

Swinburne: The Problem of Evil

THE PROBLEM:

The Problem of Evil:

- An all-powerful being would *be able* to prevent evil from happening in the world.
- An all-good being would *want* to prevent evil from happening in the world.
- Evil happens in the world.
- Therefore, it must not be the case that any being is both all-powerful and all-good.

The Problem of Evil

- On most definitions, by “God” we mean a being that is all-good, all-powerful, and all-knowing.
 - If so, then the existence of evil in the world provides evidence that there cannot be any such God, i.e., any being that is both all good and all powerful.

THEODICIES:

Theodicy:

- An *explanation* for why God, a being who is all good
 - (and so should *want* to prevent evil)
- and is also all-powerful
 - (and so should *be able* to prevent evil)
- nevertheless *allows* evil to exist in the world.

Swinburne's Theodicy

[p. 106]

- Not pre-supposing the existence of God, but claiming that “*if there is a God, it is to be expected that he would do certain things...*”
- “*Of course thrills of pleasure and periods of contentment are good things,*” but there are even greater things that God can give us, like responsibility for ourselves.
- “*The problem is that God cannot give us these goods ... without allowing much evil on the way.*”

Swinburne's Theodicy

- The maximum amount of good that God can give us *requires* the existence of some evil.
- Does this call God's being all-powerful into doubt?
 - Does (maximum) goodness *logically* require (some) evil, the way a valley requires a mountain?

**LACK OF TOTAL GOOD VS.
PRESENCE OF REAL EVIL :**

Evil not Just “Absence of Good” [p. 106]

- *“The problem of evil is not that of the absence of various good states.[H]owever much good God creates, he could have created more; and he does not in general have any obligation to create.”*
- *Rather, the problem concerns “plenty of evils, positive bad states which God could if chose remove.”*

“Absence of Good” vs. “Positive Evil”

- The problem of evil, many theists say, concerns not the *lack* of perfect goodness in the world, but only the *presence* of real badness (“positive bad states”).
- The theist can admit that the world could be better in many ways. God, for the theist, is the source of all goodness, but is not *obligated* to create all the goodness she could have. So, the lack of perfect goodness in the world is not evidence against the existence of an all good and all powerful being.

Be Thankful our Glass is Half Full

- Historically, theists have made a distinction between there being a
 - Lack of perfect or complete goodness in the world, and
 - The presence of actual “positive badness.”
- The “Problem of Evil” arises only if there is “positive badness” in the world—real evil—and not merely if there is a lack of perfect goodness, i.e., if God could have made the world even better than it already is.
- The problem, in other words, is not that our glass is only half full (of “goodness”), but that there is “*filth*” in the water.

Positive Badness (Real Evil)

- It is only the existence in the world of “positive evil” that the theist must explain.
 - These explanations, recall, are called “theodicies.”
- Swinburne divides “positive badness” into two categories, and offers a different *theodicy* (explanation) for each. They are:
 - Moral Evil, and
 - Natural Evil.

**MORAL EVIL VS.
NATURAL EVIL:**

Moral Evil vs. Natural Evil

Moral Evil

- All evil *deliberately caused by human beings* doing what is “wrong,” or not doing what is “right.”
 - e.g., homicide; i.e., suffering caused by humans freely doing bad things:
 - i.e., by “*sin*.”

• Natural Evil

- All evil *not* deliberately caused by human beings (either directly, or through negligence).
 - e.g., natural disasters; any suffering not caused by human choices.

Moral Evil and Free Will

- Swinburne's strategy is to consider (what he calls) "moral evil" and "natural evil" separately.
- He argues that "moral evil" is the result of human being having a free will.
- Moral evil is the result of our "misusing" our free will (i.e., is the result of human "sin.")

**MORAL EVIL AND
THE FREE WILL DEFENSE:**

The Free Will Defense (regarding *moral evil*)

- “...it is a great good that humans have a ... free will ... [called] free and responsible choice....” [p. 107]
- But this necessitates “*the natural possibility of moral evil.*”
- “It is not logically possible...that God could give us such free will and yet ensure that we always use it in the right way.”

The Free Will Defense (regarding *moral* evil)

- “*The possibility of humans bringing about significant evil is a logical consequence of their having this free and responsible choice. Not even God could give us this choice without the possibility of resulting evil.*”
 - on this view, God does not create (moral) evil:
 - *we do.*

The Free Will Defense

- In order for my free will to be meaningful, it must be possible for me to choose to *hurt* people as well as to *help* them.
- So, *misusing* our free will brings evil into the world.
- So this kind of “evil” is a necessary part of the *greater good* of creating a world in which human beings have a free will.

Is “Free Will” a *Good* Defense?

- Swinburne: Moral evil is caused by (our misuse of) our freewill, not by God.
 - **But** *God gave us this free will.*
 - Does that mean that a world where we freely do evil things is better than a world without free will?
 - Wouldn't this mean that, all things considered, there really isn't any evil? –that the holocaust was, in the end, “worth it,” simply part of the “greater good” of having a free will?
 - If we really have a free will, doesn't that mean God is not (or is no longer) all powerful?
 - If free will means God can't stop us from doing evil things, doesn't that mean that God has “relinquished” some power?

On the Free Will Defense ...

- Are we claiming that God is not powerful enough to eliminate evil,
 - the theist will not want to say this;
- or that moral “evil” that contribute to a greater good aren’t *really* evil?
 - This essentially *denies* the existence of evil.

NATURAL EVIL:

“Natural evil [i.e., evil not caused by human free will] is not to be accounted for along the same lines as moral evil.”

- Natural Evil makes “... *it possible for humans to have the kind of choice the free-will defense extols, and to make available to humans specially worthwhile kinds of choice.*”

Ways in which natural evil gives humans choices

- “...*the operation of natural laws producing evils gives human knowledge ... of how to bring about such evils themselves.*”
 - and how to *prevent* them.
- “... *it makes possible certain kinds of [moral] action...*” such as *enduring suffering, showing compassion to the suffering of others, and showing courage.*”

Natural Evil

- Natural evil (suffering not caused by a misuse of human free will) is a necessary part of achieving a “greater good.”
- It motivates us to understand the natural world (in order to prevent natural evils).
- And it provides opportunities for us to learn things like courage and compassion—it promotes human “moral growth.”

So,

- The opportunities to achieve certain kinds of moral goodness (*courage, self-sacrifice, etc.*) only arise in a world in which certain natural evils occur.
 - i.e., the greatest possible good *requires* the presence of at least some (natural) evil—
 - —in fact, for some theists, of *all* the evil that actually happens.
 - According to one theist philosopher: *We live in the “best of all possible worlds!”* (Gottfried Leibniz)

Best of All Possible Worlds?

- German philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz, turned the whole “problem” on its head:
 - There are many different ways that God could have created the world.
 - Being all knowing, God foresaw everything that would ever happen in each of these (infinitely many) “possible worlds.”
 - Being all good, the world God chose to create must have been the one with the maximum amount of goodness.
 - So, it not only follows that there isn’t any real evil, but that we live in the best of all possible worlds!

Swinburne's Theodicy

- “Moral Evil” is caused by human freewill, not by God.
 - So, the “badness” humans cause is “outweighed” by the goodness of our having free will.
- “Natural Evil” is created by God because it is needed in order for us to achieve a greater amount of goodness.
 - So, again, its “badness” is outweighed by a greater goodness.

**NATURAL EVIL:
ANIMAL SUFFERING**

Why does God allow *animals* to suffer?

- “*There is ... no reason to suppose that animals have a free will.*” [p.112]
 - which rules out moral evils caused by them, i.e., their suffering can’t be explained as due to misuse of their free will.
- It is “*reasonable to suppose*” that animals suffer less than humans, and so “*one does not need as powerful a theodicy as one does ...[for] humans.*”
 - Hmmm? Is it true animals suffer less than humans?
 - Even if so, why would this require a less “powerful theodicy,” i.e., a *lesser explanation*? Doesn’t *any* evil need explaining if there is an all good and all powerful God?

Do Animals *Gain* by Suffering?

- “*For animals too ... there are more worthwhile things*” than pleasure, and these greater goods are possible only if natural evil is possible.
 - i.e., like humans, they benefit from the opportunity to suffer. **!?!?!?!?**
- So, in the end, both human and animal suffering (when not caused by human free will) makes us all better. And that means it’s not “really evil.”