

DGM 102- APOLOGETICS



THE PROBLEM OF EVIL



I. Introduction



- The problem of evil constitutes perhaps "the most serious challenge to Biblical Christianity" (Ronald Nash, Faith and Reason).
- How can a God—who Christians say is all-powerful and all-good—allow such evil to continue or, for that matter, to have started in the first place?
- A question for 21st century Americans whose lives have been revolving on materialistically driven sense of happiness.

II. The Reality of Evil



- In the United States:
 - Someone is murdered → every 32.4 minutes
 - Forcibly raped → every 5.5 minutes
 - The victim of aggravated assault → every 35.3 seconds,
 - The victim of auto theft → every 25.3 seconds
 - The victim of burglary → every 14.7 seconds.
- After an hour of discussion, we will have:
 - 2 murders,
 - 11 rapes,
 - 102 aggravated assaults,
 - 142 auto thefts ,
 - 245 burglaries.
- That's just in the US!!!
- No doubt, the reality of pain, suffering, and evil in this world are issues that are hard to deal with.

III. The Rock of Atheism



- Many atheists try to turn the existence of evil and suffering into an argument against the existence of God.
- The problem of evil is
 - The problem of reconciling the existence of evil in the world with
 - The existence of an omnipotent (all-powerful) and an Omnibenevolent (all-good) God.
- The popularity of this kind of argument has led Hans Küng (1976, p. 432) to call the problem of evil "The Rock of Atheism".

IV. Two Types of Evil



- **Moral evil:** results from the actions of free creatures
 - Violence, Lying, Greed, Dishonesty
- **Natural evil:** results from natural processes
 - Earthquakes, Floods, Famines, Disabilities: blindness, deafness

V. Two Aspects of the Problem of Evil



- The logical / philosophical aspect
 - This deals with those who challenge the possibility that a God exists who would allow such evil.
 - In meeting this challenge we must utilize the tools of reason and evidence in "giving a reason for the hope within us" (I Pet 3:15).
- The emotional / spiritual aspect
 - This deals with the believer whose faith in God is tested by trial.
 - In meeting this challenge we must appeal to the truth revealed by God in Scriptures.

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VI. The Logical Challenge



- David Hume, the 18th century philosopher, stated the problem as follows:
 - Premise 1: An all-good God would desire to abolish evil
 - Premise 2: An all-powerful God would be able to abolish evil
 - Premise 3: Evil exists
 - Conclusion: Therefore, an all-good, all-powerful God cannot exist.
- Various formulations
 - Premise 1: God is the author of everything.
 - Premise 2: Evil is something
 - Conclusion: Therefore, God is the author of evil.

The Logical Challenge Cont'd



- In sum, the "problem" arises from the speculation that a perfectly good God would not allow evil to exist in the world. He ought to set up an evil-free world in accord with His perfection.
- Since evil and suffering are noticeably present, it gives the impression that God either intends it that way and is therefore not entirely good; or lacks sufficient power to arrange a world free of pain and suffering.

VII. Responses to the Challenge (Theodicies)



- **Theodicy:**
 - The branch of theology that defends God's goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil.

A- The Nature of Evil Theodicy (St. Augustine)



- What is evil? The argument above depends on the idea that evil is a thing (2nd premise).
- But what if evil is not a "thing" in that sense? Then evil did not need creating.
- According to St. Augustine, evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name "evil".
- Evil does not exist: it is not a thing and does not have being. Evil is a lack of being, and hence a lack of goodness

The Nature of Evil Theodicy (St. Augustine)

Cont'd



- Since God made everything, and everything God made was good. Evil becomes the privation of goodness.
 - Just as coldness is the absence of heat
 - A shadow is no more than a "hole" in light
 - Evil is a hole in goodness.
- St. Augustine observed that evil could not be chosen because there is no evil thing to choose. One can only turn away from the good.
- Evil is the act itself of choosing the lesser good.

B-The Free Will Theodicy (St. Augustine)



- One must recognize that for God to create beings capable of sustaining a relationship with Him, they must be beings who are capable of freely loving Him and following his will without coercion.
- Love, worship and obedience on any other basis would not be love, worship or obedience at all, but mere compliance. Additionally beings who are free to love God must also be free to ignore Him.
- He can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. And when beings act in ways against the will of God, evil and suffering is the ultimate result.
- Adam and Eve's Sin ("Original Sin") resulted in corruption of our moral nature, causing loss of the inner harmony between reason and the passions. The ability not to sin was replaced by an inability not to sin.

C- Greater Good Theodicy (St Irenaeus)



- St. Irenaeus states that God has permitted evil in order to bring about a greater good which, in His infinite wisdom, He determined could not have come about without the existence of evil.
- Those things which appear evil only appear that way because of a limited context or perspective. When viewed as a whole, that which appears to be evil ultimately contributes to the greater good.
- For example, certain virtues couldn't exist without evil: courage, mercy, forgiveness, patience, the giving of comfort, heroism, perseverance, faithfulness, self-control, long-suffering, submission and obedience, etc.

Another "Logical" Defense



- There are 2 hidden assumptions in the logical problem of evil.
 - 1st assumption: If God is all-powerful than He could create any world He wishes; namely, a world without evil, pain, or suffering.
 - 2nd assumption: If God is all good and loving, than He would prefer a world without evil.
- A good reason for rejecting the 1st assumption is that God's omnipotence does not mean He has the power to bring about logical contradictions.
- Accordingly, God cannot "lie" (Titus 1:2)



C.S. Lewis writes in the "Problem of Pain"

"If you choose to say "God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it," you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words "God can."

VIII. Is It Worth It?



- Only God could ever know the answer to this question... You and I couldn't know that because our perspective is too limited.
- We must, however, believe that God thinks it was worth it or else, according to His ultimate wisdom wouldn't have allowed it to happen.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ paid a tremendous price (1 Cor 6:20). He would not have shown His sacrificial love unless there was something to sacrifice for.

IX. Faulty Perspective



- God's purpose for creating us was to develop us into certain types of people who were fit to spend eternity with Him. He does that by conforming us to His image by helping us grow through the process of living in a fallen world.
- Unfortunately, we've bred a society that are, in many ways, like a bunch of adult two-year-olds, grown-ups who believe it's their divine right to feel every pleasure they can possibly feel, to never encounter any difficulty, any pain, any suffering. And if they do, then God must be a cruel God.
- What's the alternative? If you conclude there's no God because of the existence of evil, then there's no possibility of ever redeeming that evil for good.

X. What About Natural Evil



- It is important to recognize that we live in a fallen world, and that we are subject to natural disasters that would not have occurred had man not chosen to rebel against God.
- Sin, as a result of our free will has left the world in bondage to decay (Rom 8:21).

XI. The Purpose of Evil

(The Emotional / Spiritual Aspect)



- God is able to turn evil against itself. And it is because of this truth that we can find joy even in the midst of sorrow and pain.
- Even in severe trial God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him (Rom 8:28).
 - This is not at all to imply that evil is somehow good. But it does mean that we are to recognize that even in what is evil God is at work to bring about his good purposes in our lives.



- Growth and refinement.

- As mentioned earlier, some virtues can only be developed through evil and trial:

- ✦ No Courage without danger,
- ✦ no Perseverance without obstacles,
- ✦ no Compassion without suffering,
- ✦ no Patience without tribulation

- References of how we feel when facing evil:

- ✦ (James 1:2), (Romans 5:3-4), (2 Cor 4:17), (Jn 9:1-3), (1 Pet 1:7), (Job 1:9-11), (1 Cor 12:26), (Gal 6:2), (2 Cor 12:7), (Ps 119:71), (Rev 21:4)

XII. The Problem of Evil in Light of the Redemptive Suffering of Christ



- By the sufferings in His human nature by which mankind was redeemed, Christ gave to all of us who suffer a redeeming power when accepted as union with His Passion.
- But it is a gift so little appreciated, for it is known only in the light of faith. How many opportunities for spiritual growth and for helping others are wasted in complaining about the crosses of life?

XIII. Conclusion



- It is difficult for us to understand why God would allow some things to happen. But simply because we find it difficult to imagine what reasons God could have for permitting them, does not mean that no such reasons exist.
- God does not will that anyone should suffer for the sake of suffering itself. Rather, it is for the fruit yielded by that suffering through the furnace of affliction that both magnifies the glory of God and further shapes the soul of the believer for eternity.
- In Conclusion, God is neither the author of evil, nor its helpless victim. Rather, precisely because of His goodness He chooses to co-exist with evil for a time.