

Mackie rejected some of the answers Christians give to the problem of evil. For example:

✝ Evil is necessary as an opposite of good

✝ Evil helps us become better people

✝ Evil is a consequence of free will



**Richard Dawkins**  
Called "the most famous atheist of our time", Dawkins claims that the randomness of natural evil and disease is PROOF ENOUGH that A GOD CANNOT EXIST!

# JOHN MACKIE

## EVIL AND SUFFERING IS A PROBLEM FOR BELIEVERS!



Mackie (1917-1981) was an **ATHEIST** Philosopher



**David Hume**  
A Scottish philosopher and atheist of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. He claimed that The Problem of Evil was "THE ROCK OF ATHEISM". He believed that there was no logical way of explaining how a benevolent God can allow suffering to happen to good people (or even bad).

### Knowledge Check

1. What is atheism?
2. What are the typical answers Christians give in response to the problem of evil?
3. How does John Mackie challenge Christian answers to the problem of evil?
4. What does Richard Dawkins believe about the existence of evil and suffering?
5. What did David Hume claim?
6. What is the inconsistent triad?
7. Who put forward the inconsistent triad?
8. What does he conclude?

### Choose a Task

1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

**CHALLENGE!**  
Turn over the mat and try to complete your task without looking at the information. Then refer back to the task mat to see what you have missed/could have included.

### Exam Question

c) Explain how the existence of evil and suffering poses a challenge to belief in God [8]

✖ **Atheism:** ✖  
*Believing that there is no God*

*Evil: A cause of human suffering*  
*Suffering: The bearing or undergoing of pain or distress*

### Evil doesn't ALWAYS help us to become better people

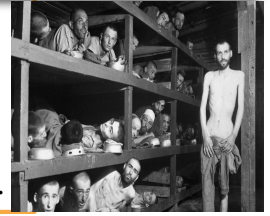
Firstly, Mackie doesn't understand why God needs to make us better through experiencing suffering. Why can God not just make us perfect to begin with? But even if we accept that the sort of goodness that comes about because of overcoming suffering is better than the goodness we could achieve without suffering, there is still a problem.

The problem is that just as often, suffering makes people worse, rather than making them better. Some people might learn patience and courage through having to undergo cancer treatment. But other people might just as likely become bitter and resentful. If evil is allowed in order to bring about greater goods, then why does it sometimes lead to greater evils instead?

### Even if evil and suffering is there for us to learn from here is TOO MUCH

Lots of examples of goodness are easily noticed and appreciated without needing a contrast. We can all see and appreciate a kind and generous person, even if we have never met a mean and selfish one.

Even if it is true that we need some evil and suffering to help us to appreciate the good, we only need a little bit. He argues that there is far more suffering than is needed to make a contrast to the good in the world and some of the suffering is truly horrible, far more and far worse than is really needed. e.g. **the holocaust.**



### Why aren't human beings made to choose good?

Both St Augustine and John Hick rely on the existence of free will to explain why God allows evil to exist. Mackie rejects this as a reason because he does not see why God could not make free human beings who always choose good instead of evil.

Some would reply that a human being who can only ever choose good, is not truly free BUT Mackie does not think the ability to choose evil is a required part of human freedom. He also feels that evil and suffering is far too high a price to pay for having free will.

*"We live in an unkind universe that simply doesn't care."*  
Richard Dawkins does not accept the idea that there is a purpose to life. We are simply here by chance. There is no loving God, nor any sort of god at all.

*"...faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate."*

*There is "no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference."*

*'Is God willing to prevent evil, but is not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both willing and able? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither willing nor able? Then why call him God?'*  
- Epicurus (an ancient Greek philosopher)

### The Inconsistent Triad

One of the most famous presentations of the Problem of Evil was made by an atheist named John Mackie. He is the first philosopher to present what has become known as 'the inconsistent triad'. A 'triad' is a group of three things. Mackie and others claim the following is 'inconsistent' because it seems that not all of them can be true at the same time.

1. If the first two claims are true, then evil would not exist. However, since from our experience, evil definitely does exist, then at least one of the other two must be false.
2. If God wants to stop suffering but cannot, then he must not be all powerful.
3. If God can stop suffering but does not want to, then he must not be all-loving.

