

Additional comments

• If you had the knowledge and power of a god, would you have created birth defects, disease, and natural disasters? If not, then you are nicer than the god you believe in. This god should be praying to you for moral advice, rather than the other way around.

• Would you take a syringe full of malaria and inject it into someone you love? Yet that's exactly what God does to people he claims to love, using a mosquito as a syringe.

• We humans spend a lot of time mopping up after God's mistakes. Some say that God works through us. But the reason we have to do "the Lord's work" is because "the Lord" isn't doing it himself. And if we're doing the work, shouldn't we take the credit?

• Yes, many religious people do kind acts of charity. But why? Too often the answer seems to fall into one of three categories, which turn out not to be altruistic at all:

1) To use the recipient of aid as a pawn to bribe the helper's way into heaven or avoid hell (or to achieve a higher reincarnation).

2) To use kindness to convert more people to the helper's religion, because religions cannot be sustained by evidence and thus need as many like-minded people as possible to prop them up and quash self-doubt.

3) To attempt to maintain the credibility of their religion by covering up the embarrassingly poor job done by their god, by claiming they are agents of God.

For those religious people who are kind for the sake of kindness, without reference to a god, that's exactly what secular humanism is.

Bible Quotes

"I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things." (Isaiah 45:7)

"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" (Lamentations 3:38)

"When disaster comes to a city, has the Lord not caused it?" (Amos 3:6)

Quran Quote

"Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak [Allah] from the evil of that which He created..." (Surah 113:1-2)

Atheist Quote

"I'm an atheist, and that's it. I believe there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for each other."

(actress Katharine Hepburn, interview in the *Ladies' Home Journal* magazine, October 1991, p. 215.)

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The Problem of Evil: The Top 15 Excuses Religious People Give for the Horrible Behavior of their God

By August Berkshire

If a god exists who is all-powerful and all-loving, then why is there evil in the world? For the sake of this argument, let's concede that the harm that humans do is a misuse of our free will, for which a god cannot be blamed. That still leaves us with genetic birth defects, genetic and acquired diseases, predators, and natural disasters.

These things seem like wanton cruelty on the part of this god. Without them, we could still be left to struggle with good and evil in terms of moral dilemmas and human actions, and be judged accordingly.

Here are "The Top 15 Excuses" religious people give in an attempt to explain away the horrible behavior of the all-powerful, all-loving god they believe exists.

(1) Unknown greater good.

God must commit or allow some evil to accomplish an unknown greater good.

But doesn't that limit God's knowledge and power? Doesn't that say that God couldn't think of a better way to accomplish his goals other than by torturing innocent people? Until this "greater good" is revealed to us, we are not obliged to accept this argument.

(2) God had to create Earth this way.

Natural disasters and diseases are an unfortunate but unavoidable byproduct of life-sustaining forces. A planet without natural disasters and diseases could not operate in a way that would support human life.

But doesn't that limit God's knowledge and power? Since God was creating humans from scratch, couldn't he create us so that we could survive on a disaster-free and disease-free planet?

(3) Blame the ancestors and blame the victim.

All evil that happens to us is our fault, either directly because of something we did, or indirectly because of our ancestors, such as “Adam and Eve.”

This is known as “blaming the victim.” Typically, a victim of abuse believes that the more he or she is punished, the more he or she is loved.

But what did an innocent baby ever do to deserve a birth defect? And what kind of justice punishes children for the sins of their long-dead ancestors?

Also, how does this explain why animals suffer? Did they “sin” too?

For those of you who believe it is okay to punish people for the sins of their ancestors, why aren't you in prison right now? Each of us has some ancestor who was a murderer. Human justice is obviously superior to God's justice.

(4) The devil did it.

God isn't really responsible for evil in the world, a devil is.

But who created this devil? And isn't God supposed to be all-powerful? Can't he stop this devil?

(5) God is testing our faith.

Evil is God's way of testing our faith, like Job was tested in the Old Testament.

If this is true, what sense does it make to impose a “loyalty test” on an infant who dies from disease or natural disaster?

(6) Evil is really God's love.

What we perceive as “evil” is really an example of “God's love.”

However, this is a definition of love that we cannot comprehend because it is exactly the opposite of what we define love to be. Therefore, we can't know that “God's love” is really love – we have to take someone's unconvincing word for it.

If disease is an example of God's love, shouldn't we all try to get as sick as possible? Are doctors violating “God's will” when they try to cure disease?

(7) Evil is necessary for free will.

Without evil we would have no free will and we would be “robots.”

But what do birth defects, disease, and natural disasters have to do with free will? Do sick people have more free will than healthy people?

God has supposedly created a heaven where there are no diseases or disasters. Are the people in heaven robots?

(8) Evil doesn't last very long.

Any misery that occurs to us on Earth is brief compared to an eternity in a wonderful heaven.

Any amount of evil is still evil and is contrary to the definition of “all-loving.”

(9) Evil is needed to appreciate the good.

Without the contrast of evil we wouldn't appreciate what's good.

But couldn't God just give us an appreciation of what's good? Why should we have to be tortured to appreciate the good?

(10) Evil is necessary for compassion.

We are born as self-centered people and evil is necessary for us to learn compassion.

But if God wanted us to be compassionate, why didn't he just make us that way? Why this sadistic scheme of torturing innocent babies to instill compassion in their parents? What about suffering and death that occurs where there are no witnesses?

(11) Suffering builds character.

Humans are imperfect/fallen/sinful beings and suffering helps build character.

While building character may sometimes require effort – such as helping others, studying, and sportsmanship – none of these things tend to make us suffer.

And what kind of character is a baby supposed to be developing, who is born with a birth defect so severe that she will only live a few days?

(12) The Creator is always justified.

God is morally justified in tormenting people because he created them.

But this confuses the power to torture someone with the right to torture someone.

Do the parents who create a child have a right to torture that child? Does might make right?

(13) Without evil, life would be boring.

Humans like a sense of adventure and life wouldn't be as interesting without the challenge of evil.

There is a difference between a welcome challenge and an unwelcome challenge.

People who enjoy a sense of adventure are free to choose which risks they wish to take. If a reporter deliberately approaches a hurricane, he has only himself or herself to blame for any negative consequences. But what about the people in the path of the hurricane who don't wish to experience it?

(14) Evil brings us closer to God.

Evil is justified because suffering makes us turn to God for comfort.

But doesn't that limit God's knowledge and power? Couldn't he think of a better way to entice us without torturing us first? How much gratitude, for example, should we show to a doctor for curing us from a disease he inflicted upon us in the first place?

(15) Evil is necessary to prove God's existence.

The existence of evil proves the existence of God because without a God-given sense of good and bad we would not be able to identify some things as evil in the first place.

But can't an all-powerful and all-loving god come up with a better way to prove his existence other than by torturing us? Why not just reveal himself?

Conclusion

God has run out of excuses. He is either incompetent, indifferent, or cruel. Another way to reconcile the facts is to conclude that an all-powerful, all-loving god doesn't exist.