

The standard reply is that although God created a perfect world, humanity's sin caused the world to become imperfect, introducing birth defects, parasites, natural disasters, etc.

There are only two ways that this can make sense: either natural evil is a necessary consequence of sin, or God intentionally inserted flaws into the world as punishment for sin.

Would great sin necessarily damage DNA, create germs and viruses, and cause natural disasters to enter a perfect world? I don't see how that makes sense.

That leaves the possibility that God created these evils as punishment for sin. I don't see how children being killed by disease and disaster is reasonable punishment for the commission of any sin. Surely there should be great punishment for whomever committed the sin, but to punish everyone who ever lives after the commission of the sin doesn't seem just.

Which leaves us taking God's infinite goodness on faith. And atheists aren't going to do that.

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things or by dooming murder attempts to failure, helping torture victims escape, interrupting petty thefts, causing lies to go unheard, etc.

If God is good and powerful, why doesn't he eliminate these evils? The standard answer is that preventing people from choosing to do evil would eliminate free will, and eliminating free will is a larger evil than allowing these evils to move forward.

Assuming it's true that free will has such a high value, this might be a good argument. But what about the possibility of God eliminating great evils without meaningfully interfering with free will? Couldn't God help an assassination attempt against Hitler succeed? Or inspire someone to recognize a wanted man on the street so that he could be captured by the police before committing another heinous crime? Or give a drunk's car engine trouble?

Natural evils — things like earthquakes, disease, and massive accidents — do not involve human intent, so preventing them would seemingly not interfere with free will. Why doesn't God intercede to stop them?



## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM OF EVIL?

A Question of Moral Atheism

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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM OF EVIL? And can it be used to prove that the existence of God is logically impossible?

In a nutshell the problem of evil is this: If God is infinitely powerful, He can do anything. If God is infinitely good, He will want to eliminate evil. If God cannot eliminate evil, He is not infinitely powerful. If God will not eliminate evil, He is not infinitely good. Since there is evil in the world, God is either not infinitely powerful or not infinitely good.

It's a good argument, but even if you agree that it is valid, all it can do is show that God cannot have a certain combination of attributes, not that God cannot logically exist. But is the argument valid?

Let's look at it in the light of two kinds of evil: human evil and natural evil.

In this context, human evils include anything that is not morally good, from murder and torture down to petty theft and telling minor lies. If God was willing and able to eliminate these evils, He could easily do so by either eliminating the human desire to do such

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# QUESTIONS OF MORAL ATHEISM: INSTRUCTIONS

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1. Print pages one and two of this document, one on each side of the same piece of paper (if you don't have access to a duplex printer, print page one, put the page back in the paper tray upside down, and print page two — depending on the type of printer, you may have to experiment a bit).
2. Cut the printout in two, using the thin rules across the middle of the page as a guide.
3. Fold the two pieces of paper in half, making a pair of small pamphlets.
4. Keep one of the pamphlets to read, and give the other away to an interested friend or stranger.

That's it! If you have any questions, suggestions, or comments, we invite you to share them by leaving a comment on [blog.iamanatheist.org](http://blog.iamanatheist.org). Thanks!

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