



God Has a Story, Too

Reflections on Suffering & Evil

Schedule/Topics

Jan 14 – Defining the problem, framing a solution
Jan 21 – Evil & suffering from a non-Christian perspective
Jan 28 – Evil & suffering from a Christian perspective

Feb 4 – Evil & suffering in light of the cross
Feb 11 – Evil & suffering as a mirror
Feb 18 – Evil & suffering does not get the final word

Atheism — No Rationale for Outrage against Evil

1. If there is no God, there is no objective moral standard against which to measure good.
2. If there is no objective moral standard against which to measure good, then no act or event is objectively evil or morally wrong.
3. If no act or event is objectively evil or morally wrong, then evil and morality are subjectively grounded in some arbitrary standard or human convention.
4. If evil and morality are subjectively grounded in some arbitrary standard or human convention, then there is no rationale for moral outrage at any act or event that seems inherently wrong.
5. If there is no rationale for moral outrage at any act or event that seems inherently wrong, then our moral intuitions are mistaken or misguided.
6. If our moral intuitions are mistaken or misguided, then ideas of evil and morality are reduced to preference.
7. If ideas of evil are reduced to preference, then the actions of Mother Teresa and Adolf Hitler were morally no different in kind and are morally equivalent to drinking diet Coke instead of sweet tea.

Deism — No Comfort or Hope in the face of Evil

1. If God is not all-good or all-loving, he would be unable to sympathize with us during suffering and evil.
2. If God is not all-powerful, he could not stop evil or sustain us in suffering, though he may really want to.
3. If God is not all-knowing, then suffering and evil would catch him by surprise. An ignorant God may emotionally react against suffering and evil, but he cannot plan for it.
4. If God is not all-wise, then he would not be able to achieve the best ends from our suffering and evil.
5. Therefore, a god who is emotionally distant, impotent, ignorant, or perplexed offers no comfort to sustain us and no hope to inspire us against suffering and evil.

Pantheism — No Meaning in Evil

The line between good and evil is illusion. Since there is no distinction between them, they have no meaning.

1. God is not personal or transcendent. Instead, God is part of the universe rather than above it and, therefore, cannot come from beyond to help us.
2. Buddhism: Suffering is not caused by evil but arises from human desire. Our problem is desire.
3. Hinduism: Suffering emerges not from evil but from the negative effects of past lives (karma).
4. The key to release from suffering is to detach from this life and embrace the oneness of all things.
5. What is perceived as evil is really a limitation that requires human effort to overcome. The goal is to rise above the illusion of evil and cycle up the chain through reincarnation as we increasingly recognize our oneness with all things.

Dualism — No Victory over Evil

1. Good and evil are two distinct principles and eternally exist with equal power. God and Satan are not real but are personifications of good and evil.
2. If good and evil are equal but opposing forces, then neither gets the upper hand and the odds are even that either wins the day.
3. Taoism: Suffering is the product of ignorance in failing to acknowledge the interdependence of all dualities (female [yin]/male [yang], light/dark, truth/error, love/hate, etc.). Labeling something good is the same as labeling its opposite evil and vice versa. The one cannot exist without the other. Embracing rather than resisting the interdependence of all dualities promotes harmonious living.
4. Thus, there is no victory to be had.



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Can a case be made for God's existence from suffering and evil?

1. Suffering and evil are real and are a departure from the way the world ought to be.
2. If suffering and evil are a departure from the way the world ought to be, then there is a way the world ought to be.
3. If there is a way the world ought to be, then there is a master plan or moral design for the way the world ought to be.
4. If there is a master plan or moral design for the way the world ought to be, then there is a Master Planner or Moral Designer for the world.
5. This Master Planner or Moral Designer we call "God."

When we ponder the love of God in the cross of Christ, the problem of evil becomes *our* problem of evil. The question we must face is not how God can justify himself in permitting suffering and evil, but how we can justify ourselves before him!

Weekly Meditation:

"However else we may try to explain the difficulties which are all around us, we are not allowed to invoke God's incompetence.

Furthermore, even if God could be absolved of the responsibility for inactivity by his impotence, he could not be absolved of the responsibility for having allowed the situation to arise, for when he created the world he must have known the potentialities that he was creating. Or, if he did not know what he was doing, we must add ignorance and folly to his impotence and inactivity."

— John Wenham, *The Goodness of God*

*Some information here can be referenced in other sources by Clay Jones, Craig Blomberg, Eleonore Stump, N. T. Wright, Doug Moo, John Feinberg, D. A. Carson, John Wenham, Paul Helm, Doug Geivett, A. E. Wilder-Smith, Alvin Plantinga, Henri Blocher, C. Stephen Evans, Oscar Cullman, Steven Boyer and Christopher Hall.