

CHRISTIANITY and ATHEISM

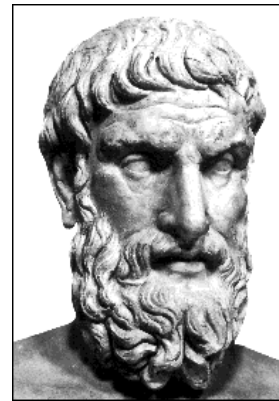
2. The Problem of Suffering and Evil

Introduction

Suffering and evil is certainly one of the most difficult problems for believers and unbelievers. Many atheists will offer this issue as the number one reason why they refuse to believe in God. There are also numerous stories of believers who have turned away from God because they cannot reconcile the problem of suffering and evil with a good and gracious God. One prominent example is Charles Templeton, one time cohort of Billy Graham. Templeton was a rising star in the arena of Christian evangelism. But all that was unfortunately reversed by the doubts this and other issues created in his mind. At one point these arguments even began to threaten Billy Graham. You can read more about this in *The Case for Faith* by Lee Strobel (p. 7ff).

The Development of This Issue

One of the first to struggle with this issue was the philosopher Epicurus (371-270 BC). He wrote: *Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, and does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how comes evil in the world?*



Since then many philosophers and theologians have struggled with this problem. The defense of the existence of God in an evil world is called *theodicy*.

C. S. Lewis has probably summarized the problem best in this way: *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 goodness, or power, or both.* (*The Question of God*, Armand M Nicholi).

Logical Response to the Problem of Suffering and Evil

1. The Classical Defense:
2. St. Augustine:
3. What the Atheist Offers:

Biblical Response to the Problem of Suffering and Evil

4. The Link Between Suffering and Evil and Sin

Genesis 3.16

Isaiah 24.5-6

Romans 8.20-22

5. Is God Indifferent to the Problem of Suffering and Evil?

Isaiah 53

2 Corinthians 5.21

Galatians 3.13.2005

Philippians 2.5-11

6. What Christianity Offers

Isaiah 58.6

John 13.14

John 13.34

Galatians 5.13

Galatians 6.2

1 Thessalonians 5.14

Argument # 1: Christianity and All Religion Is “Wish-Fulfillment”

2. The basic elements of the argument:

- A. Humanity invented the idea of God as a consolation and a distraction from the sorrow of the world.
- B. The idea of God grows out of the "fear / love" relationship with our fathers.

3. The logical fallacies of the argument:

- A. Marx's ideas have failed. The religion did not die when social structures were changed to provide for man's basic material needs.
- B. Freud's argument is a two-edged sword. On the one hand we love our fathers. On the other we hate them. Such feelings should produce either belief in God *or unbelief*. Therefore if Freud's analysis is correct why do we observe a universal need for *belief*?
- C. Freud's idea that religion is dangerous to health and well-being is fully discredited by many studies that have shown religion to be very helpful to the physical and psychological well-being of humans.
- D. Christians, in particular, do not confess a God that they would wish to have. He is not just a "father" figure. The religion is full of paradoxes that man despises such as the Trinity, justification by grace alone, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

4. Biblical responses to the argument:

Psalm 14.1 *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."*

Psalm 10.4 *The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts.*

Romans 1.28 And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting.

I think we can say that atheism is driven by a strong desire to avoid the reality of God. It is man's desire to be God, or, as in the case of Adam and Eve, "to be like God."