

Learning from the Past: The Problem of Evil
An Introduction

1. Our topic: If the world was made by a perfect God, why is there evil?
2. A quick word about definitions
 - a. Evil
 - i. Evil: any imperfection
 - ii. Moral evil: sin
 - iii. Physical evil: bodily injury, pain, and suffering
 - iv. Others: physical deformities, natural disasters, death, infelicities in nature
 - v. Noteworthy: animal pain, pointless pain, horrendous evils (moral and physical)
 - b. Theodicy: a defense of the goodness of God in light of the evil in the world
3. Is it wrong to ask?
 - a. Perhaps so, impious
 - b. Perhaps so, deleterious to faith
 - c. Perhaps so, against a good impulse to go as far as the Bible goes and then stop
 - i. Job
 - ii. Psalm 73 (why do the wicked prosper)
 - iii. Romans 9:22 (vessels of wrath)
 - d. I think not, faith and humility keep it from bad consequences
4. So, perhaps it's not bad to ask. Is it helpful to ask?
 - a. Perhaps not, mystery
 - b. I think so
5. The diversity of problems, some lame solutions, and some not so lame ones.
 - a. The logical problem of evil

The following propositions can't all be true.

- (1) God is omnipotent**
- (2) God is wholly good**
- (3) Evil exists**
- (4*) A wholly good being always eliminates evil as far as it can**
- (5*) An omnipotent being can eliminate evil¹**

¹ This is a variation of the one offered at Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil*, 13-7, itself a variation of Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence." The logical problem of evil ultimately comes from Epicurus (341-270 BC).

- b. The evidential argument from evil. Evil in the world would be more surprising if the world was created by God than it would be if the world was the result of some other source. Evil is evidence against the hypothesis of the divine origin of the world.

E =the amount and distribution of evil we observe.

H_1 = the hypothesis of a divine origin of our world.

H_2 = the hypothesis of a non-divine origin of our world.

$$\Pr(E/ H_1) < \Pr (E/ H_2) \quad \text{Therefore, } \Pr(H_2) > \Pr(H_1)$$

- c. Diversity of evils.
- d. Should the evidential argument bother us?
- i. Perhaps so. If our evangelism relies on the persuasiveness of our reasons for believing in God, the argument presents a very nice counterbalance. (there are arguments against the evidential argument)
 - ii. Perhaps not.
- e. What about the logical problem of evil? If our beliefs are true, there must be some solution.
- i. Weak solutions (see Mackie)
 1. Good cannot exist without evil
 2. Evil makes the good stand out
 3. Human free will explains evil
 4. Evil makes the world better
 - ii. Simple Solutions: Deny God's omnipotence, foreknowledge, goodness, evil's existence (impious)
 - iii. Plantinga's Free Will Defense:

If molinism is true, perhaps trans-world depravity is true.

If trans-world depravity is true, then any world God could create contains evil.

6. Why focus on historical theodicies?
- a. What's wrong with contemporary approaches?
 - b. What's *right* about a historical survey approach?
 - c. What's so difficult about a survey approach?

My questions:

- Consolation?
- I suspect that knowledge of diverse historical theodicies (without accepting any) can be as helpful as coming up a solid theodicy that meets all our confessional requirements. Is my suspicion correct?