

5 Reasons Evil Exists

One of the emotionally strongest arguments against the existence of God is known as the problem of evil. In fact, one of my students told me it made an appearance in the latest *Batman vs. Superman* movie in the form of an atheistic apologetic. In short, the problem of evil concludes that an all-loving God cannot exist when evil exists. This seems reasonable at first, at least on an emotional level. However, a closer look at the logic shows that the problem of evil is not a problem for theists, but it is a problem for atheists.

Here is one formal presentation of the problem of evil.

1. A God that is all powerful would be able to prevent evil and suffering.
2. A God that is all knowing would know that evil and suffering happen.
3. A God that is all loving wouldn't want evil and suffering to happen and would take needed action to stop it.
4. Evil and suffering happen.

Conclusion: Since evil and suffering exist, an all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving God cannot exist.

*If each point is accurate, then the conclusion follows logically. Therefore, as a theist, we must determine if there are problems with any of the individual points (premises 1-4). If not, then God does not exist. Hint: There are several problems.

Addressing the Errors in This Syllogism

1. Point one is correct.
2. Point two is correct.

3. Point three is speculative. (We will address this below.)
4. Point four is only true if God exists and, therefore, becomes self-refuting. In short, evil suggests right and wrong actions and events, with evil being the wrong action or event. However, without God, there is no evil. Things simply are. Borrowing language from the famous skeptic David Hume, without God there only "is." There is no "ought." Deceased atheist professor at Cornell, William Provine, said it well: "Let me summarize my views on what modern evolutionary biology tells us loud and clear, and I must say that these are basically Darwin's views. There are no gods, no purposeful forces of any kind, no life after death. When I die, I am absolutely certain that I am going to be completely dead. That's just all—that's gonna be the end of me. There is no ultimate foundation for ethics, no ultimate meaning in life, and no free will for humans, either." (To understand this better, read: ["Can You Be Good Without God? 5 Reasons Moral Relativism Fails."](#))

So point four already shows us that the "problem of evil" is really no problem at all—at least not for theists. For atheists, however, evil is a problem. The only way to arrive at evil from atheism is to make vast assumptions that contradict the foundation of their worldview.

Premise 3

Premise three states, "A God that is all loving wouldn't want evil and suffering to happen and would take needed action to stop it." First of all, this assumes perfect knowledge. As the statement claims to know what an all-loving God would do, to make this claim one must know everything that an all-loving, all-knowing God would know. The moment someone introduces me to a person who has this level of knowledge, I will concede.

Second, premise three sets up somewhat of a false dichotomy

(only two options, when there are at least three). The third option is that an all-knowing, all-loving God would allow evil to exist. Of course, premise three does hold certain emotional influence. It seems strange at first, though, that a loving God would allow us to experience all the hardships that we experience. Therefore, it's important for us to address why God might not stop suffering and evil from occurring.

5 Reasons Why God Allows Evil (What Purpose Does It Serve?)

There is not one reason that God allows evil and suffering. There are many. Surely, this is not an exhaustive list, but here are five reasons that God says He allows suffering. Comment below if you can think of any others. I may even use your ideas in my updated articles, videos or books down the road!

- Evil is necessary for choice (free will) to exist.

This is a bit complicated. Think about it this way: If God eliminated free will and everything was perfect, we would be nothing but robots. We not only wouldn't make a mistake—we couldn't make a mistake. Again, this is a very simple explanation of a complex philosophical idea, but you should be able to get the basic idea. Evil must exist if choice exists.

- Evil shows us that we are but beasts without God.

The wisdom literature of Ecclesiastes tells us, "In the place of justice, there was wickedness; and in the place of righteousness, there was wickedness. ... Regarding the account of sons of men, God is making clear to them to show that they are but animals (Eccl. 3:16-18)." By allowing us to make decisions, God also shows us our sinful nature without Him. It is no surprise that as modern atheism has moved further and further away from God, we are increasingly placing value on the animalistic part of ourselves. This is precisely the pattern Paul describes in Romans 1.

- Trials test worship.

Job was a faithful man. However, Satan pointed out that it is easy to worship God when everything is going your way. When you are blessed, it is easy to sing praises, but then the question arises: Is it God who is being worshipped or the blessing? When God allows for suffering, we have to make the choice to praise Him despite not getting our way. Suffering forces us to love Him above our situation.

- It produces good fruit.

The world says it this way: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." The Bible is a little more eloquent. "My brothers, count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith develops patience. But let patience perfect its work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing" (James 1:2-4). Suffering is not fun. No one loves correction when it happens, but trial by fire has the potential to produce exponential growth.

- Only God knows.

There are unquestionably other reasons God has chosen to allow evil and suffering to exist. The vastness of His knowledge is incomprehensible to finite humans. This is where faith comes in. Faith is not blind. It is not brainless. Faith simply acknowledges personal limitations and places trust in a higher power—namely God. (Side note: Everyone puts faith in something, be it their own reasoning ability, popular opinion, expert recommendations, epistemological processes and so forth. Faith is not exclusive to God's people.)

2 Possibilities

It's pretty clear that the problem of evil is not logical. In fact, it shows us that God must exist. But there is still more of the discussion to be had. Consider the outplay of each possible reality—one in which God does not exist and one in

which God does exist (specifically the God of the Bible).

Imagine if the world was truly Godless. All the suffering we experience doesn't go away. But what does that leave us with? If there is no God, there is no objective right and wrong. That means we don't even have the satisfaction of calling rape, murder, adultery and lying "wrong." We can say that we don't like it. We can say that it causes damage to people, but there is no objective right or wrong without God. (Again, read "Can You Be Good Without God?" to grasp this concept.)

Not only can we not call evil objectively wrong, but there is also no justice for it, either—save for the inconsistent justice that we experience on Earth. That means that if someone gets away with murder, that's it—no justice. Furthermore, there is no purpose for the suffering and no hope beyond the suffering. As Provine pointed out, a world without God is meaningless. That means that suffering is meaningless as well. But suffering is not just pointless; there is also no hope beyond suffering (without God). You live. You suffer. You die. This may seem callous to those of us who live fairly pleasurable lives, but what do you tell the person who is born in absolute poverty, who grows up in an abusive home, or who is sold into slavery at birth? They don't enjoy the pleasures that many of us are afforded. If there is no life beyond this life, then that is all people get. No hope. No justice. No purpose.

Consider the alternative. Suffering still exists. Evil still exists. However, in this reality, God exists. God is not only a just Judge, He is a merciful forgiver. That means that you not only get justice for the evils done against you, but you also have access to forgiveness for the evils that you commit. There is an eternal hope. Paul, a man who experienced parts of heaven and who was beaten to the point of death countless times, tells us "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). All of the

pain we suffer (and Paul had suffered a lot!) is *nothing* compared to the beauty that awaits us. Paul explained to the Corinthians how he was able to experience beating after beating, disappointment after disappointment. He knew what is coming, and it was all worth it!

One Final Point

It's often said that time heals all wounds. Of course, this is not fully true, but there is truth within the phrase. In my teen years, I was suicidal, addicted to drugs and depressed for an extended period of time. In only a decade later, those things feel like a distant reality, if not a different life altogether. At the time, those pains seemed insurmountable. If time heals all wounds, can you imagine what healing will come in the span of eternity and in the presence of God? It is no wonder that Paul said what he said.

Conclusion

So what have we learned?

The "problem of evil" is really no problem at all, at least not for theists. Not only do both premise three and premise four fail, but they also make belief in God both rational and beneficial. As followers of Christ, we can rest assured that evil is real, but it has been defeated. With God there is justice for evil, forgiveness from evil, purpose in evil, hope beyond evil, and an eternity of beauty and healing awaiting us in the presence of our beloved Creator.

What do you think? What other reasons might God have for allowing evil? Leave a comment below and share to get your friends in on the conversation. {eoa}

Check out the rest of the book Prove It: The Art & Science of Understanding & Articulating Why You Believe What You Believe by Chris Townsend.

Chris Townsend spent the first 26 years of his life as an atheist. He now leverages that background to help reach the lost and disciple the found. He has studied supply chain management and business information systems at Texas Christian University, theology at Christ for the Nations Institute (CFNI), church history at Liberty University and apologetics at Biola. Chris is the president of Redeemed Royalty Ministries, a professor at Christ for the Nations Institute and an itinerant apologist for . Chris has written several books, including *Prove It: The Art & Science of Understanding & Articulating Why You Believe What You Believe* and *Ekklesia Rising: The Organization Formerly Known as Church*. Connect with Chris at .