

Main Idea: The point of life is the glory of God, not circumstantial happiness.

The Problem of Evil is 2-fold:

A. Emotional Problem of Evil: *Comforting suffering people and dissolving the emotional dislike people have of a God who would permit such evil.*

B. Logical Problem of Evil: *Giving a rational explanation of the co-existence of God and evil.*¹

- a. Logical problem of evil
- b. Probabilistic problem of evil
- c. Evidential argument from evil

The Claim: The existence of evil means God is either not all-powerful or all-good.

The Challenge: Logical Problem of Evil

“God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or he is able and unwilling; or he is neither willing nor able, or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and is unable, he is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God if he is able and unwilling, he is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if he is neither willing nor able he is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does he not remove them?” - Epicurus, Greek Philosopher (341-270 B.C.)²

David Hume: How can Evil and God co-exist?

“Epicurus’ old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”³

J.L. Mackie, Former atheist philosopher (1917-1981):

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three.⁴

¹ Greg Welty notes the drastic consequences of allowing for a God who makes contradictions, “If you admit that God allows contradictions, the problem of evil becomes much worse. The critic can say that, “If God can do contradictions, why couldn’t He fix evil without having allowed/created evil in order to fix the problem? Why did He have to create a problem in order to fix a problem that didn’t exist until He allowed it?”” “The Logical Argument-01,” *God & Evil-PHREL 4383* (Fort Worth, TX: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 3.

² William Dyrness, *Christian Apologetics in a World Community* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 153.

³ Richard Popkin, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 63.

⁴ J.L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” in, *The Problem of Evil: Oxford Readings in Philosophy*, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 25.

Q: How can God exist when there is so much suffering & evil?

- 1) God is all-powerful
- 2) God is all-good
- 3) Evil exists
- 4) God is either not all-powerful or all-good. For if he had the power to stop evil and He doesn't, then He is not all good.
- 5) Or if God desires to stop evil but cannot, we must assume He is fully good but not all-powerful.

*Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book published in 1981, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He concludes that even God cannot stop every disaster.

Crucial questions on the logical problem of evil

1) Who determines the **purpose** of life? Ecclesiastes 12:11-12

- The character/attributes of the Creator of life determines the point of life – 12:11

- **Education** without God ends in hopelessness & depression – 12:12

2) What is the purpose of life? – Ecclesiastes 12:13

- If **happiness**, then suffering is evidence against God's existence. Happiness = God has failed

"There are certain instances of suffering that are utterly impossible to produce happiness that are not useless in producing the knowledge of God." – William Lane Craig

William Lane Craig, "Another stumbling block for many Westerners is the presupposition that the point of life is circumstantial happiness. If this is true and such a *telos* was by God's design then atheist and theist would be compelled by a basic kind of intellectual honesty that God has epically failed. A cursory reading of world history or a glimpse of the nightly news adds towards the cumulative case that the overwhelming majority of persons who have existed could not be considered as having lived happy lives, even by Aristotelian standards. "The chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God." Hence, to argue against the existence of God on the grounds of the existence suffering is to fundamentally misunderstand the point of life."⁵

"The primary reason we feel so much emotional pain when these things occur is because of our beliefs about what happened to us. Correct beliefs promote life, help, and peace. Incorrect (often called 'irrational') beliefs eventually cause great pain and suffering." Gary Habermas⁶

⁵ William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Evil," Reasonable Faith, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/the-problem-of-evil>, Accessed July 12, 2012.

⁶ Gary Habermas, *Why is God Ignoring Me?* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2010), 109.

- If **holiness/knowledge of God**, then suffering is not evidence against God's existence.
- **Fear** God & keep His commandments = Glorify God & enjoy Him forever (*Westminster Confession*) – 12:13

What the atheist has to demonstrate to prove a logical problem from evil:

- Prove that God and evil are **incompatible**.

At the forefront of Plantinga's argument is the tacit assumption of atheists who uncritically accept the inherent contradictoriness of God and evil and "make no attempt whatever to *show* that it is." . . . The atheist must first show *why* God and evil are incompatible in order to argue from that premise.⁷

John Feinberg writes, "Theists should require atheists to offer an instance of suffering which they can prove is genuinely pointless. That will be a hard challenge to meet, especially because of our limited knowledge. Atheists won't likely do better than produce some evidence that a specific evil is probably genuinely pointless, but "probably pointless" isn't enough to answer Reichenbach's objection about question begging."⁸

Q# What must you *Prove* for this (evil = God doesn't exist) to be a valid/sound argument?

You must *prove* that God *could not* use evil to bring about a greater good

Q# *What did Jesus' suffering produce?*

"Mankind is in a state of rebellion against God – thus, the Christian is not surprised at the terrible evils in the world because of man's depravity as evidenced by Scripture and common experience. . . . Christian theology reports doctrines that significantly increase the probability of Evil and suffering coexisting with the existence of God = the point of life is not happiness but the knowledge of God which, in the end, will produce ultimate human Flourishing. There are certain instances of suffering that are utterly impossible to produce happiness that are not useless in producing the knowledge of God."⁹

= Take every religion & philosophy, & Christian theology provides the most accurate picture of humanity & the world. If Christianity properly diagnoses the problem, if we're open-minded, it will also open us to the possibility that Christianity may have the answer as well. Simply put, the answer is Jesus. Hinduism denies evil. Buddhism recognizes it but pulls you inward and cuts you off from the outside world. Islam has done more to cause evil than any other religion since its beginning. Animistic religions are in the chains of magic. Judaism has rejected the cure. New Age totally bypasses the issue of the heart and scientism only reveals that scientific advance has given us more adept tools at slaughtering one another & taking us one step closer to a science-fiction, Cyberdyne-dominated war of the machines where human life is of almost no value. Probability and the problem of evil, probability depends upon what background information you

⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 22-23.

⁸ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 235.

⁹ William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Evil," www.reasonablefaith.com, *ibid*.

consider.

- A. God's existence provides the best explanation as to why the universe exists.
- B. God's existence provides the best explanation to the order found in the universe.
- C. God's existence provides the best explanation for moral values in the world.

b. Prove that God could have no **reason** for allowing suffering.

c. Inscrutability: Do we have the access to enough information to make that call?

Alvin Plantinga, "The theist believes that God has a reason for permitting evil; he doesn't know what that reason is. But why should that mean that his belief is improper or irrational?"¹⁰

Logical problem of evil – WLC states, "we are not in the position to be able to assess whether God has sufficient moral reasons for allowing suffering to exist."¹¹

Q: How much information must you have in order to say that God COULD not justify allowing evil to exist?

A: Total knowledge/every bit of data in the universe.

Q: Why doesn't God let us know why He allows certain things to happen?

A: We wouldn't be able to handle it.

Imagine the following scenario...

1. I am a good person.
2. I often inflict pain on little children, voluntarily, and people pay me to do this, and they often watch me do this.
3. I am a dentist who does his job.¹²

Point = Without point 3, we could only conclude that the person is a moral monster who needs to be imprisoned, or worse.

d. Prove an instance of suffering that is definitively pointless.

*Even if you were able to "prove" a situation of pointless suffering, it would be outweighed by all the other cases of suffering that 1) Did have a point or 2) cases that we couldn't rule out not having a point.

*If God isn't in the equation then you can't argue for hope on any level. Ultimately, all is meaningless.

Wait a minute...what must exist for evil to exist?

Serious question for Atheists: If God does not exist then how can evil...or good exist?

1. Without God, evil could not exist.
2. Evil exists.
3. Therefore, God exists.

¹⁰ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 11.

¹¹ William Lane Craig, "The Problem of Evil," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPqSrnR6VtI>

¹² Greg Welty, *ibid*, 3.

Moral Argument for God's Existence

- 1) If God does not exist, objective moral values and duties do not exist.
- 2) Objective moral values and duties do exist.
- 3) Therefore, God exists.

Point = The fact that you're arguing against God's existence on moral grounds is evidence that objective morality exists & if objective morality exists then you're arguing for God, not against Him.

TRUE POINTLESSNESS – Atheist Arguments (Darwinism: Life explained without God)

"In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference." – Richard Dawkins¹³

e. Prove the world would be better without free **choice** or natural law.

Q# Why couldn't God just create a perfect world without the possibility of evil?

1. Ability to make free choices

Plantinga also makes the case that "A really top-notch universe requires the existence of free, rational, and moral agents; and some of the free creatures He created went wrong." [1] Simply put, a very strong response to the question, "Why is there any evil at all?" is Plantinga's point that a necessary component of the best conceivable world includes free creatures, not robots, whose freedom carries the propensity for almost certain abuse of that freedom in some cases. The central value judgment of the argument is simply, "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all." . . . Moral virtues such as love, loyalty, patience, self-control, and bravery would not be considered virtues if such actions were the only option. The atheist is then left with the option of arguing that God should not have created any world unless there was a sort of "evil-free" guarantee, even if God could bring about a greater good from the existence of evil."¹⁴

*Trans-world depravity - a necessary byproduct of free will

Objection: Why wouldn't God stop the abuse of Free Will?

= We would be Moral monsters.

*Having a pain in your leg (a bruise). The doctor says could eliminate the pain by amputating your leg. Yet, it comes at a price that is far too high. He is not bad because he refuses to

¹³ Richard Dawkins, *River out of Eden* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 133.

¹⁴ Ibid, 27, 30. Plantinga notes, "Some have objected to the free-will defense on the grounds that it presupposes that there are such things as counterfactuals of freedom, that they have truth values, and that God can know them. It is the atheologian, however, who really needs these suppositions; things are easier, not harder, for the free-will defense if we reject these assumptions." Alvin Plantinga, "Epistemic Probability and Evil," in, *The Evidential Argument From Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder, 94.

amputate your leg even though he has the power to do so. He is not evil because he refuses to do this.¹⁵

*Elimination of virtues such as courage, love, compassion, and generosity. These are virtues that we must choose to exhibit, often against the grain of our own self-interest. If choice is taken away, good is also. No one praises machines for doing what they were programmed to do. A mechanistic humanity is no humanity at all.

2. Natural Law

Objection: God should have created a world insulated from natural evil

Q# Would a world w/o natural laws be better or worse?

*Random acceleration of gravity¹⁶

3) How should I approach the suffering I encounter in life? – Ecclesiastes 12:14

- Believers: Be encouraged at what God has done & have faith in what He will do.

1 John 3:8 “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil.”

****The longer we spend an eternity the more the sufferings of this life will shrink in comparison – this is why the apostle Paul could refer to his sufferings as "slight, momentary, light afflictions"***

2 Corinthians 4:17-18 “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

*Heaven would not be heaven without redemption. You cannot have redemption without something to redeem sinners from. However, do not focus on one section of eternity. Rather, look at it from a holistic perspective.

- Unbelievers: Look back in history at how God logically solved the problem of evil with the prophecy-fulfilling death & resurrection of Jesus. Then ask if you’re ready to meet Him as judge.

¹⁵ Greg Welty, *ibid*, 4.

¹⁶ “Theodicy” powerpoint, slides 1-34, minus Don Whitney’s points.