Text: Various
Title: The Problems of Evil and Suffering
Truth: Sound explanations exist to address the problems of evil.
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Introduction

A big reason/excuse that people cite for not believing in God and Jesus is the evil and suffering in the world. They cannot reconcile that with the existence of a good and omnipotent God. If God exists, why is there and evil in this world?

Stephen Frye, an atheist. "Bone cancer children? … How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault? It is utterly evil."[1] He presents God as selfish and says that life without God is much better. In his manner he is very angry, as it were, against God. This makes little sense if God does not exist. Perhaps he would reply that his anger is directed at the *people* who promulgate belief in a deity. He has less problem with the Greek gods because they did not "hide" their human-like appetites. In effect, God, by presenting Himself as holy, is a hypocrite and a monster. (Forgive me for even writing such words, but I report what I heard him say in the video.)

John Lennox is a theologian from Oxford.[2] He says that this is the hardest problem. Atheism only solves it in a trivial way by saying that is just what this world is, but it does not solve the problem. Arguments about God have accomplished nothing.[3] The world has beauty and barbed wire. Atheism appears to have a solution, but it removes hope and does not ultimately bring resolution to the problem.

Earthquakes for example are terrible events. But Lennox states that they are necessary for human life. I looked that up and found in a Boston Globe article from 2023 that has the following:

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wLzBD5Q3eRw
[2] Lennox does not believe in a youngish earth. Some say he is a theistic evolutionist.
[3] "But it should go without saying that our first reaction to the despair and destruction should be to help, not philosophize."
https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/02/15/opinion/earthquakes-bring-death-also-life/

"To those they affect, earthquakes are harrowing and tragic. Yet, unfathomable as it may seem, they are also essential to human existence. For without plate tectonics — the movement and collision of the immense subterranean slabs of the earth's crust, which trigger earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanoes as they shift and slide — our planet likely would not be habitable."

"The global process behind great earthquakes is quite advantageous for life on earth — especially human life." That process, geologists and geochemists have discovered, "builds mountains, enriches soils, regulates the planet's temperature, concentrates gold and other rare metals, and maintains the sea's chemical balance. Without earthquakes and volcanoes, Duke University geochemist William Schlesinger told the Times, essential carbon dioxide would dissipate and "the planet would turn into a frozen ball."

"In his superb 2003 bestseller, "Krakatoa" — a chronicle of one of the mightiest volcanic explosions in history — Simon Winchester made a similar point. To the victims of an annihilating eruption or a shattering earthquake, such cataclysms "must seem a most monstrous injustice." Yet out of that injustice emerge life-giving benefits:

> "The water, carbon dioxide, carbon, and sulfur that are so central to the making and maintenance of organic life are all being constantly recycled by the world's volcanoes ... [They bring] from the secret storehouses of the inner earth the elements that allow the outer earth, the biosphere and the lithosphere, to be so vibrantly alive."[4]

This points out an interesting fact: we draw certain conclusions about the character of God or the impossibility of His existence because we are ignorant of certain facts. Undoubtedly, the response might come, "Well, could not God have created a world that provided these benefits another way?" Or, "OK, fine, earthquakes are necessary. But can you come up with a benefit for *every* evil that occurs in the world? I highly doubt it."

[4] Cited from Simon Winchester, "Krakatoa."

Back to Lennox. He argues that we could make a world without these bad things, but the beings in it would be robots. Free will or moral agency would be eliminated.

Lennox: is there any evidence that God exists? Yes…the cross, Jesus as God incarnate, and the Son of God on a cross. One thing this tells us is that God has become part of and takes part in human suffering. But it did not stop there. The central evidence of the Christian faith is His resurrection from the dead.

Me: Christian truth is our hope, and it is our hope not only for our own resurrection, but also for justice against all evil; and vindication of the righteous.

On atheism, there are millions of souls who will never *get* justice for the wrongs they have done, and millions of souls who will never *receive* justice for the wrongs they have received. Because they just die, and that is it. That is an intolerable problem. But f you are a Christian the suffering has an end and has a resolution and a purpose and justice will be served.

Moral values are relative? Erases concept of evil.

Good and evil can exist independently of God. Are those grounded in "being" or "human flourishing"? If this is "good" – that presupposes a standard of good that atheism cannot justify. What is good? Is it not just a preference?

Must have transcendent source for moral good and evil.

Christianity does not magically solve every problem we have in life. God has done something for us in Christ. Sin = our contribution to the problem of evil.

I. The Problem Stated

A. Is God not loving enough to stop evil and disaster?

B. Is God not powerful enough to stop evil and disaster?

C. Since all agree that evil exists, either God does not have the attributes Christians say He does, or He does not exist at all.

Christians share some common ground with atheists: we all acknowledge evil.

D. Hume's argument: Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then He is not all powerful. Or is God able but not willing? Then He is not good. If He is both able and willing, then whence evil?

In response, notice that Hume has expressed three truths: the existence of evil, God's omnipotence and God's benevolence.

What Hume has *not* done in this classic trilemma formulation is to consider *all of the other attributes of God* and *all the attributes of humankind*. The confident way he states his trilmemma disguises that it is incomplete. What about God's omnisapience? What of His omniscience? What of His infinite nature? What of His justice? And what of man's moral agency or relative freedom? What about man's nature? And so on.

And then, the question must be raised also as to the *timing* of the decisions. Is it that God is willing to prevent evil *now*? Or is He not willing to prevent evil *now* but He is later?

In other words, we should not be silenced by Hume's formulation of an argument because Hume does not do justice to *who* God is, nor to *who* man is,[5] nor to *when* God works, nor to *how* God works, nor to *what* comes out of evil (sometimes, good, particularly for those who love God), nor to *why* God might allow evil.

II. The Problem with the Problem of Evil

A. Feinberg rightly argues that there is not a single problem of evil. Rather, there are multiple problems, or what I would call aspects or dimensions or facets of the problem.

B. These problems are:

1. There is the religious problem of evil. This is when a particular person is suffering a particular evil and this causes problems in his or her mind as to how to understand evil. It is a real problem for the person's faith. It raises questions. Job had this problem. Solutions to the whole philosophical problem of evil (next) are

[5] Our world is what it is because we are what we are, not only because God is what God is.

not necessarily going to be comforting to this person. This is a pastoral problem.

2. There is also a theological/philosophical problem of evil which is broader in scope. It concerns the existence of evil at all, in general, everywhere. This has to do with how a certain kind of God can exist, and at the same time how evil can exist. This is a worldview problem, an apologetic problem.

3. There is moral evil. This is the problem of evil that comes about because people do bad things. Fallen angels also do bad things. Satan has done bad things also. Why does God permit this, in general? And, if you are the victim of a particular evil, it raises a religious problem for you.

4. There is natural evil, which has to do with the calamities of the natural world, such as earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts and famines, cancer and other diseases. The chronic wasting disease that afflicts the deer population is an example of this. We feel badly for a suffering animal, which is part of the problem of natural evil. There are specific problems that afflict individual people, and then there is the broader question of the existence of these in general: why does God permit it?

5. There is the problem of the quantity and intensity of evil. Any evil is bothersome to the soul, but could not God have permitted *less* evil in the world? Why is there so much? And of those evils that are present, why are they *so bad*, so painful, so extreme?

6. If evil is necessary in general, why is it that some evil seems to have no purpose at all? This is the problem of seemingly gratuitous evil. Why does not God remove those, or allow them in the first place?

7. We alluded above to another problem of evil, and that is the evil that animals suffer. We can address that distinctly from the others, for there seems to be no fault of causation on the part of the animals for evil. Romans 8:20 indicates that animals did

not choose their lot of suffering. They were plunged into a world of death and decay by Adam!

8. Finally, there is the problem of Hell, of eternal punishment. Hell is so bad that it outstrips even the worst evils on earth. Christians who hold traditional or conservative beliefs based on Scripture teach that Hell is eternal punishment as retribution against sin. It seems disproportionate. It undercuts the existence of a loving God.

9. Each different theological approach has its own problem of evil. Feinberg argues that wherever there is a different view of omnipotence, benevolence, and other factors that there are variations on the theme of the theological/philosophical problem of evil.

10. In contrast to the logical problem of evil, which includes most of the aforementioned material, there is today also the evidential problem of evil. Where does this come from? The logical problem of evil has been successfully addressed in Christian circles by answers like the free will defense (Alvin Plantinga). Many atheists and theists agree that the problem has largely be solved, though individuals disagree. But as a result of the good work of Christian theologians, a new variation on the argument has arisen, namely the evidential problem of evil. While Hume's argument is not bulletproof, the evidential argument proposes that it is highly unlikely that God exists, given all the evidence. Not impossible, but unlikely because of the probability involved.

C. Implications of this are:

1. For the Christian: if you are counseling or teaching others, make sure you are answering the correct problem of evil, the one they are troubled about.

2. For the atheist, say, or the non-Christian: it is illegitimate to complain that a potential solution to one of the problems of evil does not solve all aspects of the problem. We cannot expect it to do so.

D. For Satan, the amount, intensity, and gratuitousness, of evil do not bother him whatsoever. The more the better from his perspective, evidently because it does not affect him in any negative way. He is the prime example of a being who gets away with murder for a time, but later will be called to serious account for it.

Conclusion

To be continued.

MAP

References

John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*, Third ed., Crossway, 2004.

https://jeffdavis.blog/2017/04/18/the-problem-of-evil/