Heritage College & Seminary

Philosophy of Religion

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

- Evil: Evil done by free, thinking agents.
- Evil: Death by natural disaster, pain, suffering, disease, deformities, etc.

1. The logical Problem: J.L Mackie (1917-1981)
   1. God is omnipotent and omniscience.
   2. God is good.
   3. Evil exists.

- How can all three premises be true simultaneously?
- If God is all-powerful why doesn't he erase evil?
- Does God not know how to erase evil?
- If God is good, doesn't that mean he would want to create a world free from evil?

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

Free Will Defense: Alvin Plantinga (b. 1932) argues that we need only show that premise #3 is logically possible given 1 & 2.

- If God created people to be genuinely free, then he could not stop them from evil. He even goes so far as to say, *"God is omnipotent, and it was not within his power to create a world containing moral good but no moral evil."*

- The question remains: "Could God have created a world containing free creatures who always do what is right?"

- Plantinga argues that "there are states of affairs which are possible in themselves (i.e. intrinsically) but which are not possible for God to bring about. ... God cannot override/determine the actions of free persons."

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

- Fowler argues that this Free Will defense is mistaken because it adopts an incompatible view of freedom (incompatible with determinism). He answers instead that God determines the world, could have created a world free of evil. He states that "God can ordain the occurrence of evil without being sinfully responsible for the evil." (Evangelical Baptist Sept/Oct 2004, 12-14).

- To him, the true response to evil is that God will bring judgement and punishment to the evildoer in the future.

- Others argue that Free Will Defense helps explain moral evil but not natural evil. Plantinga counters that natural evils could be due to the actions of significantly free but nonhuman persons (e.g. demons).

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

The Evidential Problem

- Theism may not be logically inconsistent with evil, but it may still be Implausible.
- Does theism provide a reasonable explanation for the facts of evil?
- Salmon: Argues that the frequency of evil shows it improbable that the universe was designed by an intelligent, good being. Plantinga and Cartwright respond that statistical approaches cannot be used for this metaphysical issue.

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

The Evidential Problem

- William Rowe: If God existed, he would prevent or eliminate the existence of any pointless, meaningless, or gratuitous evil.
    1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (FACTUAL PREMISE)
    2. An omnipotent, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse. (THEOLOGICAL PREMISE)
    3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being. (CONCLUSION)

The Evidential Problem

- Theists usually respond by attacking the first, Factual Premise that pointless evil exists. Some argue that we know this is false, others simply that we can't know whether it is true or not.

- Why should we accept that God could not allow gratuitous evil? Perhaps significant freedom involves even the ability to bring about utterly meaningless evil!

- Wykstra: The Cognitive Limitation Defense. "Accepting an appearance-claim in a given situation is warranted only when it is reasonable to believe that, given our cognitive faculties and our use of them, the truth of the claim would be discernable to us."

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

The Evidential Problem

- Natural Evil: Natural Law explains that we benefit from the operation of physical laws, including pleasure and pain. The possibility of natural good requires the possibility of natural evil.

- Defence: shows why an argument against God's existence fails. (Plantinga, Wykstra)
- Theodicy: justifies why God allows suffering and evil. (Augustine, Leibniz, Swinburne)

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

Themes in Theodicy:

1. Evil as punishment for wrongdoing (cf. Job);
2. This is the best of all possible worlds (Leibniz 1646-1716.);
3. Ultimate harmony states that only God's view matters because it sees all the connections; God's ways are higher than ours;
4. All evils will eventually result in greater goods such as character-building (however, these goods may compensate or outweigh evil, but does it justify evil?);
5. Free Will requires both God and evil.

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

Global Theodicies:

1. Augustine Theodicy: Evil is a privation of Good. Evil doesn't exist, it is the absence of good. Change allows for good to be corrupted. The world was perfect and turned evil through the mystery of finite freedom.

2. Irenaean Theodicy: The world started innocent and immature with the possibility of becoming good by following God. Evil is necessary to create morally mature people and is an inevitable stage in the evolution of the human race.

   a. John Hick's Soul-Making Theodicy. Universal salvation for all. But does the goal of building character justify the means?

Global Theodicies:

3. Process Theodicy: Reality is becoming rather than being. God is not omnipotent in the traditional sense. God has all of the power that is possible for him to have, but not all the power there is. He cannot force human will. He is persuasive rather than coercive.

Lecture 6 – The Problem of Evil

Global Theodicies:

- Assumption of non-theistic arguments: God (who is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good) would not allow any evil unless it is necessary to a greater good.
- Does God have a duty to be good in the normal ideas of rights and obligations that we associate with human good?
- Adams: The theist does not need to answer the problem by referring only to goods that the non-theist accepts (secular, finite, and temporal). There are infinite and eternal goods, which must be added into the question.
- The Incarnation: Does God's suffering with us as a human help water-down the problem of evil? Or is it an example of the greatest evil?!