

Evil, Real Life, and Apologetics

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What I want to address in this paper is the problem of evil as it is experienced in real life. I want to make a distinction between evil experienced in real life and evil presented in abstract or hypothetical philosophical examples. Instances of evil experienced in real life give rise to what I am calling the “Existential Problem of Evil,” (EPE). I want to argue that the EPE is both a significant problem for Christian theism and a significant opportunity to advance the Christian worldview and the cause of the Gospel. In order to accomplish this purpose, I will begin by describing what I mean by “real life” evil and the EPE that arises from it, including comments on the nature of the problem, for whom it is a problem, and what kinds of responses in general are appropriate in light of the problem. Also, I will outline several elements of a potential apologetic response to the EPE, suggesting specifically that such a response should focus on: 1) an emphasis on the Genesis account of the Fall and resulting curse, 2) a defense of God’s goodness focusing on redemption, and 3) pastoral comfort and the proclamation of the gospel message. Finally, I will attempt to address the EPE in light of atheism, proponents of which often cite evil and suffering in the world as positive evidence suggesting that God does not exist.

What is the Existential Problem of Evil?

It seems obvious that philosophical examples of evil and suffering are both convenient and helpful in analyzing the implications of evil for Christian theism. Such examples provide tools with which to conduct a philosophical analysis, develop a theodicy, and establish a context for serious discussion on whether belief in God is justified. In the midst of such philosophical analysis, however, it is essential for Christian apologists to make allowance for the fact that we simply do not live in a world comprised of hypothetical philosophical examples. Instead, we live in a world filled with “real life”– actual, rather than hypothetical – instances of evil, pain and suffering. Moreover, all actual human persons experience these instances. And so, the problem that arises from this “real life”

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evil is generally a different problem than that discussed in the philosophy classroom or during annual meetings of a philosophical society.

This is what I am calling the EPE. It arises at the occurrence of an actual “real life” instance of evil or suffering, and affects the person who is experiencing the evil—or one who is close to that person—in an existential way. I am using the term “existential” here because the kind of evil experienced by real people in real life can tend to cause a kind of crisis that touches the very root of the human experience. The EPE is a problem—and not an argument—because the occurrence of evil brings about an existential crisis that affects the person’s attitude toward God, rather than presenting a direct rational or philosophical challenge to theism. It does not deal with the great amounts or widespread inequitable distribution of evil and suffering in the world; but rather the EPE is deeply personal, focusing on specific concrete events in the life of the human being for whom it is a problem. It is, as David Banach has said, “Your very own problem of evil.”⁹¹

In a well-known essay, Alvin Plantinga describes this problem in the following way, “[F]aced with the shocking concreteness of a particularly appalling example of evil in his own life or the life of someone close to him, a believer may find himself tempted to take toward God an attitude he himself deplors; such evil can incline him to mistrust God, to be angry with him, to adopt toward him an attitude of suspicion and distrust or bitterness and rebellion.”⁹² Initially I am inclined to accept Plantinga’s description. One of its strengths is that it properly highlights the existential nature of the crisis. The problem that arises from the EPE is not primarily an epistemic doubt about whether I am properly justified in my belief in God’s existence. Rather, the EPE gives rise to a certain religious disposition toward God. The immediate problem is one of bitterness, rebellion, or distrust that takes place on an emotional or spiritual level; and Plantinga has done well to capture this idea.

But despite this strength, I think some important modifications must be made to Plantinga’s description in order to identify properly the scope of the problem in view here, especially regarding the type of evil associated with the problem and the groups of people that might be affected by the problem. Plantinga highlights occasions of evil or suffering that are “shocking,” and “particularly

⁹¹ David Banach, “Your Very Own Problem of Evil,” <http://www.anselm.edu/homepage/dbanach/evil.htm>

⁹² Alvin Plantinga, “Epistemic Probability and Evil,” in Daniel Howard-Snyder, ed., *The Evidential Argument from Evil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 69.

appalling.” There are certainly examples of which all of us are probably aware, such as the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, or the mass shooting at Virginia Tech that took place on April 16, 2007, or the devastation wrought by the tsunami in the Pacific in 2011. But in terms of whether or not the particular occurrence of evil gives rise to an existential problem, I do not think that only extreme and shocking examples of evil should be considered. While the more appalling instances of evil may elicit a heightened emotional response among a greater number of people, there are certainly occasions of evil, pain, and suffering that are less than shocking but nevertheless raise the same kinds of questions and elicit the same kind of response.

To give an example of what I mean, I will share a personal story. On April 3, 2009 I sat with my grandfather in a hospital room near Pittsburgh, PA. He was 95 years old and had been admitted with congestive heart failure and pulmonary edema to such an extent that he was barely able to breathe. My grandfather was not particularly troubled by the fact that he was going to die. He had reasoned in his mind that all people eventually die, and he could accept the fact that eventually his body would fail. What brought about an existential crisis, however, was the very real possibility (given his condition) that he would suffocate to death because of his pulmonary edema. His fear was that he would be consciously and painfully aware as he lost his ability to breathe, and that he would begin to panic as he struggled for breath—that he would slowly and painfully suffocate. It was the thought of this eventuality that brought about the crisis.

I think that the answer to the question of what kinds of evil give rise to the EPE is this: Rather than the magnitude or the shock value of the particular occurrence of evil, what brings about EPE are more likely to be those instances of evil that are seemingly pointless. What my grandfather could not easily accept was the possibility that he would die by slow, painful, agonizing suffocation. Such evil—while not particularly shocking or appalling—seems to be pointless, purposeless. And this phenomenon is often the charge made by the atheist in the evidential argument against God: an all-good God would *desire* to eliminate the evil in the world, as long as doing so would not bring about a worse evil or prevent a greater good (that is, God would want to eliminate gratuitous evil). And, they say, an all-powerful God *could* eliminate gratuitous evil in the world; and. And yet here we have instances in the real world of seemingly gratuitous evil. The EPE provides the underpinning for this evidential argument, and it is based on the real life examples of particular individuals.

What causes the EPE is not necessarily the “shock value” of the evil occurrence; rather it is the pointlessness of it. What greater good could possibly come from my grandfather dying a slow and painful death by suffocation? Or what greater evil could possibly come about through the alleviation of his suffering? The answer to both questions seems to be “none,” and thus we have the EPE. So for these reasons I would add to Plantinga’s description by asserting that the EPE applies not only to particularly shocking or appalling examples of evil, but to all actual instances of evil and suffering that seem to be gratuitous.

I would also amplify Plantinga’s description with a clarification about the group of people for whom such examples of evil and suffering are a problem. Plantinga seems to restrict the EPE to those who are “believers”—an ambiguous term that may or may not refer to Christian theists—who react in anger or rebellion toward God in the face of evil or suffering. Marilyn Adams, in one of her essays on the topic, also suggests that the EPE is a problem particularly for Christians. She writes, “The problem of evil for *Christians* is posed by the question (Q1) How can I trust (or continue to trust) God in a world like this (in distressing circumstances such as these)?”⁹³

While Plantinga’s and Adams’s descriptions are clearly applicable to Christians, it would seem that the EPE would also apply to other people as well. Certainly the occurrence of seemingly pointless evil in the life of a non-Christian—or even a non-theist—brings about an existential crisis equally serious to that arising in the life of the Christian. By virtue of the fact that even the non-believer bears the image of God, he has the capacity to ask—and indeed will ask—serious metaphysical (ontological and epistemological) questions in response to evil; and in times of crisis will re-evaluate previously held beliefs about the answers to those questions. Regardless of the temptation towards atheism, there will still be a deeply personal, emotional, and spiritual reaction; one of anger, bitterness, fear, rage, rebellion, and deep sorrow.

Further, from Romans chapter 1, we know that non-theists suppress their own intuitive knowledge of God. So atheists or non-Christians most likely will still have the inclination—despite their religious status or their disposition regarding belief about God—to respond with moral outrage and shake their fists towards the heavens in response to evil or suffering in their lives. Even though they may be confused with regard as to whom they should address their complaints,

⁹³ Emphasis added. Marilyn M. Adams, “Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Response to the Problem of Evil,” in *TPE: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame: UND Press, 1992), 171.

nonbelievers will still ask, “Why me?” or “Why this?” The bitterness and rebellion of which Plantinga asserts that it will be present in the life of the believer will no doubt be present equally in the life of unbelievers as well, whether or not they intentionally direct their bitterness and rebellion toward the God of Christian theism. Based on these factors, it would seem that the EPE is equally problematic—and similarly symptomatic—for anyone, regardless of their disposition toward theism in general or Christianity in particular.

So, to summarize the modifications that I would make to Plantinga’s description, the EPE as I understand it is brought about by all instances of seemingly pointless evil and suffering (shocking or not) in the life of any person (Christian or not) who is experiencing such evil. These instances of evil are likely to elicit an existential crisis that will incline the person to doubt whether God exists or is trustworthy, or has the attributes of absolute power and goodness, or whether there is any kind of justice in the universe. With this description of the nature of the EPE in hand, we are able to take steps toward developing an appropriate apologetic response.

What kind of response is appropriate?

In the same essay referenced above, Plantinga goes on to draw a distinction between the EPE and what is commonly referred to as simply the “problem of evil” in the philosophical literature. He writes that this more broad philosophical problem of evil, “is not . . . existential but broadly speaking epistemic; it has to do with fulfilling epistemic obligation, or maintaining a rational system of beliefs, or following proper intellectual procedure, or perhaps with practicing proper mental hygiene.”⁹⁴ Plantinga is referring to what is now standard in philosophical literature on the topic. Even in its most modern and contemporary forms, the argument traces its heritage back to J. L. Mackie’s 1955 article “Evil and Omnipotence,” in which Mackie asserted that evil in the world is evidence, “not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational.”⁹⁵ Of course more recently, the focus has been on the evidential argument, and so there are debates about the rationality of religious belief in the face of what appears to be instances of gratuitous evil or suffering. We have

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*,

⁹⁵ J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” reprinted in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 89.

William Rowe's hypothetical fawn in the forest fire, for example, offered as a test case in his argument to show that theism cannot rationally be maintained.⁹⁶

The distinction that Plantinga draws between the EPE and the epistemic problem appears to be valid—and perhaps it is an important distinction to make. But, the discussion of different problems (one epistemic and one existential) naturally leads to the question of whether there should be different solutions. Since the EPE is different, does that mean our apologetic response to the EPE will not include elements that address the epistemic problem? What kind of response *is* appropriate in the face of the EPE?

Plantinga offers a suggestion intended to answer this question in his *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Concerning the EPE Plantinga writes, “Such a problem calls, not for philosophical enlightenment, but for pastoral care.”⁹⁷ In fact Plantinga and—several other authors who address the subject—use the terms “religious,” “pastoral,” and “existential” interchangeably in this context. It is widely assumed that the only available and appropriate response to the EPE is one of pastoral care, extending an offer of comfort in the midst of suffering.

There is no doubt that the EPE does demand the kind of pastoral and religious care suggested by these authors. But there are at least two reasons that I think this approach is incomplete. First, the distinction between the EPE and the epistemic problem may be philosophically helpful, but it can be practically unwise to push this distinction to the point of suggesting two entirely different problems. As I have already pointed out, the EPE seems to be a very personal and “real life” form of the common evidential case employed by some atheologists. While the evidential argument in the philosophical literature deals with hypothetical philosophical examples (like Rowe's fawn in the forest fire), “real life” evil is highlighted in specific instances of seemingly pointless evil or suffering. Therefore, an appropriate apologetic response to the EPE will bring to bear the lessons learned in responding to the more abstract and theoretical evidential argument.

My second reason for thinking that the “pastoral care” approach alone in response to the EPE is inadequate is more important. It is this: no amount of pastoral care or offer of comfort can overcome the larger metaphysical questions elicited by the EPE. There can be little comfort found in a God who we suspect

⁹⁶ William L. Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” in *The Evidential Argument from Evil*, ed. Daniel Howard-Snyder (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 1–9.

⁹⁷ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 63–64.

might not exist, or might not be perfectly good or powerful, or who might not care about me. There can be little comfort found in a God who (for example) seems to capriciously prevent some suffering, but chooses not to prevent or alleviate *my* suffering. After all, what comfort can I gain upon hearing that God spared my neighbor's house from the tornado, while I have lost everything? Even if we are talking about only Christian theists in the EPE, the question remains: How can believers receive comfort in the midst of serious doubt about God's goodness or whether or not God is trustworthy or faithful, or cares about their personal pain and suffering? My point here is that in apologetics, it is unwise to separate the epistemic from the existential because in the actual life experience of real human beings it is *impossible* to separate the epistemic from the existential. Human beings are not fragmented compartments of emotion, reason, and faith. Rather, human beings are integrated wholes; and epistemic concerns and existential concerns are—and will remain—intertwined, especially in the crisis brought about by real life evil.

An Apologetic Approach

Given the above discussion, I am now able to highlight some elements of a potential apologetic response to the EPE that I think are essential. I am not here going to make a definitive argument for a complete solution to the problem. Rather, I want to suggest three key elements that are indispensable to an appropriate apologetic response to the EPE. In arriving at these three elements, I am guided by one particular principle: Christian apologetics, especially in light of the problem of evil, ought emphasize the unique features of the Christian worldview that distinguish it from other forms of theism.

It seems quite common in the literature for atheists to develop their arguments against very generic forms of theism. For example, in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, he David Hume gives an illustration to the effect that when shipbuilders build ships, the faults and imperfections in the ships can be blamed on the shipbuilders.⁹⁸ And so it is implied that, since the theist claims God as the creator of the world, then the faults and imperfections observed in the world (such as evil and suffering) should be blamed on God. But Christians generally do not believe that God is the creator of the world in the same way that a shipbuilder is the creator of the ship. And the faults and imperfections in the ship are not at all like the evil in the world. Another example of what I am getting at here is evident even in the modern debate. Both Mackie and Rowe, for example,

⁹⁸ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and the Posthumous Essays*, ed. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980), Part V.

suggest that an all-good and all-powerful God would eliminate the kinds of evil we see in the world. But God being all-good and all-powerful is simply not the whole story. God is all-powerful, and God is all-good; but those are not the only factors that come into play. According to Christian theism, there is much more to it than that.

So what I am suggesting is that Christians ought not fall into the trap of attempting to mount a defense of some sort of generic theism with only the most basic elements included. There may be appropriate contexts in which Christians should seek common ground with other theists who are willing to adopt the more generic theistic ideas. But when the theistic common ground is attacked as irrational, it is time for the Christian to withdraw from the common ground and seek instead to focus on the unique elements of the Christian worldview that suggest that Christianity (as a unique and comprehensive system) is immune from the charge.

Given this overarching principle, there are three elements of the Christian worldview that I would suggest are essential elements of a proper apologetic response to the EPE: an emphasis on the Fall and the resulting curse as the primary explanation for the existence and persistence of evil in the world; a defense of God's goodness based primarily on God's plan of redemption for humanity and offer of salvation to individuals; and an offer of pastoral comfort centered around the call of the gospel.

The Fall

At the conclusion of the creation week, Scripture proclaims that God deemed all that he had made to be "very good" (Genesis 1:31). This declaration is especially significant given that the standard of evaluating the relative goodness of creation was none other than the wholly-good creator himself. The fact of creation's goodness in its original form rules out the possibility of evil and suffering being a part of the world as God created it (contrary to Hume's suggestion in the illustration of ship building). Clearly, in the first moments of creation, there existed the potential for evil, otherwise we would never have had evil in the world. But the potential for evil is not itself an evil.

While not made explicit, the creation account also strongly suggests that there was originally no death among either human or non-human living creatures. It seems clear that God's original intention, for example, was that only plants were given to living creatures for food. This notion stands in stark contrast to present circumstances where both humans and animals feed on other animal life. The implication is that death itself entered creation as a result of the Fall.

If I am correct in this assertion (and I am not unaware of the broad controversy surrounding it), this fact eliminates the possibility of such things as “evolutionary theodicy.” Christopher Southgate, for example, in his attempt to develop such a theodicy argues that death, pain, and suffering are intrinsic to the process of evolution. He has further said that, “Death is a thermodynamic necessity. It would be impossible to imagine biological life without it.”⁹⁹ To which I would respond: Death is not a thermodynamic necessity if the Bible is true in its account of special creation. I am certainly not suggesting that creation in its original form contained no entropic processes, but the decay in animal and human life was not decay leading to death. And so I am willing to concede, that, if an atheistic theory of evolution, which goes contrary to the factual assertions of Genesis is true, then the position I am taking in this paper on this point is in need of revision.

The Fall of Adam was the precipitating event for the existence of every form of evil in the world. Moral evil tainted man’s nature such that Adam and all his progeny would choose to rebel against God’s goodness. Natural evil is also explained by this phenomenon; and so I must emphasize that so-called “natural evil” has at its root “moral evil.” What we refer to as natural evil is nothing more than the result of God’s curse on mankind and creation, and his judgment against sin. Thorns sprung up from the ground and presumably pierced the flesh of the first human beings. Work became physically strenuous. Childbearing became painful when it otherwise would not have been. Animals died, particularly to supply human needs; first for clothing and then for food. Nature itself fell and was corrupted by sin and began to bear the marks of the curse. As a result, people and animals are now vulnerable to predatory attacks, disease resulting from changes in microorganisms after the Fall, decay leading to degeneration and death, volcanoes, tornadoes, and all manner of environmental and so-called “natural disasters.” In short, Christianity asserts that evil—of either the natural or moral kind—was not present in the original creation, but was introduced by the moral choice of mankind to rebel against God’s good intentions.

Defense of God’s Goodness in light of Redemption

So in the Fall, we have a reasonable explanation for the existence of evil. But in spite of this explanation (in the case of a particular instance of real life evil) the one who is suffering may still be tempted to say, “But why would God allow

⁹⁹ Christopher Southgate, “Evolutionary Theodicy,” *Zygon* 37:4 (December 2002): 805.

it to continue? Why would God allow *me* to suffer in *this* way?" What the EPE seems to demand is an answer to the question of why God would refrain from intervening to eliminate the evil being experienced. And so in addition to pointing to the Fall as the origin of evil, an appropriate apologetic response to the EPE will also include a defense of God's moral goodness in the midst of personal pain and suffering that he did not prevent and does not alleviate.

There are many issues that should be explored and discussed related to this question, but I want to highlight only one that should serve as a prominent part of the answer: Redemption. Perhaps the clearest expression of God's goodness in the face of evil and suffering is his provision for redemption and restoration for mankind and all of creation. The Christian system asserts that all human beings participate in the Fall by nature and by choice. And so on the face of it, divine judgment would be an adequate explanation for why we suffer, for judgment against sin is an expression of God's righteousness. As Marilyn Adams has said, "He [God] would not be wrong to judge us, even if no benefit accrued to us thereby."¹⁰⁰

But we know that God's refraining from intervening in any particular occurrence of evil in the world is an aspect of his desires and redemptive plans for mankind. 2 Peter 3:9 for example assures us that God is not now neglecting his promise of final salvation, but is patient because he wants all to come to repentance that they might not perish. And this is at least part of the answer to the question of why God does not intervene to prevent or alleviate evil in general, and also in the particular instance of evil that has brought about a particular existential crisis.

It must further be noted that redemption is not limited to moral evils and human beings only. Biblical prophecy pointing to the ultimate fulfillment of God's redemptive plans speak of natural evil coming to an end as well, as symbolized in the enmity between creatures. Isaiah 11:6–9 foretells a day when the wolf and lamb will live together, and likewise, the leopard and the goat. It tells us that there will be a day when a small child will lead both the calf and the young lion; the cow and bear will both graze on vegetation together; and even the lion will eat straw like an ox. It tells us that even when a child puts his hand in the den of a viper, the viper will not harm him. Presumably, then, Rowe's fawn will no longer be in danger of suffering excruciating burns and eventual death from a forest fire in this future time. God has ultimate plans to eradicate evil from the world, to redeem not just mankind, but also his good creation.

¹⁰⁰ Adams, "Redemptive," 175.

And so, when my house is destroyed by the tornado, and my loved ones are killed or injured, but my neighbor's house remains untouched and my neighbor's family remains unharmed, it is not because I am a worse sinner or my neighbor a greater saint. Rather, I can know that God's desire is to redeem us all from this sin-marred world of pain and suffering; and any delay in the fulfillment of that desire is the result not of some particular sin in my life, nor from God's slackness (or worse, capriciousness), but rather testimony that God wants to redeem even me.

Pastoral Comfort & The Gospel

Indeed, it is this point that leads to the final element necessary for a proper Christian apologetic response: Namely, we see that there is a unique kind of ultimate comfort available to the one who is in the midst of experiencing real life evil. In light of the events of creation and the Fall, and in light of God's plan of redemption and restoration, we can offer comfort to the unbeliever. We can put our arms around the persons whose house has been destroyed and whose loved ones have been killed, and we can agree with them that things are not the way they are supposed to be. We realize that the state of affairs in which we find ourselves is a temporary evil between two very great goods. We live in a time subsequent to the great good of creation as it originally was; and we now await the final redemption of the world, longing for the day when the wolf and the lamb will lie down together and the tears shed for all manner of pain and suffering will be finally wiped away.

Jesus said, "Come to me all you who labor and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). There is a sense in which trusting in Christ for salvation provides a unique and powerful kind of comfort. Just as the EPE is an intensely personal form of the generic problem of evil; so the call of the Gospel is an intensely personal application of God's plan of redemption and the ultimate eradication of evil from the world. And so Christian apologists should offer the comfort of Christ and his call on the unbeliever to repentance and faith.

The EPE and Atheism

From the perspective of some of the more influential proponents of atheism, the debate on the question of God's existence is over, and they have won. It is no longer considered a matter deserving of serious academic and philosophical reflection. The fact that there is seemingly pointless evil in the world is decisive evidence against God's existence. But there are two reasons that I think that atheists' use of the argument from evil does little to advance their cause. In light

of the above discussion, then, I want to highlight these reasons as being important considerations in the apologetic response to evil.

The first reason that arguing from evil does little to advance atheism is that the argument itself is a kind of moral argument. But objective morality is unavailable in a naturalistic, atheistic worldview. This is the argument that Mark Nelson made in the early 1990s (and no doubt many other writers at many other times). Nelson points out that for the naturalist, there can be no universal moral law, and therefore there is no objective standard for evaluating particular natural occurrences as “evil.” He writes that “moral judgments are relativized to the speaker’s attitudes in much the same way as statements of taste are.”¹⁰¹ In an atheistic universe, events simply occur. Facts are merely facts. There can be no objective judgment as to the moral value of certain events. As much as the atheist might try, it is simply not possible (in an atheistic world) to make the move from “is” to “ought.” A person might be able to express a preference for one type of occurrence over another, but such a predilection says nothing about objective moral value. So-called evil occurrences certainly cannot count against God’s existence, because without God, we would not be able to recognize them as objectively “evil.” Therefore, when the atheist employs the argument from evil, he has no choice but first to assume that an element of the theistic worldview is true: namely that there is an objective moral standard by which events can be judged and properly called good or evil.

The second reason that I think the argument from evil does little to help the atheist is that in the end, atheism is wholly unsatisfying in the face of the EPE. If atheism were true, then we should suspect that there would be no moral outrage, no sense of bitterness or rebellion in the face of some existential crisis brought about by a particular instance of seemingly pointless evil or suffering. If there is really is no God, then the event that brought about our existential crisis is no more or less significant than any other event or occurrence in our lives. Again, Mark Nelson’s essay is appropriate as he points out that “one cannot coherently believe that God doesn’t exist and also be angry with him because he created the world” in the way that he did.¹⁰²

But as I have been pointing out in this essay, and as each of us intuitively knows, existential evil *is* obviously a problem. And the authors who address the topic of the EPE consistently remark that some sort of pastoral comfort is

¹⁰¹ Mark T. Nelson, “Naturalistic Ethics and the Argument from Evil,” *Faith and Philosophy* 8:3 (July 1991): 373.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 368.

necessary in response to the EPE. Some kind of solution must be offered in the face of the existential crisis if all hopelessness is to be avoided. There is no doubt that it is a serious challenge for Christian theism to offer the appropriate kind of comfort to one facing such an existential crisis (as I have suggested above). But what is challenging for the Christian is *impossible* for the atheist. What comfort is it to think that in the end, there is no ultimate objective value to our lives? If God does not exist, to whom do we direct our moral outrage? Moreover, implicit in the atheistic worldview is the fact that our sense of moral outrage in the face of evil must be some kind of genetic or biochemical anomaly. Atheism purports to tell us that the deeply moral and spiritual response we have to evil in our lives is nothing more than a particular type of electrical activity in the brain. But electrical activity in the brain requires no comfort. And we should be relieved at that thought, because if our existential crisis is only electrical activity of the brain, no comfort is available.

But as I have already suggested, existential evil is a problem that does indeed require a solution. While it is a challenge for Christians to offer such a solution, is an impossible task for atheists. Since atheism has little or nothing to offer in response to evil (except perhaps to complain against God). But all people face this problem, regardless of their disposition toward theism. This reality confirms that EPE, far from being a defeater of Christianity, is actually a prime opportunity for Christians to defend the Christian worldview and advance the cause of the Gospel, and, in doing so, offer to the one suffering the only kind of real comfort that will ever be available.