

Atheism and the argument of evil

[Sociology](#), [Social Issues](#)



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Introduction

Atheism. A word that describes someone as not believing in a god or gods. The standard atheist is someone who uses logic and rational thinking to determine that god does not exist. They have many tools in their arsenal to prove this, but by far their most used one is the proof of evil’s existence. However, these arguments are not always completely valid. As this paper goes on, it will be illustrated how Atheists argue with Theists on evil to discuss the presence or lack thereof of God.

There are three main viewpoints to the argument of god’s existence:

Atheism – The belief that there is no God, Theism – The belief that there is a God, and Agnosticism – The belief that God may or may not exist. Theism believes evil exists not because God isn’t all-powerful, all-knowing, or

perfectly moral but because God has some morally right reason to allow evil. Agnosticism thinks that any God or ultimate reality is unknown and probably unknowable. The Thesis of the paper will be focused on the Atheist viewpoint and how it does not successfully argue for the non-existence of God.

The God and Evil

The Judeo-Christian definition of God is that God is a being that is all-knowing, all-powerful, and perfectly moral. It is above fault and has the ability to do whatever is needed whenever. However, this creates a problem. As a perfectly moral being, God should not be able to tolerate any form of evil. However, evil does exist in this world. God is also all-powerful and all-knowing, so he should be able to rid the world of evil. However, it does not.

The Atheist would argue that since God does not exist, evil can exist in this world. If God is the perfectly moral being, it would be outraged and try to destroy evil. The theist would argue that there has to be a moral reason beyond our understanding to allow evil. This is the same idea as hurting your child with a shot in order to prevent an illness. The child may not understand why you are hurting them, but the parent understands. However, the Atheist would argue that if God is all-powerful and all-knowing, surely it would be able to stop evil and avoid the moral dilemma. Then if evil does exist, God, if it does exist, must either be not morally perfect, not all-powerful, or not all-knowing. However, this would go against the definition of God and who it is. Since the definition would be undermined, and God would not be able to live up to the definition, God must not exist. This is the argument put forward by an atheist.

Two Types of Evil

In order to define evil though, we must distinguish between moral and natural evil. Both types of evil comprise the entirety of evil but are mutually distinct. Natural Evil is the suffering of people due to natural events. These events could be hurricanes, tornadoes, or even volcanos. Moral Evil is evil that arises from humans, such as killing and theft. Both affect humanity in different ways but are all evil. There are several defenses and arguments for both sides in this. Theists argue Soul-Making and Free Will as defenses for their thoughts and beliefs. Atheists argue against these with logical deductions and counter arguments that build their case.

Natural Evil

In looking for an example of Natural Evil, one need only look at the daily news to see this. For example, recently a cyclone hit and destroyed large sections of India. This cyclone, the largest one on record, forced thousands of people into shelters and inflicted thousands of dollars of damage on the infrastructures there. However, no human could be blamed for this disaster. As such, God is the only answer as to why a disaster like this could happen. Another example of a natural evil is the rash string of tornadoes that came through Hattiesburg and the surrounding area recently. A family with two very small children were killed in this event and never had the chance to grow up or even start a family of their own. This evil is inherently natural but is abhorrent.

God is portrayed as both the ultimate creator and perpetrator of Natural Evils, since he is all-powerful and omnipotent. If God is the creator of these

evils but is morally just, then God must not be fully good or does not exist. Theists would argue that this is due to the fact that God allows these events to occur but does not will them. Thomas Aquinas explains this by looking at the definitions of primary and secondary causality. God is the primary cause of the world but does not control it. This seems to be a logical problem, considering that an all-powerful, omnipotent being would be able to find a way to correct for events such as these. Since he does not perform a divine intervention, it must be assumed that either he can't, won't, or does not exist.

Moral Evil

When looking at Moral Evils, the best example one can find is looking at the Holocaust. It was a genocide during World War II in which Germany systematically murdered some 17 million Jews, Slavs, Roma, the “ Incurably Sick”, dissenters, and gay men between 1941 and 1945. People were literally worked until they were almost dead and then were either shot or gassed to get rid of them. Others who weren't so lucky were experimented on as human test subjects for inhumane experiments such as chemical warfare testing and live vivisection. This was the industrialization of murder and saw people killed on scales that had never been seen before or since.

Another example of a Moral Evil is the Japanese Nanjing Massacre. The Nanjing Massacre, or Rape of Nanjing, was an episode of mass murder and mass rape committed by Imperial Japanese troops against the residents of Nanjing during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The massacre occurred over a period of six weeks and soldiers of the Imperial Japanese Army murdered an

estimated 40, 000 to 300, 000 Chinese civilians, and perpetrated widespread rape and looting. Evils such as these are committed by men and show just how depraved and vicious men can be. However, if God does exist and is all powerful, omnipotent, and wants to destroy evil, then these events should not occur.

The Defense of Theists

For both of these evils, Theists have a defense that correlates with each one. For starters, on natural evils, the Theists will use the soul-making defense to defend the rise in evils that come from natural events. On moral evils, Theists argue the Free Will defense to show that moral evils arise from God allowing moral evils. This paper will now look at both of these defenses in turn and see if they defend evil properly as to prove a case for a god that should exist in this world.

The Free Will Theodicy

When looking at why moral evil would exist in this world, The Free Will theodicy is used fairly often. The Free Will theodicy tries to justify that God created humans to be able to choose and to offer them anything less than the free will would not be good for humanity. This is true in that humanity can choose its path and is not predetermined to make certain actions based off of the will of a God who chose the path for them. However, several atheists argue that this is not the case.

The most notable person to argue against the Free Will theodicy was J. L. Mackie in his argument that God does not exist. In the argument, Mackie puts forth that a person can choose to do good in one event and still retain

free will. He then expands this exponentially to encompass all peoples can choose to do good at all times and still retain their free will. While astronomically unlikely, he puts forward that if god can do anything and wants to eliminate evil, he should certainly be able to create a world that would stand up to this notion and would be able to do this. Therefore, since that world is not this world, Mackie postulates, then God does not exist.

The next argument against Free Will Theodicy was put forward that if God gave us free will, why not only give us free will in small choices that would not affect other humans or destroy lives? This argument states that, while free will is necessary, it doesn't have to be for large decisions that could destroy lives. The theists argue that free will would be meaningless if we did not have control over larger actions, though. What would be the point of having free will in small things if our truly meaningful actions were completely pointless. This would undermine the idea that God wanted us to have free will at all.

Another argument against the Free Will Theodicy is that God should intervene when we choose to do evil. Since God is all-powerful, he should have the ability to stop bullets or even stop someone from murdering. All evil actions could be stopped immediately. However, the Theist would argue that this kind of world would be completely meaningless. Since our choices wouldn't actually affect anything, we could basically do only good and our moral development would be completely stunted and would not allow our mental states to grow.

However, recently a man by the name of Dr. Alvin Plantinga has come up with a Free Will defense for the existence of God. Instead of a Theodicy, which is just a justification, Plantinga argues a defense for Free Will. He argues that if God can create free creatures, but it can't cause or determine them to do only what is right. If it does so, then they aren't significantly free after all. To create creatures capable of moral good, it must create creatures capable of moral evil; and it can't give these creatures the freedom to perform evil and at the same time prevent them from doing so. While some believe this has successfully resolved the dilemma of Moral Evil, many still are concerned that this is not the answer. Several arguments against this are the Incompatibility View, which states that the defense is actually arguing that Free Will and determinism are incompatible, The Transworld Depravity, where someone always chooses right but has the option to not choose right in a subset of the world.

The Irenaean Theodicy

In the defense of God for the Natural Evils, Theists use the Soul Making Theodicy as the defense for the natural evils in the world. This Theodicy, also called the Irenaean Theodicy, was inspired by the second-century philosopher and theologian Irenaeus and developed by Friedrich Schleiermacher and John Hick. It states that this world is the best of all possible worlds. It allows humans to develop naturally and does not cause them to have to worry about violations in the nature of the universe. Natural laws exist and sometimes lend to evil happening. This is why God does not like evil but has to allow it. If he did not allow evil to exist, the laws of nature

would be completely meaningless, and humanity would not be able to grow and mature as is necessary.

This defense greatly pushes for the idea that the world would be meaningless without suffering. While an atheist would be right to say that it could be possible to have a world without suffering, what would that world be like? Could it build strength of character? Would it even be able to be recognized as the world where we live? Moral Virtues would cease to exist in this world because all actions and strife would be non-existent. People would not know what virtue was and would never understand what it meant. It would be a pointless lesson.

Some Theologists have also put forth Process Theory to challenge Irenaean Theodicy. In Process theory, God has power but is restricted to persuasion rather than coercion. This means that he is unable to prevent certain events of Natural Evil from occurring. It suggests that god is responsible for evil, but blameless and works for good in all things. C. Robert Melese argued that not all suffering is for good and that it does more harm than good. David Griffin also dislikes the Irenaean Theodicy by saying that the idea would state that God inflicts pain for his own ends, which would be completely immoral and against what God would want for its world.

Conclusion

In my opinion, the issue of evil and how God could exist or not exist is not a simple one to answer. Both sides of the argument have points that are logical, but both sides can counter each other rather easily. For moral evil, both sides have arguments that seem to be almost equal in scope and how

they rationalize the idea that good and evil are real, and that free will can or cannot determine whether or not God does exist. It also is easy to see that Atheists can't quite push the envelope over for those Natural Evils to prove that God does not exist. With Irenaean Theory and Process Theory to explain why evil would exist, it challenges their argument but does not completely cancel it out. It makes it difficult for either side to get a leg up on the other one. In the end, I find that I fall towards the Atheist side of the argument because it seems more logical. However, this argument does not actually win over the Theists. It reminds me of the arguments had by lawmakers and by politicians. Neither side is completely right and neither side can seem to make the other one look like they don't have good points. I would almost argue the true winner for these types of arguments would be the agnostic. Agnostics aren't sure whether or not there is a god, and I almost think that they may have the right idea.