

Evil and the Free Will Defense

Review of the Problem

- 1) If God exists, she'd be OOG. [By hypothesis]
- 2) If an OOG being exists, there would be no evil. [from 1]
- 3) God exists. [Suppose]
- 4) There is no evil. [From 1-3]
- 5) There is evil. [Premise from experience.]
- 6) Therefore, [An OOG] God does not exist. [Because our supposition (3) leads to a contradiction (4-5), we should reject the supposition.]

The Free Will Defense

Evil is due not to God but to human free will.

Suppose we do have free will. Why did God grant us free will if so much misery results? Answer: It is better *on the whole* that people should act freely even granted the disastrous use we sometimes make of our freedom. Free will is a *higher* good that more than makes up for whatever trouble it causes.

Objections:

i) Lots of evils aren't related to free will at all: earthquakes, floods, etc. Why do *these* exist if God is good? (Punishment? Instruction? But what about the death of innocents?)

ii) Why couldn't God have given us such excellent characters that we would *freely* choose good in every case? Perhaps, we would always have the option of doing evil, but we would always prefer the other option. As Mackie puts it: God was not faced with the choice of making either automata or free agents who sometimes go wrong. She could also have made free agents that always go right!

iii) Free will seems incompatible with God's omnipotence. The reason is that when God gives me free will, she commits herself to letting my actions depend on *my* decisions rather than hers. So, if I decide to steal a car, or burn a flag, because of her commitment God cannot stop me!!!! And if God cannot stop me, then that would seem to imply a limitation on her powers.

Van Inwagen's Theodicy

A "theodicy" is justification of theism in the face of evil. It is an attempt, in particular, to explain how God's omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness is compatible with the existence of evil. Note that given Mackie's charge that theists are committed to a *contradiction*, what van Inwagen needs to show to counter Mackie's argument is just that there is a *possible* scenario on which God is OOG, and there is evil. Van Inwagen is not compelled to show that this possible scenario is in fact *true*.

Begin with (ii). Van Inwagen seems to assume that:

An omnipotent being cannot insure that a creature who has a free choice between x and y choose x rather than y. (108)

If this principle holds, then human freedom is not compatible with God setting things up to insure that we always do the right thing. But Mackie's point is that the *possibility* of evil's being chosen is *compatible* with people being such that the good is always chosen. Consider:

i We may have a real choice whether to do something without being actively disposed to do it. It may be an option for humans to communicate only through song, but we choose not to. My choice to stand on the T-platform and not through myself under the wheels of the train may be free, even though I'm not even slightly tempted to commit suicide. In contrast, humans seem to be actively disposed to certain kinds of evil. Why did God create us with this disposition to do evil, if the good at issue is free will?

ii For van Inwagen, what's important is that my choice to love God is free. But my choice to love God might be free as long as there is some alternative that is not God: the alternative need not be evil. E.g., Suppose that God provides to humans a moral code of conduct we might call the moral law. Suppose further that some people recognize the law as God's work and love God and the law He provides. But other people see only the value of the law itself and do not believe it is the work of God. One has a choice: loving God and the law, or just loving the law. But those who love the law are equally good/moral as those who love both God and the law. One can freely choose not to love God and still be good.

Principles of van Inwagen's theodicy:

i. All evil is the result of creaturely "rebellion", a turning away from God. There is no other source of evil. (109)

ii. All creatures who rebelled received and understood a warning that their actions would lead to disaster. (109)

iii. Among those who rebelled were an entire generation of humans: all of those who were alive at a particular time. (109)

iv. In turning away from God, our ancestors ruined themselves; they made it impossible to return to God "of their own power". This rebellion and its consequences constituted "The Fall". (109)

v. The ruin caused by the Fall was inherited by all the descendants of those who rebelled. The existence of evil is unalterable by any natural means. (109)

vi. God has a plan for Atonement; it requires the fallen creature to ask God for help and to accept the help. (109)

vii. Every human has an eternal future. When God's plan of Atonement comes to fruition, there will never again be any sort of evil. The "age of evil" will be a mere flicker in human history. (109-110)

viii. Our abilities to protect ourselves from natural evil was lost in the Fall. (113)

ix. An essential part of God's plan for Atonement is that humans perceive that their attempts to order their own lives result in a hideous world-hideous by their own standards as well as His. (114)

x. The perception of human beings of their incapacity to "live to themselves" is essential to God's plan of Atonement: i) without the pain and suffering, few would consider returning to God, and ii) memory of the pain and suffering will be an important component of the final state of restored humanity. (116)

xi. Among the natural consequences of the Fall is that horrors happen to people without any relation to what they deserve,

simply as a matter of chance. It is part of God's plan of Atonement that we realize that our separation from Him has this result. (119)

Summary of van Inwagen's defense in light of the scenario he sketches:

[Question 0: Why does God allow "natural" disasters and other sorts of "natural evil" that are not due to human free will?]

Answer: Our abilities to protect ourselves from natural evil was lost in the Fall. (113)

Question 1: Why didn't God immediately restore His fallen creatures to their original union with Him? (DURATION)

Answer: This would require Him to deceive us by erasing our memories of the Fall, and God is no deceiver. (113)

Question 2: Why doesn't God protect His fallen creatures from the worst effects of their separation from Him: the horrible pain and suffering? (MAGNITUDE)

Answer: An essential part of God's plan for Atonement is that humans perceive that their attempts to order their own lives results in a hideous world-hideous by their own standards as well as His. (114) The perception of human beings of their incapacity to "live to themselves" is essential to God's plan of Atonement: i) without the pain and suffering, few would consider returning to God, and ii) memory of the pain and suffering will be an important component of the final state of restored humanity. (116)

Question 3: Why has God allowed "the age of evil" to persist for thousands and thousands of years? (DURATION)

Answer: Perhaps God wants the community of those in union with him to be large, and/or diverse. (116) Perhaps it is very difficult for creatures who have fallen to restore themselves, so it takes a long time. (117)

Question 4: Why do the innocent suffer and the wicked prosper? (DISTRIBUTION)

Answer: Among the natural consequences of the Fall is that horrors happen to people without any relation to what they deserve, simply as a matter of chance. It is part of God's plan of Atonement that we realize that our separation from Him has this result. (118)

Further questions:

i How can God allow the effects of "the Fall" to be inherited? Isn't that to deny the descendants of those who originally chose evil their own chance to love God freely? Why do *we* have to suffer the consequences of what others did?

(DISTRIBUTION)

ii If God is not a deceiver, why does He not reveal Himself and his plan more clearly to us?