

Introduction to the Philosophy Component: Part 2

Arguments for and against God's existence

Arguments for God's Existence:

Task 1:

Watch introductory videos on the arguments. Start here and watch all six short videos (on the design, cosmological and ontological arguments).

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=foeM6vXZCys&list=PLs4256w27Oa7I8jEiH4CDaPQDIKZ68P6N>

Then write a paragraph to summarise each of these arguments (meaning three paragraphs overall); how does each try to prove that God exists?

Task 2:

Write two further paragraphs. One should be about which of these arguments you find the best (or most convincing) and why. Try to give evidence or reasons to support your view. Similarly, the other paragraph should be which of the arguments you found the weakest (or least convincing).

The Problem of Evil:

One of the main arguments used by non-believers against the existence of God is the presence of Evil and suffering in the world. The term 'evil' is often used to describe something that is morally wrong. However philosophers make a distinction between *moral evil* and *natural evil*.

Moral Evil.

This results from human actions that are morally reproachable. The Holocaust – which resulted in a combination of cruelty and mistaken ideals – is a classic example.

Natural Evil.

This results from the malfunctioning of the natural world, which produces famine and disease. A recent example would be the Asian Tsunami.

The consequence of evil is suffering. Suffering involves mental anguish and depression, as well as physical pain. The effects can be very long lasting, sometimes lasting a lifetime. Suffering often seems unjust, it does not discriminate as to whom it strikes, those who have done nothing wrong, such as newborn babies, are often its victims.

The Problem of Evil for Religious Believers

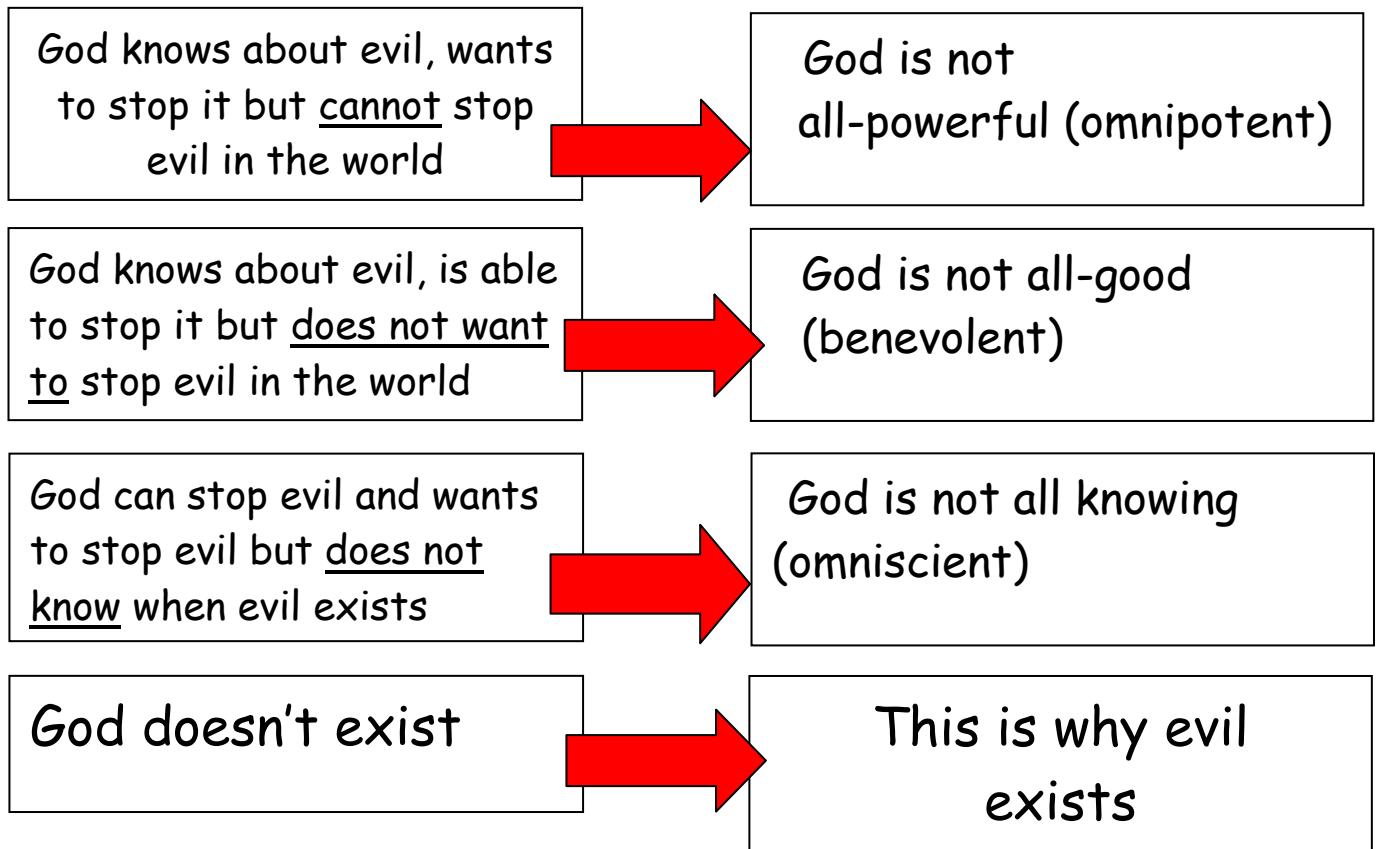
For religious people the problem of evil poses an additional challenge to their faith. This is the problem of how an all-powerful, all-loving God can allow His creation to suffer without coming to its rescue and putting an end to its torment. This challenge is frequently cited as a reason for being unable to believe that God exists. It is argued that people suffer because God does not exist, or that a God that allows people to suffer is not worthy of worship.

Task 3:

- a) Explain the different types of evil giving three examples for each type.
- b) Why does the existence of suffering and evil not present a problem for an atheist in the same way as a believer?

The Logical Problem of Evil

This was first put forward by the Greek thinker, Epicurus. Here are the possible options presented by the 'problem of evil':



So, either God is not all-loving, all-powerful or all-knowing, in which case he is NOT the God of classical theism (and not worthy of worship) OR there is no God.

- The logical problem of evil is what we call an *a priori deductive argument*. What this means is that, as long as we know the premises to be true (i.e. P1 that evil exists and P2 that an all-loving, all-knowing & all-powerful God would always stop evil) then, through reasoning alone, we can deduce the conclusion that there is no God, or that whatever being God is, it is not the God of classical theism.
- Deductive arguments are very clever and difficult to undermine. **If the premises are true in a deductive argument then the conclusion HAS to follow.** A premise is a piece of evidence that is used to support an argument. If the premises (either one) are undermined, the conclusion is no longer supported. Therefore, there are only two ways to successfully resolve the logical problem of evil and that is to undermine one or the other of the two premises. Therefore:
 - If you can prove ***there is no 'evil'*** in the world (e.g. as Buddhists believe, and as Augustine argues) then the 1st premise collapses
 - If you can prove that an all-loving, all-knowing, all-powerful God would have a ***good reason*** not to stop evil, then the 2nd premise collapses

- So, the free will defence and the soul making theodicy both attempt to undermine the 2nd premise, while the Augustinian theodicy tries to undermine the 1st AND the 2nd premise (a little confusingly). Process theodicy *doesn't* try to undermine either premise, but *accepts* the conclusion that the being that we call God is not the God of classical theism.

The Evidential Problem of Evil

- This was first put forward by J.S. Mill, commented on by many thinkers and writers until finally being developed by William Rowe. Some thinkers, such as the Scottish philosopher David Hume, have called the problem of evil "the rock of atheism", suggesting that the entirety of atheist belief could be built on the problem of evil alone. For this reason, Rowe calls his evidential argument *An argument for atheism*, rather than the evidential 'problem' of evil.

Premise 1: 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

Premise 2: An omniscient, 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

Conclusion: [as instances of intense suffering do occur, despite the fact that God was able and had motive to prevent them] There **does not exist** an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

- Imagine this page represents all the evil in the world.
- Then this **oval** thing represents all the evil God doesn't stop because it serves some greater good (e.g. we need to use our free will, or it helps us grow morally and spiritually).
- This **rectangle** represents all the evil that God doesn't stop because if he did, something just as bad or worse would happen (e.g. if the Holocaust had never happened then maybe at some later stage some far worse genocide would have taken place)

Evil that exists because it serves a good purpose (condition 1)

Evil that exists because otherwise something just as bad or worse would happen (condition 2 for not stopping evil)

- What Rowe is asking is: *what about all the evil left over (i.e. the rest of the sheet of paper)? Why doesn't God stop that?* He argues that an all-loving, all-knowing and all-powerful God would want to stop any evil that doesn't meet conditions 1 or 2. But as plenty of remaining evil doesn't meet conditions 1 or 2, it looks like God is either cruel or non-existent.
- It is an *a posteriori inductive* argument. This means that even if the premises are true, the conclusion- that God doesn't exist- doesn't necessarily follow, but is merely a **probable** conclusion. The only way to undermine an inductive argument is to suggest that the conclusion is not the most probable explanation of the premises.

Task 4:

Answer the following questions in short paragraphs:

1. Which of the arguments against the existence of God did you find most convincing? Why?
2. How do you think a religious believer might try to respond to an atheist who says that the existence of evil proves that God doesn't exist?

Philosophy: Take yourself further

The Open University has produced some excellent resources to introduce you to Philosophy.

For fun, you can play the choose your own Philosophy adventure game:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/culture/philosophy/choose-your-own-philosophy-adventure>

Play this choose your own adventure game, offered by the Open University. At the end, the game will tell you more about different types of philosophy and where your personality fits into these theories. *Tip: This is also a great game to compare with other people to see how their choices compare to yours!*

If you cannot wait to learn more Philosophy, you can also enrol and complete the Open University's Introducing Philosophy course, which covers some of what you have already learned but also other areas of debate and from different perspectives. You can find this at:

<https://www.open.edu/openlearn/history-the-arts/philosophy/introducing-philosophy/content-section-0?active-tab=description-tab>