

# GOD: The Problem of Evil

## Lecture 7

Phil 1000, Fall 2008  
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## Outline

### Review

- What is at stake?
- Cosmological Argument (Cause → Effect)
- Teleological Argument (Designer → Order)  
If one accepts the teleological argument as reasonable, then the problem of evil is particularly troubling (Why?)

### The Problem of Evil

- Why worry about “evil”?
- Proposed solutions (4)

Summary: Seriousness of the Problem of Evil

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## Why Worry about Evil?

Ivan: “Listen! I took the case of children only to make my case clearer. Of the other tears of humanity with which the earth is soaked from its crust to its center, I will say nothing... I have narrowed my subject on purpose, I am a bug, and I recognize in all humility that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is. Men are themselves to blame, I suppose;... With my pitiful, earthly, Euclidean understanding, all I know is that there is suffering and that there are none guilty; ...I must have justice... All the religions of the world are built on this longing, and I am a believer. But there are the children, and what am I to do about them? That’s a question I can’t answer... If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It’s beyond all comprehension why they suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. Why should they, too, furnish material to enrich the soil for the harmony of the future?... And if it is really true that they must share responsibility for all their father’s crimes, such a truth is not of this world and is beyond my comprehension... I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don’t want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price.” (pp. 76-77)

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## Evil

- Any form of suffering, misery, or pain that affects persons (and maybe some other creatures); usually interpreted as unnecessary or unjust suffering.
- Two Types:
  - Moral Evil: suffering which results from human action, intentional or unintentional. E.g., murder, neglect, hatred, Sept. 11, etc.
  - Natural Evil: suffering which is not the result of human action, but natural occurrences. E.g., hurricanes, earthquakes, disease, droughts, etc.

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## The Problem

- Three inconsistent propositions:
  - God is omnipotent (no limits)
  - God is omnibenevolent (wholly good, always opposed to evil and eliminates evil)
  - Evil exists
- Challenge (Three Options):
  - Give up or modify one of the propositions. (But...)
  - Provide a solution that does not modify the propositions (Theodicy).
  - Accept that God does not exist.

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## Four Solutions

1. Good cannot exist without Evil; they are necessary counterparts.

### Problems:

- Limits God’s omnipotence
- Limits God’s omnibenevolence

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## Four Solutions

2. Evil is a necessary means to a Good; some evil ultimately serves good purposes.

### Problems:

- Limits God's omnipotence
- Paradox of Omnipotence: can God create laws that he could not break?

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## Four Solutions

3. Universe is better off with some evil rather than with none; allows for noble actions, character development, heroism, etc.

### Problems:

- Goodness has an instrumental value, not intrinsic value; goodness is measured only in response to evil.
- Challenges God's omnibenevolence: If god knows what will happen and doesn't try to minimize evil, the God's purposes might be disturbing (less than omnibenevolent)

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## Four Solutions

4. Freewill Solution (1<sup>st</sup> attempt)

Choice: Humans are created so as to be free to choose between good and evil. Sometimes humans choose evil (original sin?). Thus, existence of evil is not really God's fault.

### Problems:

- May challenge God's omnipotence: could have created humans that were free, but always chose good. Perhaps some of the blame falls on God?
- Doesn't account for natural evil.

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## Four Solutions

4. Freewill Solution (2<sup>nd</sup> attempt)

Soul-Forging: It is better for humans to be free and choose evil because (a) the choice between good and evil must be real, and (b) challenging humans with some evil develops character.

### Problems:

- Sheer quantity and quality of evil may be a problem: couldn't God have made it a little less rough, e.g., not have children/innocents suffer?
- How we understand evil: if evil is a force, like Satan, what does this do to our evaluation of the soul-forging solution? Does it challenge God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence?

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## Closing Thoughts

- The Problem of Evil
  - What is the outcome of the challenge?
  - If it still leads to belief in God, then how should we understand the evil that exists? That is, why don't we attribute evil to God? Why does God get the credit for good, but not the responsibility for evil?
  - How serious is the challenge for reasons for the existence of God? Can we deny the existence of evil?
- Why do we believe in God, even in the face of such evil?
  - What is at stake? Justice? Goodness in the world?
  - Perhaps we are being irrational?

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## Next Time

- Read Clifford, p. 101 and Clark, p. 114 (Faith and Reason)
- Answer reading questions, posted on the course schedule (pdf).
- Think about how rational it is to believe in God and what it means to have a rational (or irrational) belief.

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## Key concepts

- Problem of Evil
- Types of Evil: moral and natural
- Four Solutions and their problems
- Paradox of omnipotence