Podcast Companion
The Problem of Evil & Suffering

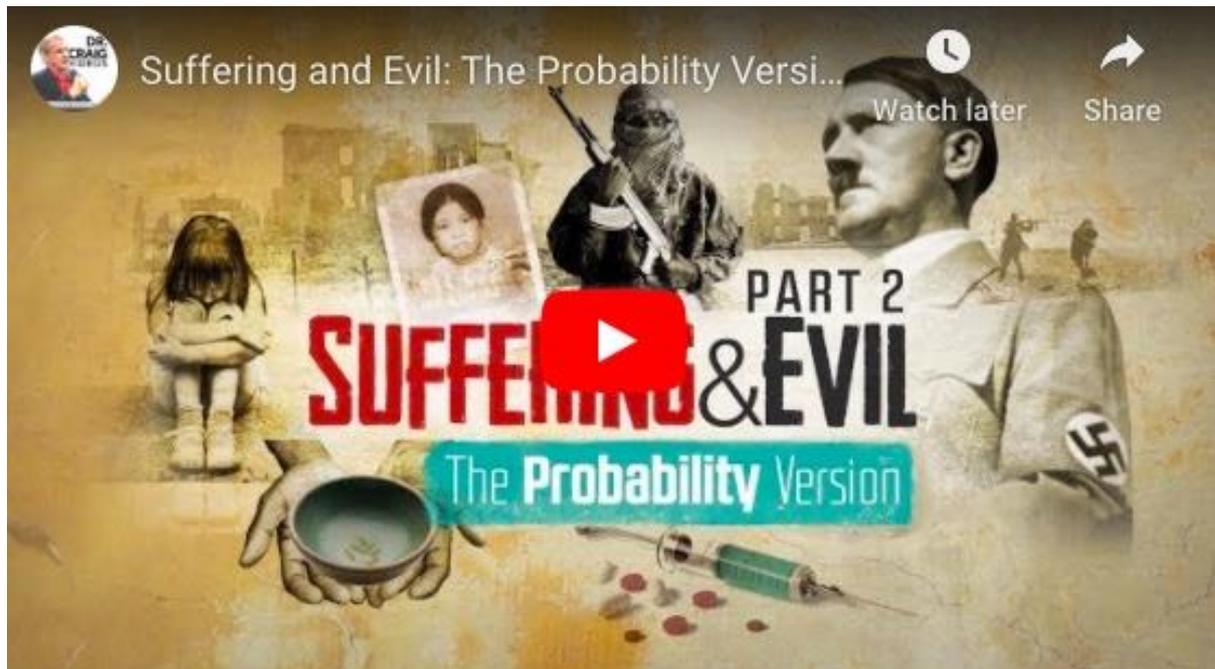Welcome to your weekly Companion!

In this episode, we're really getting stuck into our look at suffering and evil, and how Christians can respond to their existence with their non-Christian friends.

Last week, we completed our look at the implicit assumptions of the intellectual argument and showed that the existence of suffering & evil do not make God's existence logically impossible.

But what about making God's existence simply improbable?

This is a more modest claim, and a much easier one to make and defend, than simply saying it's logically inconsistent. This is also known as the probabilistic problem of evil, which is basically just a more conservative formulation of the previous intellectual argument we have looked at.

A little note: since this is basically just an adapted version of the previous weeks, we won't spend a huge amount of time on this, but it is worth looking at to make sure we don't miss something that could help you in the future!

For a swift look at this, check this Zangmeister video out:

So, let's begin by looking at the probabilistic argument itself.

It takes premise 1 of our previous argument (it is logically impossible that an all-loving and all-powerful God and evil can co-exist) and changes it slightly – it is now 'it is logically improbable that an all-loving and all-powerful God and gratuitous suffering & evil can co-exist'.

Can you see the difference there?

So, now we're no longer dealing with simply 'evil', we're dealing with gratuitous (pointless or

unjustified) evil. We're also no longer dealing with it being impossible God exists, but that it's at least not likely.

At this point I took the opportunity to explain something about these types of arguments and discussions, and apologetics in general, really. But, before any of that, what is apologetics? Apologetics comes from the Greek *apologia*, which means to defend. In the classic Greek legal system, the jury would present a reason and argument for prosecution, and then the defendant would be able to present an *apologia*, a defence. This is word used in 1 Peter 3:15, which I love so much -
"But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give a defence [*apologia*] *to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect".*
So, apologetics is the formal defence of the faith.
The most common use of this is through the employment of certain 'arguments'. These are what we will be looking at in the coming months, as we discuss and look at the evidence for the existence of God.
The most common arguments are:

- The Kalam Cosmological argument – the evidence for God's existence based on the finite nature of the universe
- The Teleological argument – the evidence for God's existence based on the apparent intelligent design in the universe
- The Contingency argument – the evidence for God's existence based on the fact that something exists, rather than nothing
- The Moral argument – the evidence for God's existence based on the existence of objective morality
- The Ontological argument – the evidence for God's existence based on modal logic and the possibility of God's existence

I'm super excited about all of these, if I'm quite honest about it.

Now, as I stated in the podcast, none of the arguments we will be looking at in the coming months *prove* the existence of God. Each argument simply seeks to make the existence of God more probable than not, because it's a more modest claim that you can over-deliver on in the best of circumstances, or simply meet in the worst. When you add another argument to your repertoire, you're essentially raising the intellectual price tag of continuing to deny the existence of God based on the evidence.
To take the examples above, when you utilise just the Kalam alone, you have some good evidence on your side, but nothing stellar. When you add in the Teleological, however, all of a sudden the likelihood of God's existence rockets upwards. Then you add the Contingency argument, and so on. When you eventually take all of the arguments for the existence of God as a whole, you essentially make the likelihood of His existence so high that to deny it is to pay a high intellectual price. That is to say, for someone to disagree with the arguments even in the face of the evidence, costs them credibility intellectually. There basically comes a point where people have a choice to either continue to deny something the evidence points to being true, or to change their minds. That's all it is.
In this instance with this modified argument, what's being sought to do here is to make the claim more modest, making it more likely to be true, and requiring more nuance in answering. This,

however, is a double-edged sword, because if more evidence can be stacked on the opposite side of the scale (that it is more likely that God *does* exist) this argument falls apart quite quickly.

Right then, let's kick this off.
The probabilistic argument seeks to make the claim that the suffering and evil in the world is so great, so terrible, that it is improbable that God could have morally adequate reasons for allowing it to happen.
What do you think of that? Is there a way, based on what we have been looking at the last few weeks, around that?
Here's a quick tip for when someone says something is 'improbable' or 'unlikely' – consider the question 'relative to what?'
Because when someone says something is unlikely, they mean 'it's unlikely because… XYZ' whatever it may be, the unlikelihood is relative to other information.
What information is the argument using as background data to inform the unlikelihood here?
As discussed, it's the suffering and evil in the world.
But we have to ask – is there more sets of data that are relevant here?
Because if you look purely at the suffering and evil in the world in isolation then yeah, the likelihood of the existence of an all-loving God doesn't look too good. But what other data might there be?
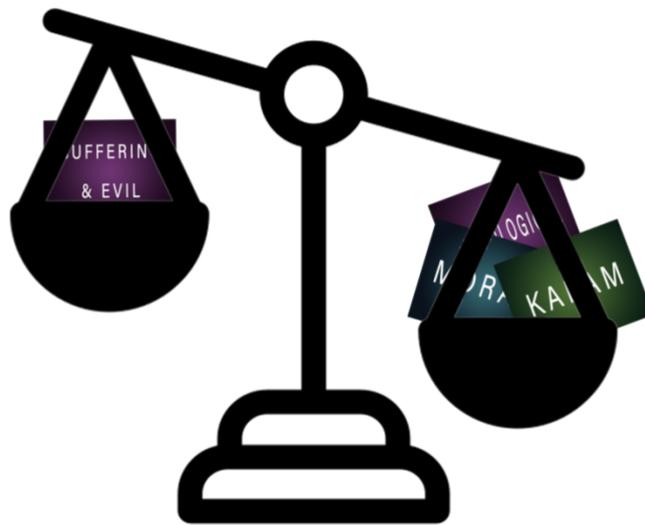When we think about what other available information we might have and use, this is where our discussion earlier about the many arguments we use in apologetics becomes more pertinent – we aren't relying solely on one set of data (suffering & evil), we're also relying on all the other arguments I'll be taking you through in the coming months.
William Lane Craig puts it this way:
"The real question is: is God's existence improbable relative to the full range of the relevant data? That will include not only the evil and suffering in the world, but things like the origin of the universe, the fine-tuning of the universe for intelligent life, biological complexity that has so impressed Antony Flew that this world-famous atheist, despite the problem of evil, has come to believe in God. It will include things like objective moral values in the world, the historical facts concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, religious experience, aesthetic experience, experience of the meaning of life, and so forth. All of these will be relevant background information."
So, when you take all of the information regarding the likelihood of God's existence, we see the double-edged sword I was referring to earlier come into play – all of a sudden there's a scale involved, and in the face of all this evidence the scales are tipping toward God's likely existence.
Do you see how that works? Do you see why I've been banging on about the importance of having good arguments in support of the existence of God for so long?

When we take all the available data, the likelihood of God's existence is very favourable toward the Christian.

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There's more to our rejection of this probabilistic argument than simply the likelihood war, however.

We can also use our knowledge from previous weeks, where we looked at the three types of knowledge of God (natural, middle & free) to inform how we view suffering.
Which form of God's knowledge might we draw on here to explain why God allows suffering?
Middle knowledge!
The question levelled at God here is whether or not he can have *morally-justifiable* reasons for permitting evil & suffering. That means, is there something good that results from the evil and suffering, that is greater than the evil that comes from it.
I'm hoping you guys can already see the answer to this, as it is what we have been talking about for weeks.
What might God's justifiable reason be?
That a world with evil & suffering might be the only feasible world He could have created in which the maximal amount of people come to a saving knowledge of Him, through Jesus Christ. That's the *ultimate* good, which makes suffering seem less morally reprehensible.
It's due to God's middle knowledge that we can use this defence. If God didn't have perfect knowledge of what *would* be, then He wouldn't have the requisite knowledge to actualise a world in which evil & suffering has a morally-justifiable reason.
Also consider that we are finite people who see a very limited amount, through a mirror darkly if you will – we're not really in a good position to adjudge the probability of God's using suffering for morally-justifiable reasons. We don't and can't see the end from the beginning, so we can't say with any confidence what the end of trials, suffering and evil will be.

This is just a skim over the topic, quite honestly, so if you want to know more or be more confident in this, then please do go over to the website and read the companion piece that comes along with this episode!

So, with that all said, I think it's fair to believe that not only are we in a poor position to make the claim God can't have morally justifiable reasons for allowing suffering, we also don't have a reason to believe that the evidence is weighted on the side of it being unlikely God exists when you consider the other arguments for God's existence. Finally, God's middle knowledge allows Him to make decisions with perfect knowledge of what is best for us individually, whilst preserving our free will, thus negating the idea that suffering & evil have no morally-justifiable good outcomes.

Let's take a look at our scripture for this week!

2 Corinthians 10:5 – *"We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ"*.

So, why is this our scripture of the week?

Well, as we continue to review the arguments that seek to undermine God and His existence, we need to know that it is beneficial to us and something we are called to in scripture.

Don't look at things like this as overly-hypothetical and theoretical. An attitude I and others who are into apologetics often encounter within Christianity is one of 'well, that's too intellectual, we're supposed to have child-like heart knowledge faith not this philosopher's head knowledge'. It's very common. Don't let this kind of attitude be your own! And don't be discouraged if you encounter this attitude. We're called to love God with our hearts and souls, yes, but we're also called to love Him with our minds. We're called to be ready to give a defence of our faith, and we're called to destroy arguments and opinions raised against the knowledge of God. Let's continue to build both our experience and love of God, alongside our knowledge and understanding of Him.

So, question of the week time! This week, our question is: what 'relevant data' for God's likely existence we looked at earlier is most convincing for you?

Let me know! Because if one is more popular than the others, I'll make it higher priority to review later.

That's all, folks!

I really hope you've enjoyed this, and I hope it's practical, useful knowledge to both undergird and strengthen your own faith, but also to inform you for helping and loving others.

As always guys don't be afraid to get in the youth group chat on WhatsApp and let us know how you're doing and what you're thinking. Make sure you have your prayer requests ready for our Bible studies on Thursdays so we can make sure we're all in this together. You can also interact with some stuff on Instagram @chawnyouth.

See you next week!