

1 **The Problem of Evil: The Logical Problem**

- Module: Philosophy
- Lesson 16

2 **Some Recommended Sources On Evil**

- Grand Central Question, by Abdu Murray
- “The Problem of Evil,” by Ronald Nash, in *To Everyone an Answer*. ed. by Beckwith, Craig, & Moreland
- “Questions about Evil,” in *When Skeptics Ask*, by Norman Geisler and Ronald Brooks
- *God, Freedom, and Evil*, by Alvin Plantinga
- “What About Suffering,” in *On Guard*, by William Lane Craig
- “Evil,” in *Stealing from God*, by Frank Turek
- “Did God Create Evil”, Mike Winger vlog, at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSToZ_4yh54
- “As Sparks Fly Upward,” paper by Rick Harvey (<http://www.persuasivefaith.org/resources/Papers/SparksFlyUpward.pdf>)

3 **The Logical Problem of Evil: Two Versions**

- The Deductive Version: It is logically impossible that God exists.
- The Inductive Version: It is highly improbable God exists.

4 **The Deductive Version Stated**

- Premise 1: If God exists, he is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
- Premise 2: An omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being would not permit evil to exist.
- Premise 3: Evil exists.
- Conclusion: Therefore, God does not exist.
- As Christians, we strongly believe premises 1 and 3, so we must ask if premise 2 is true or false.

5 **Answering the Deductive Version: Theodicy and Defense**

- Various approaches to answering the problem have been offered.
- Typically these are referred to as theodicies.
 - A theodicy is a “justification of the ways of God to man.” Theodicies attempt to tell us why God permits evil.
 - Theodicies have been very useful and persuasive to many, but for many others theodicies did not satisfactorily address the deductive version of the problem.

6 **Answering the Deductive Version: Theodicy and Defense**

- An alternative to a theodicy is to offer a logical defense, which addresses the logical aspect of the problem, proving it is not logically impossible for God to exist, even given the existence of evil.
- A logical defense “lowers the bar” of what the theist must establish. It seeks to show merely that it is logical that God might possibly be morally justified permitting evil, thereby disproving the claim that God cannot logically exist.

7 Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense

- Understanding Omnipotence
- God is capable of doing all things which are in keeping with his nature which are logically possible (incoherent).
- God cannot do that which conflicts with his nature or which is logically impossible (incoherent).
 - He cannot lie, be tempted, or cease to exist.
 - He cannot make a square circle, a married bachelor, or make someone freely choose to do something.

8 Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense

- Morally Good Creatures and Freedom
 - God sought to make a splendidly good world.
 - The pinnacle of that creation was beings who would not only be good in physical and mental aspects, but would also:
 - Possess the capacity to lovingly relate to Him and to one another.
 - Be morally good: Their moral actions (love, kindness, justice, faithfulness, etc.) would have real significance).
 - Morally good actions are a necessary aspect of loving God.
 - e.g. “He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me...” (John 14:21)
 - It is logically possible that a world with loving, morally good beings would be superior to one without such beings.

9 Alvin Plantinga’s Free Will Defense

- What is Necessary for Acts of Love and Moral Significance?
 - Causally determined acts cannot entail love or moral significance.
 - Meaningful acts of love or moral significance require libertarian freedom.
 - Libertarian freedom: A libertarian free action is not determined by prior external causes or conditions. As one makes a choice, the agent has the power to choose A and the power to choose not-A, and it is up to the agent how they will choose.

- Libertarian freedom contrasts with compatibilist freedom, where an agent acts according to their desires, but those desires are determined by some cause external to the agent. Compatibilism is the view of freedom held by determinists, including most Calvinists.

• "Moral praise and blame can only be correctly assessed only to someone who acts freely." -John Feinberg-

10 Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense

- God's Choice Regarding Creating
 - God's options:
 - To not create anything.
 - To create a world with no potential for evil, but this would entail no beings possessing the capacity of love and moral good.
 - To create a world with with the immeasurable good of beings capable of love and morally good actions, but also with the potential for them to choose evil.

11 Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense

- God's Choice Regarding Creating (cont.)
 - God made the third choice:
 - To create a world with beings capable of love and free moral actions.
 - To endow the eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil with moral significance.
 - God choose to create a world with the immeasurable good of love and morally significant actions, instead of one without evil but only robots and morally insignificant life devoid of love.

12 Is The Potential For Evil Ever Justifiable?

- Is it morally justifiable to actualize a potential for evil for the purpose of achieving some great good?
- We consider it justifiable to actualize similar situations on a regular basis.
 - We decide to have children because we deem that a great good thing, though there is the potential (as every parent knows) for some evil to result.
 - We allow people to operate automobiles, though we know some will have injury or fatal accidents, or they will use the vehicle to commit crimes. We consider the ability to own and operate vehicles to be a great good which immeasurably outweighs the potential for evil and suffering.
 - We engage in sporting activities for the simple pleasure of doing so, though we know there is a potential for injuries and defeat.

- Hence, it is not illogical to believe a perfectly good, omniscient, and omnipotent God would have morally justifiable reasons to allow for the potential of evil.

13 Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense

- Plantinga's Conclusion:
 - It is logically possible that an omniscient, omnipotent, perfectly good God would create a world with beings capable of love and moral actions.
 - Hence, the second premise of the deductive version of the logical problem fails.
 - It is logically coherent to believe a perfectly good God would create a world with free beings capable of love.
 - It was logically impossible for God to create a world with loving and moral creatures yet without the potential to freely choose evil.

14 Success of Plantinga's Free Will Defense

- It is generally agreed among philosophers that the Free Will Defense satisfactorily answers the deductive version of the logical problem.
- J. L. Mackie (1917-1981), a leading proponent of the logical problem of evil conceded that his previous position "... does not, after all, show that the central doctrines of theism are logically inconsistent with one another."
- William Rowe (1931-2015), an atheist philosopher: "Indeed, there is a fairly compelling argument for the view that the existence of evil is logically consistent with the theistic God."

15 Answering The Inductive Problem

- The Inductive Problem Stated
 - A perfectly good God would have created the best of all possible worlds.
 - With the amounts and kinds of evil that exist in this world, it appears unlikely that this is the best of all possible worlds.
 - Therefore, it is unlikely (improbable) that God exists.

16 The Inductive Assumption

- The assumption is that though the existence of God is logically possible, even with the existence of evil—
 - Premise 1: A good and omnipotent God would have created the best of all possible worlds.
 - Premise 2: Given the amount of evil and the kinds of evil in this world, it is easy to conceive of a world with more good and/or less evil than this world, and hence this world is not the "best of all possible worlds."
 - Conclusion: Therefore a perfectly good and omnipotent God probably does not exist.

17 Two Issues

- The question of the possibility of a "best of all possible worlds."

- The question of probabilities.

18 1. The "Best of all Possible Worlds"

- Plantinga has demonstrated that a "best of all possible worlds" is not a logical possibility.
 - How much good is necessary to qualify as the best possible world?
 - How much evil can be allowed and still have the best possible world?
 - Neither of these questions can be answered objectively, especially given our lack of omniscience.
 - One can go on endlessly imagining a "better world," hence the very concept of the "best of all possible worlds" becomes logically unattainable.

19 2. The Problem of Probabilities

- Is God improbable, given the kinds and amounts of evil in the world?
- Probable with respect to what? (Probabilities can only be ascertained when one considers all the relevant background information.)
 - e. g. What is the probability that John will become a medical doctor? You cannot ascertain that probability unless you know certain background information:
 - Is John a first grader with artistic inclinations? Or is John a graduate of Yale, summa cum laude, with a degree in biochemistry, in his second year of medical school?
 - One must know the relevant background information about John before assessing the probability that he will become a medical doctor.

20 2. The Problem of Probabilities

- As finite, temporal beings, we simply are not in a place to know all the relevant background information regarding good and evil.
- What is some of the potential background information that would need to be known to ascertain if this world could be better?
 - How much evil can be allowed before it can no longer be morally justified?
 - How much good would it take to overcome the amount of evil in the world?
 - Is the consequence of evil isolated, or is it possible that evil will eventually result in some compensating or even overwhelming good? (We frequently experience this phenomenon.)
- These, and similar things, are things which finite humans are not in a place to know. We cannot assess the probability of God's existence using only the existence of evil, while not factoring other background information.

21 2. The Problem of Probabilities

- If we are going to attempt to fairly ascertain the probability of God's existence, we must engage all the background evidence we possess, not factor in exclusively the existence of evil.

- The relevant weight of good and evil and the good resulting from evil.
- The teleological evidence.
- The ontological evidence.
- The cosmological evidence.
- The evidence from morality.
- The evidence from evil. (It is difficult to understand how even the concept of evil can be a coherent concept without the existence of God.)

22 **Is There a Purpose for Evil?**

- Why does God permit some evils and not others?
 - According to Scripture, God does prevent some evils from occurring while permitting others.
 - This reality implies God has some purpose at work.

23 **Is There a Purpose for Evil?**

- Some goods are only possible in response to evil.
 - Courage in the face of grave danger.
 - Mercy in the face of suffering.
 - Grace in the face of moral offense.
 - Redemption in the face of failure.
- Given a fallen world, it appears some goods can only be achieved as a result of evil and suffering.

24 **The Problem of Natural Evil**

- The historic position of the Christian church:
 - The earth (& cosmos) is in a fallen condition due to the sin of mankind (and/or angels).
 - Rom. 6:20-22 The whole creation subjected to futility.
 - Gen. 3:17 The ground is cursed.
 - The earth (& cosmos) will one day be redeemed in concert with the redemption of the human race.

25 **The Problem of Natural Evil**

- An Old Earth creationist view:
 - Possible Explanation: Perfect Purpose Paradigm
 - God did not create a perfect paradise, but a world which would accomplish his perfect purpose.
 - Challenge: This appears to abandon the historic belief of the church that natural evil is the consequence of sin.

26 **The Problem of Natural Evil**

- An Old Earth creationist view (cont.):
 - Possible Explanation: Retroactive Effect of the Fall
 - God is “outside” (transcends) time.
 - God allowed evil as a consequence of sin, but retroactively, prior to the actual fall in time from our time-bound perspective.
 - Challenge:
 - Nothing in the text appears to warrant this view.
 - How would Adam and Eve have understood all the evil they observed prior to their fall?

27 **The Problem of Natural Evil**

- A Young Earth creationist view:
 - All natural evil is the result of the fall and occurred after the advent of sin—
 - The fall of the angels (Augustine, C. S. Lewis)
 - The fall of Adam and Eve
 - Prior to the Fall there was no natural evil.
 - Challenge: This view of natural evil faces challenges from the evidence we have from contemporary science.

28 **Next Week**

- The Experiential Problem of Evil