

Faith Lecture Series Essay B  
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“Don’t talk to me about God; the reality of the Holocaust during WWII is enough to show me that He does not exist.” This is a common objection to belief in God. Hitler’s Nazis killed five to six million Jews, comprising two thirds of all European Jews. “I see too much evil in the world to believe that God exists.” Crime seems rampant, terrorism at an all time high, murder, and war all add to the list of possible grievances against God or the existence of God. “How could God allow my thirteen month old baby to die?” An only child taken from a couple that had so many hopes and dreams dashed in one instant.

All these responses are typical of individuals who hold God responsible, or hold that in light of this evidence, God can’t exist. “How can God allow this to happen?” is their heart’s cry. The argument is a simple one and can be phrased in many different ways. “If God were Good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either in goodness, or power, or both.”<sup>1</sup> In the next few pages, I will attempt to explain the problem of evil or pain in its different arguments and provide some reasonable solutions to its existence.

According to Garret DeWeese, there are three lines of arguments or problems with evil: Logical argument, evidential argument and existential problem of evil. The logical argument is an attempt to prove that the existence of God and evil is incompatible. J.L. Mackey phrases this argument well in *Evil & Omnipotence*, “God is omnipotent; God is wholly good: and yet evil exists... Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an

omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good, omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists and that evil exists, are incompatible.”<sup>2</sup> The consensus of religion philosophers consider this argument dead due to an argument presented later, although it bears considering.

The second line of argument allows that God and evil are possible to co-exist. This evidential argument is used more often and this relies on the preponderance of evidence against God’s existence. This argument looks at the events in history and even our daily experience in this painful world, to form a case against God, as if in a court of law. There may be some evidence for God, but all the evil in the past and present is added up to weigh in favor of no God (or at least not an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God).

The last argument is a personal issue and is called the existential problem of evil. In my opinion, most of the average layman’s problems with God come from this realm. They have experienced evil or pain personally and are trying to deal with the repercussions. They may or may not be looking for a rational explanation of their pain. They may ask “Why?”, but what they are really asking for is help through the pain. This individual has a choice to make typically: Can they rationally believe that God and evil can co-exist, and if so, why did He allow this to happen to them? Whether they lost a relative in the Holocaust, or were the victim of some crime, or they lost their child in an accident, they are left struggling to understand. This person can choose to believe that God doesn’t exist, that God does exist and want nothing to do with Him, or realize that God does exist and beat on His chest for an answer.

For a rational and reasonable explanation of the existence of pain, I believe that Alvin Plantinga's free will defense suffices for the logical argument listed above. Plantinga states, "A world containing creatures who are significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures."<sup>3</sup> Can God create a world with free moral will (the ability to decide between alternatives) without allowing us to choose evil? No. This would be akin to a square circle or what Chris Rice in a recent song calls smelling the color nine – it is non logical. "We can, perhaps, conceive of a world in which God corrected the results of this abuse of free will by His creatures at every moment: so that a wooden beam became soft as grass when it was used as a weapon, and the air refused to obey me if I attempted to set up in it the sound waves that carry lies or insults. But such a world would be one in which wrong actions were impossible, and in which, therefore, freedom of the will would be void;"<sup>4</sup> The only way to guarantee that creatures with free will won't choose evil is to tamper with their freedom – then they are not really creatures of free will.

For the evidential argument of evil, the G.E. Moore shift strategy is a good solution. According to this British philosopher, the idea is to build a case for the existence of God outside of the existence of evil. There are many arguments for the existence of God (which I cannot describe here), but include the cosmological argument, ontological argument, teleological (or design) argument and axiological (or moral) argument. Going back to the argument that suggests all the evidence (evil) weighs against the existence of God, this other evidence changes the equation in favor of God's existence. We now have stronger evidence to believe that God exists than to accept the premise that because of evil, God can't exist (or highly improbable).

Another way to prove God's existence with the problem of evil is the moral argument for God. By the definition of evil, the person is admitting that there is an absolute standard of good. You cannot have evil, if there is no good. If someone wishes to believe in ethical naturalism, in that what we think of right and wrong are just by-products of natural selection – they have to admit there is nothing different between Mother Teresa or Hitler. This viewpoint is unlivable and externally inconsistent with our whole existence. Since we are aware of objective moral law, this implies a moral lawgiver and therefore, there must be a supreme moral Lawgiver (God).<sup>5</sup>

The last argument of existential problem of evil is the most difficult to address because of the emotion and personal aspect of the issue. According to Plantinga, “Neither a free will defense nor free will theodicy is designed to be of much help or comfort from such a storm in the soul. . . .”<sup>6</sup> This last argument is typically left to counselors or pastors, but in my situation, I would explain to this person (in pain), that I am the father of the baby that was lost at 13 months of age mentioned above. I understand the pain and the struggle with God in coming to understand the question of “Why?” I would explain that I dealt with the intellectual part of this problem in many different angles. Although for me, I needed the rational reasons explained, they don't in themselves comfort.

What I do know is that we have a God that loves us, who understands pain, and was willing to undergo pain and suffering on the cross for our sins. We have a God that can take our beatings on his chest as we cry “Why? Why? Why?” Did God allow this evil or suffering? Yes. Does he sit by and watch us suffer? No. Sometimes it may feel that way, but when looking back on my experience, it felt like the familiar poem called

Footsteps. It was during those difficult times that Jesus carried me, not abandoned me. He will do the same for you, if you *choose* to allow Him.

Although this essay is not nearly a comprehensive solution or resource for this very difficult problem of pain, I have hopefully defined the problem, given some possible solutions and shown the kind of God we have in times of grief or pain. It is up to you to decide if the evidence weighs on the side of God's existence or the alternative – meaningless existence doomed to eventual death.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain* (New York: Touchstone, 1996; reprint, New York: Macmillan, 1962), 23.

<sup>2</sup> J.L. Mackey, "Evil and Omnipotence" in *The Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 92-104.

<sup>3</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense" in *Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 56-57.

<sup>4</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 30.

<sup>5</sup> Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1990), 22.

<sup>6</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 29.