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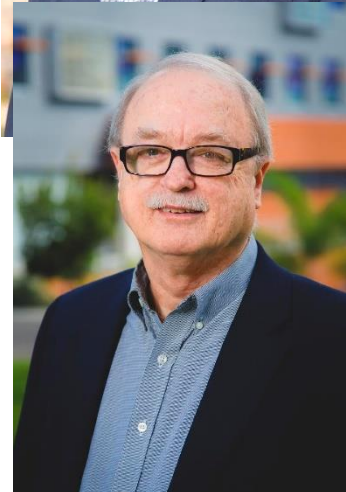
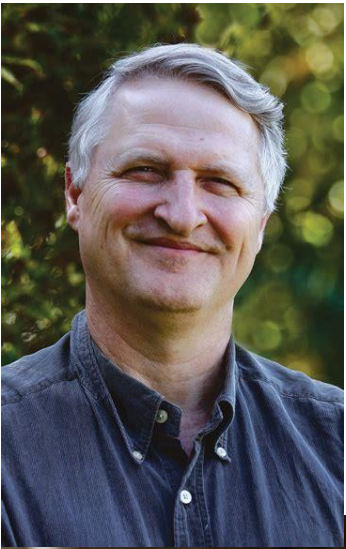
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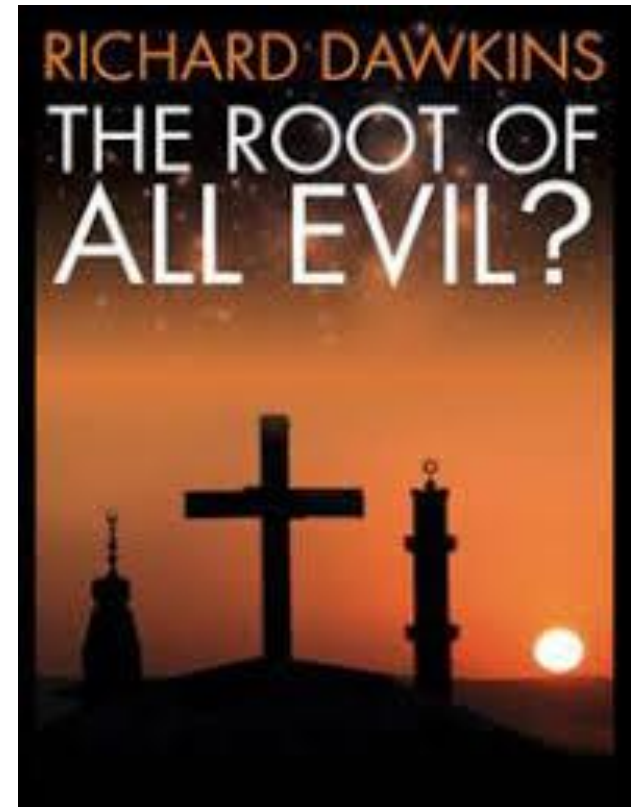
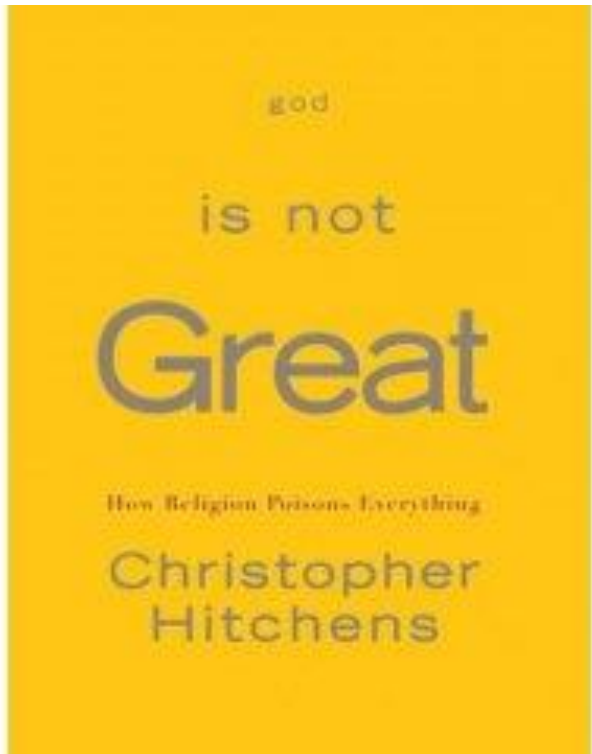


THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AS AN ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

Paul Copan



New atheist Christopher Hitchens:
“God is not great” (“Religion poisons everything”—i.e., “the root of all evil” (R. Dawkins).



Scottish skeptic David Hume (1711-1776)

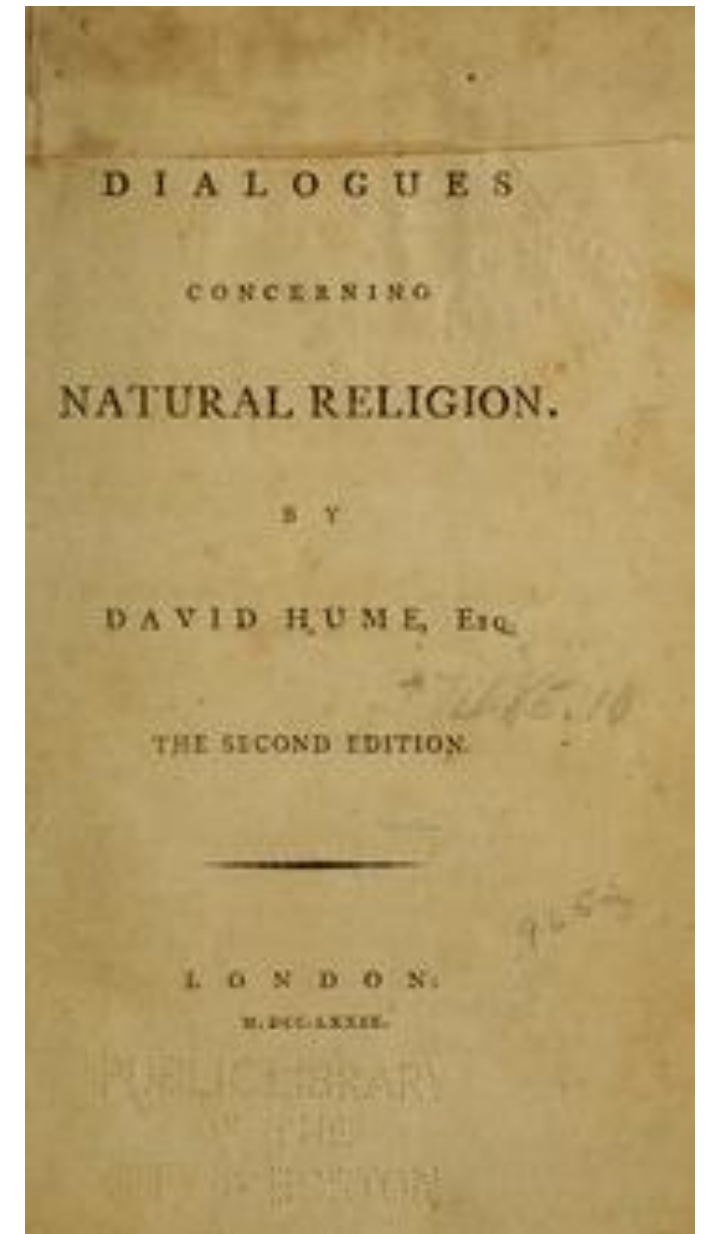
“Were a stranger to drop, on a sudden, into the world, I would show him a specimen of its ills, an hospital full of diseases, a prison crowded with malefactors and debtors, a field of battle strewn with carcasses, a fleet foundering in the ocean, a nation languishing under tyranny, famine, or pestilence.”



Hume then asks:

“Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but, not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?”

Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion



Marilyn McCord Adams (philosopher):



“I offer the following list of paradigmatic horrors: the rape of a woman and axing off of her arms, psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality, betrayal of one’s deepest loyalties, cannibalizing one’s own offspring, child abuse of the sort described by Ivan Karamazov [a mother who beats her seven-year-old girl, a five-year-old boy forced to sleep outside and eat excrement], child pornography, parental incest, slow death by starvation,...

...participation in the Nazi death camps, ... having to choose which of one's children shall live and which will be executed by terrorists, I regard these as *paradigmatic*, because I believe most people would find in the doing or suffering of them prima-facie reason to doubt the positive meaning of their lives.”

Marilyn M. Adams, “Horrendous Evils,” *Readings in Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Linda Zagzebski & Timothy D. Miller (Oxford: Wiley, 2009),

Letter from a Colorado pastor: “I am withdrawing” from serving in the Church.



...I have some questions regarding the pervasiveness of evil and why does God put up with letting Satan have his way? Especially in light of His love for children why does He allow child abduction and sexual abuse? And the list goes on ... So when does God intervene on behalf of the saints and the defenseless? And is He really nearby and motivated by our prayers that seem to go unanswered?

I was an ordained elder for a local evangelical church..... I was a student of Bible and theology at _____. I loved serving in ministry, reading and teaching God's Word and was a champion of the gospel message for all those years.

Then about 5 years ago a 10 year girl...was raped and brutally murdered (her body dismembered) by a demented high school student who lived in the same neighborhood. She was a guest of our church ...whose neighbor across the street brought her to Sunday school with their daughter and was told she trusted in Jesus as her savior one of those visits. The girl's mom was invited many times but wasn't interested in checking out [our church]. After her death we memorialized her death and visited with her mom many times to try to comfort her but to no avail.

She wanted to know where was God to protect her precious daughter? We didn't have an answer. It was then that my faith began to question many things about God's presence or lack of it, having the same question that she had. All my training and study of His Word has left me wondering: *Why doesn't God feel like we do? Why isn't [He] more active battling evil in the world? Why does He allow Satan to have control for so long? What is the greater purpose for all of this suffering?*

I'm well aware and in awe of Christ's suffering....
And I am forever grateful that the Lord reached out
of heaven to reveal Himself to me and saved me by
His grace, through faith after believing in his
message of salvation. But I am withdrawing from
serving because I don't have these answers and
wonder what kind of God would let this little girl die
like this? And so many others like her throughout
the world every day. Can you help me, Paul, see
what is clouding my faith? Thank you, brother.

*“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart!
I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)*

•

Richard Gale:

“The widespread existence of evil is the greatest challenge to the rationality of belief in the God of traditional theism, who has every perfection to an unlimited extent, among which are being omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnibenevolent (all-good), and sovereign (all-determining).”

Richard M. Gale, “The Problem of Evil,” in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, eds. Chad Meister and Paul Copan, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012).

***The perspectival problem of evil:* for *some*, the experience of evil serves as grounds for rejecting God while for *others* it prompts the pursuit of God.**

**DESPITE THE PREVALENCE OF EVIL, TO
ABANDON THE BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF GOD IS TO CUT OURSELVES OFF FROM
THE MOST ROBUST RESOURCES AVAILABLE
FOR RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM OF
EVIL.**

OVERVIEW

1. THE RECOGNITION OF EVIL: *EVIL AND COMMON SENSE*
2. THE DEFINITION OF EVIL: *EVIL AND THE DESIGN-PLAN*
3. THE PRESUPPOSITION OF EVIL: *EVIL AND HUMAN VALUE*
4. THE REPARATION OF EVIL: *EVIL AND THE MORAL GAP*

5. THE ARGUMENTATION ON EVIL: *EVIL AND CRITICAL RESPONSES*

6. THE REDEMPTION FROM EVIL: *EVIL AND DIVINE INTERVENTION*

7. THE RESOLUTION TO EVIL: *EVIL AND COSMIC JUSTICE*

8. THE ACTION AGAINST EVIL: *EVIL AND HUMAN INVOLVEMENT*

9. OUR VOLITION CONCERNING EVIL: *EVIL AND TAKING A STANCE*

Two preliminary comments:

- **THE RIGHT QUESTION TO ASK: “Which worldview offers us the best resources for responding to the problem of evil?”** It’s unwarranted to assume that the biblical faith must completely remove all of our questions about evil.
- **THE WRONG QUESTION TO ASK: “Why?”** We set ourselves up for disappointment and despair when we expect we should know why this or that particular evil happens (Luke 13:1-5).

1. THE RECOGNITION OF EVIL: INSTEAD OF DENYING EVIL, THE BIBLICAL FAITH TAKES SERIOUSLY THE OBVIOUS REALITY OF EVIL

**Evil's reality and
detectability are obvious.**

**Yet some worldviews
deny the reality of evil,
but why reject what
seems so obvious to us?**



Lisbon Earthquake, 1 Nov. 1755 (10,000-100,000 killed)

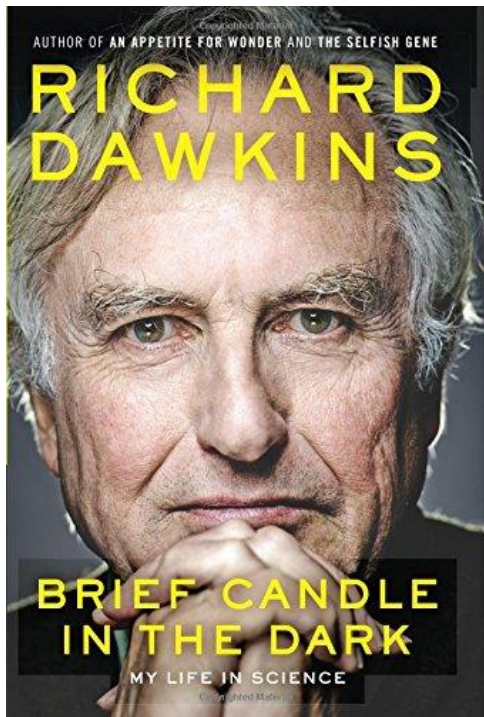


The main nave of the Carmo Convent, which was damaged in this earthquake.

Prior to this earthquake, such events were viewed as morally and theologically significant. The tendency in our modern era has been to treat these events as natural phenomena only—without meaning or moral significance:

Susan Neiman: “For contemporary observers, earthquakes are only a matter of plate tectonics. They threaten, at most, your faith in government building codes or geologists’ predictions. They may invoke anger at lazy inspectors, or pity for those stuck in the wrong place at the wrong time. But these are ordinary emotions.”

Susan Neiman, *Evil in Modern Thought: An Alternative History of Philosophy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 246. Some comments also from Jerry Walls, “The Atheists Have No Problem of Evil,” *The City* (Winter 2015): 51



River Out of Eden

From the bestselling author of
A Devil's Chaplain

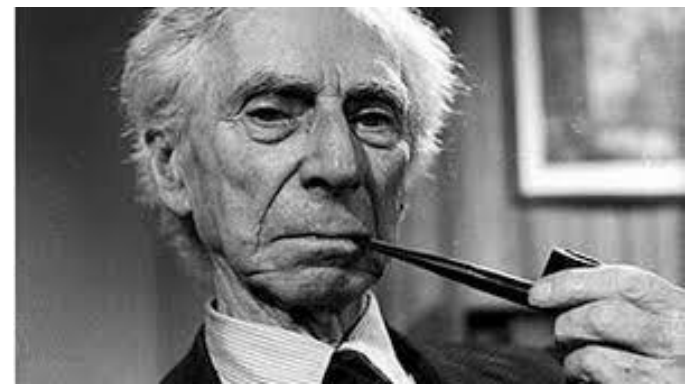
Richard
Dawkins

Example #1: A NATURALISTIC VIEW

RICHARD DAWKINS: “...if the universe were just electrons and selfish genes...[it] would be neither evil nor good in intention....The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind pitiless indifference....DNA neither knows nor cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music.”

Richard Dawkins, *River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life* (New York: Basic Books/Harper Collins, 1995), 132-33.

Bertrand Russell (atheist philosopher):



“That man is the product of causes that had no prevision of the end they were achieving. That his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves, his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms. That no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling can preserve an individual life beyond the grave....

...That all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspirations, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of man's achievements must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins. All these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation, henceforth, be safely built.

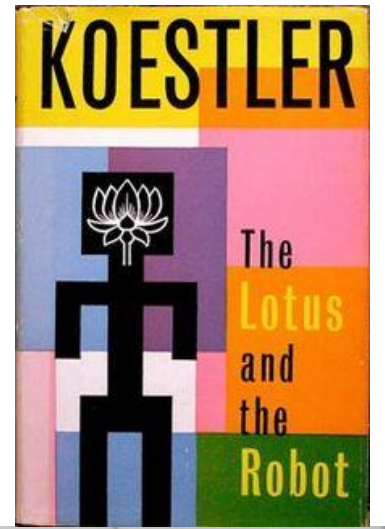
Bertrand Russell, "A Free Man's Worship," in *Mysticism and Logic and Other Essays* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1963), 41 (my emphasis).

EXAMPLE #2: AN EASTERN (ZEN BUDDHIST) VIEW:

The Lotus and the Robot (1961): Arthur Koestler's interview with a Zen Buddhist scholar (International House of Japan, Chair for Comparative Religion):

“Buddhism lays great stress on truth. Why should a man tell the truth when it may be to his advantage to lie?”

“Because it is simpler.”



Somebody else tried another tack. “You favor tolerance toward all religions and all political systems.

“What about Hitler’s gas chambers?”

“That was very silly of him.”

“Just silly, not evil?”

“Evil is a Christian concept. Good and evil exist only on a relative scale.”

At very minimum, the Christian faith has this going for it: It doesn't deny the pervasive problem of evil that some other worldviews do. Indeed, the Christian faith takes evil very seriously.

2. THE DEFINITION OF EVIL: EVIL ITSELF PRESUPPOSES A STANDARD, WHICH SOUNDS LIKE GOD.

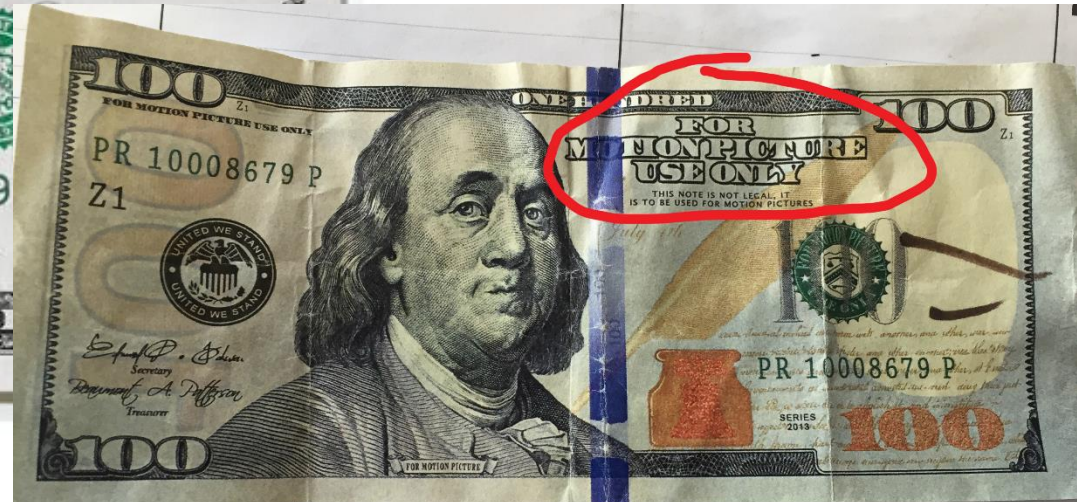


A. EVIL IS A *DEPARTURE FROM THE WAY THINGS OUGHT TO BE*. THIS ASSUMES A DESIGN PLAN, SOME KIND OF STANDARD.

Susan Neiman: “Every time we make the judgment *this ought not to have happened*, we are stepping onto a path that leads straight to the problem of evil.”

Evil is a departure from the way things ought to be.

Like counterfeit money, evil presupposes a kind of standard or design plan.



C.S. Lewis

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 45-46.



If the whole show was bad and senseless from A to Z, so to speak, why did I, who was supposed to be part of the show, find myself in such violent reaction against it?

. . . . Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense.”

Christian philosopher Alvin
Plantinga (b. 1932)

“...could there really be any such thing as horrifying wickedness if naturalism were true? I don’t see how. A naturalistic way of looking at the world, so it seems to me, has no place for genuine moral obligation of any sort; a fortiori [i.e., all the more], then, it has no place for such a category as horrifying wickedness. . .



[The problem is one of understanding] how, in a naturalistic universe, there could be such a thing as genuine and appalling wickedness. There can be such a thing only if there is a way rational creatures are supposed to live, obliged to live....

But naturalism cannot make room for that kind of normativity; that requires a lawgiver, one whose very nature it is to abhor wickedness. Naturalism can perhaps accommodate foolishness and irrationality, acting contrary to what are or what you take to be your own interests; it can't accommodate appalling wickedness.

Accordingly, if you think there really *is* such a thing as horrifying wickedness (that our sense that there is, is not a mere illusion of some sort), and if you also think that the main options are theism and naturalism, then you have a powerful theistic argument from evil.”

Alvin Plantinga, “A Christian Life Partly Lived,” in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers, Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 72, 73 (my emphasis).



WHAT IS (TRUE) NATURALISM?

MATERIALISM: MATTER IS THE ONLY REALITY.

**DETERMINISM: EACH EVENT IS THE RESULT OF PRIOR
PHYSICAL FORCES.**

SCIENTISM: SCIENCE ALONE GIVES US KNOWLEDGE.

Naturalism is “imperialistic; it demands ‘full coverage’ . . . and exacts a terribly high ontological [i.e., metaphysical] price.”



Jaegwon Kim (Philosopher, Brown University)

Jaegwon Kim, “Mental Causation and Two Conceptions of Mental Properties.” Paper presented at the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting (December 1993), 22-23.



BROAD NATURALISM?

- **Some naturalists won't go the whole way. Rather than being strict (consistent) naturalists, these broad naturalists try to hang on to common sense: humans have intrinsic dignity, moral duties, personal responsibility, self-consciousness; they believe that beauty exists.**
- **However, they are actually clinging to transcendent standards—objective values independent of the natural world.**

**B. THE BROAD NATURALIST HAS TWO PROBLEMS TO DEAL
WITH: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND THE PROBLEM OF
GOODNESS.**



C. EVIL—THE LEADING ANTI-THEISTIC ARGUMENT—
TURNS OUT TO BE AN ARGUMENT *FOR* GOD'S EXISTENCE:

- ***If objective moral values exist, then God (most likely) exists.***
- ***Evil exists.***
- ***Evil is an objective (negative) moral value.***
- ***Therefore God (most likely) exists.***

Stewart Goetz: “if you think that there is a problem of evil, then you must, if you are consistent, break ranks with contemporary philosophical orthodoxy.” There is *no* problem of evil from the strict naturalist’s point of view.

Stewart Goetz, “The Argument from Evil,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, eds. William Lane Craig and J.P. Moreland (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), 452.

3. THE PRESUPPOSITION OF EVIL: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL PRESUPPOSES HUMAN VALUE OR WORTH.

**HUMANS ARE MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE (GEN. 1:26-27).
BUT IF THERE IS NO GOD, IT IS HARD TO SEE HOW
VALUABLE BEINGS COULD EMERGE FROM VALUELESS
PROCESSES.**



Without God, there is no ultimate **SIGNIFICANCE** to life.

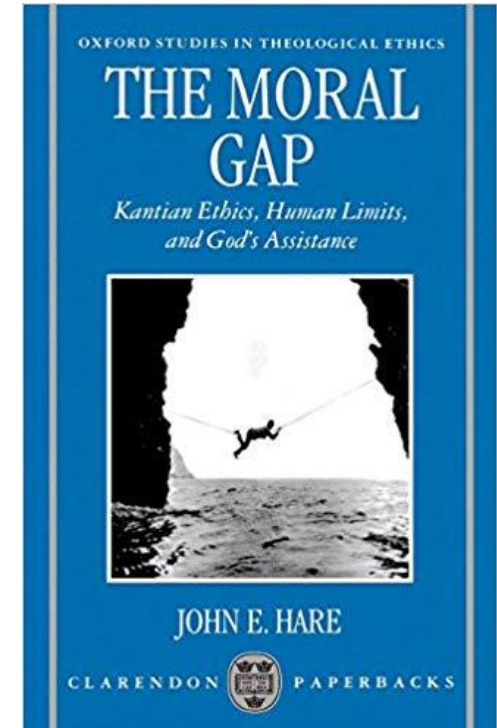
- **VALUE**: Our objective value as humans is highly probable if God (a supremely valuable being exists). It's highly improbable given a context of valueless, mindless material processes.
- **RIGHTS**: The notion of "human rights" is puzzling on naturalism, but it makes excellent sense if a good God exists (we're made in the image of God).
- **PURPOSE**: Without God, there is no cosmic purpose. And our deepest desire for perfect happiness ("joy") will be unattainable if we are limited to this life alone. God's existence removes this absurdity.

4. THE REPARATION OF EVIL:

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD PRESENTS OUR BEST HOPE FOR ADDRESSING THE MORAL GAP BETWEEN THE ETHICAL IDEAL AND OUR CAPACITIES TO ACHIEVE IT (“GRACE”).

This gap is acknowledged by “secular” and “religious” systems alike.

We need God’s grace to bridge this gap.



**C.S. Lewis, author of *Mere Christianity*:
“For the first time I examined myself
with a seriously practical purpose. And
there I found what appalled me; a zoo
of lusts, a bedlam of ambitions, a
nursery of fears, a harem of fondled
hatreds. My name was legion [i.e., a
biblical name referring to *many*
demons].”**

C.S. Lewis, Surprised by Joy



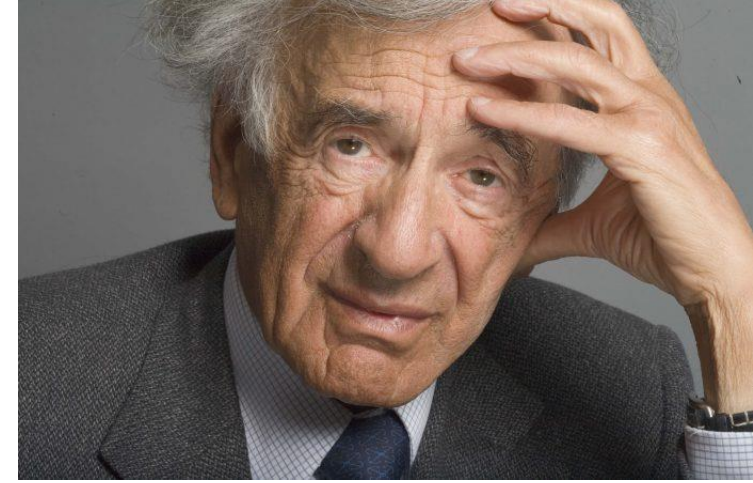


Alexander Solzhenitsyn (Soviet dissident, prisoner, author):

“Gradually it was disclosed to me that the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either, but right through every human heart, and through all human hearts. This line shifts. Inside us, it oscillates with the years. Even within hearts overwhelmed by evil, one small bridgehead of good is retained; and even in the best of all hearts, there remains...an unuprooted small corner of evil.”

Alexandr I. Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956, vol. 2, trans. Thomas P. Whitney (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 312.

Elie Wiesel (Auschwitz survivor,
Nobel laureate, human rights
advocate):



Reflecting on the human condition, he wrote:

“Deep down... man is not only an executioner, not only a victim, not only a spectator: he is all three at once.”

Elie Wiesel, *The Town Beyond the Wall: A Novel* (New York: Schocken, 1995), 163.

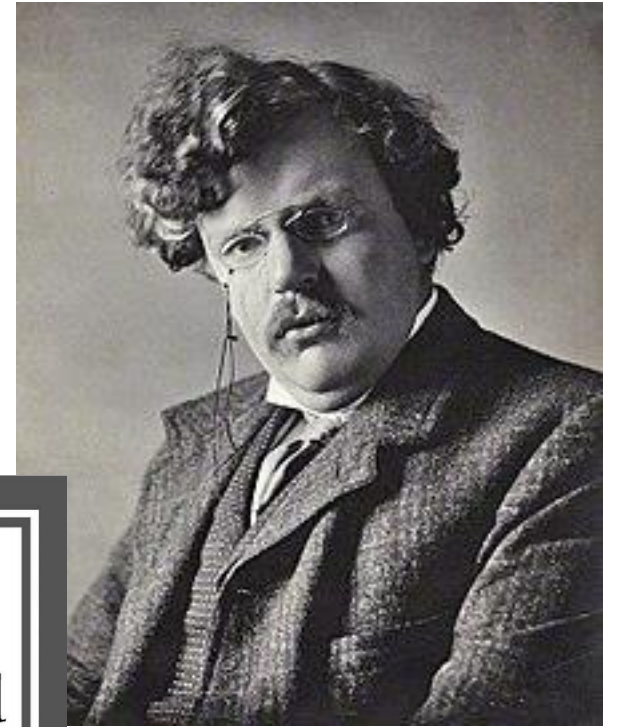
***G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936)
writing to The Times of London
about the question, “What’s
wrong with the world?”***

Dear Sir,

I am.

Yours,

G.K. Chesterton



What's Wrong
With The World



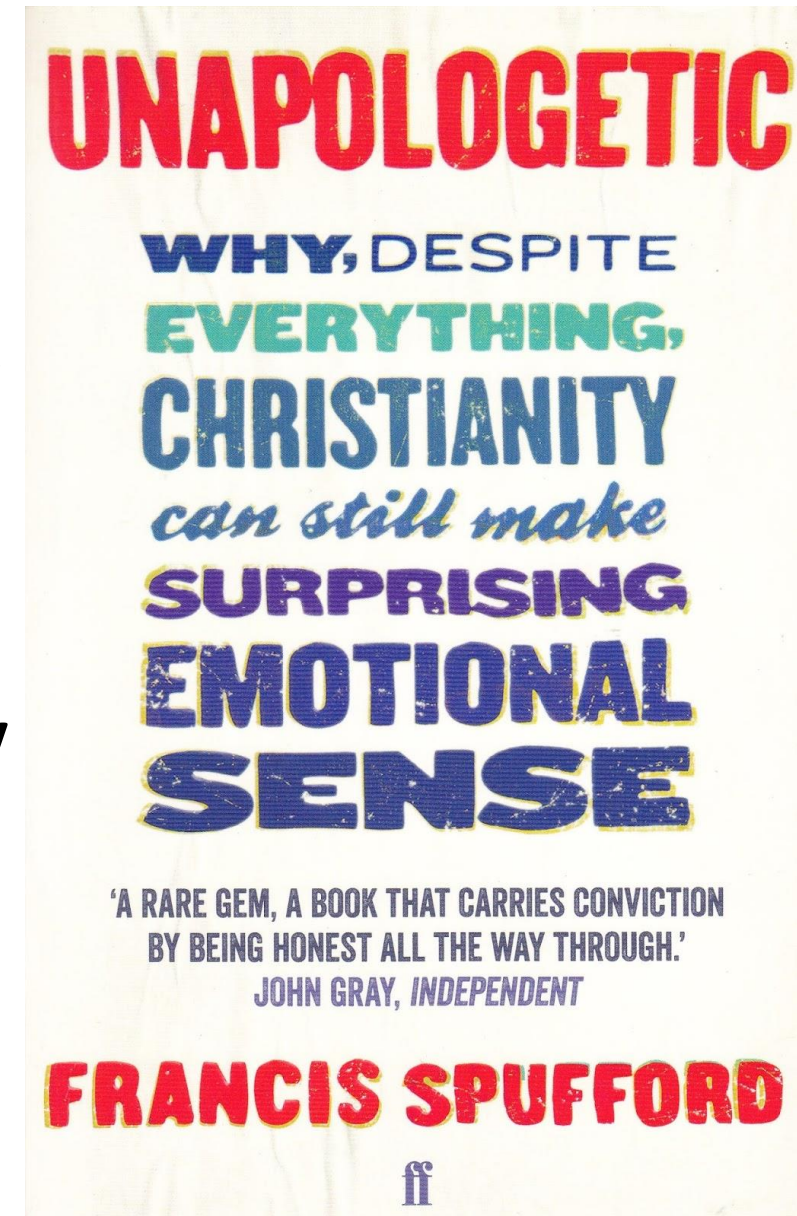
G.K. Chesterton

Start Classics

Francis Spufford on why he left atheism

“[Atheism] turned out not to contain what my soul needed for nourishment in bad times. It was not any kind of philosophical process that led me out from disbelief. I had made a mess of things in my life, and I needed mercy, and to my astonishment, mercy was there. An experience of mercy, rather than an idea of it. And the rest followed from there. I felt my way back to Christianity, discovering through many surprises that the religion I remembered from my childhood looked different if you came to it as an adult with adult needs: not pretty, not small, not ridiculous, but tough and gigantic and marvellous.”

Luis Rivas with Francis Spufford, “Q&A on ‘Impenitente [Unapologetic]” at <http://unapologetic-book.tumblr.com/post/99715799639/qa-about-impenitente-english-version>.



**5. THE ARGUMENTATION ON EVIL:
THE KEY ARGUMENTS FROM EVIL CAN BE
CHALLENGED.**

EMOTIONAL VS. PHILOSOPHICAL:

- EMOTIONAL ARGUMENT: I may *feel* that a good God couldn't exist given my state of suffering or the suffering I see in the world. Response: pastoral care, presence, comfort are needed.
- LOGICAL ARGUMENT: Hume and others assumed that if God is all-good and all-powerful, then, necessarily, evil cannot exist. Response: God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting the evils he does.
- PROBABILISTIC ARGUMENT: It may be logically possible that God and evil coexist, but it's highly improbable. Response: Are we in the best position to determine this? Just because I don't know God's possible reasons for permitting evil doesn't mean they don't exist.

- If we look only at the problem of evil, then God's existence will seem much less likely.
- However, we should consider the full scope of evidence for God:

- ☐ **The beginning of the universe (Big Bang, second law of thermodynamics)**
- ☐ **The fine-tuning of the universe (life-permitting, life-producing, life-sustaining)**
- ☐ **Consciousness**
- ☐ **Rationality and free will**
- ☐ **Beauty**
- ☐ **Human dignity**
- ☐ **Moral duties**
- ☐ **Historical evidence for the miracle of Jesus' bodily resurrection, etc.**

- *If God exists, he would not allow any pointless evil.*
- *God exists.*
- *Therefore, there is no utterly pointless evil.*

**Are we in the best position to determine
whether God could have a morally
justifiable reason for permitting evil?**

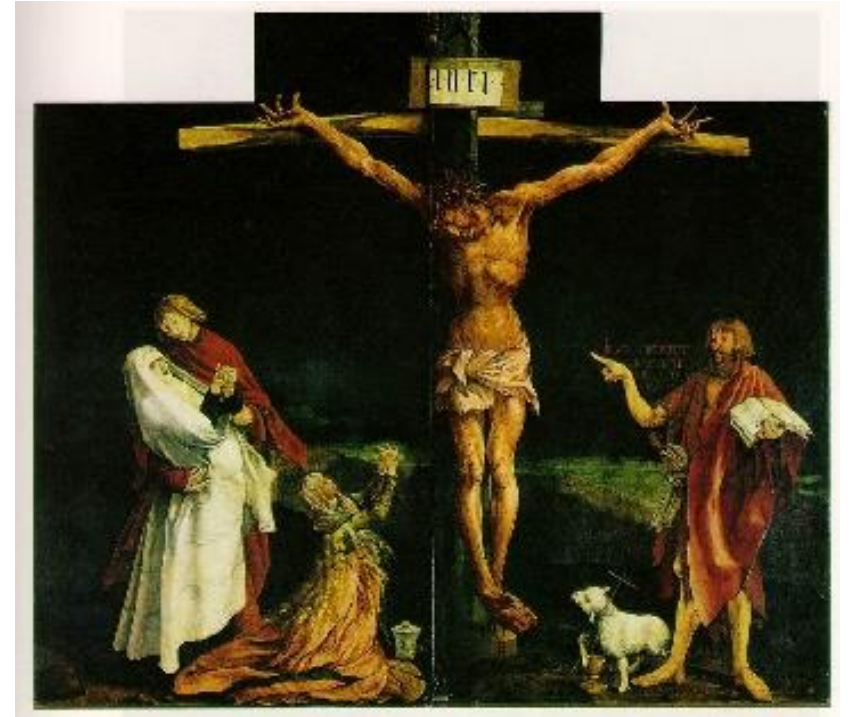
***What if evil is just INSCRUTABLE
(mysterious) rather than GRATUITOUS
(unnecessary)?***

6. THE REDEMPTION FROM EVIL:

WITHOUT GOD, THERE IS NO HOPE OF
DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL.



**In a world of
evil, what has
God done to
help humanity?**

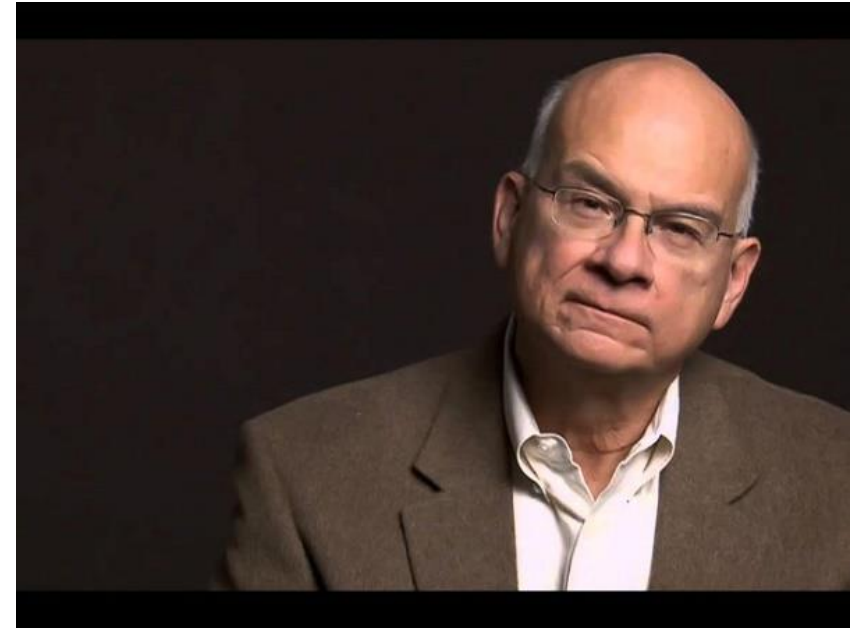


In the Christian faith, God gets his feet dirty and hands bloody as he steps into history to redeem and restore.

Unlike the assumption in other worldviews, religions, or philosophies of life, we really are incapable of saving ourselves. We need outside assistance, and this is undeserved (“grace”).

Author Tim Keller:

“If your fundamental is a man dying on the cross for his enemies, if the very heart of your self-image and your religion is a man praying for his enemies as he died for them, sacrificing for them, loving them—if that sinks into your heart of hearts, it’s going to produce the kind of life that the early Christians produced.



The most inclusive possible life out of the most exclusive possible claim—and that is that this is the truth. But what is the truth? The truth is a God become weak, loving, and dying for the people who opposed him, dying forgiving them.”

Tim Keller, “Reason for God,” *The Explorer* (Veritas Forum), (Fall 2008). URL: <<http://www.veritas.org/explorer/fall2008.html#story1>>.

Alvin Plantinga

“As the Christian sees things, God does not stand idly by, cooling observing the suffering of his creatures. He enters into and shares our suffering. He endures the anguish of seeing his Son, the second Person of the Trinity, consigned to the bitterly cruel and shameful death of the cross. Some theologians claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God’s capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness.”

Alvin Plantinga, “A Christian Life Partly Lived,” in *Philosophers Who Believe*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 71.

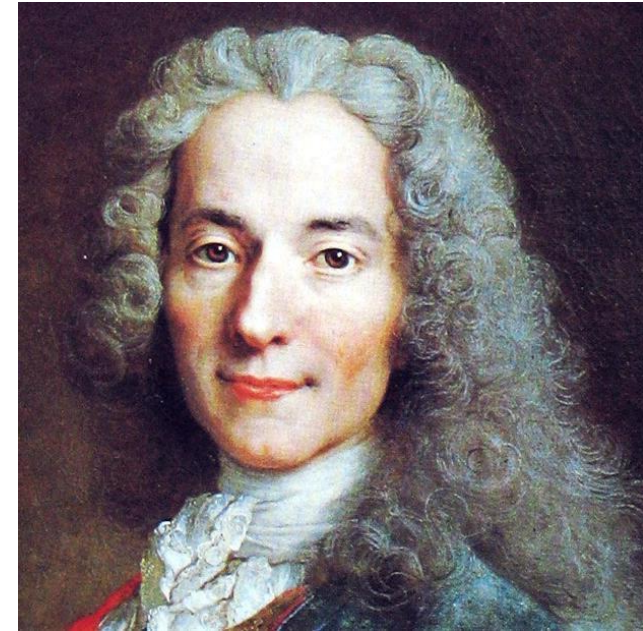
Historian, author
Tom Holland:
“Why I Was Wrong
About Christianity”



“The longer I spent immersed in the study of classical antiquity, the more alien and unsettling I came to find it.”

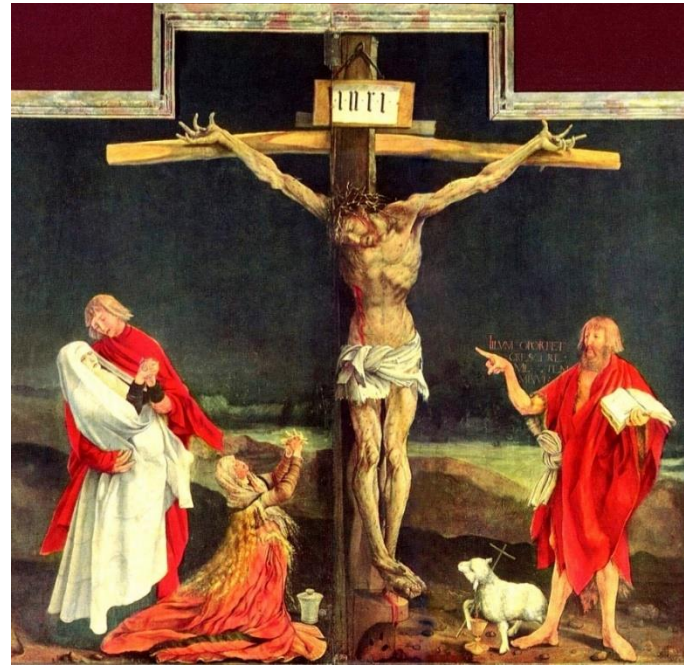
“It was not just the extremes of callousness that I came to find shocking, but the lack of a sense that the poor or the weak might have any intrinsic value. As such, the founding conviction of the Enlightenment – that it owed nothing to the faith into which most of its greatest figures had been born – increasingly came to seem to me unsustainable.”

**“‘Every sensible man,’
Voltaire wrote, ‘every
honourable man, must
hold the Christian sect
in horror.’ ... Yet
Voltaire, in his concern
for the weak and
oppressed, was marked
more enduringly by the
stamp of biblical ethics
than he cared to admit.**



“‘We preach Christ crucified,’ St Paul declared, ‘unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.’ He was right. Nothing could have run more counter to the most profoundly held assumptions of Paul’s contemporaries – Jews, or Greeks, or Romans.”

“The notion that a god might have suffered torture and death on a cross was so shocking as to appear repulsive. Familiarity with the biblical narrative of the Crucifixion has dulled our sense of just how completely novel a deity Christ was. In the ancient world, it was the role of gods who laid claim to ruling the universe to uphold its order by inflicting punishment – not to suffer it themselves.”



“Today, even as belief in God fades across the West, the countries that were once collectively known as Christendom continue to bear the stamp of the two-millennia-old revolution that Christianity represents. It is the principal reason why, by and large, most of us who live in post-Christian societies still take for granted that it is nobler to suffer than to inflict suffering.

“It is why we generally assume that every human life is of equal value. In my morals and ethics, I have learned to accept that I am not Greek or Roman at all, but thoroughly and proudly Christian.”

Tom Holland, “Why I was wrong about Christianity,” *New Statesman* (14 Sept. 2016):

<http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/religion/2016/09/tom-holland-why-i-was-wrong-about-christianity>

7. THE RESOLUTION TO EVIL: Without God, cosmic justice is becomes impossible.

If there is no God, Hitler and Stalin get away with murder. Mother Teresa's self-sacrifice for God goes unrewarded.



- **EARTHLY JUSTICE: It would be a terrible society if murderers and rapists were never called to account/punished for their actions.**

- **COSMIC JUSTICE: Unlike atheism, the existence of a good God guarantees that justice will be carried out and wrongs put right. No one will “get away with murder.” Self-sacrifice for God and others is not in vain.**

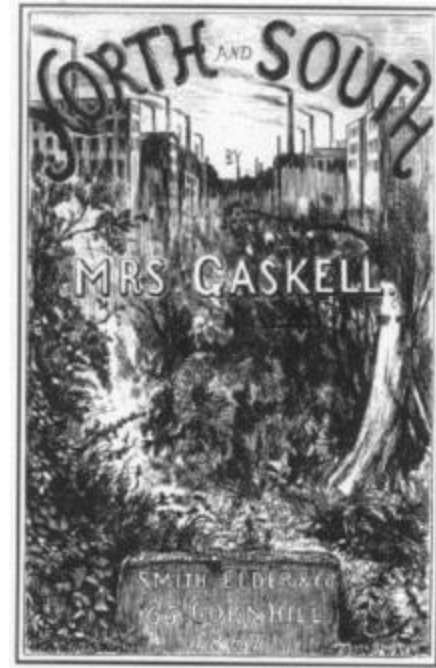


- God's existence guarantees that ultimate *happiness* and *virtue/the moral life* will come together.
- Atheism leads to the absurdity that this deepest longing will not be fulfilled by those who have lived virtuous—but unrewarded—earthly lives (e.g., Mother Teresa).
- The Christian faith presents a two-worlds model in addressing the problem of evil; atheism has only one world available within which to address evil—and it leaves many problems unresolved.

2 Corinthians 4:17: “For our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

The factory girl in Elizabeth Gaskell's novel, *North and South*:

“I think if this should be the end of all, and if all I have been born for is just to work my heart and life away, and to sicken in this [dreary] place, with those mill-stones in my ears forever, until I could scream out for them to stop and let me have a little piece of quiet, and with the fluff filling my lungs, until I thirst to death for one long deep breath of the clear air, and my mother gone, and I never able to tell her again how I loved her, and of all my troubles—I think, if this life is the end, and that there is no God to wipe away all tears from all eyes, I could go mad!”

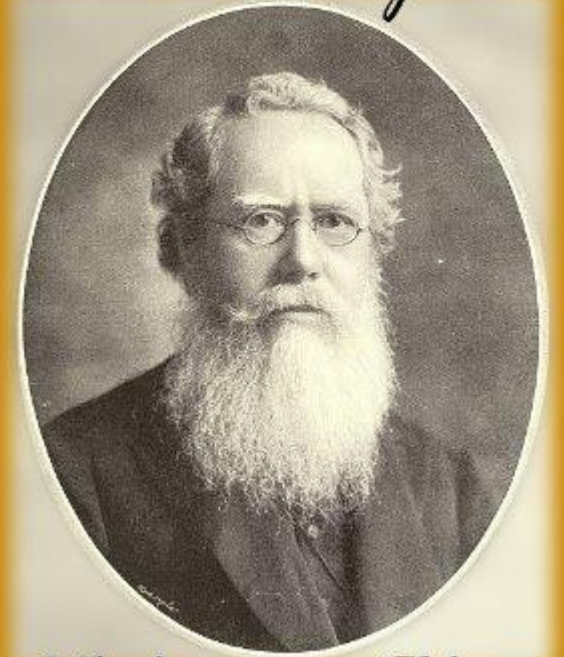


Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South*, quoted in John Henry Newman, *The Grammar of Assent* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1955), 247.

8. THE ACTION AGAINST EVIL: GOD'S PEOPLE HAVE A SHARE IN BRINGING THE HEAVENLY REALITIES TO A BROKEN WORLD.



*The Autobiography
of
Hudson Taylor*



Missionary to China

GLH Publishing



Atheist philosopher Jürgen Habermas

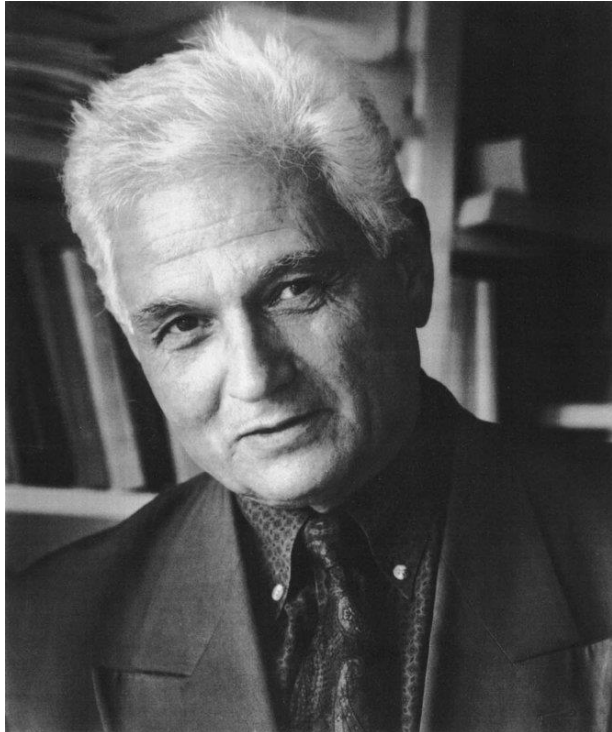
“Christianity has functioned for the normative self-understanding of modernity as more than just a precursor or a catalyst. Egalitarian universalism, from which sprang the ideas of freedom and a social solidarity, of an autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights, and democracy, is the direct heir to the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love....

Habermas (cont'd)

.... To this day, there is no alternative to it. And in light of current challenges of a postnational constellation, we continue to draw on the substance of this heritage. Everything else is just idle postmodern talk.”

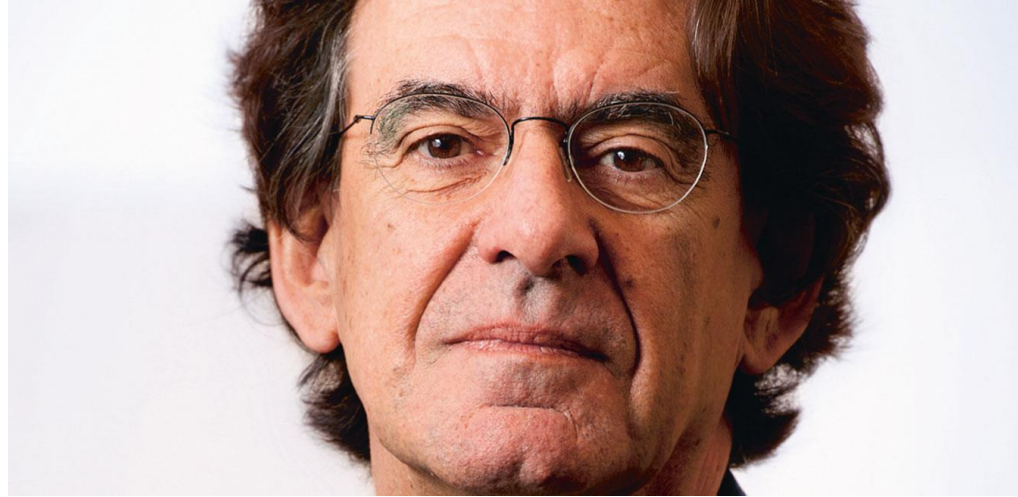
Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions*, ed. and trans. Ciaran Cronin and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 150-1.

Atheist thinker
Jacques Derrida



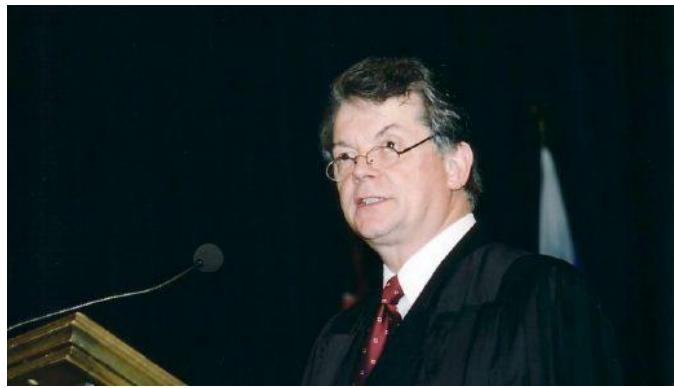
“Today the cornerstone of international law is the sacred, what is sacred in humanity. You should not kill. You should not be responsible for a crime against the sacredness, this sacredness of man as your neighbor.In that sense, the concept of crime against humanity is a Christian concept and I think there would be no such thing in the law today without the Christian heritage, the Abrahamic heritage, the biblical heritage.”

Jacques Derrida, "To Forgive: The Unforgivable and Imprescriptable," in *Questioning God*, ed. John D. Cautpo, et al. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2001), 70.



Agnostic philosopher Luc Ferry: The Christian idea of human equality was “unprecedented at the time, and one to which our world owes its entire democratic inheritance.”

Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 72.



Canadian Broadcasting
Corporation journalist
Brian Stewart

***I've found there is no movement, or force,
closer to the raw truth of war, famines,
crises and the vast human predicament,
than organized Christianity in action. And
there is no alliance more determined and
dogged in action than church workers,
ordained and lay members, when mobilized
for a common good. It is these Christians
who are right 'on the front lines' of
committed humanity today and when I
want to find that front, I follow their trail....***

Stewart (cont'd)

It is a vast front, stretching from the most impoverished reaches of the developing world to the hectic struggle to preserve caring values in our own towns and cities. I have never been able to reach these front lines without finding Christian volunteers already in the thick of it, mobilizing congregations that care, and being a faithful witness to truth, the primary light in the darkness, and so often the only light.

Stewart (cont'd)

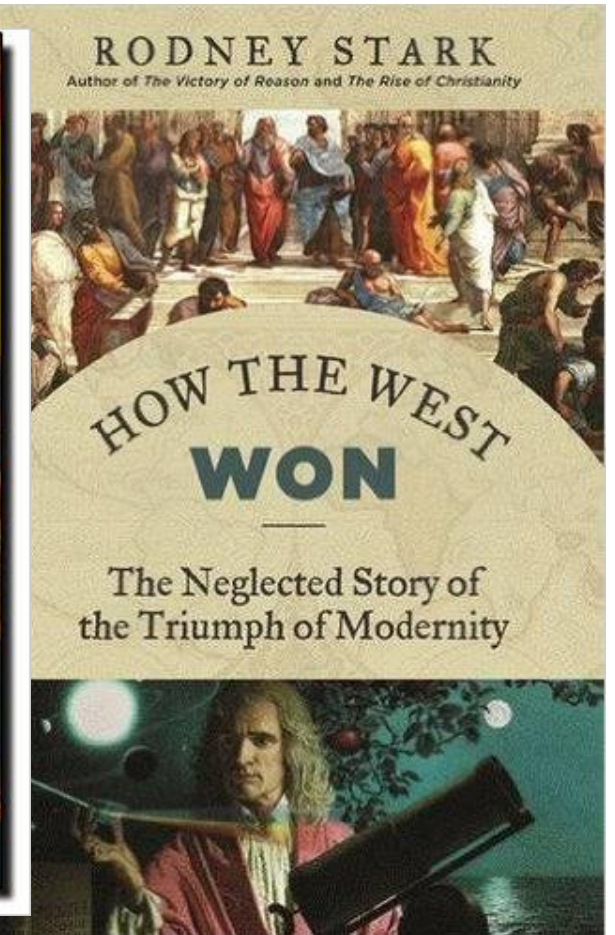
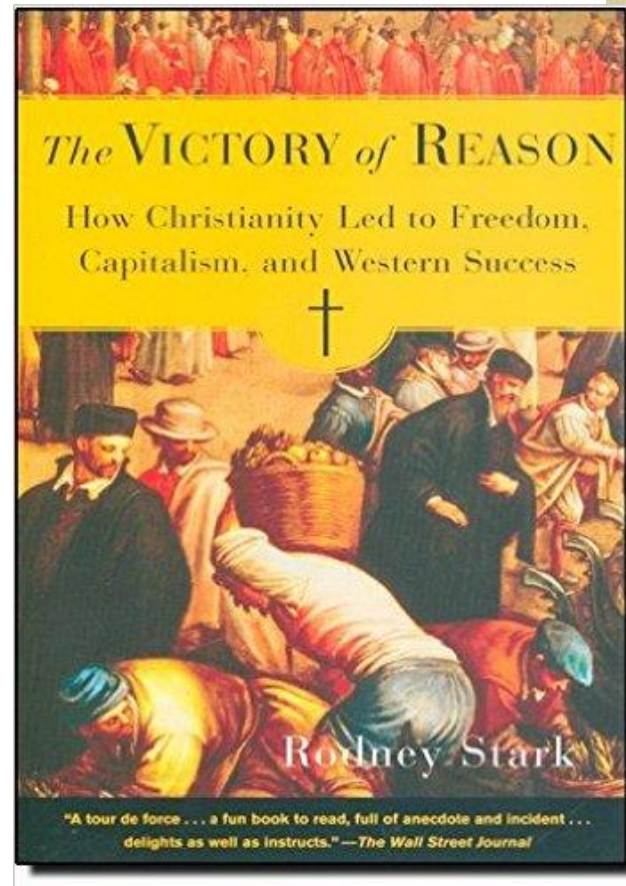
Now I came to this admiring view slowly and reluctantly. At the start of my career, I'd largely abandoned religion for I, too, regarded the church as a rather tiresome irrelevance.

What ultimately persuaded me otherwise – and I took a lot of persuading – was the reality of Christianity's mission, physically and in spirit, before my very eyes.

Sociologist Rodney Stark (Baylor University)

**“I basically wrote
myself into the
Christian faith.”**

Rodney Stark, personal letter, December 2011.



The Gospel and Systemic Evil

- All cultures are sick, but some are sicker than others.
- Evil isn't merely individual—demonically-inspired evil structures (e.g., slavery, prostitution, caste system) and attitudes (e.g., racial prejudice). And institutions intended for good (government, judicial system, marriage/family) can contribute to systemic evils (Roe vs. Wade decision; (Communist, Nazi, apartheid states), sick/evil cultures.
- The gospel has made inroads to create certain mediating influences: religious toleration, church-state as mutually independent, mass education, economic development, reduction of corruption. (Protestantism has contributed to democracy, lessened corruption, etc.—see the work of Robert Woodberry, Baylor Univ.).

Historian Philip Jenkins:

“Yet a Christian worldview that acknowledges supernatural evil does not disqualify itself from participation in worldly struggles, including movements for far-reaching social and economic transformation. Whatever their spiritual truth—whatever their fidelity to Christian tradition—supernatural approaches can be valuable in moving societies away from pernicious traditional superstitions. For instance, offering distinctively Christian solutions to witchcraft helps disarm the sometimes bloody practices of anti-witchcraft rituals. In a relatively short time, the new Christian emphasis on prayer and Bible reading defuses the fatalism inherent in a traditional system based on such notions as witchcraft, curses, and the power of ancestors. Instead, Christians are taught to rely on faith and on the role of the individual, who is no longer a slave to destiny or fate. By treating older notions of spiritual evil seriously, Christians are leading an epochal cultural revolution.”



“Believing in the Global South,” First Things (Dec. 2006),
<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2006/12/believing-in-the-global-south>

9. OUR VOLITION CONCERNING EVIL: *EVIL AND TAKING A STANCE*

- Everyone will choose to privilege *something* (e.g., an experience of evil, abandonment of a parent, the loss of a child) over another thing (e.g., the goodness of God, the sacrifice of Christ for humanity).
- The stance we take (skeptical or trusting) will shape/distort our understanding God, the world, etc.
- Christians have focused differently (on Scripture and Jesus) because “they believe [them] to be a *better* focus and explanation than any other: *Look here rather than there.*”

- R.W.L. Moberly, *The Bible in a Disenchanted Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 92.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER



- ***Will we privilege our doubts or skepticism over against what God has done for us in Christ?***
- ***Will we give priority to the problem of evil and our own distressing experiences with evil over against a God who loves us and suffers with us—and who himself faces evil and the cruelty of an unjust and humiliating crucifixion?***

- *Will we take the stance that this world is all the reality that there is, that people will get away with murder, and that virtue will ultimately go unrewarded?*
- *Or will we trust that God is our only guarantor for securing cosmic justice and setting right all of the world's wrongs? Will we agree with the promises of God in Christ that he will richly compensate those who love him far beyond anything they may have suffered and endured in this life?*

- ***Will we place our trust in philosophies that cannot assuage our guilt or cleanse our conscience or help us overcome our fear of death or give a stable purpose and meaning to our lives?***
- ***Or will we trust in the all-sufficient Christ, who secures our place in God's family and who promises full forgiveness and complete rest, joy, and peace in the life to come?***

ENGAGING THE WILL

Is there a willingness/readiness to enter into the Jesus-story and to find our identity within it?

“Jesus answered them and said, ‘My teaching is not Mine, but His who sent Me. If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself’” (John 7:16-17).

Do I find that this overarching biblical story proves reliable in making the best sense of the way things are, the human condition, my own sense of identity and purpose?



Concluding Remarks

The atheist's key argument against God becomes an even more difficult problem without God:

“When belief in God becomes difficult, the tendency is to turn away from Him; but in heaven’s name, to what?” (G.K. Chesterton).



**Peter to Jesus: “To whom else shall we go?
You have the words of eternal life” (Jn.
6:68).**

SUMMARY

- Without Christ, what resources are we left with in addressing the deep problem of evil? The very **existence definition**, and **presupposition** of evil make the best sense in light of the biblical God.
- Without Christ, what hope do we have the problem will be set right? We need a champion who steps in to do **reparation**, to bring **redemption** and **resolution** to evil.

- The modeling of God's own love in Christ's death and the empowering Spirit produce in God's people the motivation to action in helping a hurting world.

- ***Every worldview must grapple with the problem of evil and injustice, but some will address this only partially or not at all.***
- ***The biblical worldview has far better resources for grappling with evil than the alternatives.***

Philosopher Marilyn McCord Adams

“If Divine Goodness is infinite, if intimate relation to It is thus incommensurably good for created persons, then we have identified a good big enough to defeat horrors in every case.”

Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 82-83.

Conclusion

- **Richard Gale's claim that the "widespread existence of evil is the greatest challenge to the rationality of belief in the God of traditional theism" is correct.**
- **But the reality of evil proves to be an utterly devastating challenge to the naturalist, who has no room in his metaphysic to account for its existence.**
- **If we get rid of God—particularly, the biblical God—we only make matters worse when it comes to accounting for the reality and implications of evil.**