

OpenTheo

Does the Existence of Evil Point to the Existence of Multiple Gods?

February 29, 2024



#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about whether the existence of evil points to the existence of multiple gods and why God needs to slowly improve our character here on earth if he's going to make every Christian sinless at the resurrection regardless of how long each one was a Christian.

* Would the existence of multiple gods, some good and some evil, explain the existence of evil better than the existence of one God who allows evil?

* If, after death, God will give the thief on the cross the same sinless character as the Christian who lives to be 100, why does he need to slowly change us over time here on earth? Why doesn't he just make us sinless immediately instead of at the resurrection?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Cogle, and you're listening to the hashtag SCRAskPodcast. Good morning.

Good morning, Greg. Alright, Greg, here is a question from Joy. What would you say to a cousin of mine who said he was more likely to believe in multiple gods than just one? He said this was because if there were good and bad gods, sometimes there were good and bad gods.

Sometimes the evil ones would win, causing the evil in the world. He felt that made more sense than one God allowing the evil. Hmm.

Well, part of the difficulty here is that, and I'm not sure if this is going to make how this would translate into a conversation, okay, but part of the difficulty is that there's some philosophical necessity to having a maximally great God, okay, because that separates the one God is responsible for creating everything, okay, from all the others that are limited and finite and created gods. And this is the case with, when you look at these

different pantheons, these are all finite gods that actually by most standards are really immoral in many of the things that they do. And where the God of the Bible is the God of strict monotheism is a God that is maximally great.

And part of that entails assaity. That means he has the ground of existence. He, there never was when he didn't exist nor will there be when he does not exist.

So he's eternal in that way. If you don't have that, what you're left with I think is just a pantheon of gods of fighting with each other. Now, if this young man or this person thinks that this is a superior explanation to Christianity because it gives an accounting for the problem of evil, the two thoughts come to mind immediately.

What then becomes their standard of goodness by which they can distinguish good from evil. Now, maybe I should word that differently. What then becomes their grounding, how did I put it, the grounding for morality that doesn't help them to distinguish, but allows a distinction to be made.

So I'm just shifting from the epistemological, which is the way I put it first to the ontological, the existence of morality, not how we know it. Okay. So if there's good and evil, what is it? What standard makes sense of that? Is there one God that turns out to be absolutely perfectly holy, that becomes the standard for others? Or is there a God that just turns out to be holy because he fulfills a different standard, an external standard? Now, that's a problem.

It's called euthyphros dilemma or euthyphros dilemma that Socrates dealt with, but it is a problem if you have this multiplicity of gods that are kind of characterized some good and some bad. Where's the standard coming from? If it's coming outside from outside of them, then you have to ask, well, what is the basis for that standard? Why are we obliged to this standard? And obligation is the foundational part of morality. So that's one difficulty of having all this multiplicity of gods that you can distinguish good from evil with.

Oh, these are good and these are bad. Well, where is the standard? Okay, that's one problem. The second problem is we've already solved that problem that he thinks he's solving with having good and bad gods because we have good and bad beings on this earth that account for the problem of evil.

We have a good God creating a good world with good human beings that are morally innocent, good in that sense, but they are mutable. In other words, they could do bad things, which they did and then brought evil into the world and caused the world to be broken. So it isn't like our way of looking at it lacks a way of explaining the way the world really is.

Well, here's how we're going to explain good and evil. We got good gods and bad gods.

Okay, well, I guess that's a reason.

That's an explanation. I don't know. And that solves one problem for you, but it raises other difficulties.

And why do you need to solve solve a problem that Christianity already solves in a way that actually comports aggressively with our common intuitions about the world? We know we're fallen and we know other people are fallen. And everybody knows the world is broken. And we have a standard for goodness in a God who is not broken, who is not fallen, but is not keeping some external standard of goodness to accomplish his holiness.

But who is in himself morally perfect. And he becomes the standard for goodness. That's a better solution if what you're looking for is a way of explaining what we find in the world.

I think you've hit on the biggest problem here, Greg, and that's his solution. Saws off the branch he wants to sit on. Because you do have to have a self-existent perfectly immoral being as the grounding for the standard of good and evil.

If you just have all the gods doing whatever they want, you just have gods doing whatever they want. There's no, there's no standard. There's nothing they're beholden to.

That doesn't make sense of evil at all. So it not only doesn't answer well, it just gets rid of evil. And so that's not a good answer.

Incidentally, that's my understanding is that's why how these people saw these pantheons. They didn't assess these gods in terms of goodness or badness. They were just there and they did what they did.

And what we had to do was find ways to manipulate those gods through sacrifice so that we could get what we want. And this was worshiped to Baal, worshiped to the Astra. These were storm gods and agricultural gods.

And so if you do the right things with them, then you're going to get stuff. You're going to get a good harvest. And the issue of the morality of these gods doesn't seem at all to have entered into the discussion of them.

Plus limited beings can't be self-existent. So you can't have a pantheon of limited self-existent beings. That's not a possibility.

So what you end up with is chaos. So how do you explain a world of order and mathematics? And that's discoverable. This is why science arose in the West because people believed in the self-existent, orderly, rational God who had created everything.

Whereas in the ancient world, there was no order to be found. There was the chaos of

the pantheon of gods. So he's creating a whole lot of problems that he's not going to want to accept with this answer.

And so I think Joy, if you just help him to understand the implications of what he's saying, say, well, maybe you can think about some difficulties with that. And then maybe the answers for the problem of evil are better with Christianity. And we can talk about those a little more.

And we've talked about those a lot on this show. So we're not going to go into that right now. But you can certainly go back and look at all the times we've talked about evil because evil is a big topic.

This is the one topic that touches everybody. Everybody is going to be interested in this topic because they have to deal with it. And they also think that it's a hole in one against Christianity.

So it's a good topic to bring up and people will have a lot of opinions, but maybe that's a direction you can go into. In the *The Streets March* book, there's a chapter titled *Evil, colon, atheist's fatal flaw*. Atheism's fatal flaw rather.

And it's not a good argument against theism. It turns out to be a good argument against atheism. Okay, let's go to a question from Max W. I heard that God keeps us on this earth to improve our character.

But if after death, the thief on the cross will have the same sinless character as the Christian who lives until 100, why does God need to change us over time now instead of immediately like he does it death? Yeah, that's a, I think that's a really good question. I don't know that it's a, and I don't know how the question is posed, but it doesn't strike me as a challenge to the legitimacy of Christianity, but it's a curiosity about the nature of the resurrection. And let me say first of all, not everybody in heaven enjoys the same quality of existence.

Now, that seems like, huh? Are you kidding? But I say that because of some things the scripture says, I think of two different ones. One of them is in Hebrews 11, where they talk about the, the writer there talks about the great heroes of faith. And then he gives all of these people who in a sense through trusting in God brought certain dramatic success in their life.

All right, people raise from the dead, et cetera, et cetera. But then it says, and others. And others who similarly trusted in God faith, yet it did not produce a favorable effect to them subjectively in this life.

And what the writer says there is that they were going to have a better resurrection, a better resurrection. The heck is a better resurrection? Well, that's a clue. I mean, it's a fair question and it's hard to outline exactly what that looks like, but it does clearly

indicate that some people are going to be, in a certain sense, a more favorable existence or position or quality of life than a quality of eternal life than than than others.

Okay. And that's one passage. The other passage is in 1 Timothy and Paul says there, he says, you know, physical exercise, okay, it profits a little.

You help pump iron and brown and bear with downs, okay, you get some benefit from that. But by contrast, godliness is a means of great gain for it holds a promise not just for this life, you know, being physically fit holds a promise for this life or at least a limited promise for this life, but also for the life to come. So if you, if you are focusing principally on developing godliness, you will benefit in this life from that.

But it also has a benefit for the future. Now, there are some Christians who are not as aggressively developing godliness in their lives. And so because they're not, that's going to have an impact somehow in the quality of their existence in the afterlife.

And I don't even know what that looks like because there is a sense of the resurrection. We get resurrected bodies that have a, I probably perfection is a way of describing it, but I'm even faltering for words here myself because it's, it's hard to know in detail. And so they're, we're going to be perfect, but as one person pointed out to me a long time ago, and he was a broadcaster at KBRT, my flagship station when I started radio back in 1990.

And Tim Behrens, his name was, and he said, maybe it's kind of like a light bulb where you could be a perfect 100 watt light bulb or you could be a perfect 1000 watt light bulb. Well, both are perfect, but their luminescence is different. And, you know, their capacity, would you say, is that what? Whatever.

It's just, it's an illustration show you can have perfection on different levels. And, and actually the luminescence is maybe an appropriate or an apt kind of a reference or metaphor because there's glory to be had. You know, a weight of glory, Lewis talks about this.

And there's glory to be had in the afterlife. And what that looks like is, is hard for us to quantify and imagine, but there can be greater glory, greater amounts of glory, manifestations of glory by different people. And so I think that's probably the best way to understand it.

There's, in hell, there are going to be different levels of experience. This is clear by things that Jesus said. There are greater sins.

There are less than sins. There are greater judgment. There's lesser judgment.

But in heaven, there's also going to be greater and lesser glory. And that's going to relate to a lot of different things. I gave two passages that, that seemed to point to that

and other passages that talk about crowns that are given for people who accomplish particular things.

And, and so these are rewards. The beam of seat judgment there in Corinthians that Paul talks about. There's a, that's a seat, a judgment seat for rewards.

And some people have, would, hey, stubble, that gets all burned up. But then others have, have a gold and precious metal. And that survives the judgment that, that is meant to winnow out the good that we've done from, from the useless.

Okay. So these are, these all intimate, varying degrees of, and again, his wife, balk at the word status, experience quality of life. I don't know how to characterize it.

But if this is true, to me, this is obviously true in scripture. What we don't know how to do is cash it out in tangible terms, concrete concepts. What does that actually look like? I don't know.

And so my, my temperance is illustration of the light bulbs is the best that I could do. But if this is true, then if a person becomes a Christian much later in life, as opposed to earlier life, that means they are going to enter eternity with a lot less maturity than those who have been Christians, faithful Christians, productive Christians all their life. All right.

And my dad died when he was 70, just after a 72nd birthday, is that right? Yeah. And, but he became a Christian a year before. And it was absolutely genuine.

It was a radical transformation. But he had no period of time really to grow spiritually. So the way I've kind of characterized it, he entered eternity as it were, naked and smelling of smoke.

Because Paul describes the burning away of the wood, hey, stubble. So man, maybe you get, you end up going into eternity as spiritually immature. I have no sense that we grow in spiritual maturity when we're in heaven.

It looks like this is the place to do that growth. And that's why soul care, godliness, is so important to attend to this side of the grave. Yeah, it is hard to know how this will be cashed out, because if we are no longer sinning, that's not the aspect of our character that will be different.

And like there won't be different degrees of not sinning. So it has to be some other, it would have to be some other kind of difference, whether it's our appreciation of God or our knowledge of him or whatever it is. And I mean, it could be we are increasing, but we're starting from different points.

So I mean, I really don't know, but I do want to throw something out there that I don't

want you to miss Max. And that is that this world is about more than just our character. So even if none of this, even if all the speculation about how this goes down with our character is wrong, the truth is God is doing a lot more than that.

And this world than just shaping our characters. I mean, it does say that this, his goal for us is to shape our characters to be like Christ. Yes, that's true.

Present every man completing Christ. Right. So that is obviously that is a very important goal that God has in this world, but he's also doing something else.

He's revealing himself through what happens in this world. He's actually enacting a story that reveals who he is, what he's like, what he loves. And this is actually part of the reason why we will glorify him forever because we will have all of these stories of all of these lives and how God interacted with people to see who he is forever.

Because there won't be any sin. There won't be there won't be any examples of people repenting and being shown grace and and seeing God work and all of these things that have happened. This is all happening now.

If God were to end the world now, he would short circuit all of that. So if his goal is to reveal himself, not only through our becoming more like Christ, but also through our sin. Like our sin also has ways of revealing God.

It reveals God's I don't I don't want to say judgment for Christians because obviously Christians won't face God's wrath, but some people sin will reveal God's wrath and his judgment. In fact, I was just reading in I think it was numbers where where Moses hits the rock and he's supposed to just give say, you know, they'll have the water come from the rocks and he hits it. And then God says, you know, you guys are all in trouble now because you didn't show me holy and here's here's the punishment that I will give you Moses.

You're not going to enter the promised land. And then the passage ends by saying and God showed himself to be holy through this situation. So the sin that happened there actually revealed God's holiness and it's and it's the aspects of God like his holiness, his grace, his justice that we will be enjoying for eternity.

But it's being revealed now in ways that it won't be revealed then. So God is doing all of this right now. And so that's why he doesn't just end it because his goal isn't just to make us perfect and no longer sinners.

His goals to reveal himself. Well, that's it. Thank you, Max.

Thank you, Joy. We love hearing from you. You can go to our website at str.org. We look forward to hearing from you.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.