

**Discussion Notes (Handout 4)**  
**Series: The Problem of Evil**

Jack Crabtree • Reformation Fellowship, May-June 2012

**PART 4: IS GOD GOOD?**

**A. What does the argument from evil prove?**

1. The argument from evil is inconclusive.  
*Because we do not have a standpoint from which we can know enough to know whether the evil and suffering in the world is meaningful...*
  - a. The “problem of evil” does not rationally compel one to conclude that God is not good.
  - b. The “problem of evil” does not allow one to conclude—on the basis of the whole of reality that God has created— that God is clearly and unmistakably perfect and pure is his goodness.
2. The “problem of evil” dramatizes the fact that both of the following cannot be true:
  - a. God is good.
  - b. Reality is overly evil. (overly evil = contains unnecessary or excessive evil)
  - c. Either God is not good; or reality is NOT overly evil. It is not possible for both assertions to be true.
    - i. *If the creator God is good, then reality is not overly evil.*
    - ii. *If reality is overly evil, then God is not good.*

**B. The rational status of the argument from evil.**

1. The person who rejects biblical divine determinism ASSUMES that reality is overly evil and infers from that fact that God is NOT good.
  - a. A formal statement of “the argument from evil”:
    - i. *If God is good, then reality cannot be overly evil.*
    - ii. *Reality is overly evil.*
    - iii. *Therefore, God is NOT good.*
2. But the person who rejects the argument from evil ASSUMES that God is good and then infers from that fact that reality is not overly evil.
  - a. A formal statement of “the argument from divine goodness”:
    - i. *If God is good, then reality cannot be overly evil.*
    - ii. *God is good. (I know that, not from the goodness of reality, but independently of that.)*
    - iii. *Therefore, reality is NOT overly evil.*

ARGUMENT FROM EVIL	ARGUMENT FROM DIVINE GOODNESS
Premise 1: If God is good, then reality cannot be overly evil.	Premise 1: If God is good, then reality cannot be overly evil.
<b>Premise 2a: Reality is overly evil.</b>	<b>Premise 2b: God is good.</b>
Conclusion: God is not good.	Conclusion: Reality is not overly evil.

3. THEREFORE, it all comes down to this: One must decide what he is justified in ASSUMING, either <1> that reality is overly evil or <2> that God is good.
- The “problem of evil” does not prove one of these assumptions over the other one; it does not dictate which of these assertions we should embrace.

**C. Do reason and experience give us any reason to pick one assumption over the other?**

- To embrace assertion <1> (reality is overly evil) is rationally problematic.
  - We do not have a standpoint from which to presume to know whether the evil and suffering within reality is meaningful.
  - Our perception of the evil and suffering in the world is skewed by our imagination, our empathy, our natural impulses, and our instincts.
- We do have at least four reasons to embrace assertion <2> (God is good).
  - Ordinary, everyday experience
  - Personal experience.
  - God’s self-revelation as recorded in the Scriptures.
  - Jesus, God’s translation of himself into a readily understandable medium.

**D. The moral nature of ordinary, everyday experience.**

- Occurrences of evil and suffering strike us as horrible and tragic because they strike us as a violation of the fundamental nature of reality. We have a striking sense that they “ought not be.”
  - Our assessment of the fundamental nature of reality comes from our overall tacit assessment of our everyday, ordinary experience.
  - Our experience-based expectations are these: we expect to be protected, fed, cared for, etc.
    - Jesus appeals to just this tacit assessment of reality in Matthew 6:25-34.*
      - Most of God’s creatures, most of the time, are cared for.
      - Any exception to the above is part of God’s providential knowledge and purpose.
    - The benevolence of ordinary experience is so “normal” that we ignore it, don’t notice it, and take it for granted. The benevolence is so normal that it is invisible to us. We see and “count” the suffering and evil we encounter. We don’t even “see” the goodness, blessing, and benevolence that constitute everyday experience.*

- (A) Consider how truly exceptional tragedy and extreme suffering are!
    - (1) We are shocked when tragedy happens. Why?
    - (2) Thought experiment: If evil and suffering were as likely to happen as good, would we be shocked by evil and suffering?
    - (3) How many total hours of my existence am I basically well and provided for? How many total hours of my existence am I not?
  - (B) If we were to give God the credit that is due him for every little gift and blessing, the “score” isn’t even close.
2. The “argument from evil” ultimately depends for its power on painting God as a moral monster (Ivan Karamazov).
- a. While everyday experience cannot prove the perfect goodness of God, it certainly refutes the moral monster picture of God.

**E. Personal experience with suffering.**

- 1. Personal experience with suffering leads me to conclude that all the suffering I have and will experience is meaningful, purposive, and productive.
- 2. If I have personal experience with suffering as meaningful and “good,” it follows that I cannot know that the suffering of others in the world is evidence of an absurd and meaningless reality.
- 3. The suffering and evil in the world do not provide incontrovertible evidence against the fundamental goodness of reality.

**F. Biblical revelation about the moral character of God.**

- 1. Authoritative teaching of God’s goodness.
- 2. Apart from biblical authority, the history of God’s revelation of himself.
  - a. The moral character of God the Transcendent is unknowable: he creates good, he creates evil.
  - b. The moral character of God can only be seen as it is revealed in the roles he plays within history and reality: Law-giver, judge, God of Israel, etc.

**G. The revelation of the moral character of God in Jesus.**

- 1. Jesus is the most accessible and clearest translation of the moral character of God.
  - a. The eyewitness testimony with regard to Jesus is that Jesus is utterly good.
  - b. The action of Jesus on behalf of all mankind is the most elegant and dramatic statement of the love (and, therefore, of the goodness) of God.