

"Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent.  
Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.  
Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?"  
—Epicurus (341-270 BC)

"For few are the goods of human life, and many are the evils,  
and the good is to be attributed to God alone;  
of the evils the causes are to be sought elsewhere, and not in him."  
Plato, *Republic* II. GBWW 322

## I. Evil as a Philosophical Objection and as a Personal Question

### A. Evil as a personal question/concern

Why me? Why now? Why this?

### B. Evil as a philosophical problem

1. If God is all-knowing, then He is aware of evil and human suffering.
2. If God is all-powerful, then He could do something to alleviate evil and human suffering.
3. If God is all-loving, then He would want to do something about evil and human suffering.
4. If God is just, then He will not permit evil and human suffering to go unrequited.
5. However, evil and human suffering persists, seemingly unrequited, and radically so.
6. Therefore, God does not exist at all, only evil.
7. Or, if He exists, He is limited as to His knowledge, power, love, or justice, and cannot do anything about evil (finite concept of God).

## II. Three Types or Sources of Evil

### A. Natural evil (also non-moral evil/ surd evil):

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Michael Peterson, et. al., *Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Oxford, 2003, and on other sources.

B. Moral evil:

Evil that results from sin; the kind of evil, suffering and pain that is inflicted upon others as a result of the operation of the human will as a moral agent.

*Homo homini lupus*

Some say the world will end in fire,  
Some say in ice.  
From what I've tasted of desire  
I hold with those who favor fire.  
But if it had to perish twice,  
I think I know enough of hate  
To say that for destruction ice is also great  
And will suffice.

—Robert Frost

How long, O Lord, will I call for help  
And Thou wilt not hear?  
I cry out to Thee, "Violence!"  
Yet Thou dost not save.  
Why dost Thou make me see iniquity,  
And cause me to look on wickedness?  
Yes, destruction and violence are before me;  
Strife exists and contention arises.  
Therefore, the law is ignored.  
And justice is never upheld.  
For the wicked surround the righteous;  
Therefore, justice comes out perverted.

— Habakkuk 1: 2-4

C. Demonic evil:

"Scripture places the reality of Satan and his angles beyond doubt."  
Herman Bavinck.

III. Two Types of Theistic Responses to the Philosophical Arguments from Evil

A. Theodicy: an account or explanation of why God allows suffering and evil.

B. Defense: shows that arguments against God on the basis of evil fail

IV. Two Types of Responses that are Unacceptable to the Traditional Theist

A. To deny the reality of evil; evil is an illusion.

1. The Hindu pantheist

2. Christian Science

3. Baruch Spinoza

B. To deny God or the power and/or goodness of God

1. Denial of God (atheism)

2. To deny the goodness or power of God.

V. Two Types of Philosophical Arguments from Evil

A. Logical form: God and evil are logically incompatible

1. The logical argument

- An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God exists
- Evil exists

- These are inherently contradictory, and a violation of the law of non-contradiction

## 2. Theistic response

Alvin Plantinga, *Free Will Defense*

God did in fact create significantly free creatures; but some of them went wrong in the exercise of their freedom; this is the source of moral evil.

God is omnipotent and it was not within his power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil.

B. Evidential form: God's existence is logically compatible with evil, but highly unlikely in light of the evidence from evil.

### 1. The evidential argument

a. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. A factual premise.

b. An omnipotent, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. A theological premise.

c. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.  
Conclusion.

### 2. Theistic response

a. Reject the factual premise on the grounds that there is no such thing as pointless evil.

b. Reject the theological premise on the ground that there may be a place for pointless evils.

c. Reject the conclusion as a result of a. or b.

VI. Various types of theodicies: (in an attempt to relate good and evil logically)

A. Soul making theodicy

B. Free will theodicy (St. Augustine, John Hick, Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne):