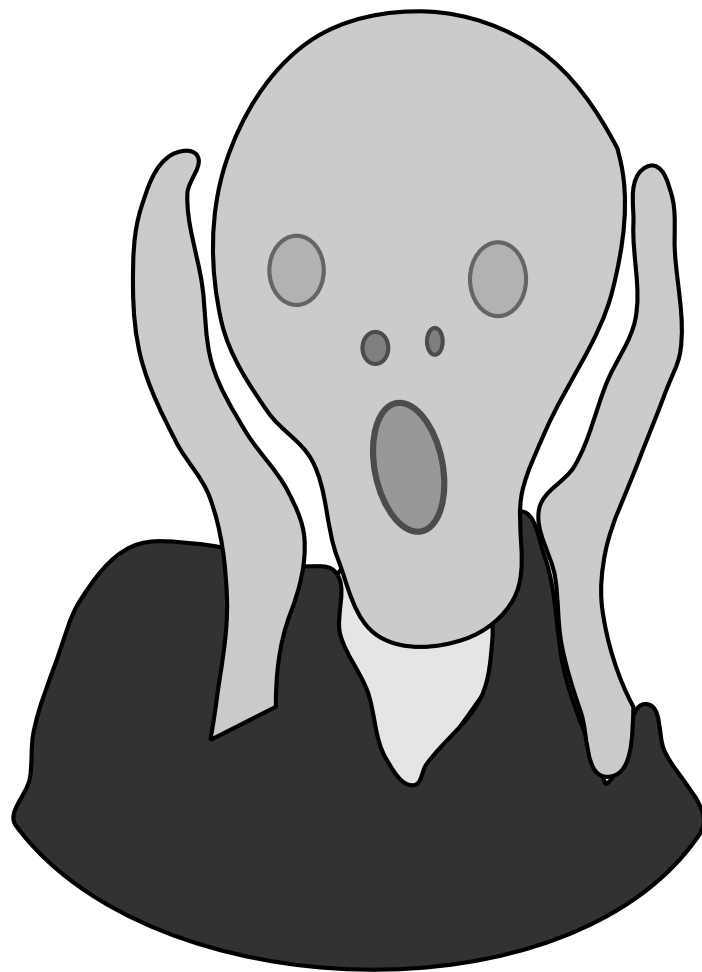


The Problem of Suffering Solid Proof that God Exists



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Summary

A survey of websites used by “New Atheists” to promote their opposition to Christianity in any form shows that the most frequently used argument (and for most the only argument) to oppose the idea of God is the problem of suffering. This argument presumes that a God who allows suffering is not an appropriate God and that one should therefore not believe in such a God.

Of course, Christian philosophers (and pre-Christian ones for that matter) have had to think about the problem of suffering for some time and have answered the issue very clearly and in a wide variety of ways. This paper looks at the problem in only a very simple way, but the answer is that there is a God who cares about his creation.

There are several problems with the atheist argument. The most obvious of these is that the atheists’ idea of God does not correspond to the God of the Bible. No Christian believes in the God that atheists say doesn’t exist.

However, there is a more serious problem for atheists, which is that the argument that atheists make from suffering presumes the existence of a universal moral standard which can be used to decide whether God is good. Such a moral principle cannot be said to have any validity unless there is a God to underwrite it. Thus the atheists’ own argument presumes the existence of the God that they claim to deny.

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We live in a world of great beauty and subtle design, one full of natural marvels where the forces of nature interact with one another in phenomenal precision to ensure a universe where life can exist. We also live in a world full of suffering where famine, disease and war run rampant and where death is the fate of all.

A considerable amount of suffering is brought about by mankind's greed, stupidity or wickedness. Human beings cause wars and commit acts of terrorism. We spread disease around the world by failure to observe simple rules of hygiene and we cause famine by economic greed and by desire for political power. We negligently build houses on flood-plains and villages on the slopes of volcanoes. There is no end to human greed, negligence and violence, and the result is a considerable amount of man-made misery.

However, there is also suffering that is not the direct result of human action. The Japanese Tsunami, for example, killed thousands and left many more thousands homeless. There are random disasters such as earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions which can happen in unexpected places, and epidemic disease can cause suffering in spite of mankind's best endeavours.

We think of major disasters, natural or man-made, as being particularly serious because they strike many people at once. However, when one considers carefully one will realise that the real disaster is universal. Ultimately, death comes to everyone. We will all lose the struggle to live and the end for every one of us will be the same (unless something happens to completely change the world order), whether we die in war, in a natural disaster, or in our own beds. Suffering and death are facts for us all.

The Atheist Argument

It is common for atheists to attempt to use the existence of suffering in the world as an argument for the non-existence of God. The argument they use is often referred to as "The problem of suffering"; if one looks at the websites sponsored by militant new-atheists one finds that the problem of suffering is the common theme, and for more than half the only argument given for the non-existence of God.

The atheist argument can be summarised in these terms:-

1. An all-powerful God can do anything at all. This would include the prevention of suffering.
2. A good God would wish to prevent suffering.
3. It is a matter of observation that the world contains much suffering.

From these three points the atheists deduce that there cannot be a Good, all-powerful, God. They then argue that a God who is not good, or all-powerful, is no God at all, and that therefore there is no God.

The Atheist Argument

The atheist argument can be summarised as:-

1. An all powerful God would have the power to bring all suffering to an end.
2. A good God would wish to end suffering.
3. There is suffering in the world

Therefore there cannot be a God who is all powerful and good.

This argument is based on several assumptions.

Assumptions about the nature of God:-

- It is assumed that the only kind of good God would be an indulgent one who would not pursue justice or punish wrongdoing.
- The argument assumes that there are no restrictions on an all powerful God, such as the restriction to act consistently.

The Fundamental Assumption

- There is a universal moral principle which defines an essential underlying difference between right and wrong, between Good and Evil. This underlying difference is so secure as to allow us to judge the actions of a God.

The Three Problems

The Problem of Suffering is not a single question, but a collection of three or four problems. These are:-

- **The Problem of Evil:** This is the question of why God allows evil in the world, including suffering, and why he does not immediately act to stop it.
- **The Problem of Injustice:** This is the problem of why the apparently innocent appear to suffer at least as much as, and sometimes more than, the obviously wicked.
- **The Personal Problem:** Given that God has allowed suffering into the world, what should one do about it. What can one believe in such circumstances?

Each of these problems has its own individual analysis and its own answer. It is important not to switch between problems if one is to carry out a thorough analysis of the problem of suffering.

The argument is often put in an extremely emotive way. Atheists may ask questions such as “Where was God in Iraq/Afghanistan/Somalia?” The idea here is that thousands of people have been killed by terrorists in these places, and this is being attributed to God, in spite of the reality that it is faithless men who are causing the suffering. The point of using emotive language of this kind is that it makes it difficult for the hearer to engage their logical faculties in answering the question. Nevertheless there is an answer.

There are, of course, three main question implied in this argument. These are the problem of evil (why does God allow the world to contain suffering?), the problem of Justice (Why does God allow the innocent to suffer with the guilty?) and the personal problem (What can I believe? What should I do?). Each of these problems needs to be handled separately, because each has an essentially different argument.

The Problem of Evil

This is the problem of why God allows the world to contain evil. Why would a good and powerful God allow the presence of suffering in the world which he has made? This question is, of course, at the heart of the atheist argument.

The atheist argument is based on two main assumptions. The first is the problem of what it means to be all-powerful. An all-powerful God can do anything, but a consistent God will not contradict himself. This is the one limit to the power of an all-powerful, consistent God. As the world is logically consistent we have a consistent God.

This means that if God wishes to allow mankind free will, then he must allow mankind a choice, and this in turn means that the outcome of God’s actions will depend to some extent on the response of human beings to God’s actions.

The more important issue concerns the definition of a good God. The definition that atheists seem to wish to apply is that a good God is one who will keep human beings in comfort and safety no matter what they do. This, of course, is not a picture of a good God. It is a picture of an *indulgent* God.

The God of the Bible

The God of the Bible is a thoroughly moral God. Not only is this God the source of good, but he is also a God of justice. This means that he looks after the faithful, but also that he condemns the wicked.

God describes himself as: “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” (Exodus 34:6,7)

One cannot expect God to have an interest in morality and to ignore a lack of ethics in his creation.

The God of the Bible is also consistent. He makes plans and holds to them. He makes promises which he will keep in the far future. This has a bearing on freewill. God allows mankind to choose between doing right and doing wrong. This can only happen if God allows humans to do wicked acts. Anything else would be simply a charade, and would be dishonest. Thus the outcome of matters in the world is determined in part by the freewill of others and not entirely by God.

A genuinely good God would not be merely indulgent. A good God would also be moral. There is a clear distinction between right and wrong, and a good God would always maintain this distinction. Human beings are generally aware of the difference between right and wrong, and one would expect no less of God. Indeed the existence of a universal idea of right and wrong can only be possible if there exists a being outside of humanity who can define the difference between right and wrong and who is able to communicate this difference to human beings. Without such a fixed point there is no way that human beings can know what is absolutely wrong and what is absolutely right.

The existence of the universal moral principle requires that there is a supreme moral entity outside of creation. This entity must have moral purpose, because an ethical principle doesn't merely state how things are, but says how things should be. A universal moral standard is necessary before one can say that something is good or evil, and it must approve the good and condemn the evil. The God who underwrites this moral standard

Moral vs Indulgent

The atheist argument of suffering uses the term "A good God" to refer to a God who will never cause any kind of harm, no matter how minor, to any being, regardless of the circumstances.

This is not the Bible's definition. The God of the Bible is also interested in justice and in judgment. This means that he will not simply allow anyone to do whatever they wish and to be rewarded, even if what they do is evil. To simply smile on anything done by humans, regardless of whether the things done were good or evil, would not be a sign of a *good* God, but merely the sign of an *indulgent* God.

The God of the Bible is not indulgent.

The Bible gives an account of the origin of suffering and death in the following terms: (see the box to the right for more detail):-

Initially, when God made the world, he made it good (Genesis 1:31). It contained no suffering. However, God put mankind on the earth, and early on, when there was only one man and one woman, they violated God's law.

The Universal Moral Principle

It is clear that there is a distinction between right and wrong, which is shared by all people. This is a strong principle in simple cases (everyone agrees that murder is wrong and that corruption is wrong) but sometimes the situation is complicated and it becomes more difficult to decide.

The most elegant statement of this moral principle comes from Jesus Christ: "*And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.*" (Luke 6:31). However, the principle is shared by all cultures and all ages, from America to Africa and Asia and from the times of Aristotle to the modern day. It is used as a basis of argument between people, both over trivial matters and over international disputes. It is universal among all people.

It is impossible to account for the existence of any moral principle by either a process of evolution or by the application of pure reason. The existence of such a principle requires the existence of an outside entity to guarantee it as fixed point. Only God can fulfil the requirements of the guarantor of a universal moral principle. Thus the existence of a distinction between right and wrong requires the existence of a single God outside the creation.

must do the same thing. When we speak of a good God, we are speaking of a God who approves goodness and condemns evil.

The point about a good God is that such a God cannot merely be indulgent and reward wickedness. A good God must condemn wickedness, and the God of the Bible is exactly such a God. The atheist argument falls down because it assumes something about the nature of God which is not so. One might say to the atheist: "I don't believe in the God you say doesn't exist!"

The origin of Evil

The existence of the human race means that there must have been a first human being. The first human being has died, so death must have passed on the first human being. This implies that the first human being was also a sinner, so there must have been a first sin.

The Bible describes the origin of evil exactly in terms of this first sin. The consequence of this was death and with it the suffering of mankind. Since then mankind has suffered and died, and will continue to do so until the day of judgement.

Breaking God's law is termed "Sin" in the Bible. Sin is the violation of moral principles. The first sin was fairly trivial by comparison with our later efforts, but essentially man, although he knew God's standard of right and wrong, preferred to follow his own desires instead. The consequence was death (Romans 5:12).

Since that time human beings have continually violated God's moral principle and as a consequence human beings are subject to death. This principle is written throughout the Bible and is one of its more important statements.

It is fairly easy to understand why sin must lead to death. The alternative would be a race of immortal sinners. Imagine a world full of the likes of Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Genghis Khan and Pol Pot, able to continue their evil to eternity. A world with death is preferable, especially as God intends to use this to form a world of peace and security without suffering where the evil are excluded.

The purpose of God is that in the end, evil will be destroyed and suffering will then end. The things that are wrong with the world as a result of mankind's sin will be put right and there will then be no more evil. This is a future state of affairs to follow the day of judgement, and in the Bible it is called the Kingdom of God. It will then last for ever.

When we look at the world as it is, it is important to remember that it is not in its final state. The world we see is a construction site in which something much better, the Kingdom of God, is being built. If one looks at a construction site it usually looks like a mess, with bits of concrete, bricks and scaffolding, usually in the middle of a muddy hole. To see what the final building will be like one needs to look at the architect's plans.

Sin and Death

The Bible is very clear that everyone is a sinner. This is a matter also of our own experience. We all know that there have been times when we have been angry with others without cause, or have lied to cover up a mistake, or have been selfish when we shouldn't have been.

The Bible explains in many passages that sin leads on to death, not immediately but in the due course of time.

Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

(Ezekiel 18:4 - see also v 20)

For the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a)

The consequence of this, of course, is that everyone is subject to death, and hence to suffering. No-one can claim to be exempt, with the exception of Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom of God

The main message of Jesus was to declare the Kingdom of God. The phrase appears 69 times in the New Testament, with another 30 mentions of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is what the Kingdom is known as in Matthew's Gospel. The theme reappears many times, but there is a clear statement of it as the main point of Jesus' teaching in the Gospel of Luke (but he said to them, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" [Luke 4:43]).

The Kingdom of God is the period after the day of judgement when the earth will no longer be subject to the effects of sin. As a result there will be no more death, and no more suffering. There are many passages which describe the Kingdom of God. Among these are Psalm 72, Isaiah 2:1-11; Isaiah 11:1-9; Isaiah 35:1-10; Joel 3:17-21; Amos 9:11-15 among others. One of the best descriptions of the final state of affairs is in the Revelation:-

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:1-4)

The Kingdom of God is the hope for mankind, and anyone who is repentant and faithful is able to enter the path to this kingdom. For those who follow this path suffering will reach an end. It is our choice, however, whether we travel to the Kingdom of God, or whether we choose to end our days in this world of suffering.

The same is true of the world in which we live. we are in the building site. The completed world will be much better than what we now see, and very different in many ways, although one can gain a glimpse of what is intended by looking at some of the more peaceful scenes of nature.

This brings a very important principle about understanding the world in general and suffering in particular - one can only make sense of it by taking a very long term view. This means a look at the whole of eternity, from the creation to the Kingdom of God. In the long run, our current sufferings are only an eye-blink against the whole eternity of peace and happiness in God's Kingdom.

Pantheism & Christianity - Ethics & Suffering

One popular method of thinking about the universe is to consider the universe, and everything in it, as God. This idea is called "Pantheism". Pantheism allows one to believe in a kind of God, but there is no moral implication of the belief. Everything that happens in a pantheist world is part of the thread of life and is neither good nor bad. The pantheist God has no ethical intention (no intention of any kind) and therefore makes no moral demands on his creation. As such the pantheist God can be popular in the modern day.

The problem with a pantheist God is that such a God is not concerned with the suffering in the world. The death of a human being is no more consequential than the death of a small insect, and disease, war, famine and death are simply parts of the workings of nature.

To anyone who believes the Gospel of Jesus Christ, this is simply not good enough. The God of the Bible is a moral God who plans to bring suffering to an end and to establish the Kingdom of God. Christians therefore have an imperative to act in a moral way and to fight evil.

The Problem of Evil

Suffering is in the world as a response to the wickedness of mankind. Because God is a good God and mankind violates his moral principle, mankind is under sentence of death. However, there are several important points about suffering:-

- Suffering and death are not the intended state of our world, but are the consequence of sin. The existence of death puts a limit on the growth of human wickedness, and death is a part of suffering.
- Suffering can help to develop character and make better people. This seems a terribly hard thing to say, and even harder to accept, but it does have scriptural backing. Hebrews 12:5-7 describes the pain of suffering as being similar to the chastisement that a child receives from a loving parent (v11 repeats the point). The purpose of this is not to simply cause needless pain, but to teach the child the difference between right and wrong. We should be upset by suffering and it should lead us to be more caring people.

A similar metaphor would liken suffering to the pain that one feels when working to become more fit. If one works properly at a physical discipline then one will feel exhaustion and later probably stiffness. This is part of the process of becoming fitter. Suffering should do this to society.

- Suffering is a short-term necessity to bring about an eternal kingdom of peace and justice where there is no more suffering. The point is made succinctly in Romans 8:18-22 which likens the pain of suffering to the pains of childbirth, severe but necessary to bring a new creature to light.
- Suffering is a sign that there is something wrong with our current world. Because suffering exists, we can see that the world has been blighted by sin and can see that there is something better to come.

Because of man's wickedness God brought the curse of death into the world, and with it suffering. Death may come through a natural disaster, or as a result of warfare, or as a result of human negligence, or simply by old age. But whichever of these is the case, death is still the greatest of disasters, and it is the result of mankind's sin. In the end it is mankind's freedom to choose wickedness which has led to suffering and death. It may not be possible to trace a particular death to a particular sin, but the general tendency of mankind to wickedness leads to all our deaths.

In the mean time, suffering acts as a warning, just as pain is a warning. There are people who, for one reason or another, are unable to feel pain. These people tend to accidentally do themselves considerable harm as they are without an important warning system. Someone who touches a

hot object will usually feel pain and will therefore pull back from the object before too much damage has been done. Someone who doesn't feel pain doesn't realise that damage is being done, doesn't pull back, and suffers major damage.

In a similar way, suffering tells us that there is something wrong with the world. We should be upset by suffering and we should work to reduce it and help those who suffer. Suffering is bad and it tells us that something is wrong with our world. We know, however, that suffering is to be brought to an end and evil will not prevail.

The Problem of Injustice

Having looked at the problem of evil, one can go on to a second problem to do with suffering. This is the problem of justice. The problem can be summarised by the question: "Why do the innocent suffer at least as much as the guilty?"

Again, there is a problem of definition. In reality no-one is innocent. Everyone, if they are honest, knows that they have, from time to time, broken God's universal moral principle. The letter to the Romans contains a list of passages from other parts of the Bible which explain this. The passage begins:-

as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; (Romans 3:10)

and ends

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (verse 23)

These passages express a very important spiritual principle; we know that this principle is true. We know that there are some times when we have acted unjustly, when we have been unpleasant to

people who didn't deserve it, when we have tried to cover up errors with lies, and so on.

Nevertheless, some people are more wicked than others and it appears that the wicked often prosper while those less wicked suffer more. This is the essence of the problem of injustice.

Again, to make sense of this problem it is necessary to take a long view.

The writer of Ecclesiastes starts chapter three with the observation that there is a time for everything; the opening words are "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: " (Ecclesiastes 3:1) The passage illustrates this with a list of matters where there is sometimes an occasion for one kind of action and at other times there is an occasion for the opposite action. One of these is "a time to be born, and a time to die" (verse 2). The point that is being illustrated is that to understand what is going on one needs to think

The Problem of Injustice

This is the problem that the more wicked people do not appear to suffer more than the less wicked. Indeed, the wicked often avoid suffering while a disproportionate proportion of the defenceless suffer much more.

The Bible makes two points about this:-

- No-one can be considered innocent. Everyone is a sinner, and all have violated God's moral principle. As a consequence, no-one has a right to avoid suffering.
- The most innocent person that has ever been is Jesus Christ. Jesus never did any wrong, but in spite of this he was put to death in an especially painful manner on the cross. No human being deserves better treatment than Jesus Christ.
- The only way to understand the injustice of the current world is to take a long term view. At present there is injustice in the world, but God will execute a thorough justice on the day of judgement. At this point the wicked will be destroyed and the faithful will receive eternal life.

To receive the forgiveness of our sins and a place in the Kingdom of God we need to investigate the one and only real God.

about the long term run of events. The passage then goes on to discuss justice.

- 16 Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, even there was wickedness, and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.
- 17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work. (Ecclesiastes 3:16,17)

The point is that while the current time is a time when injustice prevails there will be another time when everyone will be judged and injustice will be put right. Now may be a time of justice, but the time of justice will come in the end.

The same idea is repeated later in the book:-

- 12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.
- 13 But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.

(Ecclesiastes 8:12,13)

Where was God in Iraq?

One of the questions that is so frequently asked by those with an atheist agenda is the question of where God was in some serious war situation from Vietnam to Afghanistan, where many suffer and die including helpless civilians. To some extent it is unfair to blame God for a situation brought about by mankind, but even so one might reasonably ask what God is doing.

The answer is that God is involved in several ways.

- God is with the suffering. Those who are suffering as a result of war, terrorism or natural disaster can turn to God and God will both help them to face the disaster and give eternal life in the long run.
- God will end suffering. In the short run, the fact that God has allowed freewill to mankind has brought about suffering. In the long run there will be judgement. Those who have not followed God's way will no longer be a problem as the faithful will receive eternal life.

This hope is outside the capability of mankind to deliver, either now or in the future. God is with the suffering, but without a faith in God we cannot be part of that help.

Atheists and the Long Run

On its website, one atheist association claims that to consider the hope of the future as putting right the evils of the present is equivalent to someone who repeatedly rapes a child and then offers a large present to them to make amends.

This is an example of a typical atheist technique of argument, which is to try to produce an emotive reaction which overcomes a more rational look at the issue.

In this case the atheist argument attempts to belittle the idea that the long run is important by talking up the problems of the world and talking down the benefits of the Kingdom of God. This is then attached to emotive language to try to make the reader recoil with horror and not consider the problem properly.

In fact the simile is completely wrong. For the faithful, death is not the end. The problems of this world, no matter how severe the ungodly can make them, are nothing much compared to the joy of the age to come. Another simile compares the suffering of this world with a vaccination, where a small pain is inflicted to enable a future without continuing greater suffering.

It is up to the reader to decide which is a better simile. However, the important point is not to allow emotional language to replace clear thinking.

The point is that we may be oppressed by injustice now in what we suffer, but in the long run this will be put right by God. If we only look at the short term we are likely to mislead ourselves and jump to the wrong conclusion. It is only in the long run that justice prevails, but the long run is what we should be aiming for.

The Personal Problem

The final question involved in the problem of suffering is the personal one. It involves moving on from the theoretical discussion of the reasons for pain and suffering to problems that involve individual belief and action. If one is suffering in hospital, or finds that one's child has an incurable disease then the answer: "This suffering comes because sin has cursed the world" may be true, but probably brings little comfort.

Psalm 73

Psalm 73 is a psalm in which David the shepherd who became king considers that the wicked often seem to suffer less than the blameless. The first verses of the psalm consider the state of the wicked and arrogant, who prosper more than the more deserving.

- 3 *For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.*
12 *Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.*

David considers the prosperity of the wicked, and it causes him to become envious. Indeed, the envy was almost too much for David:

- 16 *But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,*

However, this is because David has not taken a long enough view. In the next verse David is able to put the matter into perspective:

- 17 *until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.*

David has now seen that the wicked will not prosper in the long run. Indeed, going into the sanctuary of God has reminded David of the fate that awaits the wicked:-

- 18 *Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin.*
19 *How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors!*
20 *Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms.*

David realises that no matter how much the wicked prosper now, in the long run they will be judged by God.

Because of this it is much better to be just and near to God now than it is to make short-term gain through wickedness. The apparent success of the wicked may rouse our envy, but in the end there is nothing of which to be envious. The wicked will be destroyed in the end; it is the faithful who will survive them.

(All verses cited in this box are from Psalm 73)

A more satisfactory answer may come in the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus was better than any of us, and still is. He never broke the universal moral standard or, to put it another way, he never committed sin. If anyone deserved not to suffer it was Jesus. But in spite of this Jesus suffered injustice and undeserved suffering. His death on the cross was gratuitously agonising. We have all to ask why we deserve less.

The long term view is also important. David the king had to face this problem and he expressed his feeling about it in the Psalms. Psalm 73 is a particularly clear expression of the way that David understood the problem (see box). He saw the wicked prosper while the godly suffered and it roused his anger. Then he thought about the long-term prospect for the ungodly and realised that the godly have an incomparably better hope than the faithless.

The long view is the only view that matters.

Those who are facing suffering face a very vital problem. This could be stated: "I am suffering - what shall I do?" Some give in at this point. They tend to try to get back at God for allowing them to suffer and the only thing that they can do is to refuse to believe in him.

This, of course, is no use. Refusing to believe in God will not make him go away. For what little satisfaction we gain by refusing to believe in God, one still has to face the suffering. But if one turns one's back on God then one has to face it alone. A philosopher to attempt to diminish God by refusing to believe in him is like a lunatic in trying to dim the sun by writing "darkness" on the wall of his padded cell.

The way to overcome suffering is by holding to one's faith in God, serving him and following God's way. This way, suffering becomes less destructive and becomes a refining process which helps us to develop a more godly and faithful existence. In the end we reach the Kingdom of God, where suffering will have been overcome and abolished.

Summary

The picture in the Bible is that God made the world good, free of suffering and without death. Mankind ruined this situation by violating God's law and hence brought the world to a state which contains suffering, pain and death. Not only that, but as humans, we all continue to exercise our free will, and sometimes we all violate God's universal moral principle for our own immediate gratification. As a consequence, suffering continues.

However, there is good news as well. The world in which we now live is not the end of the story. God is using the current situation to build a better world, a world without suffering. However, only the faithful will live in it. There is, however, an opportunity for any one to have their failures forgiven and to live in the world to come.

The Personal Problem

This is the problem of what one should believe and do, given that there is suffering in the world.

- The existence of God does not depend on whether we believe in him. Even if we refuse to believe in God, God does not disappear.
- Some see suffering and attempt to punish God for it by refusing to believe in him. This, of course, has no effect on God, who continues to be in spite of lack of belief.
- If we remain faithful to God in the face of suffering, then God stands with us and comforts us. If we turn our back on God we do not cease to suffer, but we will be forced to suffer alone.
- In the Kingdom of God there will be no suffering. If we remain faithful we will be able to reach a realm where suffering is at an end.

The Origin of the Moral Principle

The existence of a general distinction between right and wrong is impossible to account for without the existence of an external entity as a fixed point. In spite of this, human cultures have a universal appreciation of the same ideas of right and wrong.

Philosophers have attempted to derive the moral principle from general principles of logic, but the results of their thinking has been to conclude that it is impossible to account to derive any kind of ethical principles from first principles. Kant, Wittgenstein, Sartre and Nietzsche, among many others, attempted to generate an ethical principle without reference to any God, and all of them failed. Nietzsche and Sartre concluded that the distinction between right and wrong was an illusion, while other philosophers deduced the existence of a God to derive the principle.

Evolutionary theory does not provide an explanation for any kind of moral principle. A tendency to act in an ethical manner is a restriction on one's actions which will tend to reduce one's chances of surviving and passing on genes to the next generation.

The problem of accounting for a moral principle without any reference to God is seen in the idea of altruism. Altruism happens when someone helps someone else but in doing so puts themselves at a disadvantage. Evolutionary theorists have attempted to show that altruism doesn't ever happen, but examples are related regularly (for example someone who pulls a stranger from a raging river and saves their life, or someone who donates a kidney to a stranger). The point about altruism is that one doesn't need to see examples of it for it to show the existence of an external moral principle. The fact that everyone can agree that altruism is a highly moral action is enough to show that the principle exists.

Because there is a universal moral principle which cannot be accounted for without the existence of God, one has to conclude that God exists.

The Atheist Argument and the Existence of God

Going back to the connection between the problem of suffering and the existence of God. The argument that the atheists rely on to prove the non-existence of God has flaws in it, which we have looked at, but there is another flaw which is more fundamental.

The atheists' argument is based on the basic idea that it is wrong to cause unnecessary suffering. This idea is based on the idea of a universal moral principle. The idea of a good God or a God who is not good depends on the existence of a universal moral principle to define what the idea of a good God is. Without such a moral principle the argument will be meaningless. Even the militant New Atheists have to admit that at universal moral principle exists, or they lose their only argument for the non-existence of God.

The existence of a universal moral principle requires the existence of an

entity outside humankind and probably outside the entire universe to determine and underwrite that moral principle. We call this entity God, and we can see that God must have a moral purpose in order to determine the difference between right and wrong. He must also have the power to ensure that thinking beings within the creation can understand the moral principle.

The fact that we know that there is a problem with suffering shows that we understand the universal moral principle, and this in turn means that there must be a God to underwrite the principle. The existence of the Atheist argument shows that there is a God.

One can look at the same thing in a different way. We see that there is suffering in the world and it troubles us, because suffering is a sign that something is wrong. The fact that we know that something is wrong shows that there is a distinction between right and wrong. It is strong evidence to show that there is a universal moral principle which we all understand to some extent, but which we frequently break. The only way that this moral principle can exist is if some entity outside the created universe underwrites it. God is that entity and God has a moral purpose which includes the good of humanity. This can be taken further to show the forgiveness of sins and the opening of a path to a reformed world without suffering.

If you wish to be part of a world without suffering, then you will need to investigate this God.

The Atheist Argument and God's Existence

The argument about the problem of suffering uses the idea of a "Good God". This in turn requires an absolute moral principle which can be used to decide whether God is good or is not good. Without such a principle, one could not say that any God was not good, even a god who required the sacrifice of babies or supported the idea of murdering those who decided not to believe in him any more.

The "problem of suffering" argument requires a universal moral principle. However, such a principle requires a moral entity outside humanity and the universe to underwrite it. Without the existence of a good God, there can be no universal moral principle, and hence no idea of whether God is good or bad. If there is no universal moral standard then the atheist argument fails.

The fact that atheists make such use of the idea of suffering, and the idea that causing suffering is wrong, as the basis of their arguments implies that atheists accept the existence of a universal moral principle.

This completely undermines the basis of atheism, and provides a solid reason for believing that God exists.