



# Introduction to

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# APOLOGETICS

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## Session VI: The Problem of Evil



# So what is the Problem?

# NOTES

Few questions have been leveled against a Christian worldview more often than the question of evil. Sadly, many Christians are either unable or unwilling to tackle the nature of this issue. In order to fully understand how to view and handle this issue let us take a deeper look at what many philosophers have deemed the “issue of evil”.

The argument of evil actually has two versions. There is the “logical problem of evil” and the “evidential (or probabilistic) problem of evil”. The logical problem of evil, attempts to show that it is logically impossible for God and evil to co-exist. If God exists, then evil cannot exist. If evil exists, then God cannot exist. Since evil exists, it follows that God does not exist. The probabilistic problem states that though the co-existence of God and evil is logically *possible*, it argues it’s highly *improbable*. The extent and depth of evil in the world is so great that it’s improbable that God could have morally sufficient reasons for permitting it. Therefore, given the evil in the world, it’s improbable that God exists.

## Logical Problem of Evil

Let us unpack the logical argument against God, based on evil. Epicurus, an ancient Greek philosopher, stated his famous logical argument like this: If God is willing to prevent evil, but not able, then he is not omnipotent (all-powerful). If he is able, but not willing, then he is not good. If he is both able and willing, then how can evil exist? If he is neither able nor willing, then why call him God? To combat this argument there are a few options we as Christians can take. Either we have to give up one or more of His divine attributes or defend those attributes in light of evil. Anytime someone attempts to vindicate the divine goodness and providence of God in view of the existence of evil, they must develop what is known as a theodicy. A theodicy in short is merely an attempt to show that the existence of evil doesn't rule out the possibility of God's existence.

	All Powerful	Not All Powerful
Good	<i>Theodicy – the problem of suffering</i>	Wants to stop suffering but can't.
Not Good	Could stop suffering but doesn't.	Can't and doesn't want to stop suffering.

## The Logical Problem Defined

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
2. If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil.
3. If God is omniscient, then God knows when evil exists.
4. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil.
5. Evil exists.
6. If evil exists and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know when evil exists, or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil.
7. Therefore, God doesn't exist. (Or does He?)

# Understanding Evil

## NOTES

To answer arguments of evil (the Logical and Evidential) we must first understand the nature of evil. We must define what it is and what it is not.

So what is evil? Some say evil is a privation. By privation, they mean a lack or absence of something that should be there. The theologian Augustine was one of the first to popularize this idea. Augustine argued that sickness for example could be considered a privation (lack) of good health. Evil could be the lack of good. In fact Augustine advanced two arguments in favor of this view that evil is not a substance.

First, God is good and the author of all good. Hence, whatever He created is good like Himself. Nothing can be the source of its opposite. But God *is* good and *is* the creator of everything. It follows, then, that everything God made is good and that there are no evil *things*. So what does this mean? If this were indeed true then it would mean that the evil that exists does not exist in and of itself but only as a corruption or privation of good things, which were made by God.

Second he argued that “When what we call evil is not present in a thing, then the thing is better. But when all of what we call good is taken away, then there is nothing left at all.” From this, Augustine concludes that, if after the evil is removed, the nature of the thing is purer for the removal and If the thing does not remain at all when the good is taken, then it must be the goodness of a thing that makes up it’s nature. This would seem to show that evil is not the true nature of a thing. So what is being presented here is evil does not exist in itself but again only in another as a corruption of it.

But is evil merely an absence of good? No. Merely being an absence is not what is being argued here. After all, to say that evil is a privation is *not* the same as saying that it is a mere absence or negation of good. A privation is the absence (or lack) of something that *should* be there. Privations are real and physical. Blindness is a real and physical lack of sight. Sickness is a real physical lack of good health. A rusty car or mold eaten apple are real examples of corruptions in otherwise good things. In each case, there is a real lack or corruption of a thing. Even the word corruption hold important meaning for it is The act or state of being corrupt or putrid. It is the destruction of the natural form of bodies, by the separation of the component parts, or by disorganization, in the process of putrefaction. This is exactly how Evil and Sin works. It is a twisting on goodness that God made.



## NOTES

The response to the problem of moral evil is actual quite easy. The response to this evil is called the Free Will Defense or Argument. This argument holds that God, being all-good, maximized the goodness in the world by creating free beings and of course, true freedom means that we have the choice to do evil things. Therefore, if God was good and loving he had to create free beings. Otherwise, He would have created robot like automatons who *had* to love Him. This would not be true love. True love is not forced love. Therefore, God created us capable of choosing evil and so evil cannot be avoided without depriving us of our freedom. This means that logically a world without freedom, true freedom, would be a worse place overall. This defense does a few things. First it preserves God's goodness because he created the best possible world, a free one. Second, it preserves his omnipotence and omnipresence. So we are left with the fact that He knows about evil and could stop it; He just has a good reason not to. To ensure our *freedom*. So what is the problem here? After all doesn't this answer the issue of evil? Well yes...but not all of it. The problem is the free will defense only really addresses moral evil or the evil committed on purpose by humans. Or at least that is what some might say. So what about natural and therefore metaphysical evils? Well the truth is, Free Will has a place here too. Let's take a look.



## Define the Terms

**E**VIL, *n.* *Evil is natural or moral. Natural evil* is any thing which produces pain, distress, loss or calamity, or which in any way disturbs the peace, impairs the happiness, or destroys the perfection of natural beings.

*Moral evil* is any deviation of a moral agent from the rules of conduct prescribed to him by God, or by legitimate human authority; or it is any violation of the plain principles of justice and rectitude.

## The Fall of Man

So how do we answer why a child is born with cancer? How do we respond to seemingly “random” acts of evil? The answers lies in two areas. First, if scripture is true then the world was made much different than we see now. Though we do not know fully to what extent it is different, we know there was no death, famine or disease. The literal earth was different. This would logically account for why some things happen.

<sup>17</sup> To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

<sup>20</sup>Adam named his wife Eve,<sup>p</sup> because she would become the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup>The Lord God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. GEN 3:17-21

So that hurricane is due to the curse. That cancer is due to the curse. Yes science can tell me by what laws it came about. It cannot however explain why it is philosophically. The Fall answers this.

## God is Logical and Consistent

Another idea we must uncover again rests in the nature of God. Fire is hot. It always is. Could you imagine a time it wasn't? The fact is God is a God of logic. He created flames to burn. The flame is governed by the laws of nature. Laws which require a lawmaker. Now we know those flames can be good. They can help feed us, they cleanse the forest, they warm and light our world. On the other hand, they can burn, suffocate and kill. Should God make fire cold every time an animal or human are exposed to the flame? This suspense of the natural laws would have dire consequences. How would we view God or the world if things were not consistent. Would we need to lean on Him or worship Him if nothing were dangerous? If life had *no* risk why would we need a God? Furthermore if Christianity is true we must contend with eternity. What is suffering now in the short term when compared to existence in eternity?

## NOTES

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# Evidential Argument of Evil

## NOTES

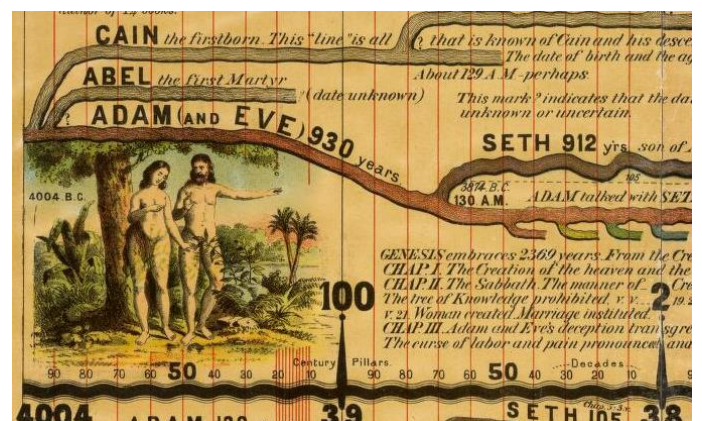
The *evidential* version of the problem of evil (also referred to as the probabilistic version), seeks to show that the existence of evil, although logically consistent with the existence of God, counts against or lowers the *probability* of the truth of theism. This argument focuses on the fact that a being allowing or causing natural “evils” may not logically be impossible but argue that due to lacking scientific evidence for its existence this is very unlikely and thus it is an unconvincing explanation for the presence of natural evils.

This is actual a much better argument for atheists in general as it speaks not to absolutes but questions of probability. Thus, we must answer this argument by responding to the presumptions held by nonbelievers and highlight some basic principles of Christianity.

William Lane Craig writes on the evidential problem of evil and mentions three main points in responding to this form of attack.

1. *We are not in a good position to assess the probability of whether God has morally sufficient reasons for the evils that occur.*

As finite persons, we are limited in time, space, intelligence, and insight. But the transcendent and sovereign God sees the end from the beginning and providentially orders history so that His purposes are ultimately achieved through human free decisions. In order to achieve His ends, God may have to put up with certain evils along the way. Evils which appear pointless to us within our limited framework may be seen to have been justly permitted within God’s wider framework. The brutal murder of an innocent man or a child’s dying of leukemia could produce a sort of ripple effect through history such that God’s morally sufficient reason for permitting it might not emerge until centuries later and perhaps in another land. When you think of God’s providence over the whole of history, I think you can see how hopeless it is for limited observers to speculate on the probability that God could have a morally sufficient reason for permitting a certain evil. We’re just not in a good position to assess such probabilities.



2. *The Christian faith entails doctrines that increase the probability of the co-existence of God and evil.*

In so doing, these doctrines decrease any improbability of God's existence thought to issue from the existence of evil. What are some of these doctrines? Let me mention four:

- The chief purpose of life is not happiness, but the knowledge of God.*
- Mankind is in a state of rebellion against God and His purpose.*
- The knowledge of God spills over into eternal life.*
- The knowledge of God is an incommensurable good.*

3. *Relative to the full scope of the evidence, God's existence is probable.*

Probabilities are relative to what background information you consider. For example, suppose Joe is a student at the University of Colorado. Now suppose that we are informed that 95% of University of Colorado students ski. Relative to this information it is highly probable that Joe skis. But then suppose we also learn that Joe is an amputee and that 95% of amputees at the University of Colorado do not ski. Suddenly the probability of Joe's being a skier has diminished drastically! Similarly, if all you consider for background information is the evil in the world, then it's hardly surprising that God's existence appears improbable relative to *that*. But that's not the real question. The *real* question is whether God's existence is improbable relative to the *total* evidence available.

The fact is I'm persuaded that when you consider the total evidence, again that's Evidence, then God's existence is quite probable. This is where other arguments (like many that have been discussed in this course) can come along side these points and help make a convincing argument.

Craig, William Lane. "The Problem of Evil: Reasonable Faith." *Popular Writings / Reasonable Faith*,  
[www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-problem-of-evil/](http://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/existence-nature-of-god/the-problem-of-evil/).

# NOTES

