

Session 10 - Responding To Evil & Suffering (part 1)

10/26/18

The **problem of evil** or the argument from evil - We will abbreviate the problem of evil as **(POE)**

◆ **Approach:**

In session 3 we discussed the two types of barriers, intellectual and emotional.

The POE can be divided into 2 categories:

1. **The intellectual (logical) problem:** The idea that the evil and suffering in the world is logically inconsistent with the existence of God. The person that says “If there was a god, there wouldn’t be the evil and suffering that exists.”
2. **The emotional problem:** Anger or emotion against God for allowing evil and suffering to occur. The person that says “I don’t want a cruel God who allows such suffering”.

Many times this argument commonly has a profound emotional basis and is often directly connected with personal, painful experiences.

There are 2 different types of evil:

- **Moral evil:** evil and suffering caused by the acts of another human (rape, torture, theft, selfishness, etc..)
- **Natural evil:** suffering that results from purely, natural events, not by the acts of any person. (hurricanes, cancer, earthquakes, etc.)
- (Almost all evil can be categorized in one of these two areas. There are things that can be in both categories)

**** NOTE **** We have added some links to RDOF videos that may help in illustrating some of the points we are making: Links can be clicked directly on the PDF version at: rdof.org/session-10

One of the most common anti-theistic arguments regarding evil goes like this:

“If God exists, He wouldn’t allow moral evil like rape, murder, the holocaust, etc..”

- **Transfer of affect:** When we convey to the other person whether we genuinely like them not (even if we disagree with them).

- **The Socratic Method or (Dynamic Duo):** The tactic where we ask questions in order to cause the person to examine both the basis of their belief and the validity of that basis.
 - **“What do you mean by that?”** (making sure you understand their actual position)
 - **“How did you come to that conclusion?”** (Shifting the burden of proof - from you to them)

The Intellectual (Logical) Problem:

- The POE is actually considered a very poor argument against the existence of God by many philosophers - including well known atheist philosophers.
 1. *J.L. Mackie, Prof Philosophy, Univ of Sidney (atheist):* **“We can concede that the problem of evil does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another.”**
 2. *William L Rowe, Prof Philosophy, Univ Michigan (atheist):* **“Some philosophers have contended that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with the existence of the theistic God. No one I think, has succeeded in establishing such an extravagant claim.”**

**** We let these atheists say it’s a poor argument.**

Important: We are not using this as a complete argument to refute the POE. That would be a logical fallacy (*argument from authority*). Instead, we use it as an initial response to be able to further the conversation.

PIP (Put into Practice)

1. Validate (Yes, this is a really important and difficult topic)
2. Relate (your experience of moral or natural evil)
3. Show you’ve put some thought into this topic (There **may actually be some good reasons for evil** and **many philosophers** and even **atheistic scientists say evil isn’t an effective argument against God**)

The POE from the standpoint of atheism:

- ❖ **Objective evil:** actions that are unequivocally, universally evil regardless of time, culture or even human existence. Like torturing a baby for fun.
 - **On atheism there is no basis for the existence of objective evil.**

Well-known atheist and scientist Richard Dawkins says,

“The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but blind, pitiless

indifference.”

- **Naturalism**: the idea that the natural world is all that exists in the universe. That there is no such thing as the supernatural.
- **Physicalism**: Everything that exists is matter, nothing more. Humans, cockroaches and bacteria are all just different configurations of the same matter.
- Atheists must **admit** that **humans are fundamentally different** than other animals
- That's what **atheism and naturalism positions** do, they **back you into a corner** at every turn.
- From an **atheistic/naturalistic perspective** there is **nothing** intrinsically or **objectively evil** about **any action**.
- There's **no common basis** to **even define evil** it's actually **incoherent** from an atheistic point of view.
- Atheism would say as we evolve, the **definition of good and evil changes**, different to any given organism, culture or time in history. From this standpoint, what may be considered good or evil today is **constantly changing from culture to culture, decade to decade**.
- The atheist may say that it **helps our society** to have order to have a common understanding of what is good or evil, but that **just** says defining good and evil is **beneficial** or **pragmatic** or utilitarian, **it doesn't say good and evil really exist**. In a **theistic view**, they **really exist**.

There are other flaws to the idea of evil being a sign against God, but **clearly** there's **no objective standard of evil from an atheistic/naturalistic perspective**.

From an **atheistic/naturalistic perspective** there is nothing intrinsically or objectively evil about any action.

There's no objective standard of evil from an atheistic/naturalistic perspective.

★ *Video link: Christianity, Human Rights & Equality: vimeo.com/254723837*

** This argument does NOT show that atheists cannot be morally good people.

[Use in conversation:](#)

Socratic method:

1. So as an atheist, how do you know that objective evil exists?
2. So are you saying that your argument against God's existence is the evil in the world but you don't really have a basis for the existence of objective evil itself?
3. If they respond that they do have a basis for the existence of objective evil, you can respectfully ask them to tell you what that basis is. (*hint - there isn't one*)
4. You can continue asking questions to gently reveal their lack of basis.

★ *Video link: Good and Evil:* vimeo.com/235420407/c1bc3cd460

Common atheistic response: God himself dictates what is good and evil and He also says that He is all loving and all powerful. So, for that reason, it's logically inconsistent that He claims to be all loving and all powerful and yet he still allows evil & suffering.

- ❖ Make the distinction whether they are arguing based on moral evil or natural evil. We will respond to these differently. Natural evil is covered in session 11.

Basic structure of the atheistic presentation of the problem of evil:

- **(Premise 1)** If an all knowing, all powerful, all loving God exists, He would not allow evil and suffering in the world.
- **(Premise 2)** There is evil and suffering in the world.
- **(Conclusion)** Therefore, an all knowing, all powerful, all loving God does not exist.

Problems with the premises:

- **Premise 2:**
 - From the atheistic/ naturalistic perspective, premise 2 is not necessarily true.
- **Premise 1**
 - burden of proof - If it's even possible that God has good reasons for allowing evil, this premise fails.

Conclusion: For the atheist, neither premise is necessarily true.

Other problems with premise 1:

- **The Fallacy of Exclusion** (aka cherry picking).
 - If God's very words are being used in this argument, then they logically must consider **all** of what He says, not just the part that supports their

argument.

The greatest commandment:

1. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,"
2. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Love:

- Love is impossible without having the freedom of choice (freedom of the will)
- Out of His all loving, all powerful nature, He gave us this freedom..
- Without this freedom, love couldn't exist.

★ Love at its very nature requires freedom of the will.

Of all possible worlds, a world where we have the freedom of choice is greater (more good) than a world where we have no freedom of choice.

With this comes the freedom to make other choices:

1. The freedom not to love.
2. The freedom to hate.
3. **The freedom to choose evil.**

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 - Alvin Plantinga, PhD. Philosophy, Notre Dame

Conclusion: The existence of moral evil is not only logically consistent with the existence of an all loving, all powerful God, it is consistent with who the biblical God says He is.

★ *Video link:* Love & Free Will (Ned): vimeo.com/283230337/42508a3ceb

★ *Video link:* Moral Evil: vimeo.com/296557545

Leader Interaction:

**** REMEMBER**** The socratic method (*asking questions to spur deeper thought*)

Examples of questions you might use: (*try to put it in your own words*)

I. Refuting Premise 1:

- Are you saying that it's impossible for an all loving, all knowing God to exist based on of all the evil and suffering in the world?
- Do you think it's possible that God may have reasons for allowing suffering for a greater good?
- How did you come to that conclusion?

II. Refuting Premise 2:

- Evil from the standpoint of atheism
 - As an atheist what is your moral foundation for calling something good or evil?
 - Millions of people in different countries believe that you & all other americans are the greatest evil in the world and think it would be "good" if we're all eradicated. What's your basis for saying their moral foundation is wrong and yours is right?
 - a) If I claim to have one, ask how do you know? (*shift burden of proof from you to them*)
 - b) If no - next question
 - So are you saying that your problem with God is that He allows evil when you don't really have a basis for the existence of objective evil itself?

III. Using Free Will:

- Do you think a world with love is a greater world than one without love?
- Is God's all loving nature shown more in creating creatures with the capacity to love or creatures without the capacity to love?
- Is love something you can be forced to do or something you choose to do?
- So you agree that love can't exist without the freedom to choose?
- If we have the freedom of choice, aren't we also free to make other choices, like moral choices... for instance doing evil?
- So do you agree that the existence of an all loving God is consistent with the existence of moral evil?
 - *If yes* - DONE
 - *If no* - How did you come to that conclusion? (shift the burden of proof)

RMR (Rubber Meets the Road):

- **The first week take 1 or 2 points we've talked about today and discuss them with a friend or family member.**
- **Then do the same thing with a different 1 or 2 points on the second week.**
- **Be ready to share how it went at the beginning of our next session.**

