



## Essential Philosophy with Dr. David Schenk

### Lesson 14: William Rowe's Evidential Version of the Problem of Evil Argument

#### Outline:

##### Introduction:

- Since the 1970s, many philosophical atheists stopped using the Logical Version of the Problem of Evil and have since adopted the Evidential Version of the POE.
- The most famous Evidential Version of the POE is William Rowe's argument, from "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism" (1979), which is used by Dr. Schenk in this lecture.
- **William L. Rowe** (1931-2015) was a leading philosopher of religion at Purdue University. He considered himself a friendly atheist, or sympathetic atheist, which is an atheist who believes that rational philosophic arguments for the existence of God can be made.

#### **Bill Rowe's Evidential Argument for the Problem of Evil (0:44)**

- (1) There are cases of intense suffering that an omnipotent, omniscient being like God could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good.
  - (2) An omniscient, omnibenevolent being like God would prevent any intense suffering He could so long as doing so would not sacrifice any greater good.
- > (3) ∴, there is no omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent Being like God.

- Notes:
  - Rowe argues that, even after all the Greater Good theodicies, there is still a wealth of unredeemed, unexplainable evil.
  - Similarly, while God might be off the hook for evil that is redeemed through a greater good, there still exists meaningless, pointless suffering that cannot be redeemed by theodicies.



- Therefore, because there is a wealth of meaningless, pointless suffering in the world, there cannot be a genuinely omnibenevolent God.
- **Example:** (6:18) A baby fawn that cannot escape a natural forest fire and takes 4 days to die is an example of meaningless, pointless suffering.

## William Rowe's Objections to the Evidential Argument (9:50)

[A] **Direct Attack:** Put on our theological thinking caps and figure out some greater good for each case of suffering cited in Premise (1) of Rowe's Evidential Argument.

### **Indirect Attack:**

#### The G. E. Moore Shift

There is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent Being.  
An omniscient, omnibenevolent being like God would prevent any intense suffering He could so long as doing so would not sacrifice any greater good.

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> (3) ∴, contrary to appearances there are no cases of intense suffering that an omnipotent, omniscient being like God could have prevented without losing some greater good.

- Notes:
  - Like any good philosopher, Rowe anticipates the objections to his own argument!
  - The G. E. Moore shift takes the conclusion of Rowe's Evidential Argument and makes that its first premise—a bold move!
  - Despite Rowe's objection, he still argues that there is more evidence for genuinely unredeemed suffering.
    - Remember, Rowe's argument came before the Ontological, Cosmological, and Fine Tuning arguments for the existence of God.
    - As Dr. Schenk argues in this lecture, we must weigh the evidence: *Does more evidence exist that shows there is suffering with no redeemable greater goods? Or is there more evidence which supports an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God?*
- Dr. Schenk's Response:
  - The G. E. Moore Shift knocks the stuffing out of Bill Rowe's argument! As the Cosmological, Ontological, and Fine Tuning



arguments show, there is overwhelming evidence for an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God.

- Furthermore, any monotheist should expect to see greater goods for our suffering that we cannot comprehend. As humans, we cannot know all of God's ways.