

Welcome to Ratio Christi

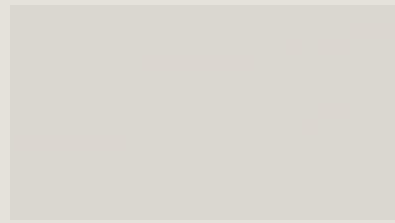


at Texas A&M



THINK
THEISM

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Think Theism lectures are supported by Ratio Christi @ Texas A&M, but the opinions represented herein do not necessarily reflect the beliefs or values of Ratio Christi. This content is presented to encourage discussion and critical thought about challenging questions.



RATIO
CHRISTI

The background features a dark space filled with small white stars. A large, glowing yellow arc is positioned in the upper half of the frame. At the bottom, there is a purple wireframe landscape consisting of jagged, interconnected lines that resemble a mountain range or a complex terrain. The text is centered within the yellow arc.

Does evil prove that God does not exist?

The Problem of Evil

	General Theism	Christian Specific
Positive (i.e. making the case)	Reasons why God exists	Reasons why Christianity is true
Defensive (i.e. responding to objections)	Responses to arguments for atheism	Responses to arguments against Christianity

	General Theism	Christian Specific
Positive (i.e. making the case)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguments for God's Existence • Cosmological • Teleological • Moral Argument • Ontological Argument 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Testament Textual Transmission • Historical Argument for the Resurrection • Reliability of the Bible • Uniqueness of Jesus • Undesigned Coincidences
Defensive (i.e. responding to objections)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem of Evil • Divine Hiddenness • Incoherence of theism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science vs Faith (e.g. Evolution) • Historical Errors in the Bible • Scientific Errors in the Bible • Contradictions in the Bible • Moral Objections to Biblical Stories • Religious Pluralism vs Particularism • Problem of Hell

The Structure of Classical Apologetics



Roadmap

1

Development of the Problem

Charting the development and varied formulations of the Problem of Evil.

2

The Deductive Argument

Is there a contradiction in the coexistence of God and Evil or Suffering?

3

The Probabilistic Argument

Is the existence of Evil good evidence for atheism?



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Premise #1 At least some objective moral facts exist.

God and evil cannot possibly coexist.
That would amount to a contradiction.

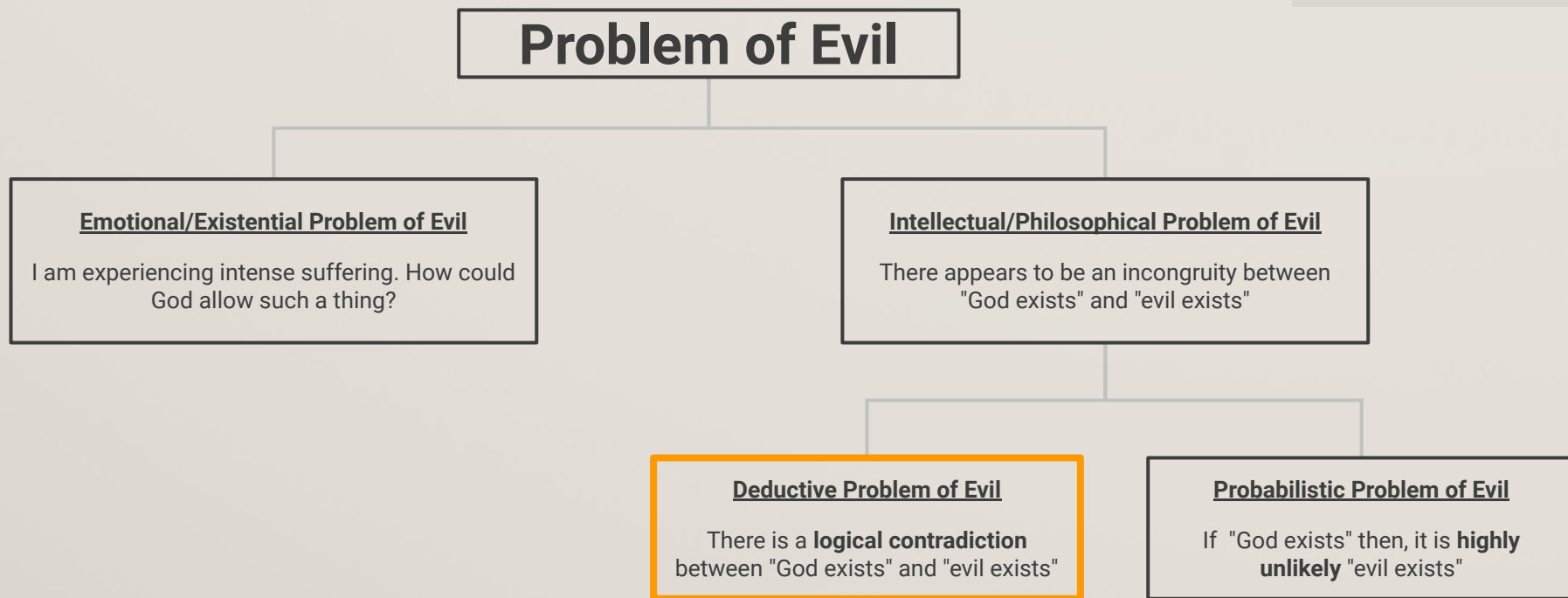
Alvin the Atheist

I am sorry you are experiencing what
evil in your life you are facing right
now, but if you have faith in Christ then
he will be your comfort and aid.

Carol the Christian



Important Distinctions



Premise #1 At least some objective moral facts exist.

God and evil cannot possibly coexist.
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Alvin the Atheist

God only punishes the wicked and so if
you are experiencing evil then you
aren't trusting in and following God.
Otherwise you would be prospering.

Carol the Christian

Premise #1 At least some objective moral facts exist.

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Alvin the Atheist

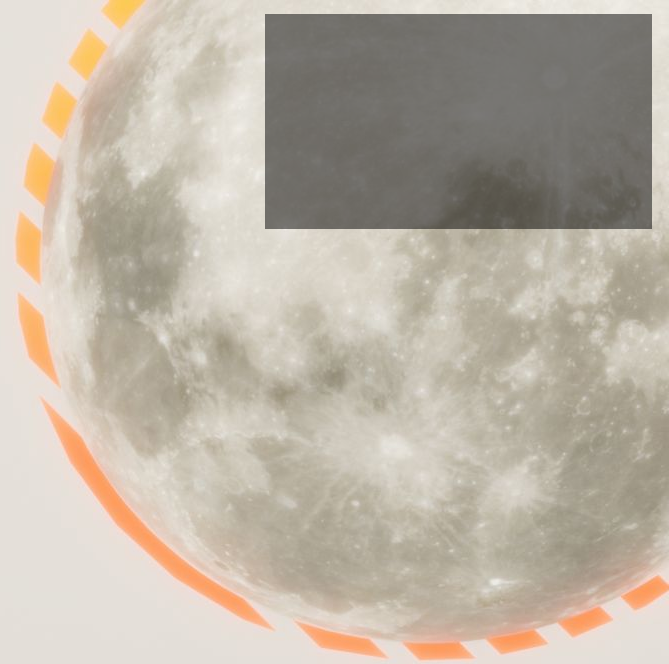
Or does it? The great thinker known as Samuel the Humongous has evaluated that claim and found it lacking for the following reasons ...

Carol the Christian

Defense versus a Theodicy

A Defense is simply concerned with the argument itself - the logical structure, the premises, and whether or not there is a contradiction.

A Theodicy is tasked with explaining how things actually are and is a more ambitious project overall with greater constraints.

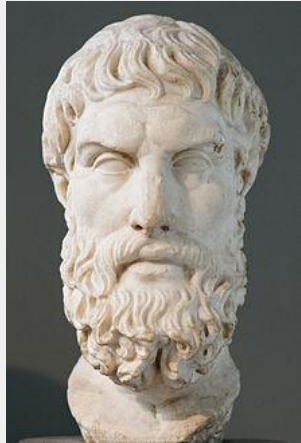


History of the Problem

From Antiquity to Modern Day:



Epicurus (341-270 BCE) - None of his extant writings actually include any version of the Problem of Evil. His writings indicate that he was a deist of sorts, believing that the gods were too good and therefore incapable of interacting with this world.



(Snyder, McBrayer 2014)

David Hume (1711-1776 CE)

Hume “quoting” Epicurus (341-270 BCE), famously saying:

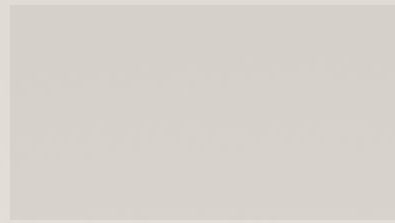
"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?

Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing?

Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing?

Then from whence comes evil?"



The Simple Syllogism



1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
2. Evil exists.
3. Therefore, God doesn't exist.

This version clearly fails to draw out the logical contradiction.



The Simple Syllogism

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
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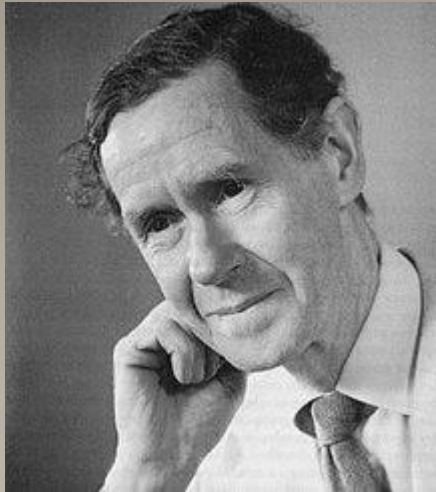
Are these
necessarily
true?



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J.L. Mackie

Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another. (1955)



The Pivotal Moment

In 2011, Alvin Plantinga was interviewed on the local news about AC troubles he was having. After and due to this appearance, he rose to prominence in the realm of philosophy and was widely regarded as an expert in the problem of suffering due to the aforementioned AC troubles.

Insert Warranty and Proper Belief joke



God, Freedom, and Evil

Alvin Plantinga

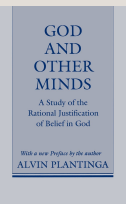
Resource #1

God, Freedom, and Evil

(1989), Alvin Plantinga

In his discussion of natural theology (arguments to prove the existence of God) and natural atheology (arguments for the falsehood of theistic belief) Plantinga focuses on two of the traditional arguments: the ontological argument as an example of natural theology, and the problem of evil as the most important representative of natural atheology. Accessible to serious general readers.

Dig deeper with...



God and Other Minds

(1967), Alvin Plantinga

G&OM re-kindled philosophical debate on the existence of God in Anglo-American philosophical circles by arguing that belief in God was like belief in other minds: although neither could be demonstrated conclusively against a determined sceptic both were fundamentally rational. This contains Plantinga's first version of the Free Will Defense.



The Nature of Necessity

(1979), Alvin Plantinga

An exploration and defense of the notion of modality de re, the idea that objects have both essential and accidental properties. Plantinga develops his argument by means of the notion of possible worlds and ranges over such key problems as the nature of essence, transworld identity, negative existential propositions, and the existence of unactual objects in other possible worlds. He also applies his logical theories to the elucidation of two problems in the philosophy of religion: the problem of evil and the ontological argument.

Roadmap

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Development of the Problem

Charting the development and especially the more recent development of the Problem of Evil

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The Deductive Argument

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The General Structure

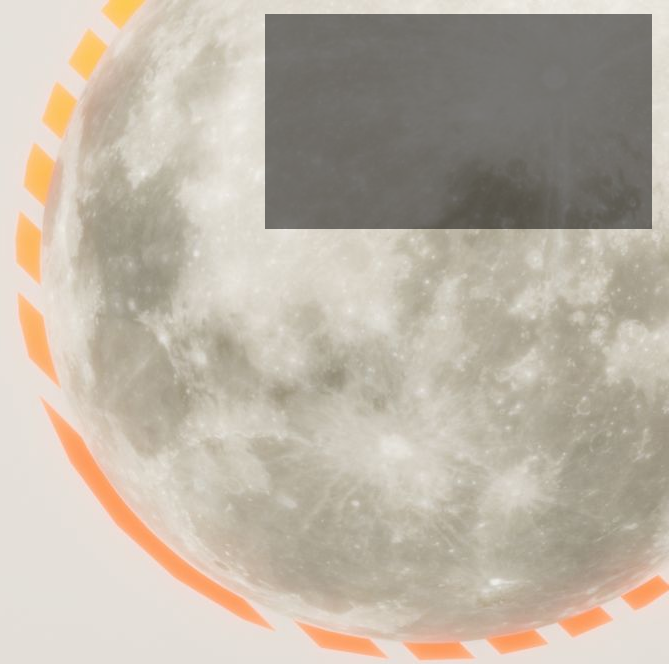
The Deductive Problem of Evil can be reduced to this simplest form:



Epistemic facts have to do with our belief formation and our evidence, reasons, and justification for knowledge. We follow epistemic norms in theorizing about knowledge and also in everyday evaluations of people's actions and reasoning. In other words, epistemic facts are prescriptive, binding, and intrinsically motivating, much like moral facts. Hence, the normative web.

The Reality of Evil and Suffering

1. Not hugely disputed (Mary Baker Eddy is the notable exception), but a Moral Nihilist cannot so much buy into the existence of evil.
2. Defining evil may be relevant. A rather intuitive understanding of evil, popular amongst Christian thinkers, is as a negative existence rather than a positive existence.
3. Certainly no Christian would deny there is such a thing as evil or God, but can they really hold both at once?



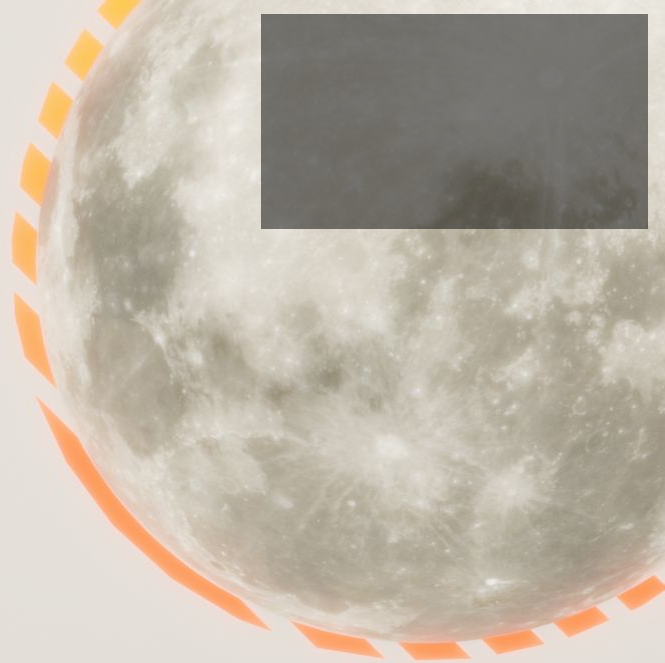
The Nature of God

- The most common attributes brought up in Problem of Evil discussions are the three **omni-**qualities

God is omnipotent

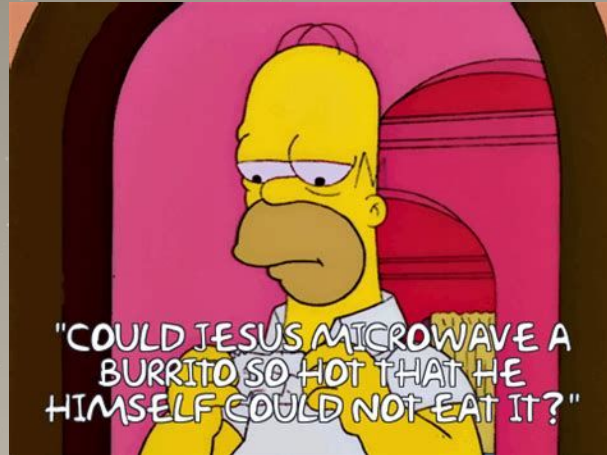
God is omniscient

God is omnibenevolent



A Clarification on Omnipotence

God can do anything **logically possible**. Questions like, “can God microwave a burrito so hot that he can’t eat it?” The answer is usually pretty simple and uniform amongst Theists.



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Don't ignore me!!!



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A Clarification on Omnipotence

God can do anything logically possible. Questions like, “can God microwave a burrito so hot that he can’t eat it?” The answer is usually pretty simple and uniform amongst Theists.



REALLY?!?



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The Nature of God

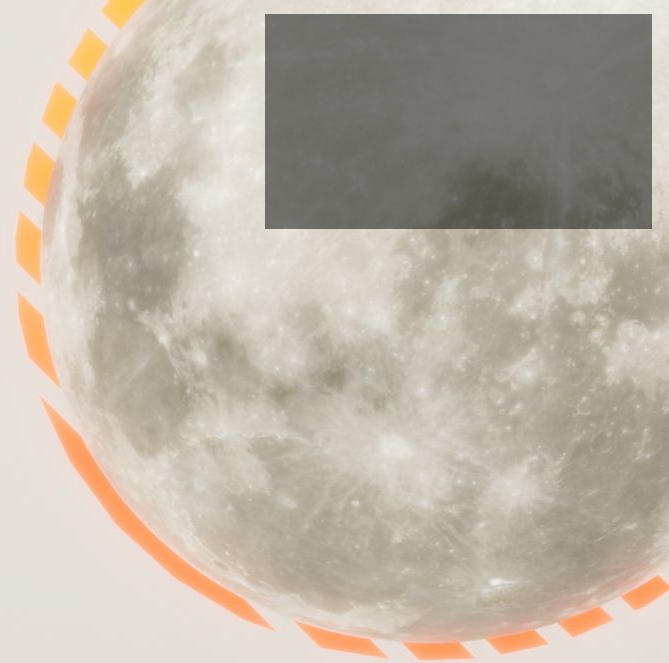
- The most common attributes brought up in Problem of Evil discussions are the three (or four or five or six) **omni-** qualities

God is omnipotent

God is omniscient

God is omnibenevolent

- Some additional premise that supplies the contradiction.



The Nature of God

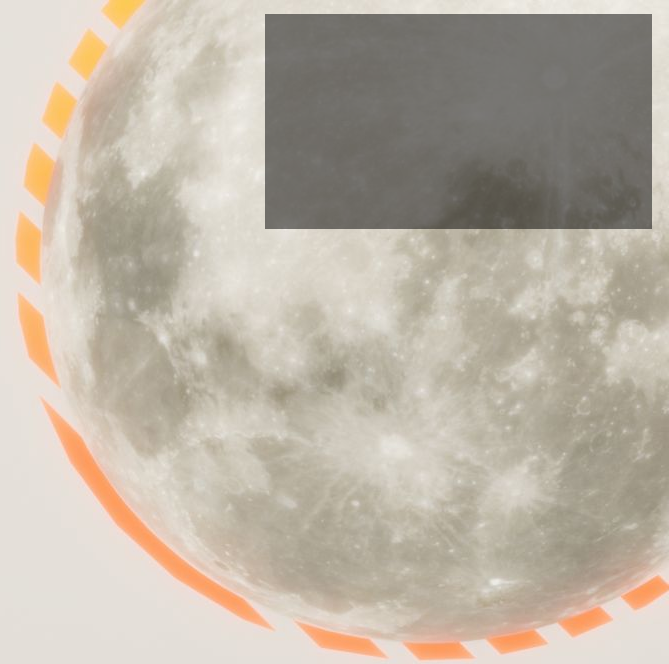
- The most common attributes brought up in Problem of Evil discussions are the three (or four or five or six) **omni-** qualities

God is omnipotent

God is omniscient

God is omnibenevolent

- If God exists, he would want to create a world with no evil and he would be able create any world he wants.



A Logical Defense

To prove a contradiction between P1 and P2, there must be a third premise (P3) that is either (i) necessarily true or (ii) necessarily entailed by P1.

$P1 \rightarrow P3$

$P2 \rightarrow \sim P3$

$P1 \vee P2$

One such premise is "If God is omnipotent, then he can create any world he wants". But, the FWD says this is neither necessarily true, nor necessarily implied by omnipotence. For example, if God creates a world of free creatures, it's possible that some of them choose evil against God's wishes. For God to force them to not choose evil would make them not free. So, it's possible God desires a world of free creatures that always choose good, but whether such a world is in fact able to be created by God is a contingent fact. In other words, the FWD demonstrates the very premise the atheist is employing is an inscrutable contingent fact and thus cannot be used in a logical proof.



A Logical Defense

To prove a **contradiction** between P1 and P2, there must be a third premise (P3) that is either (i) necessarily true or (ii) necessarily entailed by P1.

$P1 \rightarrow P3$

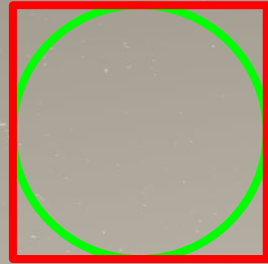
$P2 \rightarrow \sim P3$

$P1 \vee P2$



A Logical Defense

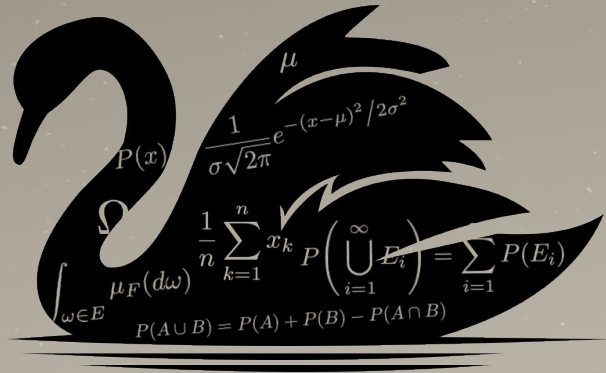
1. All squares must have four sides.
2. X is a circle.
3. Therefore, it is impossible for X to be a square.



"X is a circle and X is a square" is logically contradictory, i.e., X's being a circle rules out X's being a square.

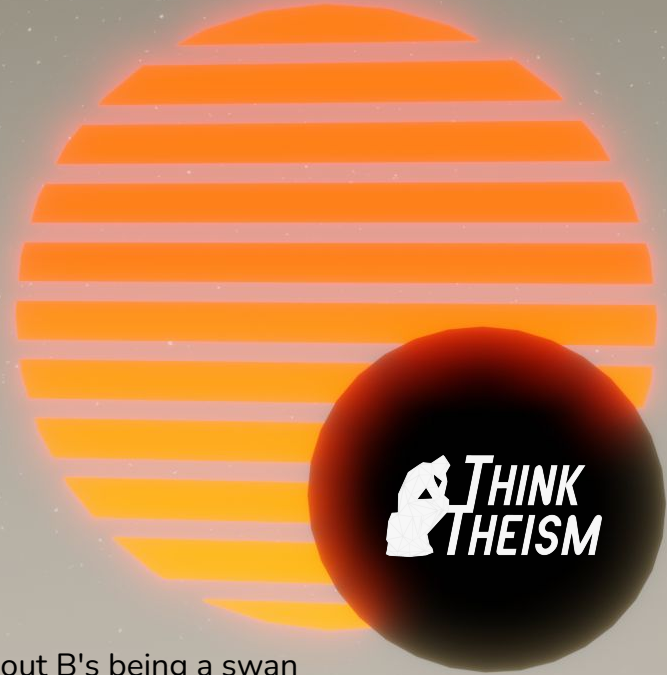
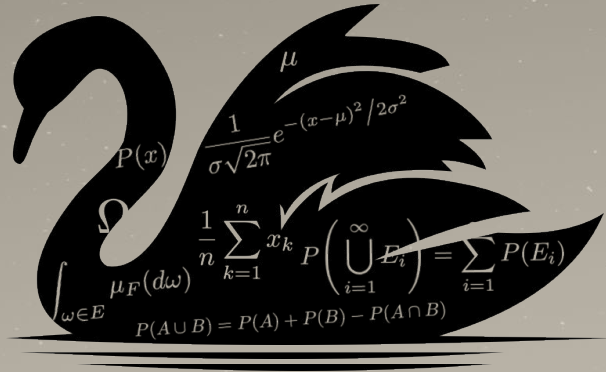
A Logical Defense

1. All swans must be white.
2. Necessarily, if a bird is a swan, then it is white.
3. B is a black bird.
4. Therefore, it is impossible for B to be a swan.



A Logical Defense

- ~~1. All swans must be white.~~
- 1'. Most swans are white birds.
2. It is possible some swans are black.
3. B is a black bird.
4. Therefore, it is possible B is a swan.



"B is a swan and B is black" is logically compatible, i.e., B's being black does not rule out B's being a swan

A Logical Defense

1. Mo
 - a. Necessarily, if a bird is a swan, then it is white.
2. B is a black bird.
3. Therefore, it is impossible for B to be a swan.
4. But, it is possible for swans to be black.
5. Therefore it is possible for B to be a swan
6. Most swans are white.
7. Therefore, it is unlikely B is a swan.



The Simple Syllogism

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
2. If God exists, he would want to create a world with no evil.
3. If God exists, he would be able create any world he wants.
4. Evil exists.
5. Therefore, God doesn't exist.

Are these
necessarily
true?



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God wants a world with no evil

This could follow from the things said to be true of God. In fact, Christians understand God to be working towards the elimination of evil.

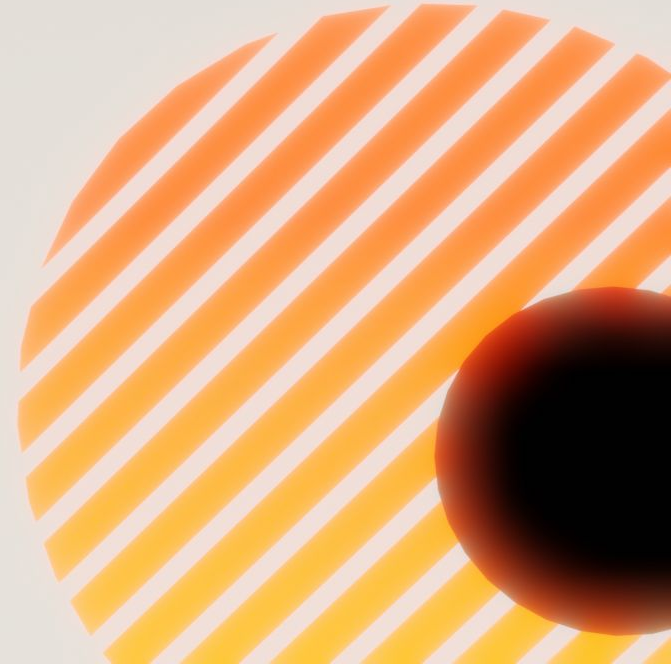
But what does one do with a contradictory set of desires? Does God have any contradictory set of desires?



Parents and Children

The most common analogies are a parent giving instructions to a child, but then leaving them unsupervised for some duration. The parent knows full well that the given instructions may not be followed.

This is merely to illustrate the possibility of a contradictory set of desires.



Can God create any world?

1. We have already established that God cannot do the logically impossible.
2. God wants there to be no evil, but he may also desire things such as Free Will.
3. God cannot allow Free Will while simultaneously controlling and deciding every action. That is a contradiction in terms.
4. What can we say is possibly and/or necessarily true about God and free creature?



The Simple Syllogism

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The Syllogism

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
2. If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil.
3. If God is omniscient, then God knows when evil exists.
4. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil.
5. Evil exists.
6. God has some Morally Sufficient Reason for allowing evil to exist.
7. Therefore, God and evil can coexist.



Resolution of the Problem

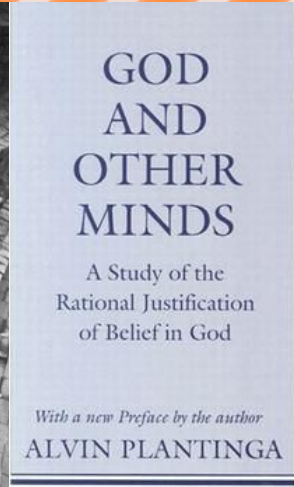
The MSR must take the form of “some possible truth under Theism which entails the existence of evil”



The Conclusion of the Free Will Defense

“It is possible that God cannot instantiate any possible person containing the property *always freely does what is right*. It is also possible that He can instantiate such possible persons. But that He can (if indeed he can) is a contingent truth. **And since Mackie’s project is to prove an entailment, he cannot employ any contingent propositions as added premises.** Thus, the reconstructed argument [from evil] fails”.

- Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (pg. 144)



The Free Will Defense

- God creates creatures whose Free Will Decisions are known by him in advance, but which he is not responsible for or controlling the outcome of.
- It is not necessarily true that God can create Free creatures who always choose the good.
- It is possible that there are no possible worlds where some of those creatures do not go wrong, but that is not because of God. It is possible that no possible world is available to God with entirely and freely virtuous creatures.



If the Free Will Defense is Successful...

If the Free Will Defense is successful, we must all be Theists and can never think about evil again!



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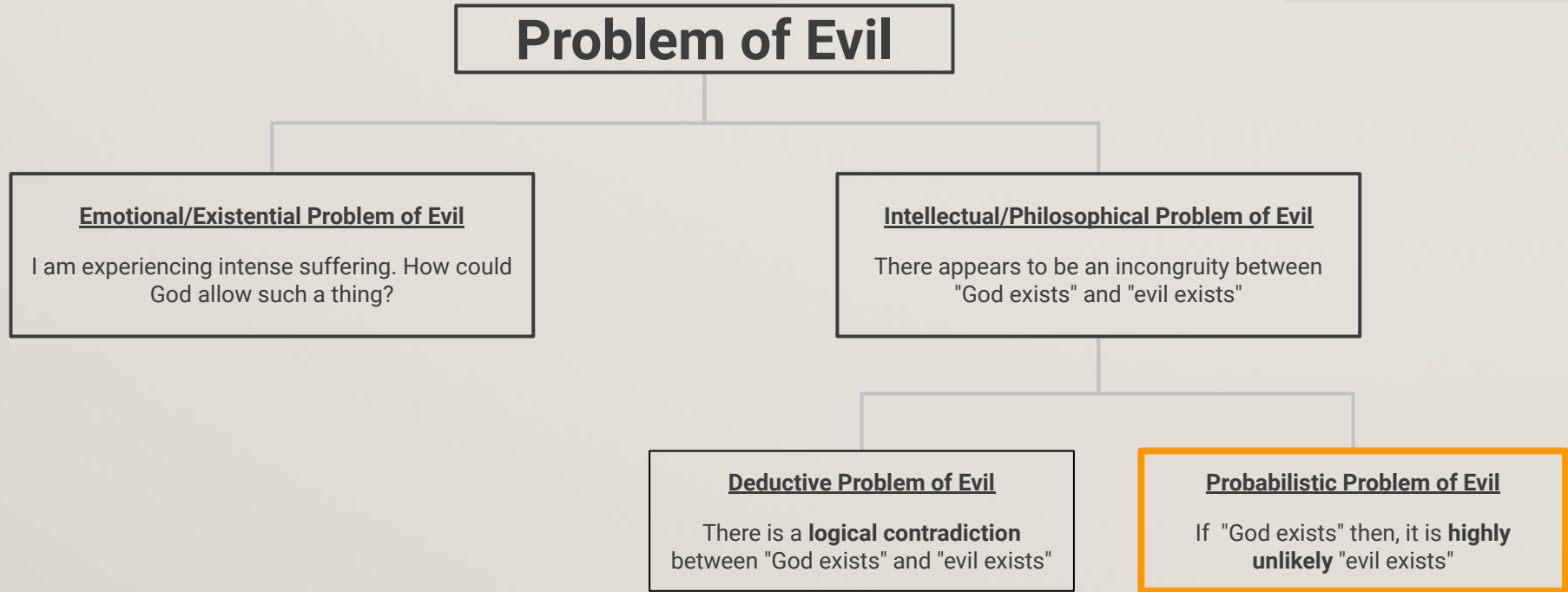
The Probabilistic Argument

Is the existence of Evil good evidence for atheism?



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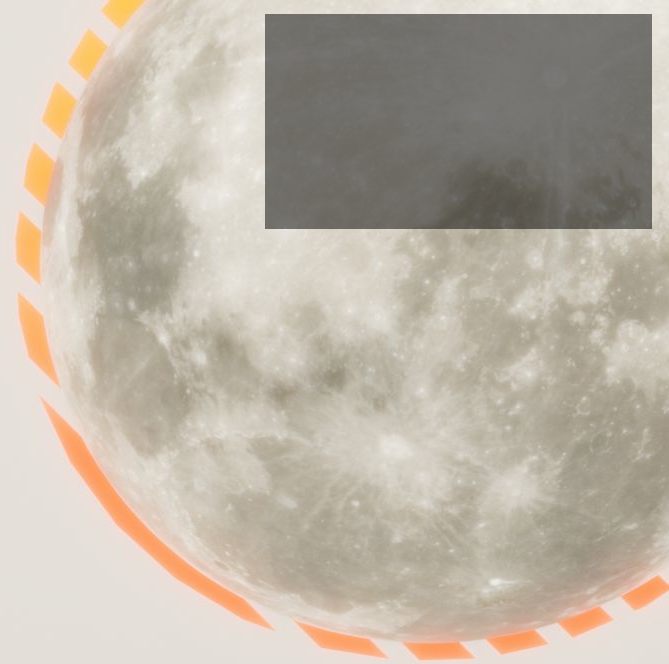
Important Distinctions



Defense versus a Theodicy

A Defense is simply concerned with the argument itself - the logical structure, the premises, and whether or not there is a contradiction.

A Theodicy is tasked with explaining how things actually are and is a more ambitious project overall with greater constraints.



Wrap-up (Conclusions)

1. We have covered the History of the Development of the Problem
2. We have covered the Logical Problem of Evil and
3. We have begun to broach the more general Probabilistic or Evidential Problem of Evil.



Conclusions

1. *The Free Will Defense shows the coexistence of God and evil is **logically possible**, thus non-contradictory.*
2. *Nevertheless, the atheist may retort the coexistence of God and evil, while possible, is **highly improbable**. This will be our focus next week.*
3. *Having addressed the logical problem, we have in a sense given ourselves permission to think further.*