



UNDERSTANDING HUMANISM
Resources for Education

Humanist perspective: The problem of evil

Learning objectives:

To know and understand
humanist perspectives to
the problem of evil

Why do bad things happen?



God is punishing us for things we have done wrong.



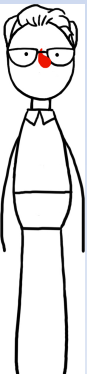
We could not be as kind or brave if there were no suffering or danger in the world.



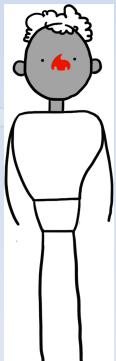
God is testing our faith.



We can't understand god's mysterious plan. This is the best possible world.



God allows bad things to happen to build our character and help us learn to appreciate the good things in life.



There is no god. Bad things just happen because that is the way the world is.

What does the word 'evil' mean?

Challenge!

You are not
allowed to use
the word 'evil'
in your answer!

The 'why?' game

Look at this headline:

'Earthquake kills 500 people in China'

- 1) Why do you think this happened?
- 2) When you have thought of an answer, ask why again.
- 3) See how many times you can ask why and give another reason until you can't explain any further.
- 4) Are your answers scientific explanations or non-scientific explanations?

Try the activity again with these headlines:

- 'Gunman shoots dead 30 people in Texas shopping centre'
- 'Drought in Ethiopia responsible for the deaths of thousands'
- 'Terrorist sets off bomb on Spanish train'

Nature: Red in tooth and claw

'I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent god would have designed **parasitic wasps** with the express intention of feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars.'

Charles Darwin (1809–1882)

'I think of a **parasitic worm** that is boring through the eye of a boy living in West Africa, a worm that's going to make him blind. Are you telling me that the God you say is an all-merciful God, that cares for each of us individually, are you saying that God created this worm that can live in no other way than in an innocent child's eyeball? Because that doesn't seem to me to coincide with a God that's full of mercy.'

David Attenborough

The Epicurean paradox

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able?

Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing?

Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing?

Then where does evil come from?

Is he neither able nor willing?

Then why call him god?



What would the world be like if...?

What would the world be like and how would it differ if there were...

- 1) An omnipotent, benevolent god?
- 2) A benevolent but not omnipotent god?
- 3) An omnipotent but not benevolent god?
- 4) An omnipotent, malevolent god?
- 5) No god?

Questions about the problem of evil

- 1) Is 'evil' the best word to use to describe natural disasters?
- 2) Is 'evil' the best word to use to describe human cruelty?
- 3) Can 'evil' exist detached from people or actions?
- 4) Are there evil people, or just evil actions?
- 5) Is the belief that there is no god, the simplest way to explain the fact that evil and suffering exist?
- 6) Even if the existence of evil and suffering does not prove the absence of an omnipotent benevolent god, does it make one's existence less likely?
- 7) Would there be any disadvantages or advantages to limited free will?
- 8) Is this the best of all possible worlds? How easy is it to imagine one better? If you can imagine a better one, does that mean this is not the best? Does it make it less likely this is the best?
- 9) If an evil god is unlikely due to all the good in the world, does that mean all the 'evil' in the world makes a good god equally unlikely?
- 10) Does a belief in a god or gods make any difference to one's ability to cope with suffering?