

PHIL 1305

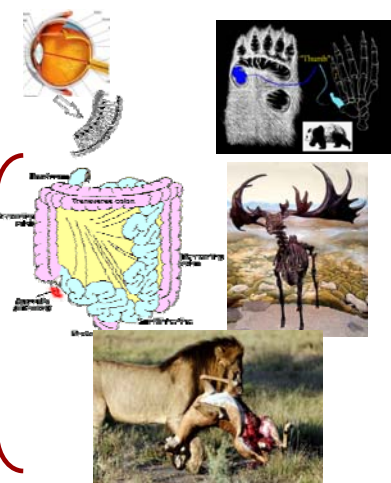
The Problem of Evil

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Problem of poor design... Problem of “evil”

Would an intelligent designer create this?

Would a benevolent designer allow this?



The Problem of Evil

A lot of bad stuff happens in the world: suffering, diseases, natural disasters, accidents, and human atrocities.

Shouldn't an all-powerful, benevolent God be doing a better job at keeping all this bad stuff from happening?



Argument Types (summary)



Deductive: guarantee that if the premises are true, then the conclusion must be true.



Abductive: Use the surprise principle to decide which hypothesis is probably the best explanation for a given observation.



Inductive: Conclude that what's true of things within a sample will also probably be true of things outside that sample.

An Abductive Argument

O. Innocent children die in earthquakes;
predators rip prey limb-from-limb;
appendicitis; malaria; etc...

H1. An All-PKG God is watching over our world.

H2. We evolved in a godless world.

O is exactly what you'd expect.

O would be really surprising!!!

So, we probably evolved in a godless world.

A Deductive Argument

P1. Unnecessary
suffering occurs.

P2. An All-PKG God would
prevent unnecessary suffering.



C. So there is no All-PKG God.

Note: there's no "probably" here.

Deductive arguments are usually harder to make work than abductive ones (c.f., Descartes vs Paley).

We'll consider this first – if it fails, then the atheist can go abductive.

Why Believe Premise 2?

2a. An All-Knowing God would recognize ways to avoid unnecessary suffering.

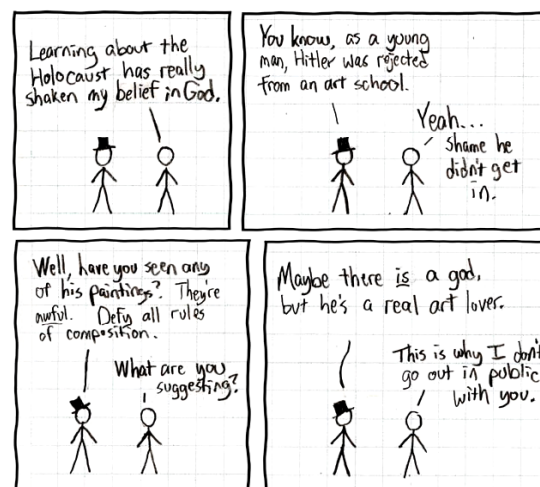
2b. An All-Powerful God could enact any plan it could recognize.

2c. An All-Benevolent God would prevent unnecessary suffering if it could.

P2. So, an All-PKG God would prevent unnecessary suffering.



What if God weren't All-PKG?



Problem of Evil (deductive version)

P1. Unnecessary suffering occurs.

P2. An All-PKG God would prevent unnecessary suffering.

C. So there is no All-PKG God.



Is there really unnecessary suffering?

Or is every bit of suffering somehow necessary for a greater good?

Is all actual suffering necessary?

We need some suffering to appreciate happiness.

- But do we need this much suffering?

Some suffering helps to build character.

- But couldn't an All-PKG God find a more humane way to build character?

Some suffering stems from free human choices

- Animals suffer independently of our choices.
- Bystanders should still rescue burning babies, even if someone else freely started the fire – shouldn't a benevolent God help too?
- Loving parents let their children freely explore, but not with lethal weapons they'll abuse.

P1. Unnecessary suffering occurs.

All the atheist really needs is one convincing case of suffering that God could have prevented without cost, but didn't – it doesn't matter whether lots of other suffering might be justified.



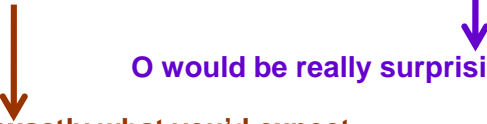
"Oh, I know He works in mysterious ways, but if I worked that mysteriously I'd get fired."

Problem of Evil (abductive version)

O. Innocent children die in earthquakes;
predators rip prey limb-from-limb;
appendicitis; malaria; etc...

H1. An All-PKG God is watching over our world.

H2. We evolved in a godless world.


O would be really surprising!!!
O is exactly what you'd expect.

So, we probably evolved in a godless world.

Activity: Present both sides of the following:

Group #1: Is all suffering justified by good effects?

Avoid dependence, maintain moral urgency, build virtuous character, deflate our egos, provide contrast (Johnson, pg 337-8)

Group #2: Is suffering a regrettable side-effect?

Of free will (pg 336-7), of the laws of nature (338), or of God's lack of omnipotence (339)?

Group #3: Should we just have faith?

Unspecified good results (pg 336), "higher morality" (339), faith (339).

Cases to think about:

Do any of the following cases involve suffering that an All-PKG God should have prevented?

1. The 9/11 attacks
2. Hitler's conception
3. A tornado painfully killing a family.
4. Lions vs. Gazelles
5. An innocent child dying alone.