

# The Evidential Argument from Evil

PHIL 101

Self, World, & God

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

- Logical problem of evil
- Classical theism
- God is omnipotent
- God is omniscient
- God is morally perfect
- Pain, suffering, & misery exist
- Inconsistent with God's existence?

## Recent Philosophical Developments

- Abandonment of logical problem of evil
- Evidential problem of evil
- Logic of good evidence
- Contemporary theodicies
- Inference to the Best Explanation
- Appeals to the limitations of the human cognitive condition

## Evidential Argument

- E<sub>1</sub>.** The world contains vast amounts of moral evil — human pain, suffering, and misery caused by the actions, choices, and oversights of other human agents engaging in (free) human actions.
- E<sub>2</sub>.** The world contains vast amounts of natural evil — human pain, suffering and misery caused by non-human natural occurrences like disease, genetic defects, and natural disasters.
- E<sub>3</sub>.** The world contains — and has contained for millions of years before the evolution of humans — vast amounts of animal pain.
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- T<sub>0</sub>.** The God of western theism does not exist — there is no omnipotent and morally perfect being who bears any responsibility for the pain and suffering in this world.

## Theodicies – Rival Explanations

- T<sub>1</sub>. Free will — The pain, suffering and misery we see is the result of freely chosen actions on the part of human (and perhaps angelic) agents. God can intercede in the choices of free agents only at the expense of turning genuine freedom into pseudo-freedom.**
- T<sub>2</sub>. Soul-making — The evil of this world is a necessary part of creating a challenging environment that allows for genuine spiritual growth. God desires eventual spiritual communion with fully formed human souls; the evils of this world are required for the production of these fully formed souls.**

## Additional Theodicies

- T<sub>3</sub>. Causal and epistemological regularity — Pain, suffering, and misery is the result of the world's operation under consistent and understandable causal laws. God could intercede, but this would require interfering with the causal regularity (this would be a kind of aesthetic flaw). More importantly, without causal regularity human agents are incapable of understanding, and to a limited extent, controlling their world. Thus, divine interference with the causal regularity of the world would implicate genuine free choice.**
- T<sub>4</sub>. Generic theodicy – God has a “morally sufficient reason” for allowing pain and suffering.**

## Theistic Rejoinders

- Ignore the problem
- Defend a theodicy, or combination of theodicies, as a better explanation
- Admit the problem, but insist that other relevant evidence points to the existence of God
- Utilize the “limitations of the human cognitive condition” strategy

## Limitations of the Human Cognitive Condition

- Hume’s statement
- Wykstra’s analogy
- Van Inwagen’s statement
- Are we in a position to rank the plausibility (the “goodness”) of the competing explanations?
- Is inference to the best explanation useful in theological contexts?

# My Take

- Forces a necessary philosophical and theological modesty
- Points to “friendly atheism”
- Inference to the best explanation has theological applications
- Atheism presents a genuine explanation of evil
- Atheism remains the best explanation