

# PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

## The Problem of Evil

Evil in the form of suffering, whether intentional or not, is seen in the world all around us. Many consider the existence of evil to be at odds with the existence of God.

The Problem of Evil is an argument often used by atheists in an attempt to prove that the Christian God doesn't exist. **David Hume**, a notable atheist philosopher, described it as 'the rock of atheism'. It presents the following argument:

If God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful) then he would be able to remove evil from the world, if God is **benevolent** (all-loving) then he would want to remove evil from the world. Yet, evil exists in the form of **natural and moral evil**. Therefore, the Christian God does not exist. Atheists also point to the **EXTENT** of evil that is found in the world and also evidence of **PURPOSELESS** evil and suffering where nothing is learnt or gained.

Christians have responded to the problem in a number of ways;

1. Evil is the result of human **FREE WILL**. It is important for humans to have free will so that their actions can be judged and good actions can be rewarded after death.
2. Evil and suffering can give **GOOD EFFECTS** on people e.g. can allow them to develop good qualities like **compassion**, bravery and loyalty.
3. The **DEVIL** is responsible for evil as he tempts humans into wrong actions, as seen in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis.

## Religious Experience

Some Christians claim to have experienced God directly. To those who have had a religious experience, this is **the greatest proof that God exists**. Religious experiences can come in many different forms;

**Mystical:** A oneness and union with the divine

**Numinous:** Feelings of inner-peace, love and insignificance

**Conversion:** Dramatic change in a person's life

**Nature:** A sense of awe and power behind nature

**Vision:** Seeing a direct image of God or a divine representative

**Corporate:** A group of people share the same experience (e.g. the Toronto Blessing)

This may be a persuasive argument for those who have had a religious experience, but such a personal experience is **unlikely to convince an atheist**. Many atheists argue these experiences have alternative explanations.



## The Design Argument

Some Christians believe that it is possible to prove the existence of God by **observing the nature of the world we live in**. The world shows signs of **ORDER** and things working to achieve a **PURPOSE**. This, they believe, is evidence of **DESIGN**. In other words, God is the DESIGNER of an ordered and purposeful world.

**William Paley** supported this argument by way of **ANALOGY**. He drew a similarity between the world and an old-fashioned pocket watch. He argued that if you went for a walk and stumbled across a pocket watch in a field you would know that;

- a) The watch could not have appeared by itself
- b) It has been made for the purpose of telling the time
- c) A skilful watchmaker must have designed it



Similarly he believed that:

- d) **The world shows evidence of order and purpose** e.g. gravity, reproduction of plants, rotation of the planets
- d) Therefore the world must be designed
- e) **God must have designed the world**

Paley believed that lots of nature demonstrates **ORDER** and **PURPOSE** and that this is **EVIDENCE** of design in the world.

**Problem:** If the world is designed by an omnipotent God, then why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

## Keywords

**Atheist:** someone who has no belief in God or gods

**Natural Evil:** evil and suffering caused by natural forces

**Moral Evil:** evil and suffering caused by human action

**Analogy:** drawing a similarity between two things to make one or both things easier to understand

**Religious Experience:** an encounter with the divine that leaves the person with knowledge of God's existence

**Free Will:** the ability to make a choice between good and evil

# Can we prove God exists?

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## The Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil is an argument often used by atheists to prove that God doesn't exist.

The argument is:

1. If God is **omnipotent** (all-powerful) then he would be able to remove evil from the world because he is stronger than evil.
2. If God is **benevolent** (all-loving) then he would want to remove evil because he doesn't anyone to suffer.
3. Yet, evil still exists in the world therefore, God cannot not exist.

Christians have responded to the problem in a number of ways;

1. Evil is the result of human **FREE WILL**. It is important for humans to have free will so that their actions can be judged by God.
2. Evil and suffering can gave **GOOD EFFECTS** on people e.g it can make you more understanding towards other
3. The **DEVIL** is responsible for evil as he tempts humans into wrong actions, as seen in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis.

## Religious Experience

Some Christians believe they have experienced God. To those who have had a religious experience, this is **the greatest proof that God exists**.

Religious experiences can come in many different forms;

**Numinous**: Feelings of peaceful

**Conversion**: Amazing change in a person's life

**Vision**: seeing a direct image of God

**Corporate**: A group of people have the same experience (e.g. the Toronto Blessing)



Although some people may believe this is evidence that God exists, atheists do not believed that this is 'evidence'. The argue that these experiences can be explained using science.

## The Design Argument

Some Christians believe that it is possible to prove the existence of God by **looking at the world we live in**. The world shows signs of ORDER and PURPOSE and therefore it much have been DESIGNED (made) this way by God.

**William Paley** supported this argument using an ANALOGY about a pocket watch. He argued that if you went for a walk and stumbled across a pocket watch in a field you would know that;

- a) The watch **could not** have appeared by itself
  - b) It has been made for the **purpose** of telling the time
  - c) A skilful watchmaker must have designed it
- This pocket clock is similar to the world:
- d) **The world shows evidence of order and purpose** e.g. gravity,
  - d) Therefore the world must be designed
  - e) **God must have designed the world**



**Problem**: If the world is designed by an omnipotent God, then why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?

## Keywords

**Atheist**: someone who does not believe in God

**Natural Evil**: evil caused by nature e.g. earthquakes

**Moral Evil**: evil caused by humans e.g. murder

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3. Yet, evil still exists in the world therefore, God does not exist.

Some Christians respond by saying God gave humans FREE WILL and this is why most suffering happens.



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