

## Philosophy of Religion Problem of Evil: Handout 1

### The Argument:

- 1) Evil exists
- 2) If God exists, He would want to prevent all evil.
- 3) If God exists, He would be able to prevent all evil.
- 4) If (2) and (3) then, if God exists, there would be no evil.
- 5) Therefore, if God exists, there would be no evil.
- 6) Therefore, God does not exist.

Premise 1 seems obvious. [When we use the word "evil," we are not assuming any particularly contentious view about ethics. Think about "undeserved suffering" if it makes you more comfortable.]

Premise 2 seems true because God is wholly good.  
Premise 3 seems true because God is all powerful.

Premise 4 seems true because any being that desires something (all things considered) and has the ability to achieve that desire will bring it about.

5 follows from modus ponens (2-4), 6 from modus tollens (1 and 5).

### Kinds of Evil:

Moral Evil: Evil that comes about as a result of human actions. (war, murder)

Natural Evil: Evil that does not come about as a result of human actions (natural processes?) (disease, natural disasters)

### Some responses:

**1) Evil doesn't exist; we only think it does!**  
Are you kidding me?

**2) Evil is logically necessary for good.**

This sets a limit on what God can do; *viz*, he can't create a good thing without having created evil.

What is the relation between good and evil? Why can't there be a world of only good things?

Is good and evil more like *blue* and *green*, or *big* and *small*?

If good and evil are merely comparative, then they are not opposing forces after all. Saying that God wants to create good things is only to say that he wants to create some things that are better than other things!

Why is there *so much* evil? Can't we get by with less?

**3) Evil is a means to good; "The Divine Plan"**

Why does God need to subject us to evil in order to bring about good?

If God is all-powerful, why can't He give us what is good without also giving us the evil stuff that goes along with it?

(An omnipotent God could give us May flowers without April showers!)

**4) The universe is better with some evil in it.** The existence of evil is logically necessary for the existence of virtues such as benevolence, sympathy, and heroism.

Call physical pain first-order evil; physical pleasure is first-order good. These virtues (benevolence, sympathy, heroism, etc.) are *second-order goods*; they logically require first-order evil to exist, but are worth much more than those evils.

Is the existence of these virtues really worth the evil that exists?  
How do some evils (random lightning strikes) create virtue?

Most importantly: first-order good and evil also creates second-order evil! Consider malevolence, cruelty, and cowardice. Wouldn't second-order evil be as important as second-order good? Do they "cancel out"?

**5) The Afterlife:** All evil that exists in this world is trumped by the infinite goodness of an afterlife.

How plausible is belief in the afterlife?  
Then why even mess around with the actual world?

**6) Evil is due to free will.**

The best worlds contain creatures that are free to perform acts of good or evil. God could not have created free creatures that are guaranteed to refrain from evil.

*Freedom* is some higher-order good that trumps first (and second?) order evil. Furthermore, the first- and second-order evil that results from freedom are not evils that God is responsible for.

This only explains moral evil!

Why couldn't God have made people that always freely choose good? Why couldn't he have given us all saintly dispositions?

Why can't an omnipotent God control our will?