

### THEISM AND QUESTION OF EVIL

"I know now, Lord, why you utter no answer. You are yourself the answer. Before your face questions die away. What other answer would suffice? Only words, words; to be led out to battle against other words."

C.S. Lewis, Till We Have Faces

"Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able?  
Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing?  
Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing?  
Whence then is evil?"

David Hume, Dialogue Concerning Natural Religion

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### What's the heart of the problem of evil?

The problem of evil is a perennial problem that is as old as human tears. It may be expressed in this way:

1. God is morally perfect.
2. God is omnipotent
3. Evil exists.
4. A morally perfect being would want to stop evil.
5. An omnipotent being would be able to stop evil.
6. Therefore, a morally perfect and omnipotent being does not exist.

### Evil and Other Worldviews

1. God exists.
2. God is all-good.
3. God is all-powerful.
4. Evil exists.

Affirm any three, and you must deny the fourth. Apparently.

Atheism denies proposition 1. Agnosticism questions it.  
Pantheism denies proposition 2. Sadism promotes the opposite view.  
Polytheism denies proposition 3. So does Process Theology and Open Theism.  
Idealism denies proposition 4. (Hinduism, Christian Science, New Age)  
Theism affirms all four propositions. (Christianity, Judaism, Islam)

### **Just what is evil?**

Augustine's definition of evil is now well-known. He defines evil as a privation in goodness. Augustine argues that God maybe the author of everything but evil is not a thing but a privation in things; a lack of something that should have been there; e.g. sickness is a privation of good health; blindness is a privation of sight.

Evil is an ontological parasite.

+ Where did the privation come from?

+ Augustine's answer is two-fold.

1. God is perfect and infinite. He is not composed and therefore cannot be decomposed. By nature creatures are decomposable. Anything of God is God. And there is only one. All other things are from God. Creation is not *ex deo* "out of God" but *ex nihilo* "out of nothing". Creation makes evil possible for anything that is created can be deprived.
2. God who is the cause of beings cannot be the cause of their tending towards non being. The cause of the existence cannot also be the cause of the tending towards non existence.

+ What then is the cause of metaphysical evil?

+ "None" says Augustine. Metaphysical evil is "no thing" and therefore needs no cause.

+ If there is no metaphysical cause for the privation how did evil arise?

+ For Augustine, the ultimate solution is moral. Free choice is the cause of the corruption of a good world. Because he is finite he is capable of corruption. His free choice turned a theoretical possibility into an actual reality. Evil is nowhere but in the will.

+ What caused the evil will?" Augustine's answer is short. "What cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing?"

+ Augustine perceive of evil willing as a self-originating act. And a self-originating act is not explicable in terms of causes, for "what cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing?"

*(On Free Will 3.17.49; Cited in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977; p. 61)*

## Varieties of Evil

Moral Evil: Evil committed by morally culpable free human beings such as lying, rape, murder and cheating.

Natural Evil: Sometimes referred to as Physical Evil. This is evil as seen expressed through part of the natural order such as natural disasters, disease, death, and decay.

## The Deductive Version of the Problem of Evil

This approach tries to prove logically that the existence of evil is logically inconsistent with one or more major propositions of the Christianity. The British philosopher J.L. Mackie in a series of journal articles tried to dismiss the rationality of religious beliefs by pointing out that they are irrational in that there are logical internal inconsistencies within the faith-belief.

The deductive argument sees a contradiction in the following argument:

1. God exists.
2. God is omnipotent.
3. God is omniscient.
4. God is omnibenevolent.
5. God created the world.
6. The world contains evil.

We do not find in this list two or more propositions which blatantly contradict one another. The opponent recognises this fact.

But they argue that propositions 1 – 5 should rightly imply a 7<sup>th</sup> proposition, viz:

7. The world does not contain evil.

+ In order to make his charge of an internal contradiction stick, the critic needs to come up with an additional premise, so that when taken together with propositions 1 – 5, would necessarily entail proposition 7. If he could do this, his charge of an internal inconsistency in religious beliefs would have a case.

+ Philosophers have tried to come up with such a missing premise but so far they have not been successful. Such additional premises were found either to be not necessarily true or they were such that they comprise a doctrine that the theist do not necessarily hold to be a true Christian doctrine.

+ Some philosophers have proposed the following as an additional premise:

*“An omnipotent being can do absolutely anything.”*

+ They hold that if this premise is included in the argument, then it would entail proposition 7, and that would generate a contradiction.

+ But the theist denies this additional premise fact that an omnipotent being can do absolutely anything.

+ In his book *The Problem of Pain* C.S. Lewis writes:

"God's omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible; not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to God but not nonsense. It remains true that all things are possible with God the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God "

C.S. Lewis. *The Problem of Pain*. (San Francisco: Harper: SanFrancisco, 2001), 18.

+ The phrase “God cannot” sounds blasphemous and many theists are reluctant to say it. But there are illogical propositions like creating a square circle which that God cannot do. Aquinas is right when he said that it is more appropriate to say that such things cannot be done rather than God cannot do them.

+ In the light of this argument, God cannot create a free creature and not allow him full freedom.

+ Plantinga, together with other Christian philosophers, through their rigorous defence of theism employing analytic philosophy, has largely diffused the deductive argument of the problem of the evil.

+ Plantinga proposes that all that is required to prove propositions 1 – 6 logically consistent is to add a further proposition that is both logically possible and consistent with the other propositions.

+ Plantinga makes the following additional proposition.

*“God creates a world that now contains evil and has a good reason for doing so.”*

+ The new argument goes this way:

1. God exists, is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and created the world.
2. God created a world that now contains evil and has a good reason for doing so.
3. Therefore, the world contains evil.

+ From such an argument, we may see that evidentially the existence of evil in the world does not necessarily constitute an argument against God’s existence.

### **But why does God allow evil?**

Plantinga’s reply to the atheist is both short and confident. He says: “We don’t know why God allows evil.”

+ If you should be tempted to dismiss this as a bad answer you should pause and ask what, if anything, follows from the Christian’s admission that she doesn’t know why God allows evil.

+ Plantinga gives us a reply which is now regarded as a classic reply:

“Suppose none of the suggested theodicies is very satisfactory. Or suppose that the theist admits he just doesn’t know why God permits evil. What follows from that? Very little of interest. Why suppose that if God does have a good reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know? Perhaps God has a good reason, but that reason is too complicated for us to understand. Or perhaps He has not revealed it for some other reason. The fact that the theist doesn’t know why God permits evil is, perhaps, an interesting fact about the theist, but by itself shows little or nothing relevant to the rationality of belief in God. Much more is needed for the atheological argument even to get off the ground.”

(Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1974, p.10)

What’s the most that someone can conclude about God from the existence of evil?

John M. Fraiser writes:

“The most that can be concluded from the existence of evil is that God’s existence is evidentially challenged. This means that there are some facts that are difficult to reconcile

with God's existence. But does this make evil a problem? Consider how many other facts in the world are evidentially challenged.

One could conclude that I do not smoke a pipe when they learn that:

1. I was raised by parents who taught that all smoking is sinful.
  2. I am married to a woman who detests the smell of tobacco smoke.
  3. Virtually no one in my social circles smokes.
  4. I am part of a church denomination that discourages smoking.
  5. Very few people smoke pipes anymore (at least with tobacco in them).
  6. People much older than I are the ones who usually smoke pipes.
  7. I have a fear of cancer.
  8. Pipe smoking can be quite expensive and I do not have a lot of money.
- As evidentially challenged as me smoking a pipe may be, none of the above facts disprove that I smoke a pipe."

John M. Fraiser, *Chaos & Old Night*,  
(<http://chaosandoldnight.wordpress.com/2007/02/12/a-brief-response-to-the-problem-of-evil/>)

### **The Inductive Version of the Problem of Evil**

The deductive approach has not been successful. But that does not mean that the theists are out of the woods. Not just yet. The critics now turn from a deductive approach to an inductive one.

- + The deductive approach makes the strong claim that theism is logically flawed.
- + The inductive approach is far more modest. It asserts that the existence of evil makes theism improbable as a viable worldview; that theism is probably false.
- + Theists have given some classic replies to this inductive argument of evil.

Such attempts are called *theodicies*.

### **What is a theodicy?**

The word theodicy comes from two Greek words *theo* meaning God and *dikē* meaning righteousness or justice,

- + It is an attempt to vindicate God's righteousness and justice in the face of the existence of evil. Purportedly, it comes from *Essai de théodicée*, a work by Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz.

- + Some Christian apologists proffer what they believe to be God's reasons for allowing evil in the world. This approach gives more than a defence. It actually proffers a theodicy.
- + Theodicies are attempts to give reasons for why God allows evil. Nash thinks that Christians could be "foolish enough to offer suggestions as to what God's reasons for permitting evil might be."

### **Some Theodicies**

- + The Free Will Theodicy.  
This position argues that God is unable to create a world containing moral good without permitting moral evil. A world that contains moral good is better than one that does not.
- + God's Glory Theodicy:  
God allows for evil as to brings Him glory. But this in a sense begs the question because precisely the issue is what kind of God would be glorified through evil and human suffering.
- + Greater Good Theodicy:  
This position says that the ultimate good that is coming from all the evil around us will be greater than the evil itself.
- + The Soul-Building Theodicy:  
This view asserts that horrible as it is, evil brings out the best out in human people. Some of the greatest chapters in human history were written out of times of the darkest human suffering.

### **Some Theodicies at Work**

#### **The argument that evil exists.**

George Schlesinger argues that the existence of evil disconfirms the hypothesis that God exists. For him the multiplicity of evil is beside the point. The sheer existence of evil in the world is a negative evidence.

- + He assumes that God would not allow the existence of evil whatsoever. But this is an assumption. The atheist fallaciously uses this additional proposition which theists are not necessary committed to. theists have never assumed that God would not allow the existence of evil whatsoever. Neither is it a universal and necessary truth such that all who consider it should necessarily accept it.

- + Theists believe that there are morally sufficient reasons why God might allow some evil to exist. (i) The potential result of freewill. (ii) The continual operation of nature.
- + God must have some morally sufficient reasons for allowing evil though we may know what that reason is. (His existence having been proven through some independent grounds).
- + The bare fact of evil *per se* does not count weightily against Christian theism.

The atheist may want to argue that God always seeks to promote good and eliminate evil.

- + Both C.S. Lewis and M.B. Ahern rebut by affirming that the argument of the atheist does not hold because God might have sufficient reasons for allowing some evil. Lewis argues that God's goodness and love are much more "*stern and splendid*" than what the atheist's allow for.

(C.S. Lewis *The Problem of Pain* NY: Collier Books, Macmillan Pub. Co., 1962 p. 47-54)

From Augustine to Plantinga the classic rationale for God's permission of evil is human free will.

- + God cannot eliminate evil without eliminating human freedom.
- + The atheist seems to have foisted some debatable propositions and, by a sleight of hand, surreptitiously make them appear integral to Christian theism but these are propositions the theist does not necessary hold to be intrinsic to his faith. Theists need to expose these nonessential propositions for what they are.
- + But in making this point, the atheist begs the question by selecting propositions which the theist is not committed to.
- + The proposition that an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God exists is consistent with the proposition "Evil exists". The two statements are not immediately contradictory. And in order to defend the consistency of those two statements taken together, the theist simply needs to show that it is possible for them both to be true.

### **The argument that large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exists**

Gordon Kaufman is concerned with the varieties, subtleties and enormities of evil in human life.

"For atheism and polytheism there is no special problem of suffering, nor need there be for every kind of monotheism. The problem arises when monotheism is enriched with, or impoverished by, two assumptions: that God is omnipotent and that God is just. In fact, popular theism goes beyond merely asserting

God's justice and claims that God is "good," that he is morally perfect, that he hates suffering, that he loves man, and that he is infinitely merciful, far transcending all human mercy, love, and perfection. Once these assumptions are granted, the problem arises: why, then, is there all the suffering we know? And as long as these assumptions are granted, this question cannot be answered. For if these assumptions were true, it would follow that there could not be all of this suffering. Conversely: since it is a fact that there is all this suffering, it is plain that at least one of these assumptions must be false. Popular theism is refuted by the existence of so much suffering. The theism preached from thousands of pulpits and credited by millions of believers is disproved by Auschwitz and a billion lesser evils."

(Walter Kaufmann, *The Faith of a Heretic*, Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961)

- + Thinkers like Kaufman argue the fact that large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exists is inconsistent with the proposition that an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God exists.
- + They argue that God limits the evil in the world and that those amounts, kinds and distribution of evil have exceeded what he will allow.
  - + The theist need not necessarily agree to this assertion. The theist refuses to fix a limit on what evils God might allow. He argues that it is entirely possible that God could will extreme evils for a number of different reasons:
    1. to preserve human free will
    2. to allow the regular operation of nature
- + The troublesome assumption is that a loving and just God would allow only a certain amount of evil and no more.
  - + This is hard to justify.
    1. In principle how much evil is too much for God to allow.
    2. How could we ever ascertain that the present amount of evil in the world far exceeds the divinely set limit? There does not seem to be any clear limit placed upon evil by Christian theology.
    3. The freewill defence argues that evil, even large amounts, extreme kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil are the result of free agents exercising their freewill.

## The argument that gratuitous or pointless evil exists

It is quite often taken as a given in the debate on the problem of evil that an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God could not permit any gratuitous evil.

- + In discussions of evidential arguments from evil, any premise to the effect that God must have a morally sufficient reason for every evil he permits is usually conceded to be a self-evident and necessary truth.
- + Terrence Penelhum argues that the fact that pointless evil exists is inconsistent with the proposition that an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God exists.

+ He puts it quite plainly:

“It is logically inconsistent for a theist to admit the existence of a pointless evil.”

(Terence Penelhum, *Divine Goodness and the Problem of Evil*, Religious Studies 2; 1967, p.107)

- + Jame Cornman and Keith Lehrer assert that Christian theism is defeated by the evidence of the existence gratuitous or pointless evil.

Cornman and Lehrer:

“If you were all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful and you were going to create a universe in which there were sentient beings, beings that are happy and sad; enjoy pleasure, feel pain; express love, anger, pity, hatred, what kind of world would you create? ... Try to imagine what such a world would be like. Would it be like the one which actually does exist, this world we live in? Would you create a world such as this one if you had the power and know-how to create any logically possible world? If your answer is "no," as it seems to be, then you should begin to understand why the evil of suffering and pain in this world is such a problem for anyone who thinks God created this world. ... Given this world, then, it seems, we should conclude that it is improbable that it was created or sustained by anything we would call God. Thus, given this particular world, it seems that we should conclude that it is improbable that God, who, if he exists, created the world, exists. Consequently, the belief that God does not exist, rather than the belief that he exists, would seem to be justified by the evidence we find in this world.”

(James W. Cornman and Keith Lehrer, *Philosophical Problems and Arguments: An Introduction*, New York: Macmillan, 1970, pp. 340-41. Cited in Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, Baker Book House Company, 1982)

- + But atheists like Penelhum needs to prove that the theist must be committed to the belief that God would allow not pointless evil and to the belief that pointless evil exists.

- + In this argument one additional assumption is made.
- + It is believed that God is utterly fastidious in preventing all evils from being pointless.
- + This may be called the principle of meticulous provision: "An omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good God would prevent or eliminate the existence of pointless evil.
- + The theist is not necessarily committed to the principle of meticulous provision. He can argue that there must be good explanations for all evils no matter how severe. He might even venture some explanations (like attributing evil to Satan and his cohorts).
- + The theist can seek to show that the doctrine of pointless evil is not essential to theism and therefore unacceptable.
  - + Keith Yandell argues that the crucial question is whether it is certain, or at least more probable than not, that there is unjustified evil, whether natural or moral..."
 

(Keith Yandell, *Basic Issues in the Philosophy of Religion*, Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971, pp. 62-63. cited in Michael Peterson, *Evil and the Christian God*, Baker Book House Co. 1982)
  - + Michael Petersen argues that the theist could grant that pointless evil exists and then proceed to block the atheistic conclusion by refusing to grant its other premise which says that God allows no pointless evil. If the principle of meticulous provision is extricated from the theistic commitment then the theological premise does not hold. And if this is the case the atheistic argument cannot succeed.
  - + This is not an arbitrary move.
    - a) accepting the existence of pointless evil is more in keeping with what we experience in real life.
    - b) rejecting the principle of meticulous provision opens the way for a deeper and more profound apprehension of God.
- + By rejecting the principle of meticulous provision we can begin to show why there is a place for some pointless evil within the theistic world-view.
- + It can be argued that human freewill includes not simply the possibility of bringing about evil, but the possibility of bringing about evil which is utterly pointless.
- + The kind of freedom which is basic to the accomplishment of great and noble actions is also the kind of freedom which allows the most atrocious deeds.

- + Among the possibilities open to man is that of freely choosing to bring about utterly pointless evil. For God to prevent all pointless evils would be for him to endanger the freewill which allows for high human endeavour.
- + The very possibility of maximising good is also the terrifying possibility of maximising evil.

Plantinga affirms “Logically impossible states of affairs cannot be actual.”

It is not within God's power to make persons freely obey his will. The very notion itself is contradictory. He can make them obey his will, but they would not be doing so freely.

- + Very simply: if the idea of human freewill is taken to involve the possibility of bringing about pointless evil, then God cannot completely prevent pointless evil without severely diminishing freewill. This proposition entails a logical impossibility.
- + This does not imply that God always allow men to carry out their most destructive intentions. He sometimes overrides human choices to accomplish his own purposes. But God cannot always and systematically override human choices in order to prevent pointless evil and still be able to offer them freewill.
- + The atheist who agrees that God should allow men freewill and who also insists that God must not allow any pointless evil, is asking for the impossible.
- + At this point the atheist might argue that although God must allow some pointless evil to maintain freedom, he should at least limit the degree of that freedom.

We may respond in a two-fold manner:

1. The whole idea that God created freewill (and with it the possibility of pointless evil) seems to imply that there are no predetermined limits to that possibility.

This should reveal to us the utter seriousness of what it means for humans to have significant freewill and with it the awesome possibility of bringing about pointless evil.

But free will enables that noble acts to be accomplished. To remove the possibility of great evil is to remove the possibility of great good.

2. The issue regarding how much pointless evil God can allow is an impossible one to arbitrate. Rational and moral persons legitimately differ on this matter.

Some atheists argue that God could have created a world with free moral creatures but one which did not contain any evil.

- + God could have created a world like this since a world with free moral creatures and no evil is a superior than a world with free moral creatures and evil present.
- + Plantinga rebuts this argument by asserting that there are some worlds God cannot create.
  - + He argues that God cannot do what is the logically impossible. He argues that God cannot get rid of much of the evil and suffering in the world without also getting rid of morally significant free will.
- + Plantinga offers a morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil.
  - + He believes that God's creation of human people with moral free will is something of supreme worth. If God eliminated evil in this world he would necessarily eliminate the greater good of having humans with free will. The evil that God allows to exist is smaller in value compared to the greater good that would come with allowing for evil. The elimination of evil would necessarily mean the elimination the greater good as well.

( Plantinga, Alvin. 1974. *The Nature of Necessary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; and Plantinga, Alvin. 1977. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.)

### **Theistic Answers to Evil**

- + Seeing that evil is so prevalent and real, who is to say that God does not have a morally justifiable reason for permitting evil
- + This point rebuts the logical problem of evil (which hastily concludes that the very presence of evil must necessarily refute God's existence)
- + Just because we don't know God's reasons for permitting evil this does not prove that such reasons don't exist.
- + There is no basis for thinking we should know God's reasons for permitting evil. The atheist needs to provide logically compelling reasons for why theists need to know the reason for why God allows evil.
- + If we had the power only to help other people but we are not capable of hurting them, we would not have any deep or meaningful responsibility for one another.
- + If we do not suffer, we will never get to see the consequences of sin. We would have the impression that we are not separated from God and needing to be reconciled to Him
- + The atheist is in a fix when he raises the issue of the problem of evil. If evil exists but God

does not (since the fact of evil disproves God, as the atheists purport), then how is it that the atheist could come to possess an independent objective moral law (which judges evil to be necessarily bad)?

No matter how the atheist defines evil, he will have to say one of two things.

He will assert either that evil is:

- (1) the absence, lack or corruption of goodness or
- (2) a departure from the way things ought to be

The problem of (1) defining evil as the absence, lack or corruption of goodness is that this very notion presupposes a standard of goodness

The problem of (2) defining evil as a departure from the way things ought to be is that this definition presupposes that there is a *telos*, a design plan from which one must not depart. We need to alert the atheist to the fact that that whilst in one breath he denies objective morality, in another, he is introducing a moral "oughtness" to the argument.

Unwittingly, both objections smuggle the God of the Bible into the equation.

- For (1) God's character is the very standard of goodness.  
(2) And it is God who is the designer of the universe.

### **The Problem of Evil and Non-Christian Worldviews**

All worldviews must give an answer to the question of evil

- + All worldviews (atheism, Islam, Buddhism, Christianity) must account for the problem of evil. Every competing worldview will need to offer some kind of explanation for not only the existence, origin and fact of evil. Additionally each worldview must also provide not just a diagnosis but a solution.

### **Atheism and Evil**

- + Atheism must account for evil if for no other reason the reason that Christianity has one which it challenges and, indeed, challenges it.
- + Adherents of naturalism have no logical ground in believing in any objective good and therefore no ground too for believing in any objective evil.

- + In the light of naturalism, the only way to understand good and evil is to say that they are simply subjective preferences, that is all.
- + If they view good and evil as something relative, then, by default of their position on moral absolutes, they have unwittingly disqualified themselves from raising the question of evil in their debate with the theists.
- + When they point to the evil in the world to discredit the existence of God, they reveal the inherent inconsistency of their own position, for after all they hold to the belief that good and evil have no objective realities.
- + Just what is atheism's response to the question of evil remains to be heard.
- + Atheism seems to lack an explanatory power for this crucial issue of life. They appear to hide behind the excuse that evil need not be defined or explained
- + As for all those charges against theism in the face of evil, the burden of proof is on the atheist to show clearly, just exactly where the contradictions lie, if indeed there are any.
- + But so far no atheist has been able to do this.

### **Pantheism and Evil**

- + If, as the pantheist affirms, everything is ultimately one, a part of one unified non-dualistic whole, then, ontologically, good and evil have no true distinctions. This is experientially inexplicable as evil seem evidentially and existentially real.
- + Further the view that evil is an illusion cannot be meaningfully affirmed. As we have seen in our class on Eastern pantheism, if ultimately, everything is illusory, how may we know that the pantheist's assertion that everything is illusory is itself not illusory?

### **Christianity and Evil**

- + The only people who may meaningfully wrestle with the problem of evil are Christians.
- + They will have to resolve how a good God will allow for the existence of evil. They are the only ones who can talk about evil and show no inconsistencies because to them evil is neither relative nor illusory.

## Conclusion

C. Stephen Evans does not see that a full-fledged theodicy, either the free will theodicy or the soul-making theodicy, or even a combination of the two, is ultimately an adequate response to the problem of evil.

- + Finally, one may say, quite unashamedly, that no one has God's mind on the matter.
- + It would appear that it is not necessary to have a full-fledged theodicy to rebut the evidential problem of evil. We need to remember that the charge of the atheist is that in the face of evil, theism is self-contradictory. To rebut this particular charge, it is not necessary to know God's actual reasons for allowing evil. It is sufficient to affirm that the belief in the existence of God and the existence of evil are not two contradictory states of affairs.
- + We need only to be reminded again of the salient and unforgettable words of Plantinga:

“Why suppose that if God does have a good reason for permitting evil, the theist would be the first to know? Perhaps God has a good reason, but that reason is too complicated for us to understand. Or perhaps He has not revealed it for some other reason. The fact that the theist doesn't know why God permits evil is, perhaps, an interesting fact about the theist, but by itself shows little or nothing relevant to the rationality of belief in God. Much more is needed for the atheological argument even to get off the ground.”

## Closing words

We have highlighted the problem of evil but we often do so at the expense of the presence of goodness in the world. The existence of evil seems to militate against belief in an all-good, all-powerful God. But our many experiences of love and goodness in such a fallen world are hard to understand without pre-supposing the existence of a good, powerful God.

- + Harry Emerson Fosdick once wrote: “The mystery of evil is very difficult when we believe in a good God but the problem of goodness seems to us impossible when we do not.”

“Once, I also decided that I could not believe in the goodness of God in the face of the world's evil. But then, I discovered that I had run headlong into another and even more difficult problem: what to do about all the world's goodness – if there is no God? Sunsets and symphonies, mothers, music, the laughter of children, great books, great

art great science, great persons, victories of goodness over evil, the long hard-won ascent up from the Stone Age, and all the friendly spirits that are to other souls 'cups of strength in great agony.' How can we, without God, explain all that as the casual, accidental by-product of physical forces going at it blind? The mystery of evil is very great on the basis of a good God – but the mystery of goodness is impossible on the basis of no God.”

(H.E. Fosdick, *Living Under Tensions*, New York: Harper & Co., 1941; pp.214-15 cited by John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977, Revised, p.11)

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