

God and Evil (part 3)

God's Reasons For Evil May Be Inscrutable To Us

In a widely celebrated paper entitled "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," philosopher William Rowe put forth the following argument:

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.
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.
3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.¹

This is obviously a valid argument, but it must be kept in mind that the first premise is not airtight. Although Rowe concedes this, he considers it more likely true than not. As such, he considers the conclusion to be more likely true than not. To support the plausibility of the first premise, Rowe describes a fawn caught in a forest fire that suffers immensely before finally succumbing to its injuries and dying. He then suggests it is unreasonable to believe that God has a reason sufficient to justify allowing such an instance of suffering, much less the myriad of others that happen globally every day. Theistic philosophers, however, have been quick to respond noting that Rowe is essentially arguing as follows:

4. "It *appears* there is no reason sufficient to justify God in allowing this evil.
5. Therefore, there *probably* is no reason sufficient to justify God in allowing this evil."²

Even with this clarification, Rowe's argument seems compelling because we suspect that if we searched for God's reason long or hard enough, we would find it. Nevertheless, there is a problem here, lurking in the shadows, that needs to be exposed. Perhaps I can do so by way of illustration. Imagine being asked to look in the refrigerator for a jug of milk. You peer inside, but you do not see any milk. Hesitant to return empty-handed, you check twice, look in the door, and move items around to be sure nothing is hiding the container from your view. After completing your second search, you decide, "There is no milk in the refrigerator." Is this a safe conclusion? Surely it is. Both the limited space you have to look and the size of the item for which you are searching make it highly likely that if the milk were in the refrigerator, you would see it. But now consider a second example. Picture yourself sitting on the edge of a hospital bed waiting to receive your annual flu shot. In walks the physician's assistant assigned to administer the vaccine pale with anxiety and visibly shaking. Not a little alarmed, you ask if she is well to which she replies that it is her first day on the job and she is terribly nervous. Trembling, she drops the freshly unwrapped needle on the floor beneath the bed. Unfazed, she feels around with her foot until she locates the needle, kicks it out into the open, picks it up from the floor and proceeds unabated in her effort to administer your vaccination. When you protest and demand a new needle lest you get germs from that one, she holds it up to the light, twisting it in her fingers for close inspection and then announces confidently, "I don't *see* any germs; I think it will be all right." Is this a safe conclusion – safe enough that you would allow her to use the needle? Of course not! Germs are not the kinds of things that one can see with the naked eye. The nurse, despite her careful scrutiny, was not properly equipped to make that sort of judgment.³ Returning to Rowe's basic assertion that since it *appears* God does not have a morally justified reason for allowing every instance of pain and suffering, it is likely that He, in fact, has no such reason, the appropriate question to ask is whether or not we are in a good position to see such a reason if it existed. In other words, is our situation more akin to looking for milk in the refrigerator or to seeing germs on a needle? Given our finite and temporal status and God's infinite and eternal status, not to mention the incomprehensible complexity of the issues involved, especially in the long term, it seems obvious that our

¹ WILLIAM L. ROWE, "The Problem of Evil and some Varieties of Atheism," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16 (10/01, 1979), 336.

² Gregory E. Ganssle and Yena Lee, "Evidential Problems of Evil," in *God and Evil: The Case for God in a World Filled with Pain*, ed. Chad Meister and James K. Dew Jr., 2013), 17.

³ Both illustrations are from, Inman, *Problems of Evil*

situation is more like trying to see germs on a needle. As such, it is entirely plausible that God may have many morally justified reasons for permitting evil, which are nevertheless inscrutable to us.

Arguments For God's Existence Counterbalance The 'Problem' Of Evil

As mentioned in the first article in this series, the evidential problem of evil is the notion that evil offers evidence, which makes it unlikely that God exists – or at least any God that Christians could affirm. Formally stated, the evidential problem of evil can be written as follows:

1. If God exists, then there is no evil, *unless there is a reason that would justify God in permitting it.*
2. There is evil.
3. There is *likely* no reason that would justify God in permitting evil.
4. Therefore, it is *likely* that God does not exist.⁴

This argument, however, has some hidden assumptions that need to be dragged into the light of day. For instance, it assumes that evil is the only factor involved in determining whether or not God exists. This is an assumption, which Christians justifiably deny and thus the argument needs to be sharpened. Christians, in fact, on the basis of design evidence, moral evidence, causal evidence, fine-tuning evidence, religious and aesthetic experience, and many other more or less sophisticated deductions, argue that apart from the presence of evil, God's existence seems highly likely.⁵ After all, these deductions do not spring from any "gaps" in our knowledge, but rather from what we have learned through vast experience and careful observation. In our experience, for example, everything that begins to exist has a cause. From scientific observation we know that the universe began to exist. The logical inference is that the universe has a cause sufficient to explain its existence. Again, Christians observe the presence of information in DNA and conclude that it must have originated in the mind of an intelligent agent. After all, as Dr. Werner Gitt has noted, "There is no known law of nature, no known process, and no known sequence of events which can cause information to originate by itself in matter."⁶ Mutations cannot account for it. "All point mutations that have been studied on the molecular level turn out to reduce the genetic information and not to increase it."⁷ "When its progress along the chain of transmission events is traced backward, every piece of information leads to a mental source, the mind of the sender."⁸ This is clear enough; no one could reasonably conclude that the information in this magazine resulted from an explosion in a typewriter. In like fashion, the sheer fact that information exists in our DNA suggests that it could not have come about through a random chance process but rather must ultimately go back to a mind – in this case, the mind of God. Such arguments are numerous and weighty. Indeed apart from the presence of evil, God's existence might well seem unchallengeable. Now, as noted by Ganssle and Lee, the key premise of the evidential argument is premise 3, the conclusion, that there probably is no reason that would justify God in permitting evil to exist.⁹ Yet if we add another premise to the argument, which takes into account the other lines of evidence that bear on the question of God's existence, then suddenly the argument yields a dramatically different result. Consider the argument again with the new premise added:

1. If God exists, then there is no evil, *unless there is a reason that would justify God in permitting it.*
2. There is evil.
- 3*. It is *likely* that God exists.
4. Therefore, it is *likely* there is a reason that would justify God in permitting evil.¹⁰

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ J. W. Wallace, *Cold-Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels* (Colorado Springs, Colo: David C Cook, 2013), 66.

⁶ Werner Gitt, *In the Beginning was Information : A Scientist Explains the Incredible Design in Nature* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006), 106.

⁷ Lee M. Spetner, *Not by Chance! : Shattering the Modern Theory of Evolution* (New York: Judaica Press Inc, 1999), 138.

⁸ Gitt, *In the Beginning was Information : A Scientist Explains the Incredible Design in Nature*, 72.

⁹ Ganssle and Lee, *Evidential Problems of Evil*, 17.

¹⁰ Inman, *Problems of Evil*

The logical follow-up question to ask is, which premise is more reasonable to accept?

3. There is *likely* no reason that would justify God in permitting evil, or

3*. It is *likely* that God exists.¹¹

Given the previous point that God's reasons are likely to be inscrutable to us plus the fact that our reasons for believing He exists are strong, 3* seems far more likely. As such, the only reasonable conclusion is that God probably *does* have a justifiable reason for permitting evil to exist.

Conclusion

In this and the previous two articles I hope to have argued cogently that the problem of evil fails to render God's existence unlikely for four key reasons.

(1) Without God, there is no objective morality. Without objective morality, there can be no evil, and if there is no evil, then there can be no *problem* of evil. Hence the entire objection is meaningless.

(2) *Man's freedom*, which enables meaningful relationships; *natural consequences*, which provide strong motivation to reconcile with God; *natural law*, which provides the ability to interact meaningfully with others and the environment; as well as the opportunity to develop *higher-order character traits*, are of such value – especially when combined – that despite entailing the possibility of evil and suffering, they more than justify God in permitting evil to exist.

(3) As an infinite and eternal being, God is likely to have many morally justified reasons for permitting evil that are simply inscrutable to us. The issues involved are just too complex and long term to be comprehended by finite, temporal human beings.

(4) The evidence and arguments for God's existence are of such consequence that, apart from evil, it is very likely that God exists. Such evidence counterbalances the problem of evil and therefore renders it likely that God does have a justifiable reason for permitting it.

¹¹ Ibid.