

The Problem of Evil

Compiled from *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*ⁱ

I. Overview:

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II. Worldviews and Evil

A. Confronting Evil

- 1. All worldviews must confront the problem of evil.
- 2. No worldview can be considered sufficient that fails to account for the existence and persistence of evil.

B. Worldviews and Evil

- 1. Atheism: evil but no God.
- 2. Pantheism: God but no evil.
- 3. Theism: both God and evil.
 - a. Finite Godism says God is unable to defeat evil.
 - b. Deism says we are on our own, God is distant from evil.
 - c. Panentheism says evil is a necessary part of the process of God's interactive poles.

C. Theism

- 1. Problem
 - a. God is all powerful and could destroy evil.
 - b. God is all loving and should destroy evil.
 - c. God knew what would happen to this world.
 - d. God freely created this world.
- 2. Question: Would a Loving God allow Evil to Exist?

III. The Origin of Evil

A. What is Evil?

1. To understand the origin of evil we first must know what it is.
2. There are three kinds of evil.
 - a. Moral evil: the acts of moral agents.
 - b. Physical evil: calamities, disease, and corruption.
 - c. Metaphysical: evil as a thing.

B. Problem

1. Where did evil come from?
 - a. God is absolutely perfect.
 - b. God cannot create anything imperfect
 - c. But perfect creatures cannot do evil.
 - d. Therefore, neither God nor His perfect creatures can produce evil.
2. Solution: the perfection of freedom.
 - a. God is absolutely perfect.
 - b. God created only perfect creatures.
 - c. One of the perfections God gave some of His creatures was the power of free choice.
 - d. Some of these creatures freely chose to do evil.
 - e. Therefore, a perfect creature caused evil.
3. Solution: the perfection of freedom
 - a. God is the primary cause of freedom and man is the secondary cause of freedom.
 - b. God is responsible for the possibility of evil, but free creatures are responsible for the actuality of evil.
 - c. I am not free choice, I have free choice. I am the efficient cause of my own free actions.

C. The Nature of Evil

1. Problem: What is the essence or identity of evil?
 - a. God is the Author of everything. (Evil is not a co-eternal principle with good).
 - b. Evil is something. (Evil is not an illusion).
 - c. Therefore, God is the Author of evil.
2. Solution: Evil is not a thing or substance.

- a. God created every substance.
- b. Evil is not a substance (but a real privation in a substance, i.e. blindness).
- c. Therefore God did not create evil.

D. Persistence of Evil

1. Problem: Why does God allow it?

- a. If God is all good, He would destroy evil.
- b. If God is all powerful, He could destroy evil.
- c. But evil is not destroyed.
- d. Therefore there is no such God.

2. Solution: The impossibility of destroying evil.

- 1. God cannot do what is actually impossible.
- 2. It is actually impossible to destroy evil without destroying free choice.
- 3. But free choice is necessary to a moral universe.
- 4. Therefore, God cannot destroy evil without destroying this good moral universe.

3. Solution: God will defeat evil.

- a. God is all good and desires to defeat evil.
- b. God is all powerful and is able to defeat evil.
- c. Evil is not yet defeated.
- d. Therefore, evil will be defeated in the future.

III. The Purpose of Evil

A. God has a good purpose for evil.

1. Objections:

- a. There is no good purpose for evil.
- b. God is responsible for innocent suffering and death.

2. Problem: Purposeless evil.

- a. An all-good God must have a good purpose for everything.
- b. There is no good purpose for some suffering.
- c. Therefore, there cannot be an all-good God.

3. Solution: God has a good purpose for everything.

- a. An omnibenevolent God has a good purpose for everything.

- b. There is some evil for which we see no good purpose.
- c. Therefore, there is a good purpose for all evil, even if we do not see it.

4. Solution: four basic answers.

- a. An omnibenevolent God has a good purpose for everything even if we cannot see it.
- b. The purpose for much evil is known by us.
- c. Evil is sometimes a byproduct of a good purpose and not every specific event must be good for there to be a general purpose for good.
- d. God can bring good out of evil.

B. The problem of physical evil.

5. Problem: God is responsible for innocent suffering.

6. Solution

- a. According to Rom. 3 and 6:23 no one is innocent.
- b. God is not morally culpable for taking that which He had given and presently sustains.
- c. All natural evil is the result of the fall of man through his exercise of free choice.
- d. Natural evil serves to warn us that something is wrong, just as pain warns we are being burned.

IV. Avoidability of Evil

A. Problem

1. If God knew evil would occur, why did He create the world?
2. God could have chosen a better alternative (not creating; creating non-free world; free world with no sin; or save all who sinned).
3. But God did not choose one of these better alternatives.
4. Therefore God did not choose the best alternative and is not perfect.

B. Solution

1. None of these alternatives are better.

2. A non-world is not better than some world. Nothing is not better than something. There is no comparison.
3. A non-free world is not morally better than a free world. A non-free world is a non-moral world. There is no moral comparison.
4. A free world with no sin or with universal salvation may not be achievable. A free person may always choose to do evil.
5. A world without sin is conceivable, but is it desirable? If evil is not permitted it cannot be defeated.

V. Conclusion

A. Origin of evil.

1. Evil did arise from that which is good, but indirectly.
2. Evil arose from the freedom of God's creatures to choose to rebel against Him.
3. It is good to be free, but freedom comes with the possibility of evil.

B. The Nature of Evil

1. Evil is not a substance.
2. Evil is not a co-eternal principle.
3. Evil is a privation of the good, a real absence of positive goodness.

C. Persistence of Evil

1. God cannot do the impossible.
2. It is impossible to destroy evil without destroying freedom.
3. Freedom is necessary to a moral universe.
4. Destroying freedom destroys a good universe.

D. The Purpose of Evil

1. Evil is a by-product of a good perfection – freedom.
2. Physical evil warns us that all is not right in our world or in ourselves.

3. Some evil is directly related to a good, as drowning is to water.

4. Evil can produce a greater good such as patience or courage.

E. The Avoidability of Evil

1. Evil cannot be destroyed without destroying something good, namely freedom.

2. A free world without sin may not be achievable.

ⁱ Norman L. Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 219-24.