

Whence Evil?

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Motivation

In our meetings we frequently bring up the idea of beauty. As physicists we delight in the elegance of the laws of nature. We have even found the beauty of the laws so compelling as to consider it evidence for the existence of some supreme mind or god.

Indeed the abundance of beauty found in our universe (in any form) is a compelling reason for the existence of god.

As philosophers we are motivated by a love for wisdom. Presumably if we continued to stumble upon only ugly but true ideas we would no longer want to practice philosophy.....Yet here we are.

Then what about *evil*? How can we reconcile our love for wisdom and our reverence for beauty when there is so much *evil* present.

Two Excerpts From Hume

Speaking though Philo...



“It must, I think, be allowed that, if a very limited intelligence whom we shall suppose utterly unacquainted with the universe were assured that it were the production of a very good, wise, and powerful Being, however finite, he would, from his conjectures formed beforehand a different notion of it from what we find it to be by experience; nor would he ever imagine, merely from these attributes of the cause of which he is informed, that the effect could be so full of vice and misery and disorder, as it appears in this life....But supposing...this creature is not antecedently convinced of a supreme intelligence, benevolent and powerful, but is left to gather such a believe from the appearance of things....nor will he ever find any reason for such a conclusion”

“Did I show you a house or palace where there was not one apartment convenient or agreeable, where the windows, doors, fires, passages, stairs and the whole economy of the building were a source of noise, confusion, fatigue, darkness, and the extremes of heat and cold, you would certainly blame the contrivance....you will always without entering into any detail, condemn the architect”

David Hume-Evil and the God of Religion

So finding ourselves in this world, do we have grounds to condemn the architect or deny that there even is one?

Statement of the problem:

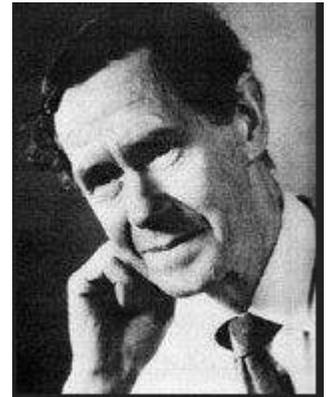
Lets first consider the logical problem of evil.

- 1) God is all good
- 2) God is omnipotent
- 3) God is omniscient
- 4) Evil exists

Immediately there is a sense that these 4 statements can not all be true. For the atheist this looks like an opportunity to disprove the existence of a God (or at least one with these attributes). The boldest claim an atheist can make here was said by J.L. Mackie:

“Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another”

Evil and Omnipotents-J.L Mackie



Statement of the problem:

The 4 statements do not explicitly contradict each other.
However some very reasonable and straightforward
deductions seem to make it so.

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Statement of the problem:

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- 1) God is good  5) If God is good, he would want to prevent all of the evil and suffering in the world.
- 2) God is omnipotent  6) If God is omnipotent, he would be able to prevent all of the evil and suffering in the world.
- 3) God is omniscient  7) If God is omniscient, he would know about all of the evil and suffering in the world and would know how to eliminate or prevent it.
- 4) Evil exists

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| 4) Evil exists | | |

From this we deduce 3 more statements

- 8) If God knows about all of the evil and suffering in the world, knows how to eliminate or prevent it, is powerful enough to prevent it, and yet does not prevent it, he must not be perfectly good.
- 9) If God knows about all of the evil and suffering, knows how to eliminate or prevent it, wants to prevent it, and yet does not do so, he must not be all- powerful.
- 10) If God is powerful enough to prevent all of the evil and suffering, wants to do so, and yet does not, he must not know about all of the suffering or know how to eliminate or prevent it—that is, he must not be all-knowing.

Statement of the problem:

The particular form I present here is from:

"Logical Problem of Evil," by James R. Beebe, *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ISSN 2161-0002, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/>"

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And the finally we arrive at the conclusion

- 11) **If evil and suffering exist, then God is either not omnipotent, not omniscient, or not perfectly good.**

Statement of the problem:

Of course statements 5-7 leave room for objections

5) If God is good, he would want to prevent all of the evil and suffering in the world.

6) If God is omnipotent, he would be able to prevent all of the evil and suffering in the world.

7) If God is omniscient, he would know about all of the evil and suffering in the world and would know how to eliminate or prevent it.



Unless there is a good reason to allow evil.

And so, many explanations have been put forth as to why evil must, or at least does, exist*:

1) Evil is a necessary counterpart to good.

2) Evil is necessary as means to good.

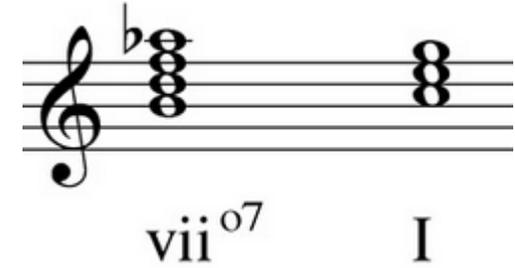
3) The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil.

4) Evil is do to human free will.

*I'm taking these as Mackie lists them in **Evil and Omnipotents-J.L Mackie**

The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil

Sometimes this argument is introduced through a metaphor: Evil, **by contrasting** also heightens, good in the same way musical dissonance brings out a richer harmony.



To some extent this is true. Certainly we all have had events in our lives that, at the time was seemingly ruined by the presence of some unexpected “evil”, but in fact turns into a fond memory.

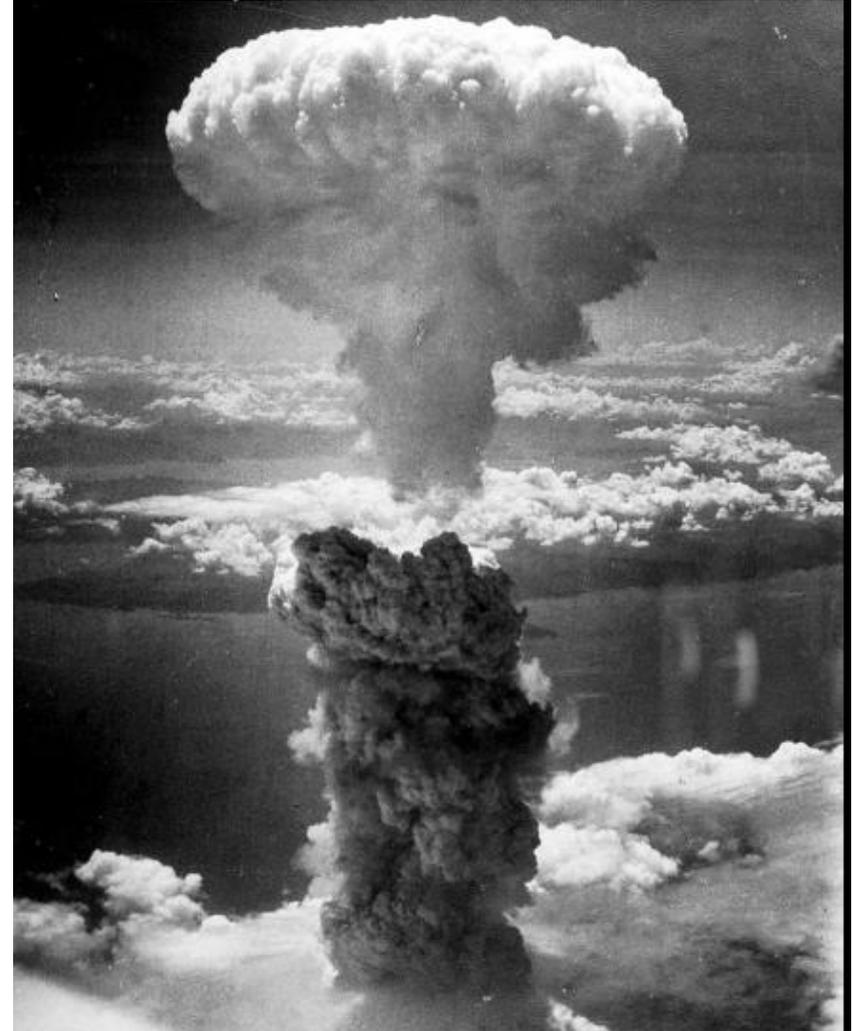


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But to me this metaphor becomes absurd when we apply it to the actual moral evils (world wars, serial killings, genocides) that provoke the problem of evil. The evil here is not dissonance. It is the total loss of harmony.



The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil

Mackie presents (and refutes) a different interpretation of this statement. Now the existence of pain (which is clearly opposed to a simple good such as pleasure) also allows for a nobler good such as sympathy or bravery.

Hence the existence of a lower order evil “evil (1)” is the **justification** for the existence of a higher order good “good (2)”.

Note how this is different than evil(1) merely contrasting and so enhancing good(1). It is also not as clear whether my objection from the last slide still stands. The existence of good(2) seems especially (to me) important for a philosopher as it necessarily expands awareness beyond the immediate self.

The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil

Mackie refutes this in the following way....

Evil(1) is permitted to allow for the existence of **good(2)**.

However if there is a **good (2)** it is also evident that there is an **evil (2)**; Anything that is resulting in an increase in the amount of **evil(1)** and a decrease in the amount of **good(1)**. For example as cruelty. Since **evil(2)** exist apparently gods goodness must not be attempting to eliminate it.

We might next attempt to justify **evil(2)** so that **good(3)** can exist. Now we are saying the ultimate good is an increase in, say benevolence over cruelty. Very well but **good(3)** but we also see that **evil(3)** exist. So gods goodness must not be attempting to eliminate it either.

It is clear that this argument keeps justifying an n^{th} order evil as a justification for $(n+1)$ order good. But this leads to an infinite regression.

The *Free Will Defense* provides a way out of this loop. Here we will still have **evil(1)** as a justification for **good(2)** but **good(3)** is human free will. Human free will can (and obviously has!) resulted in **evil(2)**. The existence (or at least possibility of) **evil(2)** is logically necessary for free will but is no longer being justified by it.

The Free Will Defense



Historically attributed to St. Augustine of Hippo.

- 1) Anything God created is good.
- 2) Evil is a privation of good.
- 3) Evil, natural or moral, is caused directly or indirectly by the wrong choices of free rational beings.

“The will which turns from the unchangeable and common good and turns to its own private good or to anything exterior or inferior, sins. It turns to its private good, when it wills to be governed by its own authority; to what is exterior, when it is eager to know what belongs to others and not to itself; to inferior things, when it loves bodily pleasures. In these ways a man becomes proud, inquisitive, licentious, and is taken captive by another kind of life which, when compared with the righteous life we have just described, is really death.” –On Free Will

This notion of free will as the source of evil is then used in the Christian myth of “The Fall” to describe wholly innocent man, living in a paradisaal state free of pain or suffering, suddenly turning from god to sin and thus bringing pain and suffering into his world.

Let’s just leave this as is but use it for a spring board for an important question.

If freedom of will is so good (hence championed by a benevolent god), could an omnipotent, omniscient god have created a world that has both creatures with free will and yet also no evil?

Mackie's Answer (yes)

Are wrong choices a logical necessity for freedom?

Since it is not logically impossible for a man to choose what is right **sometimes**. It is logically possible for god to have made men with free will but still always choose to do right **every time**.

Only if freedom here means the same thing as, choices are the result of randomness or indeterminacy is it not possible.

Freedom in this sense has no real merit and certainly can not justify the necessity of evil. If our free choices are just random choices and these random choices are the cause of **evil(2)**; it would just be better if we were automata always doing the right thing.

To Mackie the free will defense requires the conflation of two senses of freedom. Undetermined randomness on the one hand, and the ability to act in accordance to one's will independent of anything prior on the other.

Plantinga Responds

Although Omnipotent god is still bounded by logical possibility. Hence we must consider which worlds are possible:

World 1	World 2	World 3	World 4
God creates persons with morally significant free will	God does not create persons with morally significant free will	God creates persons with morally significant free will	God creates persons with morally significant free will
God does not causally determine people in every situation to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong	God causally determines people in every situation to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong	God causally determines people in every situation to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong	God does not causally determine people in every situation to choose what is right and to avoid what is wrong
There is evil and suffering in W_1	There is no evil or suffering in W_2	There is no evil or suffering in W_3	There is no evil or suffering in W_4

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There is evil and suffering in W_1	There is no evil or suffering in W_2	There is no evil or suffering in W_3	There is no evil or suffering in W_4
Possible	Possible	Not Possible	Possible-though improbable

Plantinga Responds

In Plantinga's "God, Freedom and Evil" he successfully refutes Mackie's claim that these four statements

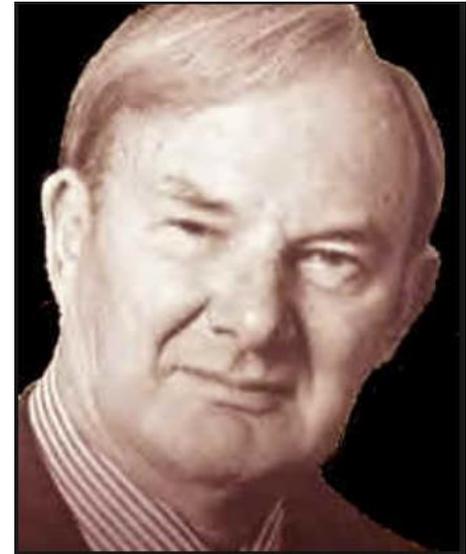
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are logically contradictory. He does so by only looking for a possible reason for god to allow for evil (a greater good from freewill) but does not claim to have found the actual reason for evil. And so he succeeds in what he set out to do; his approach doesn't really 'solve' the problem of evil in any satisfying way.

The World as a Vale of Soul Making

Philosopher John Hick rejects St. Augustine's theodicy and the free will defense. Claiming there is a fatal inconsistency in perfectly good men, in a paradisaical state and in the full presence of God, suddenly turning to sin.

He presents an alternative theodicy, based on one proposed by St. Irenaeus, in which the world created by a benevolent god would not be a 'hedonistic paradise' but rather a place for the forging of a soul in the 'finite likeness' of god.



“Instead of regarding man as having been created by God in a finished state, as a finitely perfect being fulfilling the divine intention for our human level of existence, and then falling disastrously away from this, the minority report [Irenaeus theodicy] sees man as still in the process of creation....and so man, created as a personal being in the image of God, is only the raw material for a further and more difficult stage in God's work. This is the leading of men as a relatively free and autonomous persons, through their own dealings with life in the world in which He has placed them, towards that quality of personal existence that is the finite likeness of God.”

John Hick-Evil and the God of Love

Suffering: An exchange between Hume and Hick

Hume: Might not the Deity exterminate all ill, wherever it were to be found; and produce all good , without any preparation or long process of cause and effects?

Hick's Answer

Yes he could being omnipotent, but such a world is void of moral meaning as no wrong action can do harm.

Also such a world would stymie the capacity to love. As there are no moments that afford the possibility of mutual giving and helping or sharing in a time of need.

Also we could not be free in a world like this. Even thinking bad thoughts would be prevented..... And it certainly could not contain elegant laws of physics.



Suffering: An exchange between Hume and Hick

Hume: Ok but what if God only interfered secretly on special occasions? So that 'A fleet, whose purposes were salutary to society, might always meet with a fair wind'. Or at least prevent really exceptional evils.

Hick's Answer

Evils are exceptional only in relation to other evils which are routine. Therefore we might always make these objections, no matter how many evils have been secretly eliminated, we would always point to the most outstanding one and think it to should go and 'there would be no where to stop short of a divinely arranged paradise'.

Again since nothing extremely disastrous could happen virtues such as bravery could not be evoked. Our world 'reduced to the level of a television serial. We always know the rugged hero who upholds law and order is going to win the climatic gun fight'.

I think here the theist will always just have to trust that there is the 'right' amount of evil where the atheist is not likely connived by this argument.

Suffering: An exchange between Hume and Hick

Hume: 'The winds are requisite to convey the vapors along the surface of the globe, and to assist men in navigation: But how often, rising up to tempest and hurricanes, do they become pernicious?' Or even if this evil does have a purpose, does it not become too much and thus counter productive to 'soul making'.

Hick's Answer

Compassionate reactions require that the individual who is suffering is doing so undeservedly and that the suffering is, overall, bad for them. So in a world that is the scene of compassionate love and selfless giving we might expect suffering to be dished out haphazardly.

Eliminating unjust suffering would also eliminate 'good will' or doing what is right for the sake of right. As bad actions would always be anticipated by punishment and good actions by reward.

Finally there certainly seem to be examples where the evil is too much and rather than a gain there is only loss. And here we must appeal to the positive value of mystery. The impenetrable mystery of unjust suffering might itself be part of the soul making process.

For the cases of in which 'soul-making' fails in this world. Hick must appeal to 'The infinite future good' where all suffering leads to 'a common good which will be unending and therefore unlimited'.

“Tell me yourself, I challenge you-answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature-that little child beating its breast with its fist, for instance-and found to be the edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.”

The Brothers Karamazov | Fyodor Dostoyevsky