

Why Does God Allow Evil?

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On December 2, 2015, a mass shooting by two terrorists killed fourteen people in California's Inland Regional Center. Years earlier, in 2012, a gunman forced his way into Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut: he shot twenty first graders and six adults. From shootings like these to natural disasters that level communities, we regularly hear about or even experience the effects of sin and evil in the world. This leads many to ask, "If God can prevent such massacres and destruction, why doesn't he?" That people routinely ask this question implies the widely held conviction that an all-powerful and all-good God would choose to destroy all evil. How could he possibly allow evil to exist?

Many suppose that the existence of evil disproves God's existence. But the human ability to recognize evil is actually a good reason to believe in a Creator. If there was no God, there would be no objective, universal standard by which to measure good and evil. Since, however, all humans agree that the two are distinct, there must be an independent, eternal standard by which we ground moral convictions.

Nonetheless, some philosophers claim that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of the all-good, all-powerful God described in Scripture. If God exists, the theory goes, evil cannot. If evil exists, God cannot. God and evil, like square circles, are logically contradictory and thus cannot coexist. But few philosophers think this argument successful. In fact, even philosophically-informed atheists acknowledge the weakness of this view.

After all, it is logically possible that God, though all-powerful and all-knowing, has a good reason for allowing evil to exist. For instance, evil's presence ensures the preservation of human free will. If we have genuine freedom, then we have the possibility of choosing to do evil rather than good. God is certainly powerful enough to prevent us from doing evil, but he would be taking away our free will by doing so. He cannot force us to always choose the good, because being made to choose the good would mean that we are not free.

There are other reasons God could allow evil to occur. For instance, coping with the effects of evil in the world often contributes to the development of virtues such as empathy, patience, and trust in Jesus as Savior. Without the ability to choose and exercise free will or the opportunity to develop virtue, our lives would be shallow and without love; we could not truly love one another or love God. We would essentially be robots lacking the ability to have a relationship with God, and loving relationship with us is the very thing God desires.

Though it is reasonable for God and evil to coexist, some say the presence of *so much* evil makes it difficult to believe in God. However, this is a subjective judgment. How much evil is too much? Who but God can say? We are all troubled by evil, but God has dealt evil a fatal blow through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.