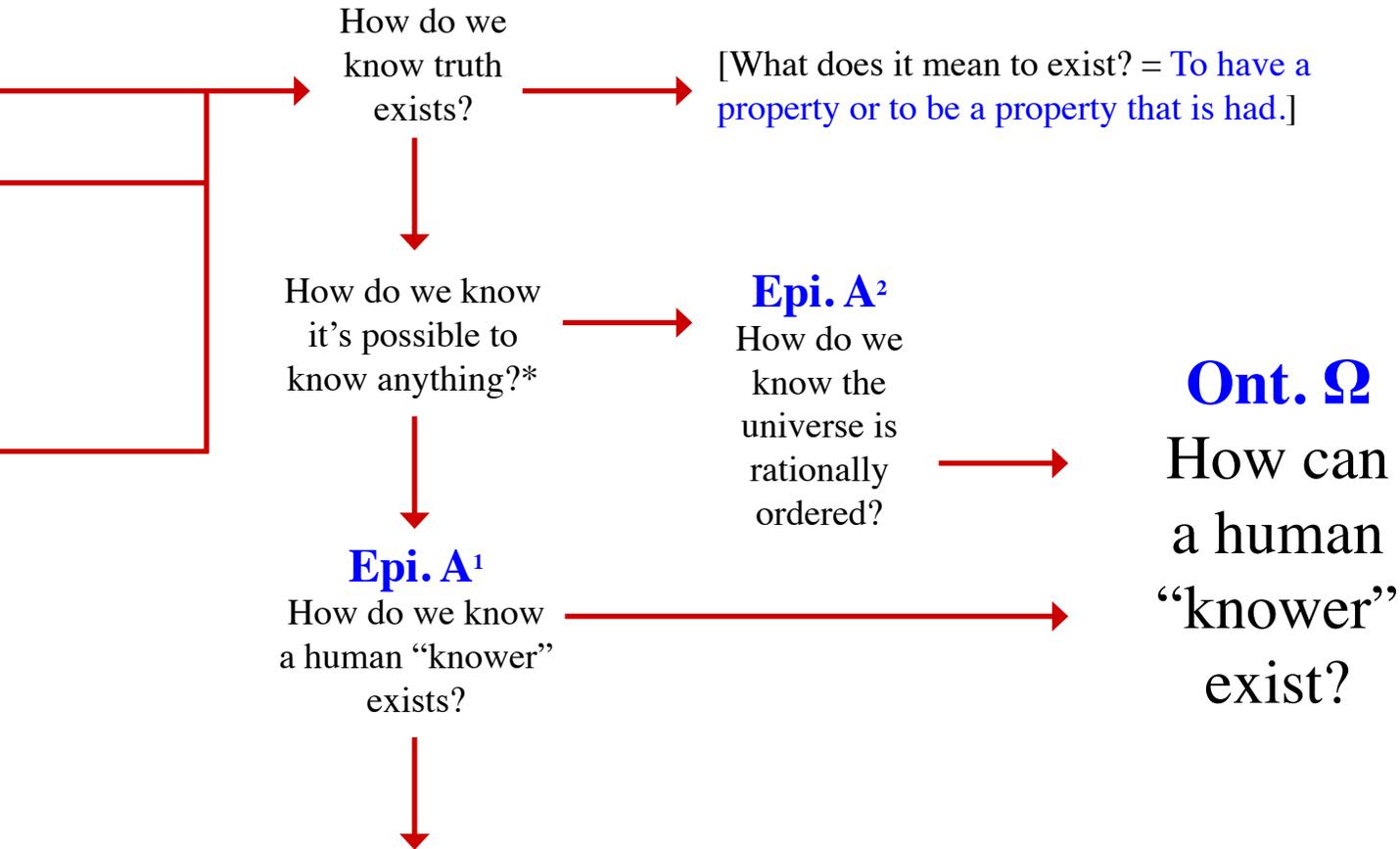
The flowcharts begin with an ultimate (Omega) question, and work their way back to a basic or foundational (Alpha) question.

## Observable Data

## EPISTEMOLOGY

## Philosophical Data





[WHAT'S THE ALTERNATIVE?  
= A biochemical machine (brain)  
responding to chemical stimuli, and  
whose every event is predetermined  
by all preceding events.]

\* The statement "It is impossible to know anything"  
is self-defeating. Therefore, it is justified to believe  
that knowledge is possible.

Observable Data

**ONTOLOGY**

Philosophical Data

**Ont. Ω**  
HOW CAN A HUMAN  
KNOWER EXIST?

[What does it mean to exist?\*

Is our cognition mechanical  
or supernatural?

Can random material give rise  
to organized mind?

How did the first  
humans originate?

Evolution or Special  
Creation?

Is it rational to believe  
in supernatural entities  
and miracles? [What is  
a miracle?]\*\*]

Can we ratio-  
nally say God  
does not exist,  
or miracles are  
impossible?

How did life originate  
on earth?

Chance, Space Aliens  
or Special Creation?

Is it more rational to  
believe in the creative  
power of chance, space  
aliens or God?

Does life come  
from life or  
from non-life?  
[What is life?†]

How did the material  
universe originate?

What is the universe  
made of?

Who tuned the superstrings?  
[What is information?\*\*\*]

What are the implications  
of the Big Bang?

Causeless event or  
uncaused Creator?  
[*Ex nihilo, nihil fit.*]

Why is there  
something rather  
than nothing?

- \* To have a property or to be a property that is had.
- \*\* A miracle is not the same thing as a supernatural event. All miracles are supernatural events, but not all supernatural events are miracles. Supernatural events in heaven occur according to normal heavenly rhythms, not in contravention of them. Nor do the terms used and translated “miracle” in the Bible carry any connotation of contravening natural laws. The NT word, *dynamis*, does not imply violation of natural law, but only an application of energy great enough to overcome the normal effects of natural law in a specific instance. So, just as a rocket does not violate the law of gravity, but overcomes its pull in a specific location, so a miracle does not violate natural laws, but overcomes their effect with the application of a greater power. So the argument of secular science is not with the power, nor its overcoming of specific effects of natural law, but with *the Source* of the power.
- \*\*\* Information = Specification expressed by (a) symbol or (b) code, or imposed upon the constituents of a (c) living or (d) mechanical system. Examples: (a) blueprint, (b) essay, (c) pacemaker signal, (d) spark plug gap.
- † Science cannot define life, only describe the characteristics of living things. Life is the animating power of God lent to the biosphere.
- †† Yes! An original Something logically had to exist and had to volitionally cause everything that followed. We only know two kinds of causes: mechanical (material) and volitional (personal). Since no mechanical cause was possible before the existence of the material universe, a volitional and personal cause is necessary.

Not without the insertion of information.

No. → Can we rationally say that God *must* exist, i.e., that He exists necessarily?††

Paul Davies writes, “If the divine underpinning of the laws [of physics] is removed, their existence becomes a profound mystery. Where do they come from? **Who sent the message? Who devised the code?**” —D’Souza, p. 137

→ Where did the information come from?

↓ **Ont. A<sup>1</sup>**

→ Who or what was/is the original Something?

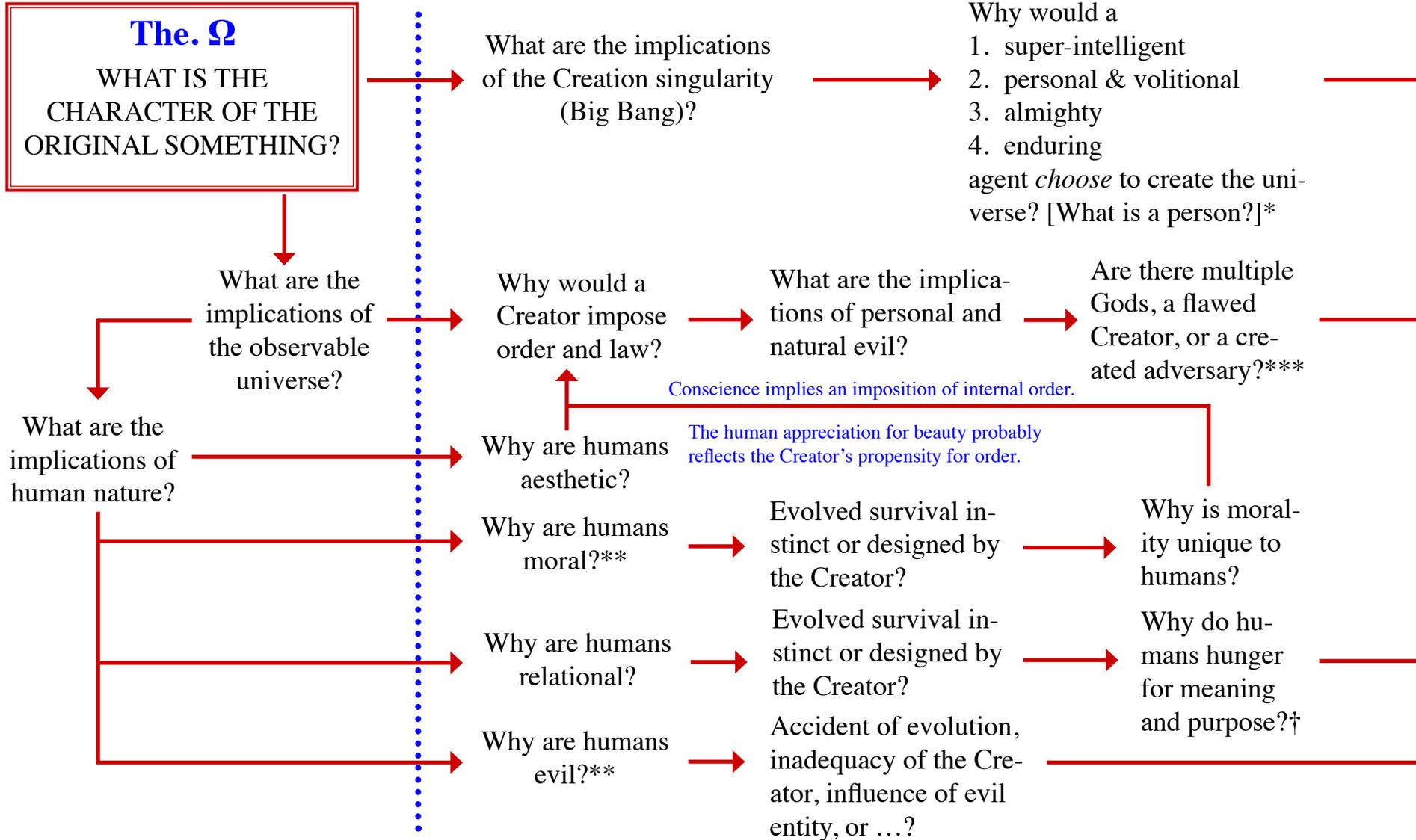
**The. Ω**  
What is the character of the original Something?

Observable Data

**THEOLOGY**

Philosophical Data

**The. Ω**  
 WHAT IS THE CHARACTER OF THE ORIGINAL SOMETHING?



- \* We consider an entity as personal when it has rationality, volition and self-consciousness.
- \*\* The questions of evil and morality press us to define the basis of ethics.
- \*\*\* The universal sense of morality and the underlying unity and order of the universe militates against the ideas of multiple gods and pantheism. That God has adversaries among His creatures is more reasonable.

What are the implications of the fundamental constants of physics?††

†† The Anthropic Principle proposes that the universe was finely tuned, from the first moment of its existence, for the emergence of life in general and human life in particular.

Why would God design the whole universe particularly for mankind?

Why did the Creator permit the angelic rebellion and the human fall?

† Meaning and purpose, like identity, are determined by personal relationship, a reciprocation of mind. The argument for God's existence, called The Argument From Desire, proposes that there is no innate hunger for that which does not exist, and that therefore, since humans desire God, He must exist. However, we not only desire God, we desire a loving heavenly Father. That humans desire a loving heavenly Father, implies a God of love. Only the Bible offers this kind of God. Furthermore, for God to be inherently loving implies a plurality of persons in the godhead, for if God were an absolute monad, He would have never loved until creation, and then would have had no inherent necessity to begin loving.

**Eth. Ω**

What defines rightness and wrongness?

**The. A<sup>1</sup>**

Does God desire relationship *now* with individual human persons?

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**Tel. Ω**

What is the purpose of humanity in general and of me in particular?

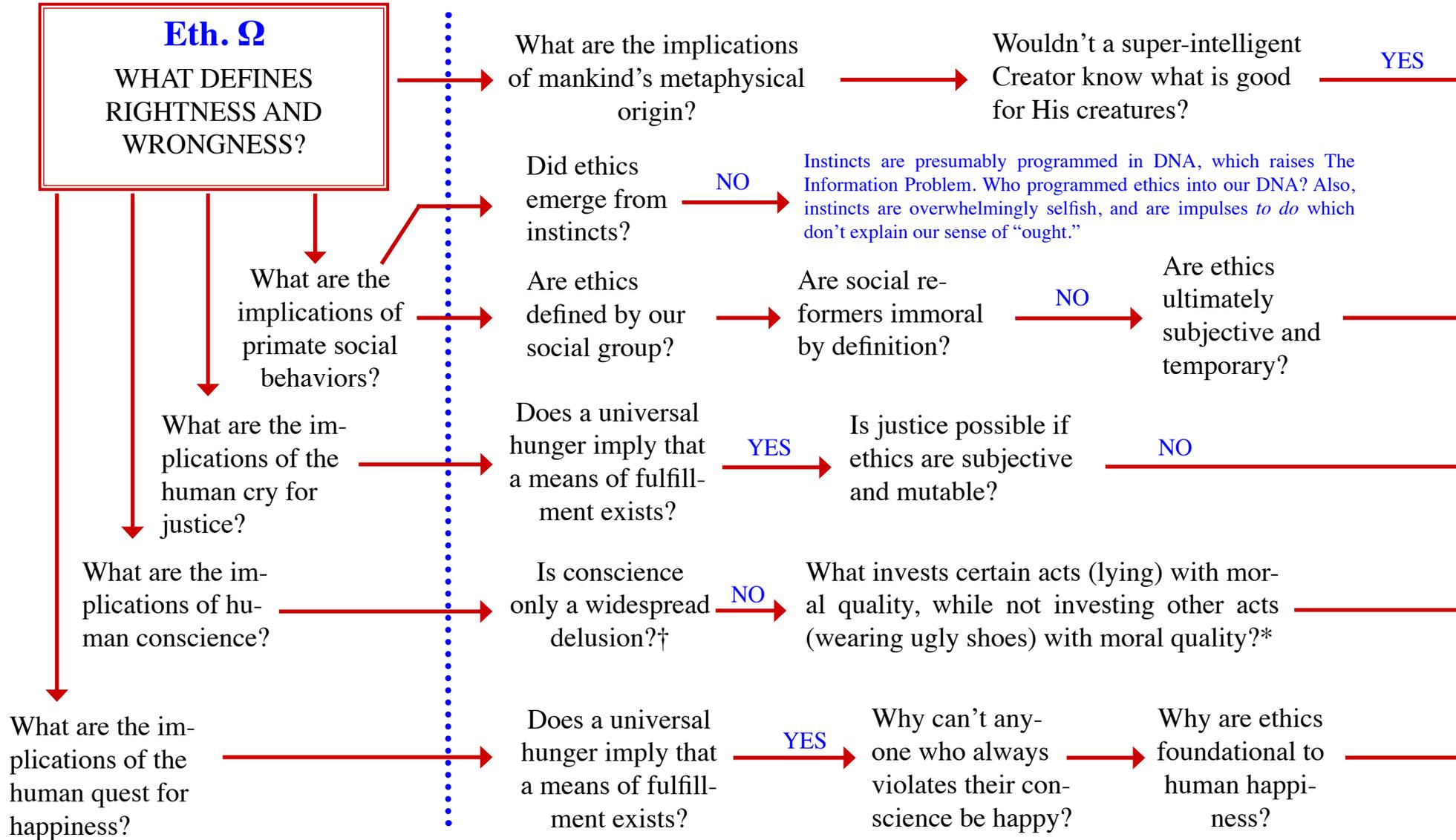
**The. A<sup>2</sup>**

Why would God pursue relationship with people in a warfare setting?

Observable Data

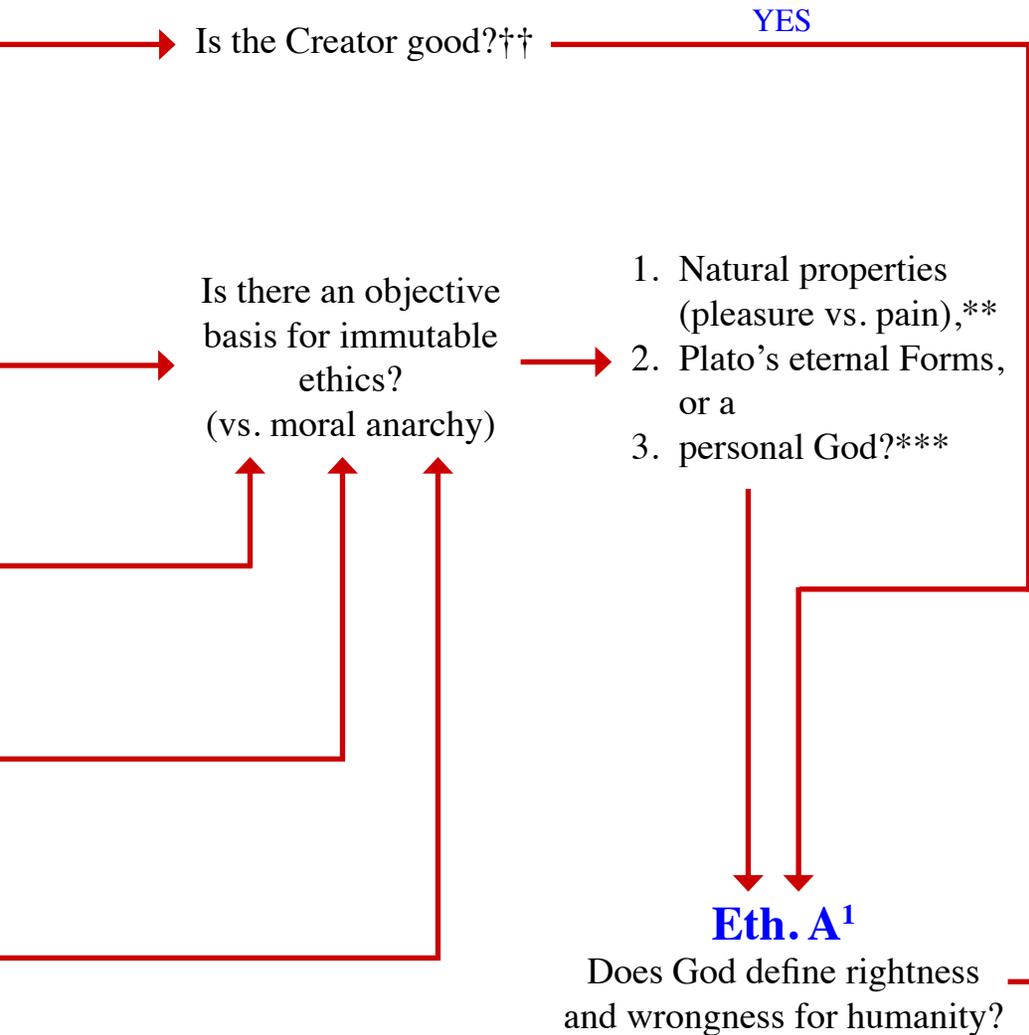
**ETHICS**

Philosophical Data



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† The inability to tell right from wrong is the accepted basis for an insanity plea in a court of law.

†† By this question we generally mean, "Does God have benevolent intentions towards mankind?" On the basis of that meaning, it points us to an innate sense of right and wrong, and also toward the questions of teleology, "What are God's purposes for mankind?" However, we must step away from our anthropocentrism for a moment and realize that from an objective point of view, the question, "Is God good?" is superfluous. Yes, God is good, by definition. Whatever He is, it is good, whether we like what He is or not!

\* We can see that certain acts result in harm to others, but what invests "harming others" with moral quality? Why don't we take a cavalier Darwinist attitude of "all is fair in the name of personal survival"?

\*\* Basing ethics on natural properties would require subjective human analysis of which properties are good and which are bad; the basis is then no longer objective.

\*\*\* Only a personal God provides an *authoritative, enforceable*, basis for ethics.

**Tel. Ω**

What is the purpose of humanity in general and of me in particular?



**Eth. A<sup>2</sup>**

Is the ultimate expression of rightness legal (law) or personal (a perfect life)?

Does God define rightness and wrongness for humanity?

**Eth. A<sup>1</sup>**

Observable Data

**TELEOLOGY**

Philosophical Data

**Tel. Ω**  
WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF  
HUMANITY IN GENERAL  
AND OF ME IN PARTICULAR?

Design & order  
in the universe.

Universal human  
hunger for meaning†

Does essence precede  
existence?

NO

Does exist-  
ence precede  
essence?

YES

**Existentialism:**  
Purpose and  
meaning are a  
subjective inven-  
tion, a self-de-  
ception.

OR

YES

Is there design  
without a pur-  
pose?

NO

Is there purpose  
without a preced-  
ing person?††

NO

Is there a tran-  
scendent Person  
to give our exist-  
ence purpose?

YES

Is there a ubiqui-  
tous hunger with-  
out the existence  
of its object?

NO

Is there meaning  
without a preced-  
ing purpose?

Is purpose mean-  
ingful without a  
*perduring* rela-  
tionship?

NO

**Darwinism**

There is no meaning or purpose beyond the survival of our DNA.

What purposes do we attach to our possessions,\* and which purposes involve something an Almighty God might plausibly desire?

1. Sustenance
2. Shelter
3. Comfort
4. Aesthetic
5. Entertainment
6. Security
7. Healing
8. Efficiency
9. Communication ← Psalm 19.1; 97.6  
Isaiah 66.19
10. Self-improvement
11. Self-glorification ← Isaiah 43.7  
Rom 8.17  
Ephesians 1.11-12
12. Transportation
13. Identity
14. Love ← 1Jo 4.7,8
15. Self Extension (Spiritual Procreation)

† What is “meaning”? It is significance, that is, the signifying of something. We want our lives (our existence) to say something, and for the statement to have value.  
 †† Purpose is personal intention, by definition.  
 ††† Only the God of the Bible fits this bill.  
 \* Including children, spouses, other relatives and friends.  
 \*\* Biblically it appears God most wishes to communicate about Theology (Himself, e.g., Rom 9.23), Anthropology (Us), and Soteriology (Redemption).

Is there a Person who both transcends our existence AND will cause our relationships to perjure?†††

YES →

**Hap. Ω**  
 What is the best path to Happiness?

↑  
**Tel. A<sup>3</sup>**

Can embracing these purposes of God bring me Happiness?

Exodus 20.22-23  
 Ezekiel 2.7; 3.1  
 Hebrews 1.1,2

**Tel. A<sup>1</sup>**

What does God most wish to communicate about?\*\*\*

← YES

Is there any God who prioritizes communication with His creatures?

**Tel. A<sup>2</sup>**

How does God wish to communicate, glorify Himself, and share love through me?

Observable Data

**HAPPINESS**

Philosophical Data

**Hap. Ω**  
WHAT IS THE BEST  
PATH TO HAPPINESS?

What is the  
“happiness”  
all seek?

Short-lived  
[event-based]  
gladness?

**Hedonism:**  
Presence of  
pleasure and ab-  
sence of pain†††

Who are the happiest  
people we have observed?

1. Corrie Ten Boom
2. Joni Eareckson Tada
3. Sister Paige
4. Elisabeth Elliot
5. Brother Lawrence
6. Lila Peters
7. Dorothy Gilmore
8. Leona Fey
9. Mother Theresa (?)
- 10.

Enduring  
contentment?  
*makarismós* =  
blessedness

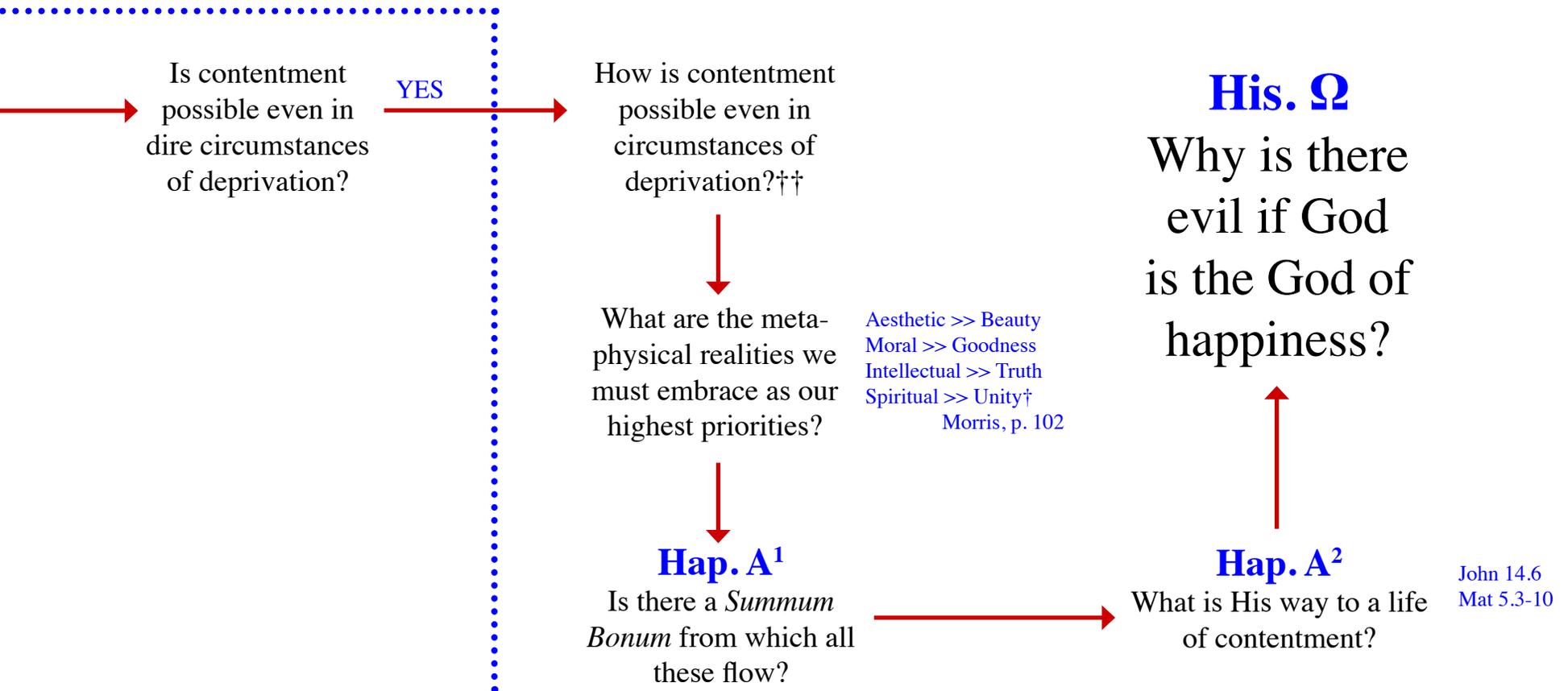
What threatens  
enduring  
contentment?

1. Lack of basic ne-  
cessities
2. Frustrated pursuit  
of goals
3. Sense of purpose-  
lessness
4. Violations of con-  
science
5. Sense of inauthen-  
ticity

What characterizes the lives of  
the happiest people?

1. Fruitfulness
2. Value People Over Things
3. Humility
4. Sense of Purpose
5. Selflessness
6. Sense of Identity
7. Faith, Hope and Love

- † What is meant by “unity” here is integration, connectedness, a sense that one’s life is part of a plan and correctly related to the rest of reality.
- †† I.e., where does happy people’s resilience come from? Only from embracing a *summum bonum* that is metaphysical and perduring!
- ††† The “dead end” of hedonism undermines both the Islamic paradise of eternal self-gratification and the Christian misunderstanding of heaven as a place of self-indulgent pleasure.



Observable Data

**HISTORY**

Philosophical Data

**His. Ω**  
**WHY IS THERE EVIL  
IF GOD IS THE GOD  
OF HAPPINESS?**

Why can only  
a theist ask  
this question?

Are man's evil in-  
clinations original  
or the result of a  
subsequent fall?

Why do people hun-  
ger for righteousness  
and become "good"?

There is real good  
and real evil in the  
world: what are the  
implications?

Dualism or  
polytheism?

NO

Is there a flawed  
Creator or a cre-  
ated adversary?

Why would the  
Creator allow an  
Adversary in His  
universe?†

YES

**DEAD END**  
What basis is there  
for right and wrong?  
What accounts for the  
unity in the universe?

Is the adversary man  
himself, or an Adversary  
external to man?

Evil not man's original  
design (Ecc 7.29).

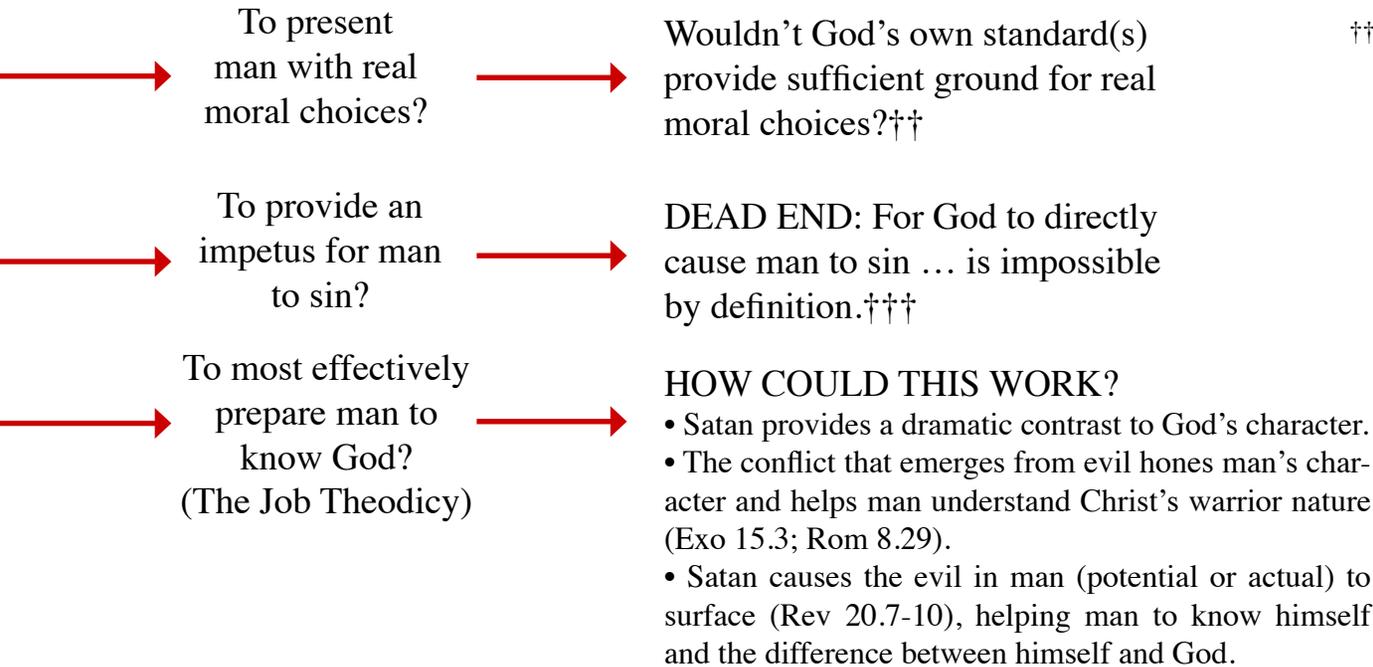
There is no justification for denying  
God's almighty power. Proposing  
weakness on God's part cannot explain  
the presence of evil. Nor can lack of  
goodness in God explain evil, for God  
is good by definition. Nor can lack of  
God's existence explain evil for then  
there is no evil, and the universe itself  
remains unexplained.

The universe displays the  
handiwork of apparently  
infinite power and wisdom:  
what are the implications?

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- † The Free Will Theodicy posits the gift of free will to man as more important than keeping the human race free from evil, but fails to adequately explain why God allows Satan to exist.
- †† God's command to not eat of the tree in the Garden gave man a real moral choice, even if man did not fully comprehend all the consequences of making the wrong choice.
- ††† God is good by definition, and all that He does is good and right. God is also True and cannot contradict Himself.



**His. A<sup>1</sup>**

Is God's Self-disclosure a higher priority to Him than keeping evil from the universe and man from sin?

**Epi. Ω**

How do we know Jesus is LORD?

Can we trust a God who bleeds? Yes, but...

**His. A<sup>2</sup>**

Can we trust a God for whom *the end justifies the means*?