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Mind Games Survival Course Manual



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God and Evil

How can a Good God Allow Evil ?

Rick Rood

III. The evidential problem of evil

Most people agree that the line of reasoning described in the previous section does satisfactorily meet the challenge of the logical problem of evil. It is not irrational to believe that a good and loving God could and would permit evil, as a necessary consequence of his creation of free beings in his own image. However, many skeptics contend that while the existence of God is possible, it is nonetheless improbable. This is due to the nature of the evil we see evidenced in the world around us. They believe that it is unlikely that such a God would permit the amount and intensity of evil we observe, much of which appears to be so purposeless.

A. *Simply because we can perceive no purpose does not mean there is no purpose for God's allowing the amount and intensity of evil which we observe.*

1. There are many things in the world which we do not fully understand, but which we nonetheless believe in.
2. It is entirely possible that reasons for much of the evil in our world are not only beyond our knowledge, but also beyond our present capability of knowing. A child does not comprehend all his father's actions.

2. *We can, however, conceive of some possible reasons for God's allowing the great evil that is in our world.*

Perhaps some people would never sense their need for God apart from

intense suffering. Perhaps there are purposes which God intends to accomplish among His angelic/demonic creatures which require our suffering. It may also be that suffering is somehow preparatory to our existence in the life to come. There are many other possible reasons.

- 3. *We must also take into account all of the positive evidence which argues for the existence of God, as well as the evidence such as apparently purposeless evil which argues against it.***

Such evidence includes the presence of design in nature, the historical evidence for the reliability of the Bible and for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. On the basis of the totality of the evidence, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the existence of God is not only possible (rational), but also probable!

4. The religious problem of evil

The foregoing is by way of response to the philosophical/apologetic problem of evil. It is intended to satisfy the challenge to our mind. But when we are experiencing the effects of evil in our own lives, we need more than intellectual reasons why our belief in the existence of God is justified. This is especially true when the evil or suffering we are experiencing appears to be undeserved or unjustified, and when those who do seem to deserve it are spared from suffering. Under these circumstances, we need evidence from Scripture that God is one in whom we can not only believe, but one in whom we can trust and in whose love we can feel secure!

A. *When we suffer it is not unnatural to experience emotional pain, nor is it unspiritual to express it.*

1. Consider that there are nearly as many psalms of lament as psalms of praise and thanksgiving; often the two sentiments being mingled together (cf. Pss. 13, 88). Indeed, the psalmist encourages us to "pour out our hearts to God" (Ps. 62:8).
2. Consider that Jesus himself keenly felt the painful side of life. When John the Baptist was beheaded, He "withdrew to a lonely place" to mourn his loss (Mt. 14:13). When his friend Lazarus died, though He knew that this was within the plan of God, nonetheless He openly wept at his grave (Jn. 11:35). In contemplating his own death on the cross, He confessed to great anguish of soul (Mt. 26:38). It is not without reason that Jesus was called "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Isa. 53:3).
3. Consider that it was the fact that Jesus' experience of the full force of evil that is what qualifies Him to be our "great high priest" the one who is not untouched by our weakness.
4. We do cross the line from sorrow to sin when we allow our grief to quench our faith in God, or lead us to accept the counsel offered to

Job by his wife to "curse God and die" (Job. 2:9b).

2. *When we suffer we can draw comfort from the fact that God knows and cares about our situation, and promises to be with us to comfort and uphold us.*

1. Consider that not a single sparrow is forgotten by God, and of how much greater value are we to Him than many sparrows (Lk. 12:6-7)!
2. Consider that "the Lord is near to the brokenhearted" (Ps. 34:18), and that when we go through the valley of the shadow of death, it is then that the Lord is particularly with us (Ps. 23:4).
3. Consider that God says He "does not afflict willingly" (Lam. 3:33), nor "take pleasure (even) in the death of the wicked" (Ezek. 18:32).
4. Consider that the one on Whom we are invited to cast our cares is the one Who "cares for us" (I Pet. 5:7).

3. *When we suffer we can draw hope from the knowledge that God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Rom. 8:28).*

1. This is not to say that evil is somehow to be thought of as good, but that in a way beyond our comprehension God is able to turn evil against itself to bring about good results. This is why we are counseled to "rejoice in trial" (James 1:2). Not because the trial itself is a cause for joy (it is not), but because in it God can find an occasion for producing what is good.
2. This is not only stated in Scripture, but illustrated by the experience of Joseph, who after years of unexplained suffering due to his brothers' betrayal could say to them: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).
3. It is also illustrated in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, which though an act of horrendous injustice was nonetheless the means God used to provide for the redemption of the world!
4. Consider some of the good things that can result from evil and suffering:
 - a. It can provide an opportunity for God to display his glory (make evident his mercy, faithfulness and love in the midst of painful circumstances).
 2. It can provide opportunity to demonstrate love for one another as we "bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (I Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2).

3. It can allow us to give proof of the genuineness of our faith, and even serve to purify our faith (I Pet. 1:7), showing that we are faithful not simply for the benefits of his blessing but for the love of God Himself (Job 1:9-11).
4. It can engender in us greater empathy and compassion, which qualifies us to better comfort others (II Cor. 1:4).
5. It can deter us from sin and motivate us to follow God more closely, just as Paul's "thorn in the flesh" kept him from undue pride and promoted true humility and dependence on God (II Cor. 12:7).
6. Consider that even Jesus "learned obedience from the things He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). As a man He learned by experience the value of submitting to the will of God, even when it was the most difficult thing in the world to do!

4. *When we suffer a longing is awakened in us for that day when God's purposes for permitting evil and suffering will be finally fulfilled!*

And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things (will) have passed away. (Rev. 21:4)

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (II Cor. 4:17).

Notes

1. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1947), 198.

For Further Reading

Craig, William L. *No Easy Answers: Finding Hope in Doubt, Failure, and Unanswered Prayer*. Chicago: Moody, 1990.

Helpful book written to those struggling with these issues. Craig is a Christian philosopher who is familiar with all the logical arguments, but who also recognizes that logic alone cannot satisfy all of the questions that arise in our experience.

Dobson, James. *When God Doesn't Make Sense*. Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1993.
Clear and forthright presentation. Practical and highly recommended!

Feinberg, John S. *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems and the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1994.

A theological assessment of various responses to the problem of evil, written from a Calvinistic perspective. A theistic alternative to the "free will defense." In the final section, Feinberg shares his own testimony of

suffering in his family.

Geisler, Norman L. *The Roots of Evil*. Richardson, Tex.: Probe Books, 1989.

This book addresses the problem of evil from a philosophical point of view.

Nash, Ronald. *Faith and Reason*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988.

This is a textbook on the philosophy of religion. The section on the problem of evil presents an excellent discussion from a philosophical point of view.

Peterson, Michael L., ed. *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992.

An anthology of essays by various thinkers, presenting several different viewpoints on the problem of evil. For the serious student who has biblical discernment.

Plantinga, Alvin C. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974.

The classic presentation of the free will defense. Be prepared for some serious thinking.

Wenham, John W. *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1985.

Though discernment should be exercised in evaluating his ideas about hell, this is a very helpful and readable book. Highly recommended.



Yancey, Phillip. *Disappointment With God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1988.

Yancey handles the subject of evil and pain with sensitivity and insight!

_____. *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1977.

Dr. Vernon Grounds writes: "One of the most helpful treatments of the problem of evil that I've ever read . . . on a level that really speaks to people."

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