

I. Session 92: Evil and the Problem of Atheism

a. Review:

- i. In the first session we laid the foundation for our series discussing the problem by first reviewing the attributes of God that we cannot minimize or deny.
- ii. In the second session we discussed the problem of evil in terms of the fact that the Bible teaches all evil will come to an end one day.
- iii. In the third session we discussed the issue of what the Bible says we as sinners deserve given that some form of the problem of evil assumes that we deserve good.

b. Purpose: In this session we shall discuss about evil and the problem of atheism to realize that in wrestling with the problem of evil there is a problem with atheism.

c. Why is this session important?

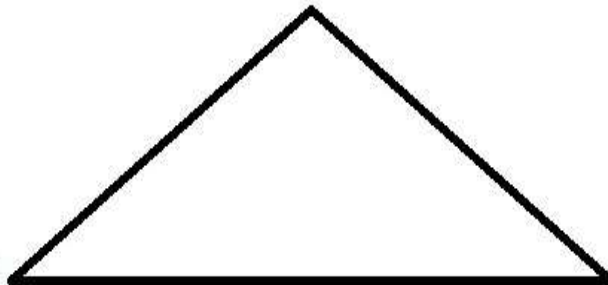
- i. We often hear discussion about God and the problem of evil. **However we must not downplay or neglect the issue of evil and the problem of atheism.**
- ii. Note also that our first three sessions the biblical worldview is driving our presupposition, interpretation and method in addressing facets of the problem of evil. Some would say that it might not be good to begin with the Christian worldview **but here we see the problem of beginning with another worldview concerning the problem of evil, specifically that of the atheist worldview.**

d. A major presupposition of the Problem of Evil is that evil exists

- i. Christian apologist Greg Bahnsen once wrote: "It should be obvious upon reflection that there can be no 'problem of evil' to press upon Christian believers unless one can legitimately assert the existence of evil in this world."¹
- ii. From the previous session we noted that the problem of evil is concerned with the relationship of goodness and evil between three referents. This might be helpful for this session.

Goodness?

God



iii. **Humanity?** **World?**

1. One way people have raised the problem of evil as we discussed previously is that if there are evil found in humanity and the world, this raises the question of whether it is true that God is good.
2. But if there is no such thing as evil, then there is no problem with evil as an objection against God or the attribute of God as good.
3. If evil doesn't even exist then nothing would trigger anyone to see the need to even question God having attributes of evil, lack of goodness, etc.

¹ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press), 166.

- e. All worldviews have the burden of proof of explaining how evil exists
 - i. For the Biblical worldview, what is evil is what is against God’s revealed will found in the conscience that God has wired in man and also in the Word of God.
 - ii. The nonbeliever also have this particular burden of proof: “In order to use the argument from evil against the Christian worldview, he must first be able to show that his judgements about the existence of evil are meaningful.”²
 - iii. Some clarity concerning the burden of proof:
 - 1. What this does not mean: “But the question, logically speaking, is how the unbeliever can make sense of taking evil seriously—not simply as something inconvenient, or unpleasant, or contrary to his or her desires.”³
It is more than a case of merely saying “I don’t like X, Y or Z.”
 - 2. The burden of proof restated as a question: “What philosophy of value or morality can the unbeliever offer which will render it meaningful to condemn some atrocity as objectively evil?”⁴
 - a. Good and evil is an issue of values.
 - b. Thus the issue is about value theory.
 - 3. It is ultimately a question of whether there is coherence within the unbelieving worldview
 - a. We are asking for a person to provide a worldview explanation that makes the issue of evil intelligible and meaningful.
 - b. We are asking this question since the discussion of the problem of evil is a clash of worldview and we are evaluating the problem of evil from our presupposition and not from a position of a vacuum, divorced from our worldview.
 - iv. Thus atheism as a worldview obligates atheists to explain how evil exists or can coexists within their worldview in order to raise the problem of evil against Christianity.
- f. Atheism undermine the existence of evil: What atheist have to say
 - i. But it turns out that not only does atheism have the burden of proof of demonstrating that evil; atheists have publically denied the existence of evil and/or subscribe to certain philosophies of values that undermine the existence of evil.
 - ii. Again if evil does not exists it dissolves the very problem of evil as an objection against the Christian God.
 - iii. Atheist Bertrand Russell
 - 1. Who is Bertrand Russell?
 - a. Famous for writing essay, “Why I am not A Christian.”
 - b. According to Wikipedia, he “was a British philosopher, logician, mathematician, historian, writer, social critic, political activist and Nobel laureate.”⁵
 - c. Again according to Wikipedia, Russell has “has had a considerable influence on mathematics, logic, set theory, linguistics, artificial intelligence, cognitive science, computer science (see type theory and type system), and philosophy,

² Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press), 169.

³ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press), 169.

⁴ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press), 169.

⁵ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_Russell.

especially the philosophy of language, epistemology, and metaphysics.”⁶

2. In his own words: “In the world of values, Nature in itself is neutral, neither good nor bad, deserving of neither admiration nor censure. It is we who create value and our desires which confer value.”⁷
 - a. Note there are no objective values “out there” in nature since nature is “neither good nor bad.”
 - b. Thus we cannot say the world objectively has any “evil.”
 - c. Russell believes values are also human creation.
 - d. But this is an undercutting self-defeater of the atheist’s argument: “When the unbeliever professes that people determine ethical values for themselves, the unbeliever implicitly hold that those who commit evil are not really doing anything evil, given the values which they have chosen for themselves. In this way, the unbeliever who is indignant over wickedness supplies the very premises which philosophically condone and permit such behavior, even though at the same time the unbeliever wishes to insist that such behavior is not permitted—it is ‘evil.’”⁸

iv. Atheist Richard Dawkins

1. Who is Richard Dawkins?
 - a. According to Wikipedia, he “is an English ethologist, evolutionary biologist and author. He is an emeritus fellow of New College, Oxford, and was the University of Oxford's Professor for Public Understanding of Science from 1995 until 2008.”⁹
 - b. Famous leader of the New Atheists, author of the God Delusion.
2. In his own words: “In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference.”¹⁰

v. Atheist Dan Barker

1. Who is Dan Barker? According to Wikipedia, Barker “s an American atheist activist who served as a Christian preacher and musician for 19 years but left Christianity in 1984. Barker, along with his wife Annie Laurie Gaylor, is the current co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation”¹¹
2. In his own words:
 - a. “There is no moral interpreter in the cosmos, nothing cares and nobody cares...what happens to me or a piece of broccoli, it

⁶ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertrand_Russell.

⁷ Bertrand Russell, *The Basic Writings of Bertrand Russell* (New York New York: Simon and Schuster), 371.

⁸ Greg Bahnsen, *Always Ready* (Nacogdoches, Texas: Covenant Media Press), 170.

⁹ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Barker.

¹⁰ Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1121858-river-out-of-eden-a-darwinian-view-of-life>.

¹¹ Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dan_Barker.

won't [matter] the Sun is going to explode, we're all gonna be gone. No one's gonna care"¹²

- i. This is in a debate with Christian apologist Dan Barker in which Barker said humans are worth the same as broccolis.
 - ii. But if humans are the same worth as broccolis then evil tragedies such as terrorists bombings and September 11th is merely broccolis getting crushed at the Groceries.
 - iii. There is no problem of evil against God with such a value system. There's a problem of evil against atheism.
- b. "Since 'value' is a concept of relative worth, and concepts, as far as we know, exists only in brains, which are material things, it is meaningless, even dangerous to talk of cosmic moral absolutes."¹³
- i. If values which include evil, is relative, there is no basis for Barker to bring up the problem of evil in absolute terms such as he does in the book.
 - ii. Dan Barker's philosophy of value is also self-refuting.
 1. In the previous page Barker claims "Relativism is all we got."¹⁴ Everything is relative but then he makes absolute claims such as relativism is "all" we got.
 2. Barker categorically ruled out cosmic moral absolute as meaningless and dangerous which is itself a claim of cosmic, moral and absolute proportion.
 - iii. Thus we see Dan Barker's views does not provide the precondition to make sense of evil that is the pre-requisite for the problem of evil since it is self-refuting.
- c. "Perhaps we would benefit from revering the "Lower powers" of the universe, and would improve morality if we were to get back in touch with the fact that we are animals living a natural environment, and that we are truly part of nature, not something separate and above."¹⁵
- i. This is in the same paragraph where Barker asks, "Is it a felony when an eagle kills a field mouse?"¹⁶
 - ii. Given Barker's ethical system without God, it allows for justification for evil and more evil since nature is "red tooth, and claw," and he calls us to get back in touch with us being animals.

¹² Source: http://www.truefreethinker.com/articles/atheist-quotes-atheism-quotes#footnoteref9_y1d6851..

¹³ Dan Barker, *Losing Faith In Faith: From Preacher To Atheist*. Madison Winsconsin: Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., 125.

¹⁴ Dan Barker, *Losing Faith In Faith: From Preacher To Atheist*. Madison Winsconsin: Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., 324.

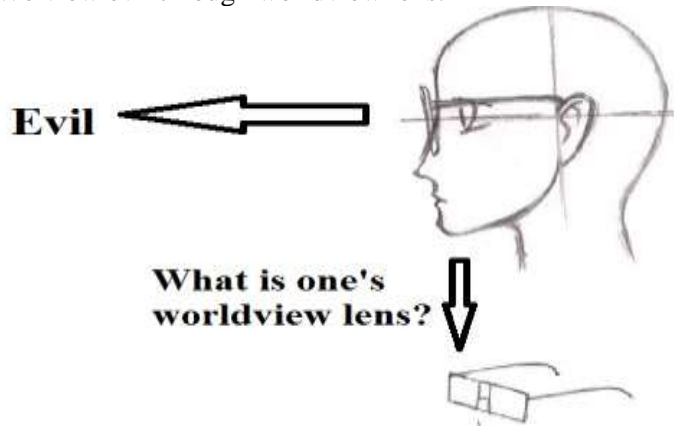
¹⁵ Dan Barker, *Losing Faith In Faith: From Preacher To Atheist*. Madison Winsconsin: Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., 325.

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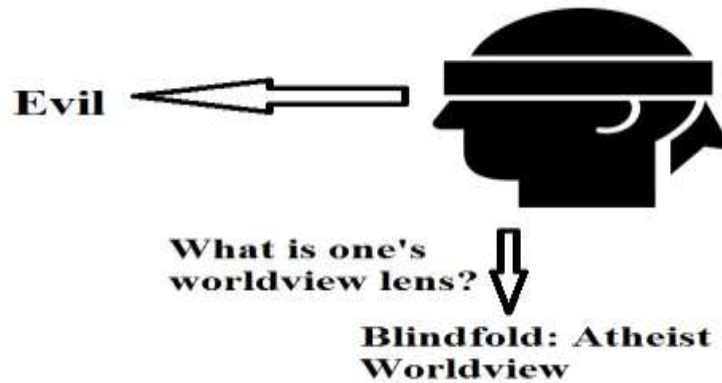
- iii. But if nature is filled with bloodshed and it just “is,” it makes little sense to even say there’s a problem of evil when bloodshed is just the norm.
- iv. Again there’s no foundation for calling something evil in the meaningful sense of the term that is necessary to critique God.

g. Summary

- i. We view evil through worldview lens.



- ii.
 1. Worldviews are like glasses.
 2. It would either enhance us seeing evil given our fallen nature of not seeing things rightly.
 3. Or it would distort what we see.
- iii. With the same analogy, what does the worldview lens of atheism do?



- iv.
 1. Atheism is a “blindfold” to the problem of evil.
 2. Thus as a worldview it cannot even raise the problem of evil against Christianity.
 3. Ultimately Atheism in fact is the biggest problem with the issue of evil: It ends up denying, relativizing and minimalizing evil.