

The Problem of Evil: The Top 12 Excuses for God's Horrible Behavior

by August Berkshire

If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving, then why is there evil in the world?

For the sake of argument, let's concede the harm that humans do as a misuse of our free will, for which God cannot be blamed (although a good case can be made that a loving god would have stopped Hitler).

That still leaves us with genetic birth defects, genetic and acquired diseases, and natural disasters.

Here are "The Top 12 Excuses" religious people give to attempt to explain away the horrible behavior of their god.

(1) Unknown greater good.

The first excuse is that God must *commit* or *allow* some evil to occur to accomplish an *unknown greater good*.

But doesn't that *limit* God's knowledge and power? Doesn't that say that God couldn't think of a better way to accomplish his goals other than torturing innocent people?

(2) Evil is really God's love.

The second excuse is that what we perceive as "evil" is really an example of "God's love."

However, this is a definition of love we cannot comprehend because it is *exactly the opposite* of what we define love to be. Therefore we can't *know* that "God's love" is really love – we have to take someone's unconvincing word for it.

If disease is an example of God's love, shouldn't we all try to get as sick as possible? Are doctors violating "God's will" when they try to cure disease?

(3) Evil is needed to appreciate the good.

The third excuse is that without evil we wouldn't appreciate what's good.

But couldn't a god just *give us* an appreciation of what's good? Why should we have to be tortured to appreciate the good?

Disease and natural disasters seem like wanton cruelty on the part of God. Without disease and natural disasters we could still be left to struggle with good and evil in terms of *moral dilemmas* and *human actions*.

(4) Blame the ancestors and blame the victim.

The fourth excuse is that all evil that happens to us is our fault, either directly because of something we did, or indirectly because of our "ancestors" Adam and Eve.

This is known as "blaming the victim." Typically, a victim of abuse believes that the more he or she is punished, the more he or she is loved.

But what did an innocent baby ever do to deserve a birth defect?

And what kind of justice is it that blames children for the sins of their long-dead ancestors?

(5) Evil is necessary for free will.

The fifth excuse is that without evil we would have no free will and would be "robots."

But what do birth defects, disease, and natural disasters have to do with free will? Do sick people have more free will than healthy people?

God has supposedly created a heaven where there is no disease. Are the people in heaven robots?

(6) The devil did it.

The sixth excuse is that God isn't really responsible for evil in the world, a devil is.

But who created this devil? And isn't God supposed to be all-powerful? Can't he stop this devil?

(7) Evil doesn't last very long.

The seventh excuse is that any misery that occurs to us on Earth is brief compared to an eternity in a wonderful heaven.

So what? Is that any excuse to torture people?

(8) Evil is necessary for compassion.

The eighth excuse is that evil is necessary for us to learn compassion.

But if God wanted us to be compassionate, why didn't he just make us that way? Why this sadistic scheme of torturing innocent babies to instill compassion in their parents?

(9) Suffering builds character.

The ninth excuse is that suffering builds character.

While building character may sometimes require effort – such as helping others, studying, and sportsmanship – none of these threatens our lives.

And what kind of character is a baby supposed to be developing, who is born with a birth defect so severe that she will only live a few days?

(10) God is testing our faith.

The tenth excuse is that evil is God's way of testing our faith, like Job was tested in the Old Testament.

If this is true, what sense does it make to impose a "loyalty test" on an infant who dies from disease or natural disaster?

(11) The Creator is always justified.

The eleventh excuse is that God is morally justified in tormenting people because he created them.

But this confuses *the power* to torture someone with *the right* to torture someone.

Do the parents who create a child have a right to torture that child? Does *might* make *right*?

(12) Evil is necessary to prove God's existence.

The twelfth excuse is that the existence of evil *proves* the existence of God, that without a *God-given* sense of good and bad, we would not be able to identify some things as evil in the first place.

But can't an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving god come up with a better way to prove his existence than by torturing us? Why not just reveal himself?

Don't we define good and bad simply in terms of what causes harm?

Conclusion: God has run out of excuses. He is either incompetent, indifferent, or cruel. Another way to reconcile the facts is to conclude that gods don't exist at all.

Additional comments

If you had the knowledge and power of a god, would you have created birth defects, disease, and natural disasters? If not, then you are nicer than the god you believe in. This god should be praying to *you* for moral advice, rather than the other way around.

Would you take a syringe full of malaria and inject it into someone you love? And yet that's exactly what God does to people he *claims* to love, using a mosquito as the syringe.

We humans spend a lot of time mopping up after God's mistakes. Some say that God works *through* us. But the reason we have to do "the Lord's work" is because "the Lord" isn't doing it himself. And if we're doing the work, shouldn't we take the credit?

There is much unnecessary cruelty in nature. For example, when one male lion replaces another in a pride of lions, he kills the cubs of the previous male lion. Yet this type of behavior does not occur in most other species. Thus, if a god designed this system, he is not above a little wanton cruelty from time to time.

Yes, many religious people do kind acts of charity. But why? Too often the answer seems to fall into one of three categories, which turn out not to be altruistic at all:

1) To use the recipient of aid as a pawn to bribe the helper's way into heaven or avoid hell (or to achieve a higher reincarnation).

2) To use kindness to convert more people to the helper's religion, because religions cannot be sustained by evidence and thus need as many like-minded people as possible to prop them up and quash self-doubt.

3) To attempt to maintain the credibility of their religion by covering up the embarrassingly poor job done by their god, by claiming they are agents of God.

For those religious people who are kind for the sake of kindness, without reference to a god, that's exactly what secular humanism is.

Bible Quotes

"I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things." (Isaiah 45:7)

"Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come?" (Lamentations 3:38)

"When disaster comes to a city, has the Lord not caused it?" (Amos 3:6)