

Theories of Reality

PHL 203 – Winter 2011

The Problem of Evil

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The problem of evil

Inconsistent triad – one of these must be false:

- God is omnipotent.**
- God is good.**
- Evil exists.**

If God is omnipotent, he'd be able to prevent evil.

If God is good, he'd want to prevent evil.

Yet, evil seems to exist.

The Problem of Evil

Probabilistic version: The existence of God is not *inconsistent* with the world we live in, just *unlikely* given the extent of evil.

Natural Evil: Disease, old age, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, animal suffering

Moral Evil: Suffering caused by intentional acts of human beings

Why do bad things happen to good people?

Why do good things happen to bad people?

Job



- **God's bet with Satan**
- **Job loses children, all possessions**
- **Job suffers disease**
- **Job's wife urges a quick death**

“Curse God and Die.”



**“The Lord Giveth and the Lord
Taketh Away. Blessed be the
name of the Lord.”**



“You must have sinned.”



JOB PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE

Job remains faithful



God Answers Job from a Whirlwind



The Problem of Evil



- God lectures Job for daring to question him
- Job repents, acknowledges his ignorance
- God rewards Job with twice his previous wealth

The Problem of Evil

- **Human Ignorance Theodicy: We can't hope to understand God's reasons for what he does.**
- **We shouldn't question God's decisions; we should just trust and obey.**
- **Life is a test to see whether we will remain faithful in suffering.**
- **What's your reaction to Job's solution to the problem of evil?**

The Problem of Evil

Do these theodicies solve the problem of evil?

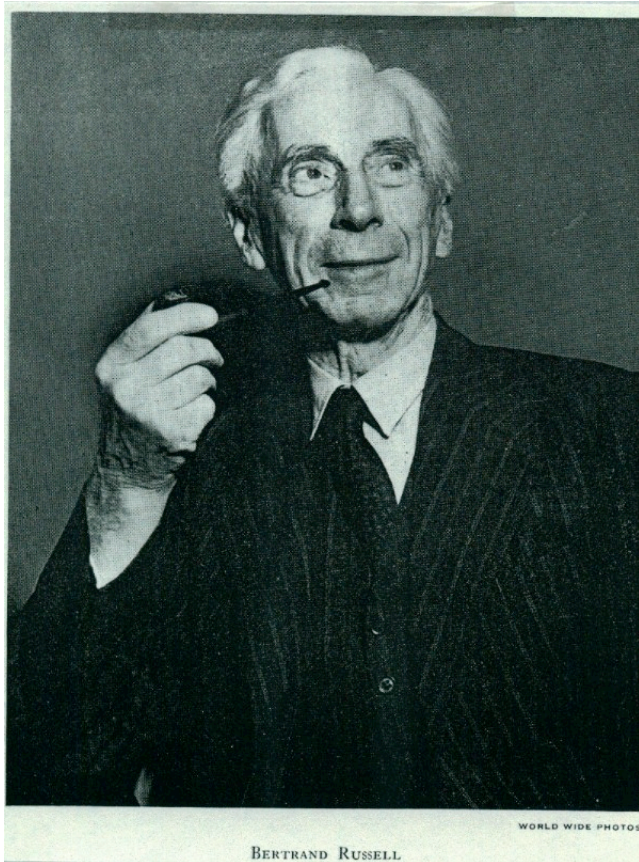
- Free Will**
- Spiritual Development**
- Human Ignorance**

The Meaning of Life

**“To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”**

—William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 5

The Meaning of Life



- **Bertrand Russell, “A Free Man’s Worship” (1903)**
- **Science presents a pitiless universe, blind to human suffering and the inevitability of death.**

The Meaning of life

Belief in an afterlife causes us to despise this life as inferior.

Sin and salvation mythology robs of us the enjoyment of natural pleasures through guilt.

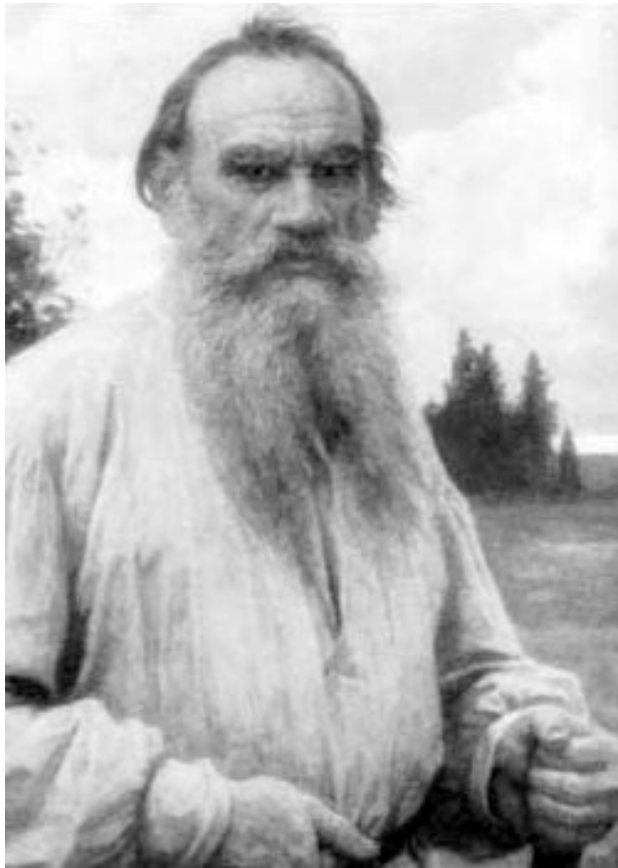
The best of religion, the God of Love and Justice, comes from Man's conscience

The Meaning of life

- Avoid the “religion of Molech” – “the cringing submission of a slave” to a cruel and capricious universe.
- Idealism
- Courage
- Sympathy
- Acceptance – of suffering, death
- Defiance – refuse to live in fear, despair, nihilism

Is a rational or proper response to a meaningless universe? The best response?

The Meaning of Life



- **Leo Tolstoy, “A Confession” (1882)**
- **Held Russell’s view on purposeless universe**
- **Realized belief in “progress” was mere superstition**

The Meaning of life

Science: You are a transitory, casual cohesion of particles.

Asian fable: You are a man chased into a pit by a wild beast, clinging to a branch over a chasm. At the bottom is a dragon, and mice are eating away at the branch.

The Meaning of life

Tolstoy tries to find meaning in

- Pleasure**
- Family**
- Fame**
- Wealth**
- Achievement**
- Art**

Existential crisis, can't sleep, eat

Contemplates suicide

The Meaning of life

Tolstoy delves into science, the writings of sages and philosophers, studies Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, questions believers.

He notes that peasants are happy while he and his rich, intellectual friends are miserable, concludes his blindness to life's meaning was due to his wealth and status.

Handle analogy

Tolstoy concludes that meaning is only to be found in the faith of his childhood and the hope of eternal life.