

“The only excuse for God is that he does not exist.”

— Stendhal

Problems of Evil

Another Theodicy



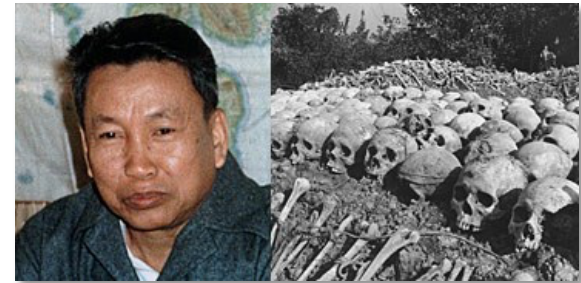
“I have the whole universe to look after, so I’m putting you in charge of this planet.”

What is Evil?

- (1) Human Evil
 - (2) Natural Evil
-

Evil as ...

- ... an instrumental good
- ... a possible by-product of good
- ... a necessary co-existent of good
- ... a just punishment (by God)
- ... uncompensated/gratuitous



Pol Pot (1925-1998) and some of his 1-3 million victims in Cambodia.



Tsunami in the Indian Ocean (2004) — almost 230,000 killed.

Mackie on Goods and Evils

1st Order

Evil: physical pain, misery, etc.

Good: pleasure, happiness, etc.

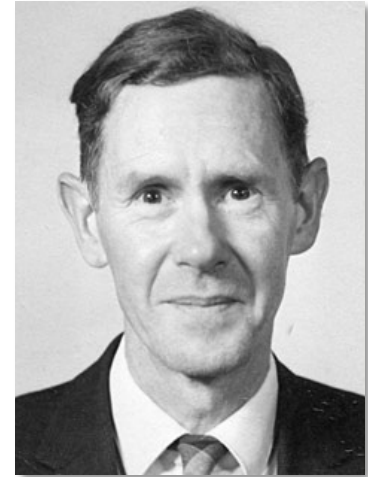
2nd Order

Evil: malevolence, cruelty, cowardice, etc.

Good: benevolence, bravery, courage, etc.

3rd Order

Good: God's desire to maximize 2nd order good,
human free will?



J. L. Mackie
1917-1981

“Evil and Omnipotence”
Mind 64 (1955): 200-12.

The Epicurean Dilemma

Is God willing to prevent
evil, but not able?

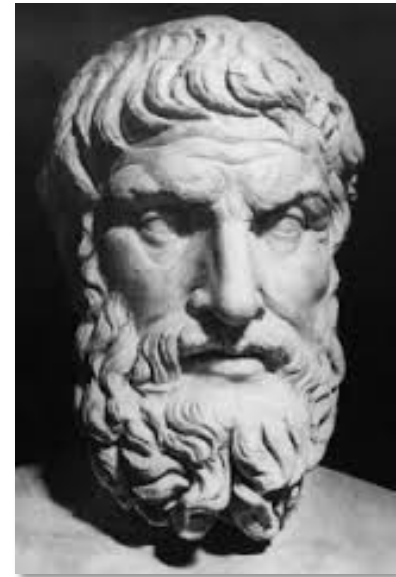
Then he is impotent.

Is he able, but not willing?

Then is he malevolent.

Is he both able and willing?

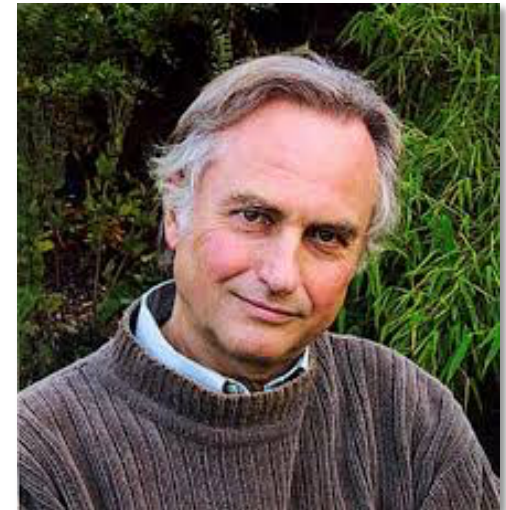
Whence then this evil?



Epicurus
(341-270 BCE)

An Indifferent Universe?

“In a universe of blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.”



Richard Dawkins
(b. 1941)

— Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (1995)

The Basic Argument

The following two statements are **logically inconsistent** (that is, they can't both be true):



- (1) A God exists who is all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good.
- (2) Evil exists.

Theodicy

Leibniz, *Theodiciée* (1710)

Greek: **theos** = God, the divine
diké = justice

Three kinds of theodicy:

- (1) **Augustinian**: evil is a by-product of creaturely free agency.
- (2) **Irenaean**: evil is an accessory to human growth.
- (3) **Process**: evil diminishes with the growth of God's reality.



Gottfried Wilhem Leibniz
1646-1716

The Lisbon Earthquake

- Between 10 and 100 thousand dead.
- The city split open with fissures measuring fifteen feet across.
- Whoever wasn't crushed by the falling buildings, or drowned by the ensuing tsunami, was burned by the fires that lasted five days.



Lisbon Cathedral
November 1, 1755

Logical Argument from Evil

- (1) An omniscient being *knows how* to produce a world with no evil in it.
- (2) An omnipotent being *is able* to produce a world with no evil in it.
- (3) An omnibenevolent being *wants* to produce a world with no evil in it.
- (4) Knowledge, ability, and desire suffice to attain a goal.
- (5) \therefore If there is a being with these three properties, then there is no evil in the world. [1-4]
- (6) God is a being with these three properties. [by definition]
- (7) \therefore If God exists, then there is no evil in the world. [5, 6]
- (8) There *is* evil in the world.
- (9) \therefore God does not exist. [7, 8 - MT]

A Free Will Defense

- (1) The good of human free will outweighs all **human** evil.
- (2) The good of Satan's free will outweighs all **natural** evil.
- (3) All evil is either human or natural.
- (4) \therefore Good outweighs evil. [1-3]
- (5) If God exists, then good outweighs evil.
- (6) \therefore God's existence is compatible with the existence of evil. [4, 5]



Augustine
354-430 CE

Free Will?

- Free Will? What free will?
- Could God interfere to avoid the “worst” evils?
- Compatibilist vs Libertarian Free Will
- “Limited Free Will” vs “Significant Free Will”

Evidential Argument from Evil

- (1) An omniscient being *knows how* to produce **the best of all possible worlds**.
- (2) An omnipotent being *is able* to produce **the best of all possible worlds**.
- (3) An omnibenevolent being *wants* to produce **the best of all possible worlds**.
- (4) Knowledge, ability, and desire suffice to attain a goal.
- (5) ∴ If there is a being with these three properties, then this is **the best of all possible worlds**. [1-4]
- (6) God is a being with these three properties. [by definition]
- (7) ∴ If God exists, then this is **the best of all possible worlds**. [5, 6]
- (8) This is not **the best of all possible worlds**.
- (9) ∴ God does not exist. [7, 8 - MT]

Hick on Soul-Making (1/2)

Two traditional Christian theodicies

(1) **Augustinian**: Evil is a result of humans who, through their free will, brought sin and misery into what had been paradise.



Augustine
354-430 CE

(2) **Irenaean**: Each human begins as immature and incomplete, but through free choices in confrontation with evil in the world is able to grow into something more perfect and to become fully human.



Irenaeus
120-202 CE

Hick on Soul-Making (2/2)

The Irenaean tradition has a two-stage understanding of humans:

- (1) We are created in the **image** of God (= physical)
- (2) We are created in the **likeness** of God (= moral/religious)

Each human can, with effort, develop into God's likeness through a spiritual/ethical practice, as exercised in:

- (a) our relationship to God (= religious development)
- (b) our relationships with each other (= ethical development)

Our **relationship to God** requires freedom, and this requires that God be hidden from us (= "epistemically distant").

Our **relationships with each other** requires "moral friction" and the opportunity to grow (i.e., morally perfect beings cannot grow)

Marilyn Adams on Evil (1/2)

Horrendous Evil: “An evil, E, is horrendous if and only if participation in E by person P gives everyone prima facie reason to doubt whether P’s life, given E, was worth living.”

Two Problems of Evil:

- (1) **Global:** whether the global balance of evil in the world can be defeated by the amount of good in the world (“this is the best of all possible worlds”).
- (2) **Individual:** whether the evil suffered by each individual can be defeated by the amount of good enjoyed by that individual.

The global problem could be solved while leaving individual lives blighted by horrendous evil. That is unacceptable; God should not have created such a life.

Marilyn Adams on Evil (2/2)

- (1) A successful theodicy must make possible each person having a life worth living.
- (2) The suffering often far exceeds the goods found in this world.
- (3) ∴ A successful theodicy must appeal to “transcendent goods” available in the afterlife that can compensate for suffering in this world.

God's reason for allowing evil **is hidden** from us. Three possible explanations for this hiddenness: We *could* understand the reason, except that...

- (a) we have not been informed of them [or]
- (b) our memory or attention span is too short [or]
- (c) we are spiritually, emotionally, or cognitively too immature.