

## The Problem of Evil Handout

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### 1. Some terminology and preliminaries

#### 1.1 Attitudes you can have about claims

There are three *attitudes* you can have about a claim (really, there are way more than three, but these are the most important ones). These are sometimes called *propositional attitudes* (because philosophers often call claims, “propositions”). If *P* is a claim, you can:

- You can *believe P*. If you believe *P* you think *P* is TRUE.
- You can *disbelieve P*. If you disbelieve *P* you think *P* is FALSE
- You can *withhold judgement (or be agnostic)* about *P*. If you withhold judgement about *P*, you don’t think *P* is true AND you don’t think *P* is false.

#### 1.2 Theism, atheism, agnosticism

The claim “God exists,” is such an important claim that there are names for the different attitudes people take towards this claim.

- *Theists* believe that God exists. They believe the claim “God exists,” is TRUE.
- *Atheists* disbelieve that God exists. They believe the claim “God exists,” is FALSE.
- *Agnostics* neither believe nor disbelieve that God exists. They don’t believe the claim “God exists” is true, and they don’t believe it is false.

#### 1.3 Modus tollens

Some argument forms are *always* valid. One of these argument forms is called *modus tollens*. Here’s an example of *modus tollens* and the form

<i>Example</i>	<i>Form</i>
(1) If it is raining outside, the sidewalk is wet.	(1) If P then Q.
(2) The sidewalk is not wet.	(2) Not-P.
(3) So, it is not raining outside.	(3) Therefore, not-Q.

### 2. A few smaller arguments against the existence of God

REFER TO HANDOUT TITLED “THE PARADOX OF THE STONE ET AL”

### 3. The Problem of Evil

#### 3.1 *The logical argument from suffering*

- (1) No morally good being would allow suffering if he or she were able to prevent it.
- (2) An omnipotent being would always be able to prevent suffering.
- (3) THEREFORE, if there were a morally good omnipotent being, there would be no suffering.
- (4) There is suffering.
- (5) Therefore, there is no morally good omnipotent being.

*Questions:* Is this argument valid? What form of argumentation is (3)–(5)?

#### 3.2 *Counterexamples*

*Counterexamples* are examples that show a generalized claim (an ‘everything’ claim or a ‘no’ claim is false).

*For example:*

- Ostriches are a counterexample to the claim, “All birds can fly.”
- Platypuses are a counterexample to the claim, “No mammals lay eggs.”

*Question:* What are some counterexamples to (1)?

#### 3.3 *Two new arguments*

##### THE WEAKENED LOGICAL ARGUMENT FROM SUFFERING

- (1\*) No morally good being would allow suffering if he or she were able to prevent it *unless* he or she had a *good reason* to permit it.
- (2) An omnipotent being would always be able to prevent suffering.
- (2.5) There is no good reason that a morally good, omnipotent being could have to allow suffering.
- (3) THEREFORE, if there were a morally good, omnipotent being then there would be no suffering.
- (4) There is suffering.
- (5) THEREFORE, there is no being who is both morally good and omnipotent.

#### THE EVIDENTIAL ARGUMENT FROM SUFFERING

- (1\*) No morally good being would allow suffering if he or she were able to prevent it *unless* he or she had a *good reason* to permit it.
- (2) An omnipotent being would always be able to prevent suffering.
- (2.5) *Probably*, there is no good reason that a morally good, omnipotent being could have to allow suffering.
- (3) THEREFORE, if there were a morally good, omnipotent being then *probably* there would be no suffering.
- (4) There is suffering.
- (5) THEREFORE, *probably* there is no being who is both morally good and omnipotent.

#### 4. What could the reason be?

Whatever reason God might allow suffering for, it's got to be *very very* important.

Anthony considers *eternal bliss* first. But it doesn't seem like the vast amounts of animal suffering is in any way linked to eternal bliss.

Perhaps God allows suffering for *free will*. But clearly this does not explain why God allows *natural evil*.

Maybe the reason is just *too complicated* for us to know. In response to this possibility, Anthony makes another analogy with the Parent and Child case:

“...let's suppose we get more information [about the Parent and Child case]. Child testifies, credibly, that Parent never warned her about the consequences of leaving her toy out in the rain.... Suppose, further, that you learn that there was, in fact, no rainstorm. Parent, it turns out, deliberately activated the sprinkler system and allowed it to run through the night. It emerges that there have been a host of incidents throughout Child's short life in which Parent did things that good parents never do. Once, Child was beaten severely for setting the table incorrectly. Another time, Parent arranged for a neighbor to offer Child a type of luscious candy that Child had been specifically forbidden to eat; when Child (predictably) succumbed to temptation, Parent punished her by locking her out of the house [and forcing her to sleep outside]... At this point, it would be grotesque for someone who wanted to defend Parent simply by pointing out that there is surely *some possible* reason a good parent might have done all the things Parent did...The situation, I contend, is the same with God. When we confront seriously the amount of suffering in the world...I think the rational conclusion to draw is that there is no good reason for it.”