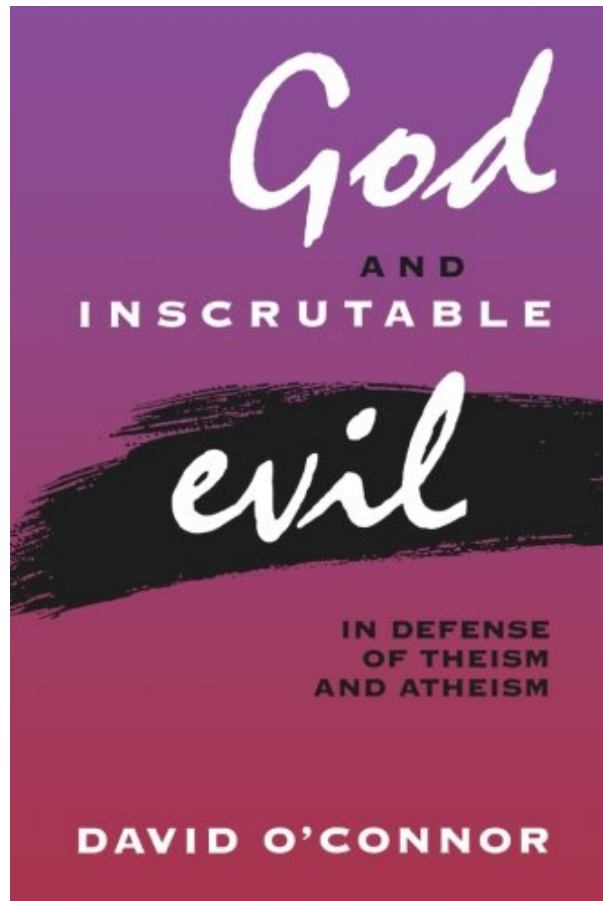
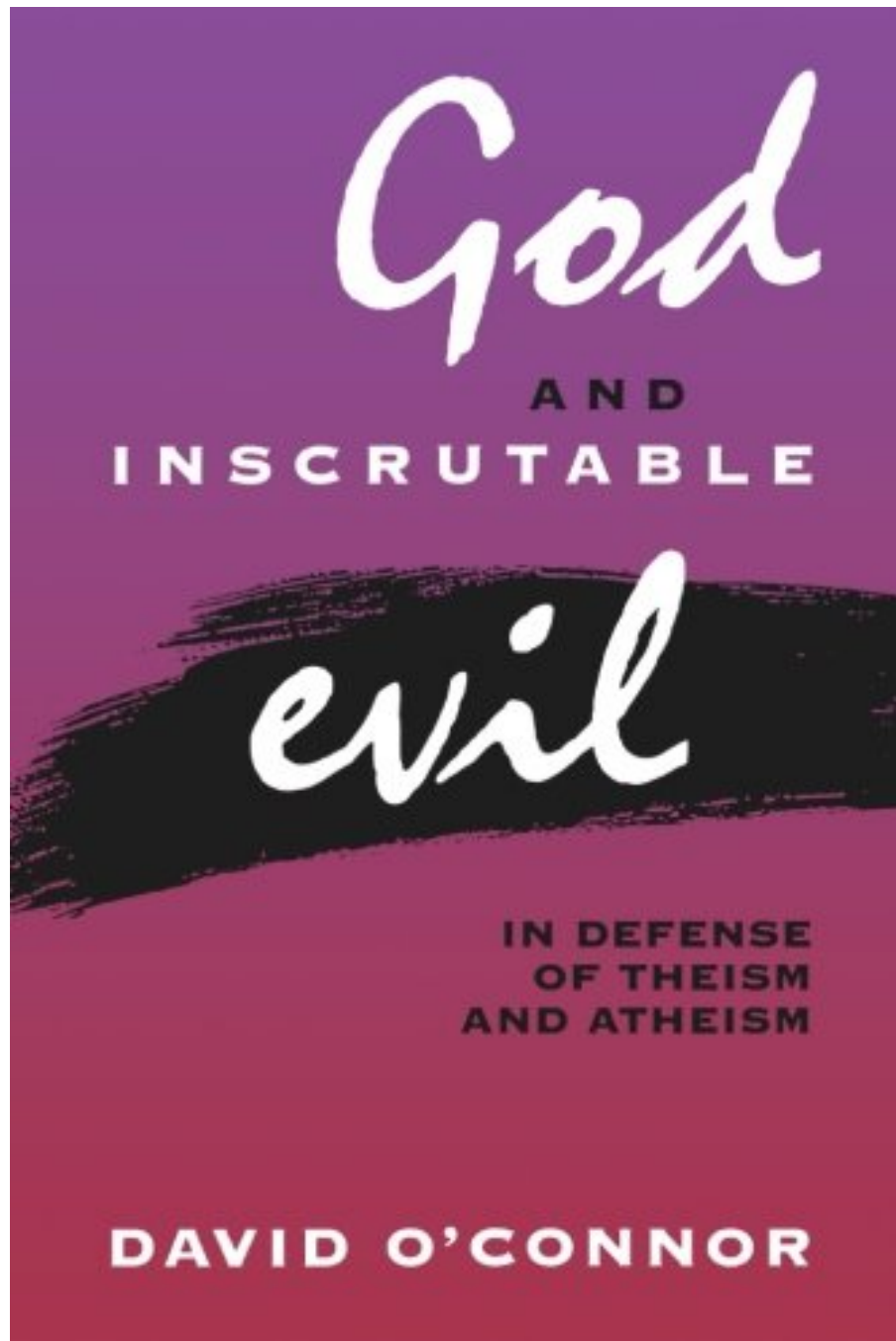


GOD AND INSCRUTABLE EVIL BY DAVID O'CONNOR



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Review

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In this important new book, David O'Connor discusses both logical and empirical forms of the problem of inscrutable evil, perennially the most difficult philosophical problem confronting theism. Arguing that both a version of theism ('friendly theism') and a version of atheism ('friendly atheism') are justified on the evidence in the debate over God and evil, O'Connor concludes that a warranted outcome is a philosophical *d_tente* between those two positions. On the way to that conclusion he develops two arguments from evil, a reformed version of the logical argument and an indirect version of the empirical argument, and deploys both against a central formulation of theism that he describes as orthodox theism. *God and Inscrutable Evil* makes a valuable contribution to contemporary debates in the philosophy of religion.

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Most helpful customer reviews

15 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

Superb -- an important contribution to the debate.

By DEAN STRETTON

"God and Inscrutable Evil" is an excellent contribution to contemporary philosophy of religion. Published in 1998, it addresses some of the latest work on the problem of evil, including some of the essays in "The Evidential Argument from Evil" (the anthology edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder).

O'Connor develops what he calls a "reformed logical argument from evil", based on the widespread existence of natural evil resulting from natural processes (NERNP). In developing the argument, O'Connor compares the actual world with a world he calls "Wp" -- a world which contains much less natural evil than the actual world. He concludes that God (that is, the God of traditional or "orthodox" theism) would have created Wp rather than the actual world; hence the actual world is not God-made; hence God does not exist (since God is defined as, among other things, the creator of the world). In other words, either all or some of the great abundance of NERNP in the actual world is inconsistent with the existence of God; hence God does not exist.

In deploying the reformed argument against orthodox theism, O'Connor considers the most important objections that might be raised against it (and which have been raised against other arguments from evil). He considers Swinburne's greater-good defence, Schlesinger's no best possible world defence, and Plantinga's free will defence, and shows how all these arguments fail to defeat the reformed argument from evil. (Interestingly, O'Connor endorses Richard M. Gale's argument which states that Plantinga's free will defence fails because God's actualisation of possible persons in that defence gives God a freedom-cancelling control over those persons. This is a very interesting argument, and I think it deserves far more attention than it seems to have been given.)

O'Connor then considers the "skeptical theism" advocated by the likes of Stephen Wykstra. Essentially, Wykstra claims that for all we know, all the evil in our world may result in greater goods that are beyond our ken; hence the fact that many evils in our world _appear_ pointless does not give us good reason to think that they _are_ pointless. O'Connor concedes (though some would disagree) that this sort of theism is largely successful against the reformed argument from evil.

However, as O'Connor points out, skeptical theism's success is not absolute. Skeptical theism gives us no reason to suppose that evils in this world _do_ have a God-justifying purpose. And since apparently pointless evil is precisely what atheism predicts, the facts of evil in the world are "sustaining evidence" for atheism.

The result of this is that certain atheists are rational in their nonbelief. (Although O'Connor does not mention it, this seems to create further problems for some forms of theism: if atheists are indeed rational, how could they be eternally punished for their nonbelief?) Also, since skeptical theism appeals to "evidence" to which nobody in this world could ever in principle have access, it follows that theism cannot be classified as an empirical hypothesis. In this way, skeptical theism pays a price that is possibly too high -- for if theism is not an empirical hypothesis, then natural theology is doomed. This is an important point; and while O'Connor mentions it, I think he should have pointed out that it follows that the whole project of apologists such as William Lane Craig and Richard Swinburne is doomed to failure. For such writers do contend that theism is a well-supported empirical hypothesis.

"God and Inscrutable Evil", while clearly written, is slightly technical at points, and so would make tough going for those with no training or background in philosophy. O'Connor's frequent use of acronyms (GGNE, OGNE, NEM, NERNP, NENPi, etc.) will also be a turn-off for some readers. (It may be a good idea to write these acronyms down for quick reference.) However, for those who have already developed an interest in the subject matter (and are familiar with some of the issues involved), "God and Inscrutable Evil" should not be missed. It is an important contribution to the debate on the problem of evil, and it will set the stage for many interesting future debates.

2 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

An excellent book, thorough analysis of philosophical issues

By A Customer

This is an excellent book that shows that there is still life in the Problem of Evil. The analysis of the problem is very thorough, precise and analytical. The arguments of Swinburne and Plantinga are considered in detail and important problems with their arguments are singled out.

The book is highly technical and while self-contained assumes some familiarity with philosophical argumentation of the analytical variety. More introductory works are Kaufmann's Critique of Religion and Philosophy (Princeton University Press), also Davis's Philosophy of Religion (Oxford University Press), both available from amazon.com.

The book contains an excellent bibliography and notes for further reading.

This book is indispensable to those who want to be on the forefront of Philosophy Of Religion.

4 of 32 people found the following review helpful.

strong attempt but doesnt work

By A Customer

The author attempts in this book to show that God cannot possibly exist because of the problem of evil. The argument goes something like this: If God is all good then evil cannot possibly exist, but since evil exists then there is no God. Why? Because there is a supposed contradiction between an all good God and evil. But is there? This argument is the classic case of begging the question. It has to be defined what good means. For example, suppose someone committed a murder, the murderer appeared in front of a judge who is a good judge. The judge would then say "Well you committed a murder, but thats fine. Im not going to punish you, Im going to let you go." Many people would think this judge had lost his mind. They would want the murderer punished. So the judge cannot be considered good because he did not punish evil. This is the problem with the problem of evil. Atheists cannot believe in God who punishes evil and therefore no God exists. The fallacy of this line of argumentation is clear. Man has free will and he chose evil over good. Free will implies a choice. That choice is good or evil. All mankind was represented by Adam, and Adam and Eve chose evil. God punished them for it. Punishment implies suffering, as hard as this is to bear. Atheists want a god who does not punish evil. If this were the case then there cannot be a god. But the truth is just the opposite. The argument for evil as presented in itself or in this book is no argument at all.

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