

The Problem of Evil and Suffering

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The Problem of Evil and Suffering

**Three Problems
Two Philosophical, One Existential**

**Logical
Problem**

**Evidential
Problem**

**Pastoral
Problem**

The Problem of Evil

The Logical Problem

The Logical Problem of Evil

1 God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.

2 There is evil.

➤ The logical problem arises from the claim that 1 & 2 are logically inconsistent (i.e., that it's logically impossible that 1 & 2 are both true).

Logical Inconsistency

Types of Inconsistency

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graph TD; A[Types of Inconsistency] --- B[Explicit]; A --- C[Formal]; A --- D[Implicit]
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Explicit

Formal

Implicit

Explicit Inconsistency

A set of propositions is explicitly inconsistent if and only if one of its members is the denial of another.

Example

{It's raining outside; it's not the case that it's raining outside}

Formal Inconsistency

A set of propositions is formally inconsistent if and only if an explicitly inconsistent set can be deduced from it using only the laws of logic.

Example

{All men are mortal; Socrates is a man;
it's not the case that Socrates is mortal}

Implicit Inconsistency

A set of propositions is implicitly inconsistent if and only if an explicitly inconsistent set can be deduced from it using only the laws of logic and some necessary truth.

Example

{Bilbo is older than Frodo; Frodo is older than Smeagol; Smeagol is older than Bilbo}

Is $\{1, 2\}$ inconsistent?

- $\{1, 2\}$ is *not* explicitly inconsistent.
- $\{1, 2\}$ is *not* formally inconsistent.
- So if $\{1, 2\}$ is inconsistent, it must be implicitly inconsistent.
- But if $\{1, 2\}$ is implicitly inconsistent, what necessary truth will yield an explicit inconsistency from it and the laws of logic?

What is that necessary truth?

- 3 An omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being would have no good reason for allowing evil.
- It seems that, if 3 were true, 1 & 2 wouldn't both be true.
 - So it seems that, if 3 is necessarily true, 1 & 2 couldn't both be true (and, hence, that {1, 2} is inconsistent).

Is 3 necessarily true?

- Well, in order to know that 3 is true, one would have to know both (i) all of the possible reasons that God might have for allowing evil, and (ii) that none of those reasons is a good one.
- But since no one can know all of the reasons God might have for allowing evil, one cannot know that 3 is true.

Is 3 necessarily true?

✓ Hence, the logical problem of evil fails.

Moreover, if 3 were false, {1, 2} would in fact be consistent.

Is 3 false?

- Can we show that 3 is false?
- Yes – if we can find a possible reason God might have for allowing evil, we can show that {1, 2} is consistent.

Defense or theodicy?

- A **theodicy** attempts to provide God's *actual* reason for allowing evil and suffering.
- A **defense** attempts merely to provide a *possible* reason—i.e., a reason God *might* have for allowing evil and suffering.

Types of Evil

- Moral Evil =df. evil resulting from free creaturely activity.
- Natural Evil =df. evil not resulting from free creaturely activity.

Soul-Making Defense

- The point of this life is to become a person of a certain sort—that is, to become a godly or virtuous person.
- Virtue develops only in adversity; suffering, in other words, is the anvil on which character is hammered out.
- Perhaps, then, God allows evil and suffering so that we will have sufficient opportunities to develop godly or virtuous character.

The Free Will Defense

- Perhaps God couldn't create a world with moral goodness but no moral evil.
- For perhaps moral goodness requires freedom; if so, then God might not have been able to create beings capable of moral goodness (and thus free) without creating beings capable of moral evil.

J. L. Mackie's Objection

- 1 It's possible that there be a world with free creatures who never go wrong.
 - 2 If God's omnipotent, He can create any possible world.
- ∴ If God's omnipotent, He can create a world with free creatures who never go wrong.

Alvin Plantinga's Response

There are some possible worlds that no one, not even an omnipotent being, can actualize.

The Problem of Evil

The Evidential Problem

The Evidential Problem of Evil

1 God exists.

2 There is evil.

Evidential Problem

$\mathcal{P} 1/2 = \text{very low.}$

The probability of 1 given 2 is very low—so low, in fact, that belief in God is irrational.

Alvin Plantinga's Response

1 Feike can swim.

2 Feike is a Frisian, and 9 out of 10 Frisians cannot swim.

So, then, $\mathcal{P} 1/2 = .10$.

3 Feike is a Frisian lifeguard, and 99 out of 100 Frisian lifeguards can swim.

Evidential Problem

- But isn't the amount of evil in the world more than we should expect on the theistic hypothesis? E.g., isn't there gratuitous evil?
- Well, what would we expect?

The Problem of Evil

The Pastoral Problem

The Pastoral Problem of Evil

Not

“God, why did You allow that to happen?”

but rather

“God, why did You allow that to happen to *me*?”