Swinburne: The Problem of Evil
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.
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 \textit{requires} the existence of some evil.

• Does this call God’s being all-powerful into doubt?
  – Does (maximum) goodness \textit{logically} require (some) evil, the way a valley requires a mountain?
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.”
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” concerns the presence of “positive badness,” not the lack of “perfect goodness.”
    - We should be grateful God gave us any goodness at all.
  - Swinburne divides such “positive badness” into to kinds: natural evil and moral evil, and explains each separately.
Moral Evil vs. Natural Evil

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

• **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.”
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 beings having a free will.

• Moral evil is the result of our “misusing” our free will (i.e., is the result of human “sin.”)
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.

• But this 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?

• Moral evil is caused by (our misuse of) our freewill, not by God (says Swinburne).
  
  – *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 isn’t any evil? –that the holocaust was, in the end, “worth it?”
  
  • 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?
Best of All Possible Worlds?

• German philosopher, Gottfried Leibniz, turned the whole “problem” on it’s 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 one 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!
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 [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 “growth.”
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, it’s “badness” is outweighed by a greater goodness.
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.”