

# What My Dog Can Tell Us about the Problem of Evil

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## Introduction

### Some Terminology:

*Evil*: closely connected with pain and suffering, especially pain and suffering that isn't deserved

*God*: an all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good person.

### The Problem of Evil

P1: If God exists, then there is a good reason to allow every evil that does in fact exist.

P2: There are no good reasons to allow much of the evil in this world.

C1: Therefore, God does not exist. [P1, P2]

### **Why Should We Believe P1?**

Analogy with Good Mommy: If good Mommy allows her child to suffer some evil, then (i) she didn't know about the evil, (ii) she didn't have the power to prevent it, or (iii) she had a good reason to allow it.

But God doesn't have Mommy's Limitations: God knows everything about evil (including when it will strike and how to prevent it) and God has the power to prevent every evil.

So: If God exists and allows some evil to exist, then He has a good reason for doing so. Hence, P1 is true.

### **Why Should We Believe P2?**

#### The Evil Noseeum Inference

E1: We can't find a good reason to allow much of the evil in the world.

E2: If we can't find a good reason to allow these evils, then there are no such reasons.

E3: Therefore, P2 is true: there are no good reasons to allow much of the evil in this world.  
[E1, E2]

### **Noseeum Inferences: Naughty and Nice**

**Noseeum Inference**: "I no see 'um, so they ain't there."

- Noseeum inferences are nice (good) only if we can reasonably expect to find what we are looking for.

Suppose I am trying to find my dog, and I look for him in my bedroom. I might reason as follows:

#### Dog Noseeum Inference

D1: I can't find my dog in my bedroom.

D2: If I can't find him in my bedroom, then he isn't in here.

D3: He isn't in here.

Alternatively, suppose I was looking for my dog's fleas and reasoned this way:

#### Flea Noseeum Inference

F1: I can't find any fleas in my bedroom.

F2: If I can't find any fleas in my bedroom, then there are no fleas in here.

F3: There are no fleas in my bedroom.

### Notice the Contrast:

- A. The Dog Noseeum is nice (good) because its second premise is true.  
*Explanation:* If the dog is in the bedroom, I can reasonably expect to find him.
- B. The Flea Noseeum is naughty (bad) because its second premise is false.  
*Explanation:* If there is a flea in the bedroom, I can't reasonably expect to find it.

### Is the Evil Noseeum Naughty or Nice?

What my dog and his fleas tell us about the Problem of Evil: the Evil Noseeum inference is nice only if we can reasonably expect that, if there were good reasons to allow the evil that exists in this world, then we would find them.

*Humility Thesis (about Value):* For all we know, there are lots of goods, evils and connections between them that we have not even dreamed of and are not even capable of understanding.

- If the Humility is true, then for all we know, finding good reasons to allow evil would be like trying to find fleas.
  - Our visual perception is limited: some fleas are too small or well-hidden for us to see.
  - If the Humility Thesis is true, then our value perception is likewise limited: some good reasons to allow the evil in this world may be too complicated for us to see/understand.
- But then E2 would be questionable: if there are good reasons to allow the evil in this world, we could not reasonably expect to find them.

*So:* if the Humility Thesis is true, the Evil Noseeum is naughty.

### Summary

- (1) The success of the Problem of Evil depends on whether it is reasonable to believe P2, the claim that there are no good reasons for the evil that exists in the world.
- (2) The Evil Noseeum makes it reasonable to believe P2 only if the Humility Thesis is false.
- (3) Hence, if the Humility Thesis is true, then the Problem of Evil fails to show that God doesn't exist—unless we discover some other way of making P2 reasonable.

### Some Pressing Questions:

- A. Is the Humility Thesis true? Why or why not?
- B. Is there some other promising way of establishing P2, besides Evil Noseeum?