

Faith & Reason Group Discussion Questions – March 13, 2026

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION 101

Arguments **AGAINST** the Existence of God

Crash Course in Logic

- Propositional [logic] – true or false statements, logical connectives
- Predicate [logic] – deals with properties, relations, quantifiers [of subjects]
- Universal [modifier] – true of “any”, “every”, “all”
- Existential [modifier] – true of “at least one”, “some”
- Deductive – conclusion valid from premises
- Inductive – conclusion cogent by statistical generalization
- Abductive – “inference to the best explanation”
- Modus ponens – affirming the antecedent (“ $P \rightarrow Q$. P true. So, Q .”)
- Modus tollens – denying the consequent (“ $P \rightarrow Q$. Q false. So, not P .”)
- “Logical” argument – establishes possibility, impossibility, necessity via deduction
- “Evidential” argument – uses induction/abduction to appraise likelihood
- “Experiential” argument – how we typically make conclusions :)

Examples (logical vs. evidential vs. experiential arguments)

- (Kalam) Cosmological | any beginning **MUST** be caused | God **LIKELY**, given big bang | [starry skies] | ∴ 👍 God
- Teleological (design) | any design **MUST** have designer | God **LIKELY**, given fine tuning | [feel special] | ∴ 👍 God
- Evil/Pain/Suffering | a good God **CANNOT** allow evil | God **UNLIKELY**, given evil | [tragic event] | ∴ 🙄 God
- Divine Hiddenness | a good God **CANNOT** be hidden | God **UNLIKELY**, given atheists | [no God sign] | ∴ 🙄 God

While we think arguments are logical, or at least evidential, experience is usually more influential than we think.

THE PROBLEMS OF EVIL, PAIN, SUFFERING

1. An omnipotent (all-powerful), omnibenevolent (all-good), and omniscient (all-knowing) God would **NOT** allow [natural, rampant, intense, pointless, avoidable] “evil/pain/suffering”
2. Yet there **IS** [natural, rampant, intense, pointless, avoidable] “evil/pain/suffering”
3. Therefore, such a God does not [or cannot] exist

Noteworthy variations: “Logical” problem of evil: God cannot exist, given evil, etc ... “Evidential” problem of evil: God likely does not exist, given evil, etc. ... Rebuttals: refutation vs. defense vs. theodicy (why evil?)

Key proponents:

- Epicurus (classic formulation)
- David Hume (evidential, “indirect inductive”)
- Contemporary: Mackie, Rowe, Draper

Key detractors:

- Augustine (privation of good, man culpable)
- Leibniz (“good reasons”, best work theodicy)
- Alvin Plantinga (esp. “free will” defence)
- Craig, Keller, Lennox on “cruciform” theodicy

Quotes:

“What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? In animal bodies, for instance, sickness and wounds are nothing but the privation of health” - St. Augustine

“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.” - Richard Dawkins

DISCUSSION PROMPT:

What do you think of the problem of evil? What do you find compelling or unconvincing about it? Insofar as you feel it is a serious problem for theistic views or otherwise, how do you resolve it?

THE PROBLEM OF DIVINE HIDDENNESS

1. A perfectly loving God would make himself known to all human beings; there would not be any non-resistant non-believers.
2. There ARE non-resistant non-believers (indeed there are many, and variably so across geography and human history).
3. Therefore, a perfectly loving God does not [or cannot] exist.

Noteworthy variations: Any non-belief (vs. reasonable, non-culpable, non-resistant); the problems of religious diversity, inconsistent revelation; even more than the problem of evil, hinges on specific theologies

Key proponents:

- J.L. Schellenberg (most recognized formulation)
- Theodore Drange (“any-non-belief” version)

Key detractors:

- Premise #1 (e.g., Garcia, Moser, Plantinga)
- Premise #2 (e.g., Calvin, Edwards)
- Many conceding #3 with misconceptions of “loving God” (Steiner, Davies, Wright)

Quotes:

“There is enough light for those who only desire to see, and enough obscurity for those who have a contrary disposition.” - Blaise Pascal

“A god who is all-knowing and all-powerful and who does not even make sure that his creatures understand his intention ... could that be a god of goodness?” - Friedrich Nietzsche

What do you think of the problem of divine hiddenness? What do you find compelling or unconvincing about it? Insofar as you feel it is a serious problem for theistic views or otherwise, how do you resolve it?

DIFFICULT DIVINE ATTRIBUTES

1. If God were [omnipotent], He could [create a rock he cannot lift]
2. Yet God cannot [create a rock he cannot lift]; that is absurd!
3. Yet if God cannot [the impossibility / create a rock he cannot lift], then He is not [the attribute / omnipotent]
4. Therefore God [so defined, as omnipotent] is incoherent / does not / cannot exist

Examples: Immutability paradox: “Can God act in any way?”; Omnipotence paradox: “Can God make a rock he cannot lift?”; Omniscience paradox: “Can God change his mind?” Euthyphro dilemma: “God’s will vs. morality: what drives what?”

Key proponents:

- Epicurus (esp. omnipotence, problem of evil)
- Plato/Socrates (esp. Euthyphro dilemma)
- Countless internet trolls, kids nearing bedtime

Key detractors:

- Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas (God’s nature)
- Descartes, Hobbes, Hume (“is” ≠ “ought”)
- Contemporary theists (e.g., Craig, Lewis, Swinburne), atheists (e.g., O’Connor, Schmid)

Quotes:

“When the answer cannot be put into words, neither can the question be put into words” ... “What we cannot speak of, we must pass over in silence.” - Ludwig Wittgenstein

“In Judaism, the Euthyphro dilemma does not exist. God commands the good because it is good ... the good is what God commands because God-the-lawgiver is also God-the-creator-and-redeemer.” - Jonathan Sacks

What do you think of the omnipotence paradox and other “difficult” divine attributes? What do you find compelling or unconvincing about them? Insofar as you feel they are a serious problem for theistic views or otherwise, how do you resolve them?