1. An Introduction to the Problem of Evil and Pain
The Problem of Evil and Pain

1: Introduction to the Problem of Evil and Pain
2: The Explanation of St. Augustine: The Fall and Original Sin
3: The Explanation of Leibniz: The Best Possible World
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6: The Existential Problem of Evil and Redemptive Suffering
7: Summary and Conclusions: The Problem of Evil and Pain
Opening Prayer

Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace, as children of one Father; to whom be dominion and glory, now and forever. Amen
Introduction

Leon Bonnat “Job” 1880
John Lennox, Professor of Mathematics at Oxford University, Author and Christian Apologist, speaking at Harvard Medical School, Boston

Excerpted from Veritas Forum Lecture
Epicurus (341-270 BC):
- Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?
Introduction

- Hans Kung: *Was God at Auschwitz?
- If God is God: all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good and loving, present everywhere, then of course God must have been at Auschwitz!
- “But how could God have been at Auschwitz without preventing Auschwitz?”* “How could God have ‘looked on’ when the gas streamed out and the cremation ovens were burning?”*

*Credo. The Apostles Creed Explained for Today, p. 89.*
Introduction

Theologian Eugene Borowitz (1924-2000) on the Holocaust:

Any God who could permit the Holocaust, who could remain silent during it, who could “hide His face” while it dragged on, was not worth believing in. There might well be a limit to how much we could understand Him, but Auschwitz demanded an unreasonable suspension of understanding. In the face of such great evil, God, the good and the powerful, was too inexplicable, so men said, “God is dead.”
In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s (1821-1881) *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan Karamazov tells his brother Alyosha, a Russian Orthodox priest, the story of about a Russian general with over two thousand serfs and hundreds of hunting dogs.

An 8 year old serf boy threw a stone that hurt the paw of the general’s favorite hunting dog.

The general ordered the boy to be taken away from his mother and shut up alone in a cell.

In the morning, the terrified boy, shivering and naked, was summoned before the general.

The general ordered the boy to run and then set his hunting dogs on him, who tear the boy to pieces before his mother’s eyes.

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Introduction

Ivan asks his brother:

“Tell me yourself, I challenge you. 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 baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance – and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell me the truth.”
Introduction

- The presence of evil and suffering in the world is the most potent rational objection to the existence of a all-powerful, all-knowing, loving God.

  Han Kung: “the rock of atheism.”

- The presence of evil and suffering in the world is one of the great and life-long challenges to a life of faith.
The Definition of Evil

Leon Bonnat “Job” 1880
The Definition of Evil

- We will adopt a “common-sense” definition of evil, and include under “evil” such things as:
  - Physical pain
  - Mental suffering
  - The suffering of innocents
  - Physical deformities
  - Psychological abnormalities
  - Disease
  - Character defects
  - Injustice
  - Oppression and Persecution
  - Natural Catastrophes
The Definition of Evil

Two Kinds of Evil

Two kinds of “evil:”

1. Moral Evil: evil caused by free human beings, such as:
   - Murder
   - Lying
   - Stealing
   - Greed
   - Dishonesty
Two kinds of “evil:”

2. **Natural Evil**, such as:
   - Hurricanes, floods, tornados, fires
   - Famines
   - Cancer and AIDS
   - Birth defects and deformities
   - Disabilities: blindness, deafness, insanity
The Definition of Evil

John Hick: “Moral evil is evil that we human beings originate: cruel, unjust, viscous, and perverse thoughts and deeds. Natural evil is the evil that originates independently of human actions: in disease bacilli, earthquakes, storms, droughts, tornados, etc.”
The “Problem of Evil” in Philosophy

Leon Bonnat “Job” 1880
The “Problem of Evil”

The “problem of evil,” in the parlance of philosophy, refers to an argument from evil against the existence of a God who is:

- all-powerful,
- all-knowing,
- all-good.
Most basic form of the “problem of evil” (echoing Epicurus):

1. An all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing God exists.
2. Evil exists.

Atheists have claimed that statements (1) and (2) are logically contradictory, or at least extremely unlikely to both be true. This is the “problem of evil.”
There are three versions of the “problem of evil” put forward by atheists.

Version 1 (basic form):

1. An all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing God exists.
2. Evil exists.

Statements (1) and (2) cannot be reconciled.
The “Problem of Evil”
Three Versions of the Problem of Evil

Version 2:

(1) An all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing God exists.

(2) Large amounts, extreme and horrendous kinds, and perplexing distributions of evil exist.

Statements (1) and (2) cannot be reconciled.
Version 3:

1. An all-powerful, all-good, all-knowing God exists.
2. Gratuitous or pointless evil exists.
3. Statements (1) and (2) cannot be reconciled.
The “Problem of Evil”

The challenge we face as Christians (a challenge also faced by Jews and Moslems), is how can we reconcile statements (1) and (2)?

1. An all-powerful, all-good and all-loving, all-knowing God exists.
2a. Evil exists.
2b. Extreme and horrendous evil exists.
2c. Gratuitous and pointless evil exists.
The “Problem of Evil”

- Note this is a problem mainly for the three great “ethical monotheistic religions” (Christianity, Judaism, Islam) who believe in one God, all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing.

- Religions with both powerful “good” and “evil” divine principles, such as Zoroastrism (or the world of “Star Wars”) don’t have a problem explaining evil.
The “Problem of Evil”

n In the secular world of philosophy, it is today widely acknowledged that all three forms of “the problem of evil” have failed.

n That is: theists (= those who believe in an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God) have successfully brought forth arguments that can reconcile statements (1) and (2) in the “problem of evil.”

n This successful defense by theists does not prove the existence of God, but it does show it is possible to rationally believe in an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God in the face of evil.
The “Problem of Evil”

Our journey is this series:

To explore some of the arguments made by theists to defend and justify the presence of evil in a world created by an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God.

In exploring these arguments, we can discover interesting and profound implications for other areas in theology, such as God’s intention in creating the universe, and the nature of life after death.
The “Problem of Evil”

Today:

- Some general themes in explaining evil in a world created by an all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing God.

Next several weeks:

- “Global” Explanations or Theodicies (theodicy = theological lingo for an explanation justifying the existence of God and evil).

  - Often draws upon and combines several general themes for explaining evil.
Some Themes in Explaining Evil
Themes in Explaining Evil

- Evil is an illusion.
  - Won’t work in Christianity.
  - The Bible testifies to the existence of evil in brutal candor.
- What we think is evil may not really be evil.
  - Example: death appears to us to be the ultimate evil, the inevitable frustration and destruction of all our dreams and hopes, of all the goodness of our lives.
  - Death alternatively is simply a transition to another level of being.
God hears the whole symphony and it is good and harmonious. We hear only a few discordant bassoons and it seems evil to us.

But if we are so far removed from hearing “the symphony,” and can hear only the bassoons, how can we claim any perspective to make moral judgments? What good is our conscience?
Themes in Explaining Evil

- God’s morality and moral judgment is so vastly superior to ours that what seems immoral to us is in fact okay in God’s superior moral judgment.
  - J. S. Mill (1806-1873): makes God out to be a moral monster whose moral standards are totally dissonant with our own deepest moral convictions.
  - What does it mean then that we are made in the “image” and “likeness” of God?
Themes in Explaining Evil

“‘All’s well that ends well.’”

All of today’s evil will eventually result in good.

Example: an orphaned and deprived child develops a deep sense of compassion and empathy, and becomes a great surgeon in an underdeveloped part of the world.

But can such a future good ever justify the brutal murder and premature deaths of the child’s parents?
Themes in Explaining Evil

- A lot of evil arises from human actions, so God should not be blamed.
  - But didn’t God make Hitler and Stalin and Pol Pot and stand by as they rose to power? Aren’t they subject to God’s power?

- A lot of evil is due to the fallen angels (the “devil”).
  - Didn’t God make the angels? Aren’t they subject to God’s power?
Good and Evil are “polar” concepts. They are logically connected and you can’t have one without the other anymore than you can have mountains without valleys.

St. Augustine suggested evil is simply the absence of good, the vacuum left when good is lost.

Are good and evil truly “polar” concepts, each logically requiring the other?
Themes in Explaining Evil

- Evils are necessary for God to be glorified
  - The power of a great hurricane can create “fear of God” and “awe” of God.
  - Evils more often seem to oppress or crush the human spirit.
- Evils are necessary as punishments for sin
  - It doesn’t seem like the punishments are being equably distributed, and often seem draconian.
Themes in Explaining Evil

- Evils are necessary for the development of “secondary virtues.”
  - Bravery cannot develop without the presence of real danger.
  - Fortitude cannot develop without the presence of hardship.
  - Generosity cannot develop without the presence of others in need.
Themes in Explaining Evil

- Evil is the necessary result of giving human beings free will.
  - The ability to *freely* choose to do good requires the possibility that a free human being will choose to do evil.
- “Natural Law Explanation” of natural evil:
  - A stable and predictable natural order was necessary as a setting for free human beings to make moral choices.
  - But a stable and predictable natural order, behaving according to amoral physical laws, inherently includes natural evil.
    - The same water that quenches our thirst can also drown us.
References


- **Philosophy of Religion (Great Courses Lecture Series)**, James Hall, The Teaching Company, 2003


Next Time: The Problem of Evil and Pain

The Explanation of St. Augustine: The Fall and Original Sin

Leon Bonnat “Job” 1880