

Omnipotence and the Tolerated Destroyer — 52

Satan, Preventable Harm, and the Burden of Perfect Divine Governance

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Central claim

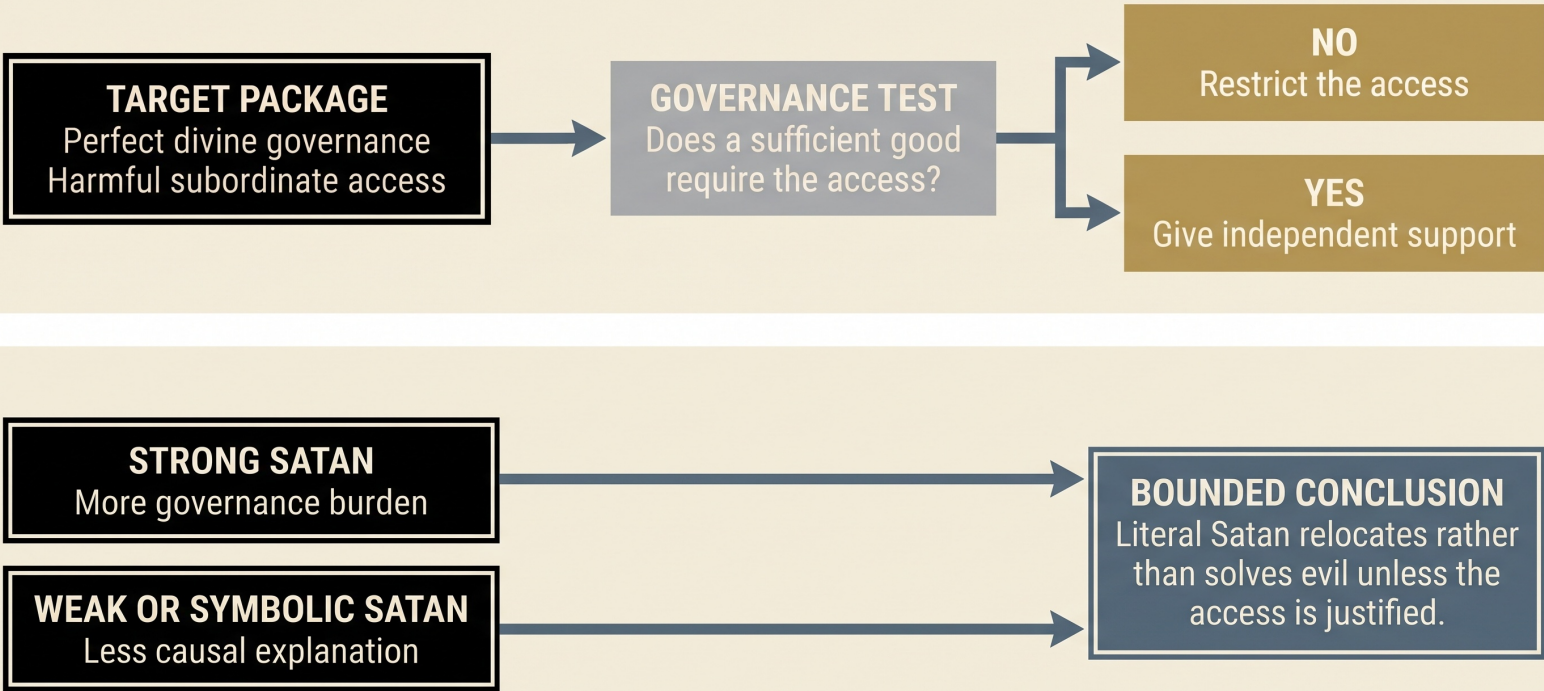
The target is a God-concept—a specified conception of a deity—combining unlimited preventive power, comprehensive knowledge, perfect goodness, providential governance, and a literal harmful Satan with continuing access to humans or nature. Within that package, Satan relocates rather than solves the problem of evil: unless a supported sufficient good requires the access, permission and delay count against perfect governance; weakening or symbolizing Satan lowers that cost only by surrendering causal explanation. This is targeted evidential pressure, not a deductive disproof: detailed theodicies, voluntary self-limitation, and unknown reasons remain possible, but they need support beyond the harms they were introduced to explain.

Preview:

Target package	Expected governance	Pressure	Bounded result
An all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly good governor permits a literal malicious subordinate continuing harmful access.	If no sufficient good requires that access, harmless restriction is expected; delegation does not erase oversight.	Freedom survives without superhuman deception; future defeat does not justify present delay; a stronger Satan creates a stronger permission burden.	A literal Satan relocates rather than solves evil unless a specific defense earns its added claims. Symbolic, limited-deity, and independently supported alternatives remain open.

The argument challenges the conjunction of perfect governance and harmful Satanic access. It does not claim that generic theism is contradictory or that every unexplained permission is gratuitous.

Visual preview:



The governance test asks whether a sufficient good requires harmful access; the strength fork shows that a potent adversary raises the permission burden while a weak or symbolic adversary explains less. The result is a burden of justification, not a deductive disproof.

Abstract

A literal Satan does not solve the problem of evil for a theology that also affirms an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, providential deity. It relocates the question: why would such a governor create, empower, delegate to, or continue to permit a malicious subordinate whose harmful access could be restricted? The governing principle is that perfect governance favors restricting serious subordinate harm unless a sufficient good requires the access. This paper tests that bridge through a cumulative case from preventive capacity, delegated oversight, the difference between freedom and deception, delayed intervention, limited explanatory gain, and the historical and cognitive availability of human adversary concepts. Together, these strands make continuing harmful access less expected under the defined package than under an ordinary human-development comparator unless a supported good or constraint reverses the comparison. They also generate a graded dilemma: the more causal work Satan performs, the more permission requires justification; the weaker or more symbolic the figure becomes, the less evil the figure explains. Recent Rebel Angel Theodicy supplies the strongest direct reply through angelic freedom, delegated evolutionary influence, and divine quasi-kenosis. Those additions can defeat a bare contradiction claim, but they do not remove the evidential burden without independent support for the delegation, the scope and duration of access, and the chosen non-intervention. Skeptical theism likewise counsels humility but cannot turn compatibility into confirmation. The conclusion is firm and limited: harmful Satanic access counts against this specific package absent a supported outweighing good; generic theism, symbolic readings, limited or non-interventionist deity concepts, and detailed theodicies with independent support remain separate questions.

Keywords: Satan; problem of evil; omnipotence; divine governance; rebel angel theodicy; preventable harm; skeptical theism; freedom; deception

1. The Claim Under Pressure

The Satan figure can appear to relieve pressure on monotheism. If evil comes from a malicious supernatural agent, then evil need not express the character of the supreme deity. Blessing has a benevolent source; temptation, deception, disorder, and suffering have an enemy. The division is psychologically and narratively intelligible. Yet under a strong doctrine of providence it creates a second question before it answers the first. A subordinate enemy acts only within a reality the supreme governor knowingly creates and sustains. If that governor can harmlessly restrict the enemy, the enemy's existence does not by itself explain why the harms occur.

The target must be exact. A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including the attributes, intentions, relationships, and governing activity assigned to it. The God-concept examined here is personal, omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good, and providentially responsible for creation. Omnipotence is not treated as the power to perform contradictions; it is the ability to bring about any broadly possible state of affairs compatible with the divine nature. Perfect goodness supplies decisive reasons against serious needless harm. Providence means more than original creation: the target deity knowingly governs, permits, or sustains the conditions under which creaturely action occurs.

The associated Satan concept is also specific. It is not a literary emblem for temptation or a compressed way of naming structural evil. It is a literal, intelligent, malicious nonhuman agent who deceives, tempts, accuses, corrupts, injures, or influences natural history, and whose access continues with the target deity's knowledge. Different traditions assign different powers and histories to this figure. That variation matters later. For now, the issue is the familiar conjunction of perfect divine governance and a causally active adversary.

That conjunction yields the paper's governing claim: a literal Satan relocates rather than solves the problem of evil. The immediate cause may be adversarial agency, but the explanatory question moves to the creation, delegation, scope, permission, and duration of the agent's access. Unless a supported sufficient good requires that access, the adversary adds a cost to the target God-concept rather than removing one.

The argument addresses readers who use the adversary to protect the goodness of the supreme deity or to explain otherwise puzzling evil. It does not begin by assuming atheism, naturalism, or the impossibility of angels. Nor does it infer from "I cannot identify a sufficient reason" directly to "there is no sufficient reason."

The question is comparative and public: what explanatory benefit does the Satan hypothesis supply, what new claims does it require, and what should a perfectly governed world lead us to expect about a known malicious subordinate?

Classical arguments from evil asked whether evil is logically compatible with unlimited power and goodness (Mackie, 1955). Plantinga's free-will defense helped establish that a bare contradiction is difficult to sustain because a coherent possible reason for permitting creaturely wrongdoing can defeat it (Plantinga, 1989). Later debate has therefore focused heavily on evidence, probability, the variety and scale of suffering, and the strengths and limits of proposed theodicies (Adams, 1999; Rowe, 1979; Tooley, 2019). The present paper belongs to that evidential discussion. It asks whether adding a malicious supernatural subordinate improves the target theology or merely transfers the burden from direct causation to permitted agency.

The governance bridge

1. Perfect governance favors restricting serious, preventable subordinate harm unless a sufficient good requires the access. 2. The literal-Satan package asserts that harmful access continues. 3. The package therefore owes a specific justification for the access, its scope, and its duration. 4. Without supported justification, Satan relocates the burden to divine governance rather than solving the problem of evil.

2. Why Delegated Harm Is a Distinct Problem

The general problem of evil includes suffering caused by human choices, stable natural processes, disease, predation, accident, and disaster. The Satan hypothesis adds a special kind of agency. A superhuman deceiver is not merely one more finite person choosing badly within a shared social world. The figure is typically represented as possessing unusual information, reach, longevity, or influence. If those advantages matter, they increase the need for governance. If they do not matter, the figure becomes explanatorily idle.

The moral bridge is familiar. Delegation ordinarily changes the route of causation without necessarily removing responsibility. A hospital director who knowingly gives a violent employee unrestricted access to patients cannot answer an oversight complaint merely by identifying the employee as the immediate attacker. A government that arms a proxy and preserves its access to civilians remains answerable for what it could foresee and prevent. These analogies do not prove that divine and human duties are identical. They identify a defeasible principle: greater knowledge, capacity, and control normally increase rather than reduce the burden to justify permitted subordinate harm.

The target theology intensifies each part of that principle. The target deity does not discover the threat late, lack jurisdiction, risk personal injury, divide attention, or face an unknown future. If Satanic access is harmful, the divine governor knows its consequences. If restriction is broadly possible, the governor can perform it. If goodness opposes needless serious harm, then continuing permission calls for a good that restriction would destroy or prevent.

This claim allows restraint rather than annihilation. The argument does not require erasing an agent, coercing every choice, or preventing every unpleasant consequence. It asks why access to victims, information systems, natural processes, or vulnerable minds could not be narrowed. Human societies regularly distinguish a wrongdoer's continued existence from that wrongdoer's freedom to enter a school, operate a financial account, contact a victim, or handle dangerous equipment. A theology appealing to angelic freedom must explain why freedom requires the relevant access rather than merely the ability to choose.

The difference gives the tolerated-destroyer problem its focus. Human free will may explain why finite humans sometimes injure one another. Stable natural order may explain why embodied life includes predictable physical risk. Neither point by itself explains why an additional superhuman deceiver must retain special opportunities

to amplify ignorance, temptation, fear, suffering, or natural disorder. That further permission requires a further bridge.

3. The Cumulative Governance Burden

No single strand below establishes a contradiction. Together they show why the Satan hypothesis must do more than provide an antagonist. Each strand pairs an expectation generated by the target package with the pressure introduced by harmful Satanic access. Table 1 keeps the comparator and the limit visible.

Strand	Expectation under perfect governance	Pressure from harmful access	Limited contribution
Preventive capacity	Serious needless harm is restricted when restriction costs no equal or greater good.	A known malicious subordinate continues to reach finite victims despite superior divine capacity.	Permission needs a specified good or constraint; bare capability does not settle whether one exists.
Delegated oversight	A governor remains answerable for foreseeable delegated powers and their continuing scope.	Naming Satan as the immediate cause relocates the question to creation, empowerment, permission, and supervision.	The point concerns governance, not the claim that the supreme deity directly causes every harm.
Freedom and deception	Meaningful agency requires options and responsibility, not maximal exposure to a vastly better-informed manipulator.	Superhuman deception can corrupt the information on which finite agents choose.	Some risk may accompany freedom; Satanic access must still be shown necessary to that good.
Delay and future victory	If harmless restriction is available now, future defeat does not by itself justify intervening later.	Victims bear the cost during the interval while the promised outcome remains fixed.	Delay can be justified, but a future endpoint alone is not the justification.
Explanatory gain	An added agent should improve comparative fit or predict some discriminating pattern.	A flexible adversary can be invoked after temptation, disaster, doubt, illness, or social conflict without identifying a distinctive signature.	Nondiscrimination lowers public explanatory gain; it does not prove the agent unreal.

Table 1: Evidence ledger for the tolerated-destroyer problem. The strands converge on a justificatory burden while leaving independently supported greater goods and altered deity concepts open.

3.1 Preventive capacity and oversight

The simplest strand concerns control. An omnipotent governor has no ordinary incapacity defense. The important qualification is moral, not physical: perhaps restriction would destroy a good that justifies the risk. That possibility should be stated rather than hidden. Once stated, it becomes the premise carrying the reply. The Satan hypothesis no longer explains evil by itself; the proposed good, its dependence on Satanic access, and the proportionality of the permission do the work.

Delegation sharpens this point. A creator might value a community of free angelic and human agents. Yet giving an agent powers is distinct from maintaining every use and every domain of those powers. The expected pattern under responsible governance is calibrated access: freedom preserved where possible, victims protected where necessary, and powers restricted when foreseeable abuse outruns their justificatory goods. A defense of continued broad access must explain why calibration is unavailable or morally worse.

3.2 Freedom is not deception

Free-will defenses correctly identify a great good that cannot be manufactured as though persons were puppets. But the relevant question is not whether free creatures may choose badly. It is whether finite human freedom needs a nonhuman manipulator with epistemic advantages. A choice can be morally significant when its options are honestly presented. Deception can reduce autonomy by distorting the evidence, hiding consequences, impersonating trustworthy sources, or exploiting cognitive weakness.

This does not show that every influence violates freedom. Humans influence one another constantly, and resistance to temptation may develop character. The comparison is narrower. If a world with ordinary temptation, ignorance, social influence, and human wrongdoing already contains robust moral agency, then an additional cosmic deceiver is not established as necessary merely by repeating the word *freedom*. The defender needs an account of what specific freedom or good disappears when the deceiver's access is restricted.

3.3 Temporal delay is morally substantive

Many traditions promise that Satan will eventually be defeated. That promise addresses final sovereignty, not present permission. If the decisive victory is certain and neutralization is possible later, the temporal question remains: why not earlier, or why not restrict the harms that contribute nothing necessary to the final good?

Finite rescue analogies make the burden vivid. A firefighter who can safely stop an arsonist today cannot justify delay merely by announcing that the arrest will occur after more houses burn. The analogy may fail if early intervention would prevent some greater rescue, disclosure, repentance, or freely achieved community. But then that good, not the calendar, justifies the delay. Future defeat and present permission are different propositions.

Van Inwagen argues that some theodicies face a no-minimum problem: for any proposed intervention threshold, one might complain that slightly less suffering would have been enough (van Inwagen, 2006). That objection rightly blocks a naive demand for one obviously optimal cutoff. It does not make every scope of permission equally expected. A governor can have reasons to draw a nonunique boundary while still being required to draw boundaries proportionate to risk. The absence of a uniquely best restriction is not the absence of all governance.

3.4 An agent should add explanatory value

The Satan hypothesis can feel explanatory because it replaces impersonal misfortune with intention. Yet an explanation should constrain expectation. What would look different if a real malicious supernatural agent were active? Which events fall within the figure's causal role, which do not, and what observable pattern distinguishes Satanic activity from human psychology, social conflict, disease, chance, or ordinary physical processes?

An answer need not be a laboratory signature. Historical and personal explanations often rely on converging traces rather than repeatable experiments. Still, unrestricted flexibility is costly. If favorable religious experiences show benevolent providence while every adverse event may be assigned to a hidden adversary, the two-agent system can absorb nearly any result. A framework that fits every outcome after the fact offers little public discrimination before the fact.

This problem is especially sharp when natural causes are known. A biological, meteorological, or geological account does not logically exclude concurrent supernatural influence. It does, however, reduce the work left for that influence unless the supernatural hypothesis predicts something beyond the established process. Satan can remain compatible with the process, but compatibility is weaker than added explanation.

4. The Strong, Weak, and Symbolic Fork

The paper's central pressure can be stated as a graded fork rather than a forced binary. Satan concepts occupy a range. At one end, the figure is literal, powerful, causally active, and responsible for substantial suffering or

deception. At the other, the figure is symbolic language for temptation, structural evil, or the felt personality of misfortune. Between them are limited-agent views on which a literal Satan exists but has narrow power.

The more causal work the figure performs, the greater the governance burden. A potent adversary may explain why an event is malicious rather than accidental, but it also raises the question why the supreme governor grants, sustains, or fails to restrict the relevant access. The adversary does not stand outside omniscient awareness or omnipotent reach merely because the adversary has a different will.

The weaker the figure becomes, the lower that burden. A metaphor does not need to be imprisoned, and a severely limited agent cannot inflict large harms. Yet the explanatory benefit falls with the risk. A symbol may illuminate how humans experience temptation without identifying an external cause. A weak literal agent cannot bear responsibility for the natural and moral record that prompted the hypothesis.

The tolerated-destroyer fork

If Satan is causally potent, harmful access intensifies the burden on perfect divine governance. If Satan is causally weak or symbolic, the figure cannot explain the evils for which a supernatural destroyer was invoked. Intermediate views are possible, but each inherits pressure in proportion to the causal work assigned.

This fork is not a deductive disproof. A strong figure plus a sufficient greater good could be coherent. A weak figure might still play a limited theological role. The point is evidential discipline: one cannot claim the explanatory benefit of a powerful Satan while assessing the moral cost as though the figure were powerless, or lower the cost through symbolism while retaining literal causal credit.

5. The Strongest Direct Reply: Rebel Angel Theodicy

Warfare and fallen-angel theodicies take the challenge seriously. Boyd develops a trinitarian warfare account in which creaturely freedom, an open future, and a genuine spiritual conflict explain why created agents can resist divine purposes (Boyd, 2001). Dunnington argues that common objections do not dispose of the Satan hypothesis as a cause of natural evil (Dunnington, 2018). Most directly, Forrest's recent Rebel Angel Theodicy proposes that angels were delegated influence over evolution, rebelled, and thereby contributed to horrendous natural evil and human moral weakness (Forrest, 2026).

Forrest's proposal deserves more than a passing dismissal. It gives the adversarial agent a defined role, distinguishes rebel angels from the later fully evil Satan figure, and openly acknowledges speculation. Its defense appeals to an extended community of free creatures, the value of angelic agency, and a form of divine quasi-kenosis: the supreme deity either relinquishes some power to interfere with the natural order or possesses independent reasons not to exercise it. The account therefore meets the logical challenge better than a vague claim that the adversary is simply "part of the plan." It supplies a possible story in which creaturely agency, not divine malice, is the immediate source of harm.

That achievement changes the debate. If the question is bare consistency, a coherent Rebel Angel Theodicy may be enough. The present argument is more demanding because it concerns comparative support and explanatory cost. Four issues remain.

5.1 Causal transfer is not yet moral transfer

Rebel angels may be the immediate causes of suffering, but divine delegation remains part of the explanation. If the target deity knowingly grants world-shaping power, foresees possible rebellion, sustains the arrangement after rebellion, and can intervene, then identifying the rebels does not by itself remove the governance question. The theodicy must explain why this delegation and its continuation are worth their human and animal costs.

The value of creaturely agency is relevant. Yet delegation comes in degrees. A teacher may value students' freedom without letting one student control the building's fire system. A government may value regional autonomy without granting an insurgent permanent access to civilians. The question is not whether angels may have significant choices; it is why their agency requires the actual scope, duration, and victims of the harm-producing power.

5.2 Quasi-kenosis revises the target package

Voluntary self-limitation can make non-intervention coherent. It can also alter the expectations generated by omnipotent providence. If the supreme deity cannot intervene because a prior act of abdication is irreversible, the account needs a reason why irreversible exposure was the better creative policy. If the deity can intervene but will not because independent goods require restraint, those goods carry the justification. In either case, quasi-kenosis is an auxiliary claim—an added supporting claim—rather than a benefit supplied by the observed suffering itself.

This is not an objection to every kenotic theology. A believer may have scriptural, metaphysical, or experiential reasons for it. The evidential point is accounting: the original package does not receive a free explanation. It becomes a more specific package containing delegation, self-limitation, and a theory of why the limit remains morally appropriate after catastrophic consequences become known.

5.3 Speculation must earn comparative weight

Forrest candidly concedes that empirical support for rebel angels is weak and largely anecdotal. The account also requires a metaphysics of angelic personhood, a mechanism of influence over evolution, motives for rebellion, and an account of delayed correction. Detail can improve coherence, but detail introduced primarily to meet each objection can also reduce prior plausibility if it lacks independent support.

This is where possibility and evidence separate. A speculative account can block the inference “no possible reason exists.” It does not follow that the observed world favors that account over a world without rebel angels. To gain comparative weight, the proposal should make the pattern more expected, connect with independent evidence, or reduce problems elsewhere without creating equal burdens.

5.4 A revised adversary may no longer be the familiar one

Forrest's rebels begin as rational agents with intentions more complicated than simple hatred. His account differs from the familiar popular picture of a primordial purely evil enemy bent on human ruin. That revision may be an intellectual virtue. It shows, however, that defending one angelic-agency model does not automatically vindicate every literal Satan concept used in preaching, pastoral explanation, or popular theodicy.

The proper conclusion is therefore calibrated. Rebel Angel Theodicy can defeat a crude logical objection by displaying a coherent possibility. It can also focus debate on real candidate goods. It does not erase the tolerated-destroyer burden. It accepts that burden and offers a detailed payment. The payment's adequacy depends on the independent support for delegation, quasi-kenosis, angelic influence, and the proportionality of continued non-intervention.

6. Other Replies and What They Change

6.1 Human freedom requires an adversary

A defender may argue that moral choice needs temptation and that Satan supplies a genuine alternative to obedience. The reply confuses alternatives with manipulation unless it explains why ordinary finite desires, social pressure, ignorance, and competing goods are insufficient. Humans can choose selfishly, courageously, honestly, or deceptively without a cosmic deceiver. If supernatural temptation contributes something unique, that

contribution should be named and its benefit compared with the informational disadvantage imposed on finite agents.

The freedom of Satan or other angels is a stronger point. Restricting harmful access may limit what those agents can do. Yet every morally ordered freedom has an object and a domain. Preventing an attacker from reaching a victim restricts opportunity, not the attacker's capacity to form intentions or make choices. A defender must show why access to humans, nature, or evolutionary history is constitutive of angelic freedom rather than a dangerous power that responsible governance may bound.

6.2 The harm serves soul-making or a greater plan

Greater-good defenses remain possible. Exposure to temptation might develop courage, compassion, discernment, resistance, or solidarity. Suffering might participate in redemption beyond present understanding. Serious theistic work, including Adams's treatment of horrendous evil, does not treat these possibilities cheaply (Adams, 1999).

The present test has three parts. First, specify the good with enough content to distinguish it from a label. Second, explain why Satanic access rather than ordinary finite challenge is necessary or substantially better for that good. Third, address proportionality: why these victims, this severity, this duration, and this distribution? A vague greater plan preserves compatibility. It does not yet show that the added adversary improves the target theology.

6.3 Unknown reasons defeat the inference

Skeptical theism warns that finite observers may be badly placed to judge the full range of reasons available to an omniscient deity. Perrine and Wykstra develop this challenge to inferences from apparently pointless suffering (Perrine & Wykstra, 2017). The warning blocks a quick move from unperceived justification to nonexistent justification.

The tolerated-destroyer argument can accept that limit. Its conclusion is not that no unknown reason exists. It is that a literal Satan fails as a public explanation unless the theology gives the harmful access a supported role. Unknown reasons may lower the force of the negative inference, especially when independent evidence already supports the target package. But a universal appeal to inaccessible reasons also weakens positive expectations derived from perfect protection, providence, answered prayer, spiritual warfare, or final victory. The same cognitive limitation cannot be invoked only when the evidence is adverse while ordinary moral expectations remain available whenever the evidence is favorable.

Bounded skeptical theism therefore recommends humility, not neutrality by decree. A believer may rationally say, "Independent reasons sustain this theology while the permission remains unexplained." That is different from saying, "The Satan hypothesis explains the evil." The first locates support elsewhere; the second assigns explanatory credit that the unknown reason has not yet earned.

6.4 The deity voluntarily refuses coercive control

Open, process, kenotic, or non-interventionist theologies can reduce the burden by denying that the target deity determines or can unilaterally correct every outcome. Such views may describe genuine relational risk or a stable covenant with created agents. They should be evaluated on their own evidence and coherence.

They also mark a scope boundary. The present argument concerns a God-concept with unlimited preventive power and strong providential governance. A theology that denies either feature is not refuted by an argument that depends on it. The intellectual cost, if any, is a change in doctrine rather than a contradiction. The virtue is clarity: the believer states which protective expectations no longer follow.

6.5 Satan is symbolic

A symbolic Satan can name the experience of divided desire, systemic cruelty, accusation, or the apparent personality of evil. This reading avoids an added supernatural agent and the corresponding delegation problem. It can preserve ritual and moral language without asserting a hidden cause.

The change is substantive. A symbol cannot be cited as the literal producer of disease, disaster, intrusive thoughts, or another person's disbelief. Symbolic language may organize meaning; it does not shift causal responsibility away from human and natural processes. The reading escapes the tolerated-destroyer problem by relinquishing the literal explanation, not by winning it.

7. A Human-Development Comparator

The governance argument does not depend on proving that Satan is a human invention. Historical and cognitive accounts matter more modestly: they provide a live comparator for the origin and persistence of adversary concepts, so the choice is not "literal Satan or no explanation."

The adversary figure has a history. Pagels traces ways in which early Christian Satan discourse developed amid conflict and helped portray religious opponents as aligned with cosmic evil (Pagels, 1996). Kelly argues that the dominant rebel-enemy biography differs from earlier biblical roles in which a Satan can function as accuser, tester, or member of a divine administration (Kelly, 2006). These accounts do not establish one uncontested history, but they make an important point: "Satan" is not a single transparent datum whose powers, motives, and relation to divine sovereignty have remained fixed.

Cognitive approaches add a limited comparator. Boyer and Atran explain why minimally counterintuitive agents, purposive interpretations, and socially transmissible supernatural concepts can arise and persist within ordinary human cognition and culture (Atran, 2005; Boyer, 2001). Such work does not show that every supernatural representation is false. A belief can have an ordinary acquisition history and still be true. It does show that a human route to agent-rich explanations is available without first assuming the external agent.

This comparator matters because explanations should be compared, not merely imagined. Under cultural development, variation in the adversary's role, the blending of inherited texts with later theology, and the application of personal agency to misfortune are unsurprising. Under the target theology, those patterns are also possible: a real adversary could be interpreted imperfectly through history. The question is which account gains support from the record and which relies on auxiliary claims.

The evidence here is suggestive rather than decisive. Historical variability lowers confidence in arguments that treat one modern Satan concept as a self-authenticating revelation. Cognitive availability prevents the choice from being "literal adversary or no explanation." Neither strand proves nonexistence. Their proper contribution is to keep a live comparator on the table and to block an unearned inference from explanatory vividness to supernatural truth.

8. A Public Test for Tolerated-Destroyer Claims

The critique can improve future arguments by demanding four forms of precision. A theology that meets them may possess a real explanation rather than an evocative label.

1. **Identity.** State which Satan concept is being defended: accuser, tester, rebel angel, cosmic ruler, tempter, evolutionary interferer, symbol, or another role. Specify whether the figure is one agent or a class of agents and which powers are claimed.
2. **Causal role.** State what the agent causes, how that role differs from human and natural causes, and what pattern would be less expected if the agent were absent. A hidden concurrent cause that changes no expectation adds little public explanation.

3. **Governance constraint.** State why the target deity creates, delegates, permits, delays, or declines to restrict the harmful access. Name the good or constraint and explain why narrower access would frustrate it.
4. **Discriminating evidence.** Identify support for the agent or governance story that does not consist solely of the very suffering the story was introduced to explain. Historical testimony, revelation, experience, or metaphysical argument may be offered, but each should be assessed against live alternatives.

These requirements are not hostile to theology. They distinguish an answer from a transfer. A detailed warfare theodicy can meet more of them than an unqualified appeal to spiritual attack. A symbolic account can be honest about giving moral rather than causal explanation. A believer relying on independent revelation can state that the belief comes from that source rather than pretending the distribution of harm independently confirms it.

The public standard is symmetrical. A critic should not treat every misfortune as evidence against the target theology while denying any possible confirming pattern. A defender should not treat protection as providence while assigning every unprevented harm to an adversary or inscrutable plan. Both sides should state what the competing accounts lead them to expect and what observations would change their confidence.

9. The Proper Evidential Conclusion

The tolerated-destroyer argument is strongest when it resists two temptations. The first is the claim of strict contradiction. Plantinga-style defenses, skeptical theism, and detailed rebel-angel accounts show why logical possibility remains. The second is the claim that a human-origin account automatically wins. Historical and cognitive explanations are genuine comparators, but their availability does not by itself settle the metaphysics.

What remains is a focused cumulative inference. The target God-concept generates a defeasible expectation of responsible restriction. A causally potent Satan adds foreseeable, preventable subordinate harm. Human freedom does not plainly require superhuman deception. Eventual defeat does not explain present delay. Flexible supernatural attribution supplies limited discrimination. Historical variation and cognitive availability give the adversary concept an ordinary human-development route. Together these considerations make harmful continuing access less expected under perfect providential governance unless an independently supported good or constraint requires it.

The defender has several coherent options. Provide a detailed theodicy and evidence for its auxiliary claims. Adopt bounded skeptical theism and acknowledge that the support comes from elsewhere. Narrow the adversary's causal role. Treat Satan symbolically. Revise omnipotence, foreknowledge, or providence. Each option can be rationally explored. None allows the literal harmful agent to do double duty—absorbing responsibility for evil while remaining costless to the divine government that permits the agent.

This conclusion is evidential rather than total. It does not set a posterior probability for the target package, because priors and evidence outside this argument matter. It does not show that every instance of unprevented harm is gratuitous. It does not rule out a sufficient good unknown to the author. It says where the burden lies and what must be supplied to move it.

10. Conclusion

A tolerated destroyer does not remove evil from a perfectly governed world; it relocates the problem to the governance of a subordinate whose creation, powers, access, and duration remain within the explanatory scope of providence. The more dangerous the subordinate becomes, the less adequate it is merely to say that the subordinate, not the supreme deity, caused the harm. Delegated agency can explain the route while leaving permission and oversight untouched.

The cumulative pressure is straightforward. Unlimited preventive power removes ordinary incapacity defenses. Perfect knowledge removes surprise. Perfect goodness creates a decisive reason against needless serious harm.

Human freedom does not by itself require manipulation by a superior deceiver. Promised future victory does not by itself justify present delay. An agent invoked across incompatible outcomes does little discriminating work. A historically variable figure with available cultural and cognitive explanations cannot be treated as self-validating.

Rebel Angel Theodicy shows how a serious reply should proceed: specify the agents, their freedom, their powers, the delegation, and the reason for non-intervention. It can defeat a bare contradiction claim. Its success as an explanation depends on whether those added claims have independent support and whether their goods justify the actual scope and cost of the permitted harm. Skeptical theism can counsel humility, but compatibility with an inaccessible reason is not public confirmation.

The requested intellectual change is therefore modest but demanding. Do not use Satan as a theological pressure valve that receives causal blame without generating a governance cost. Either explain why the harmful access is necessary, proportionate, and supported, or reduce the figure's causal role. Theism remains open; the literal tolerated-destroyer package does not remain evidentially free.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

Ordinary-language reconstruction

- P1.** If a perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent, providential deity governs creation and a literal malicious Satan has harmful access, then either some morally sufficient good requires that access or the deity restricts it.
- P2.** The defended literal-Satan package asserts that the harmful access continues rather than being fully restricted.
- P3.** Therefore, if the target deity and literal Satan both exist, a morally sufficient good must require the relevant access.
- P4.** Human freedom, moral growth, stable natural order, and future victory do not by themselves establish that a superhuman deceiver needs the actual scope and duration of access claimed.
- P5.** Detailed rebel-angel, self-limitation, and unknown-reason replies can supply possible justifications, but their added claims need support independent of the harms they are introduced to explain.
- P6.** The historical and cognitive record supplies a live human-development comparator without proving that a literal Satan is nonexistent.
- C.** Therefore continuing harmful Satanic access counts against the defined conjunction of perfect governance and a literal Satan unless a supported justification reverses the comparison; the argument does not deductively disprove generic theism or every detailed theodicy.

The inference from P1 and P2 to P3 is deductively valid: given the conditional governance principle and continued unrestricted access, affirming the target package commits the defender to a sufficient justifying good. P4–P6 do not deductively establish that no such good exists. They supply defeasible conceptual, historical, and comparative support for the evidential conclusion. The appendix therefore preserves the paper's actual strength: a valid burden-of-justification bridge within an inductive case, not a proof that the target deity is impossible.

Symbols

- T : the target God-concept exists and providentially governs creation;
- S : a literal malicious Satan exists with harmful access;
- R : the target deity restricts or neutralizes that harmful access;
- J : a morally sufficient good requires permitting the access at its actual scope and duration;
- U : the continuing-access claim within the literal package, defined as $S \wedge \neg R$;

- E : the public record assessed in the body: diverse harms and adversary attributions without a discriminating Satanic signature, together with historical variation in the adversary concept;
- H : the human-development comparator, which posits no literal Satan and attributes the relevant harms and adversary concepts to ordinary natural, psychological, social, and historical processes;
- A : the background assumptions and evidence assessed in the body, including the governance expectation and the presently offered defenses;
- P : the probability measure used for qualitative comparison;
- F : the favoring relation, where $F(E; H, T \wedge S \mid A)$ means that E favors H over the conjunction $T \wedge S$, conditional on A .

Symbolic counterpart

The deductive burden can be displayed as follows:

$$U \leftrightarrow (S \wedge \neg R), \quad (T \wedge S \wedge \neg J) \rightarrow R, \quad U \quad \therefore \quad T \rightarrow J. \quad (1)$$

The result does not entail $\neg T$ or $\neg S$. It entails that the target package, when joined to the continuing-access claim U , needs J . The public record E is distinct from that disputed theological claim, so the comparative evidential step does not assume Satan's existence:

$$P(E \mid T \wedge S, A) < P(E \mid H, A) \implies F(E; H, T \wedge S \mid A). \quad (2)$$

This second inference is valid by the law of likelihood if the inequality is true. The inequality is not a theorem. It is the paper's defeasible premise, supported by the cumulative governance burden and limited by the possibility that independent evidence for J , T , or S could alter the total comparison. The conclusion does not imply that H is more probable than $T \wedge S$ after all evidence, that the models exhaust the possibilities, or that symbolic and limited-deity accounts have been assessed.

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