

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

This section will present the problem of evil as standardly expressed, and discuss three major responses: those that try to link each occurrence of evil to a greater good; the freewill defence; and the Irenaean version of the freewill defence.

INTRODUCTION

Of all the issues traditionally discussed under the heading 'Philosophy of Religion' this is probably the one that most affects people's beliefs. Given the horror and frequency of things that are done and happen in our world, many have been unable, intellectually and emotionally, to accept that this world and everything that happens in it is sustained in being by a perfectly good and omnipotent God. Revolt against such a God has seemed to be inspired by ordinary humanity and decency. The view that God's existence can be reconciled with such facts has seemed to require a willingness to find some good in the most terrible crimes and sufferings.

This is not a new difficulty. In the Old Testament, in many psalms and especially in the Book of Job, questions such as these are found: Why does God allow the unjust to prosper? Why does he allow misfortune to befall the just? Without a belief in rewards and punishments after death, reflective believers found it difficult to reconcile these facts with God's justice.

In the Christian era the difficulty became a conceptual problem centred about the ideas of God's goodness, knowledge and power. Please read **Document 17**:

[A] He who says that God exists either holds that God is provident of things in the cosmos or he is not, and if he is provident, then he is so either for everything or for some things. But if he is provident of everything, there would be no bad thing nor any vice in the cosmos. Yet, they say that all things are full of vice. Therefore, God will not be said to be provident of everything. If, however, he is provident of some things, why these things and not those? For either he wishes and is able to be provident of everything, or he wishes to be provident but is not able, or he is able but does not wish to be, or he neither wishes nor is able to be provident. But if he wished to be provident and was able, then he would be provident of everything. But he is not provident of everything, for the reasons given above. Therefore, it is not the case that he both wishes to be provident and is able to be. If he wishes to be but is not able, he is weaker than the cause owing to which he is not able to be provident of things of which he is not provident. But it is counter to the conception of God that he should be weaker than anything. If he is able to be provident about everything, but he does not wish to be, he would be regarded as malign. If he neither wishes nor is able to be provident, he is malign and weak, and to say this about God is the act of impious men. Therefore, God is not provident about things in the cosmos. (Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* III.9-10. Transl. in B. Inwood & L.P. Gerson, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Introductory Readings* (2nd. ed., Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publ. co., 1997), pp.363-4)

[B] If God is good and has foreknowledge and the power to avert evil, why has he allowed men to be beguiled by the devil and to fall away from obedience to His law into death? If He is good, He would not wish such a thing to happen; if prescient, He would not be ignorant that it was to happen; if powerful, He could prevent its happening: every event must be consistent with those three attributes of the divine majesty. (Tertullian (b. 150 AD), *Adversus Marcionem* II. Ed. and transl. (1972) by E. Evans in the series

Oxford Early Christian Texts.)

[C] Either God cannot abolish evil, or He will not; if He cannot, then He is not all-powerful; if He will not, then He is not all-good. (St Augustine (b.3 54), Confessions, VII.5. Eng. transl. in R.S. Pine-Coffin, Saint Augustine: Confessions (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961))

[D] It seems that there is no God. For if, of two mutually exclusive things, one were to exist without limit, the other would cease to exist. By the word 'God' is implied limitless good. If then, God existed, nobody would ever encounter evil. But evil is encountered in the world. God therefore does not exist. (St Thomas Aquinas (b. 1224), Summa Theologiae, Ia, qu.2, art.3)

'EVIL' AND EVILS

The *New Oxford Dictionary* defines the adjective 'evil' as 'profoundly immoral or malevolent', and the noun 'evil' as 'profound immorality, wickedness and depravity, especially when regarded as a supernatural force'. In the discussion of the problem of evil the word has a broader sense, roughly corresponding to that of 'bad' in 'It is bad that ...' Evil would then be an extreme degree of badness. Some want to use the word in even broader sense, so that anything that detracts from perfection is an evil; but the specific phenomena discussed are usually ones that fall within the spectrum of the bad.

Discussion of the problem of evil usually involves a distinction between 'physical' and 'moral' evil:

- *moral* evil is evil that either is, or is a consequence of, human wrongdoing. Any moral evil is imputable to a human agent as its cause;
- *natural* or *physical* evil is any non-moral evil. In practice, this means any evil imputable to natural causes.

It is true that there is disagreement about what sort of item is to be counted as evil. For example, does animal suffering count? However, our world is such that it is reasonable to suppose that, whatever you count as evil, there will be facts in the world that pose for you the question, 'Why does God allow that?', if you believe in a God who is perfectly good and omnipotent.

A MODERN STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The orthodox Christian believer accepts as true the following dogmas:

- (1) God is omnipotent and omniscient;
- (2) God is perfectly good.

She also accepts as an evident truth of experience

- (3) Evil exists.

Modern versions of the Problem of Evil take the form of the claim that (1)-(3) above form an *inconsistent triad*: i.e., if any pair of them is true, it follows necessarily that the third is false.

But from the point of view of strict logic, the argument 'God is omnipotent and omniscient; God is perfectly good; therefore, evil does not exist', is unsatisfactory. It has the form 'a is F and G; a is H; therefore E does not exist', which is evidently not a valid argument-form. So in order to make a formally respectable argument, it is usual to supply extra premisses, such as the following typical pair formulated in Mackie (1955):

- (A) Any good being always eliminates evil as far as it can;
- (B) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do.

If now we put together (1), (2), (A) and (B), we will get the following argument, thought to be logically watertight:

- (1) God is omnipotent (including omniscient). [*Premiss*]
- (2) God is perfectly good. [*Premiss*]
- (3) Evil exists. [*Premiss*]
- (A) Any good being always eliminates evil as far as it can. [*Premiss*]
- (B) There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do. [*Premiss*]
- (4) God eliminates evil totally. [*Deduction from 1,2, A & B*]
- (5) Evil does not exist. [*Deduction from 4*]
- (6) Evil exists and does not exist. [*Deduction from 3 & 5*]

Call this 'the full argument.' Since its conclusion is self-contradictory, it follows that one or more of the premisses are false. But which one(s)? In effect, the believer is being invited to choose between rejecting dogma and rejecting experience.

MODIFYING THE PREMISSES

One response to the problem is to backtrack on the premisses: for example, by denying God's omnipotence. There have been dualist religions which picture the world as a battleground between equally matched principles of good and evil. Process theology rejects the picture of an unchangingly perfect God, in favour of one who is developing with his creation. Some have denied the reality, in some sense, of evil. (For Augustine's approach, see Hick (1985), pp. 38-48.)

THE NECESSARY TRUTH OF (A)

Pike (1963) has made the important point that the above argument works *only if (A) and (B) are necessary truths*. Because suppose they are offered as merely contingent truths. Then it would be open to the believer to offer the conjunction of (1), (2) and (3) as a counter-example to (A): she could say, 'Look, God is omnipotent and perfectly good, and yet evil exists. So (A) is false, and (4) does not follow.' In order to counter this move, the atheist must argue that (A) and (B) are both necessary truths, that their negation would imply a self-contradiction. Since no one will deny that something like (B) is a necessary truth, discussion has centred on whether (A) is a necessary truth.

Exercises

- (1) Please read **Document 18**:

DEMEA: Have not all pious divines and preachers who have indulged their rhetoric on so fertile a subject; have they not easily, I say, given a solution of any difficulties which may attend it? This world is but a point in comparison of the universe; this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence. And the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the y through all the mazes and intricacies of his providence.

(David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Part X; Popkin, R.H. (ed. & Intro.), *David Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), p.64)

Does Demea have a single thesis in reply? How good is whatever thesis or theses he offers in reply?

(2) Do you agree that (A) is a necessary truth, i.e., that there are no conceivable circumstances under which (A) would be falsified?

+++++

(A) is falsified by cases where there is good reason not to eliminate or forestall¹ an evil that the agent is in a position to eliminate. Such cases would have the following features:

- the positive value of the long-term consequences of non-elimination outweigh the negative value; and
- under the circumstances, the agent had no better means of achieving the long-term value.

To accommodate such cases we must modify (A) into

(A2) Any good being always eliminates a given evil as far as it can, *unless there is some greater good that it cannot, under the circumstances, achieve if it eliminates that evil.*

(A2) is more plausibly a necessary truth than is (A).

A REVISED FULL ARGUMENT

What happens if we use (A2) in the full argument, instead of (A)? Instead of (4) we get

(4a) God eliminates any evil, *unless there is some greater good that God cannot achieve if he eliminates that evil.*

From (4a) we get not (5) but

(5a) Evil does not exist, *unless its existence is necessary for the achievement of some greater good.*

The question now becomes: is such a defence of tolerating (some) evils available to God, an omnipotent being?

WHAT CAN'T GOD DO?

(4a) presupposes the conceivability of a good that *God* cannot achieve except by not eliminating an evil. Now since God is omnipotent, this 'cannot' must be interpreted in a logical or conceptual sense. A human agent's powers depend on various contingent factors, but God's do not. The only things that God cannot do are things that are logically impossible to do, or that are logically impossible for God to do. So when we talk about 'some greater good that God cannot achieve unless he allows a given evil', we have to be talking about a greater good whose achievement *logically* requires the existence of an evil: i.e., a good that is logically inconceivable unless a corresponding evil exists.

So the argument between the atheist and the believer now looks like this: the atheist began by asserting, as a necessary truth, that God eliminates evil as far as he can (i.e. boundlessly, cf citation [D] in **Document 17**). The believer denies that this is a necessary truth, on the ground that the uneliminated evils have been permitted by God for the sake of goods that it is logically impossible to achieve except by permitting those evils. The atheist can now take one or both the following lines:

(i) while admitting that there are evils whose elimination would involve the elimination of greater linked goods, argue that a world containing only goods that are evil-independent would be better than a world containing evil-linked goods;

¹For brevity's sake, 'eliminate' will be used to mean 'eliminate or forestall'.

(ii) challenge the believer to specify the relevant evil-dependent goods, in the hope of showing, case by case, that they won't do the job.

From the atheist's point of view, the disadvantage of (ii) is that complete closure is never achieved. To have shown that goods 1- n won't do the job, singly or in combination, is not to have shown that no good or set of goods *can* do the job. However, even if the atheist can't show that the possibilities have been exhausted, if she can show that none of the specified goods do the job, even in combination, she would leave the believer with the thesis that it is logically possible that there is a good sufficient to justify tolerating the evil that the world contains, even though all the ones she or anyone suggests are insufficient. See Pike (1963) for a detailed statement of these points.

Goods which are evil-dependent, and which outweigh the evils they depend on, and which are such that it is better to have them (even with their evils) than not are sometimes called *countervailing* goods.

GOODS THAT LOGICALLY REQUIRE EVILS

There are types of intrinsically good human actions or agents whose occurrence logically requires the previous existence of evils, whether physical or moral. E.g.,

quality of action or agent	logically prerequisite evil
endurance	hardships
courage	fear, danger
sympathy	other's suffering
forgiveness	other's offence
charity, help	other's need

Some philosophers (e.g., Wisdom (1933)) have claimed that some worthwhile *emotions* logically require corresponding evils: sorrowing affection or love, happy recollection of earlier trials. Others (e.g., Tennant (1930), ch.7) have argued that a virtuous *character* is necessarily something acquired in the face of various evils. And some states of mind or character may be more valuable if achieved in the face of difficulties than if achieved effortlessly.

Exercise

Please read **Document 19**:

[Here the novelist Albert Camus imagines a sermon on the meaning of the plague that, in his novel, has struck the city of Oran.]

Calamity has come on you, my brethren, and, my brethren, you deserved it.

The first time this scourge appears in history, it was wielded to strike down the enemies of God. Pharaoh set himself up against the divine will, and the plague beat him to his knees. Thus from the dawn of recorded history the scourge of God has humbled the proud of heart and laid low those who hardened themselves against Him. Ponder this well, my friends, and fall on your knees.

If today the plague is in your midst, that is because the hour has struck for taking

thought. The just man need have no fear, but the evil-doer has good cause to tremble. For plague is the flail of God and the world his threshing-floor, and implacably He will thresh out His harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff There will be more chaff than wheat, few chosen of the many called. Yet this calamity was not willed by God. Too long this world of ours has connived at evil, too long has it counted on the divine mercy, on God's forgiveness. Repentance was enough, men thought; nothing was forbidden. Everyone felt comfortably assured; when the day came he would surely turn from his sins and repent. Pending that day, the easiest course was to surrender all along the line; divine compassion would do the rest. For a long while God gazed down on this town with eyes of compassion; but He grew weary of waiting, His eternal hope was too long deferred, and now He has turned His face away from us. And so, God's light withdrawn, we walk in darkness, in the thick darkness of this plague. (Albert Camus, *The Plague*. Eng. transl. by S.C.Gilbert (Harmondsworth:Penguin Books, 1960), pp.80-1)

Would it be possible to justify God's allowing, or even causing, the plague in terms of *just punishment*, conceived as an evil-dependent good? For an analogous argument by a real theologian, see Cohn-Sherbok (1996), ch.2.

+++++

WAYS OF USING THE CONCEPT OF EVIL-DEPENDENT GOOD (1)

'For every particular occurrence of evil, there actually occurs at some time or other a countervailing good. That is, every particular occurrence of evil is incorporated at some time into a countervailing good for whose achievement that occurrence of evil was a logically necessary condition. We don't always see this happening, or even understand how it could happen. But God's understanding is infinite, ours is finite. So we should not take our failure to understand the link between the evil and some good as a proof that there is no link.' Cf **Document 18**.

Exercise

Suppose parents have had their child kidnapped, raped and killed. Suppose one is prepared to say that there is or will be a response to this event (e.g. forgiveness) whose value outweighs the horror. Even so, would anyone be prepared to say that, other things being equal, the world was a better place because of that crime and that forgiveness than it would have been without either? Do we know how to make such comparisons?

+++++

WAYS OF USING THE CONCEPT OF EVIL-DEPENDENT GOOD (2)

'God *intends* that every particular occurrence of evil should be incorporated by human action or reaction into a countervailing good for whose achievement that occurrence of evil was a logically necessary condition. God does not test us beyond our powers. If his intention is not always realized, it is because we choose not to respond in the right way.' See **Document 20**:

[A] According to the theodicy which has here been sketched, it is not necessary to suppose that every specific form of suffering that man undergoes - e. g. the agony of tetanus or of cancer - is antecedently willed by God as a means to some particular end.

It can be admitted that excruciating pains are more severe than they need be for evoking virtues such as patience and fortitude, and that to assign them to God's antecedent will would be to attribute devilishness to the Deity. Moreover, the fact that some human beings are born as abortions, as imbecile or insane, seems to be inexplicable on the view that every form of suffering is a particular providence, or an antecedently willed dispensation for educating and spiritually perfecting the person on whom affliction falls; while to suppose that suffering is inflicted on one person for the spiritual edification of another is again to conceive of God as immoral. But the hardest fact of all for human equanimity, in presence of physical and mental evil, is that the apportionment of suffering among individuals is entirely irreconcilable by us with any divine plan of adjustment of particular afflictions to the particular needs, circumstances, and stages of moral development, of individual sufferers. If we could trace the utility of particular sufferings with their varying degrees of endurableness, or discern any adaptation of pain to the person's sensibility, moral state, and need of awakening or chastening, then philosophy might be able to agree with the simple-minded piety which assigns a special purpose to every instance of suffering, and finds therein the visitation or appointment of an all-wise and all-good God. (F.R.Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, vol. II (Cambridge University Press, 1930), pp.202-3)

[B] What then are we say of the child dying of cancer? If this has been done by anyone, it is bad enough, but to be done for a purpose, to be planned from eternity-that is the deepest evil.

If God is this kind of agent, He cannot justify His actions, and His evil nature is revealed. This is the conclusion which Ivan Karamazov reaches in his famous denunciation of the appeal to consequences to justify the sufferings of children. (D.Z.Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*, 2nd impr. (New York: the Seabury Press, 1981), p.93)

[C] Tell me yourself; I challenge you-answer. 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 the truth. (Ivan Karamazov in F.Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, bk V, ch.4. Eng. transl. by C.Garnett)

- It has been argued that love, the highest value in the Judaic and Christian religions, is not necessarily a response to evil, so that God is not justified in inflicting evils in order that the highest values should be realized. True, but what about the highest forms of love? Christ gave the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) as his example of true love of one's neighbour.

- It has been argued that believers who take this line or the previous one ought to oppose any development that lessens physical evil, since such developments actually make the world a worse place by reducing the number of countervailing responses to evil. In response to this believers have argued that God tolerates evil *in order for human beings to eliminate it*. Elimination is the countervailing good. So a world that contains evil *at some time* is a better world than one that does not; but, if elimination is the aim, it does not follow that a world that contains evil *all the time* is better than one that does not contain evil all the time. On the assumption that God tolerates evil in order for us to eliminate it, the better world is the one

that contains many and varied evils at the outset, but at some later time and thereafter for ever contains no evils. This is the thought behind so-called Irenaean theodicies (see below).

WAYS OF USING THE CONCEPT OF EVIL-DEPENDENT GOOD (3)

Here theodacists give up the approach to the problem of evil in terms of relations between *particular* occurrences of evil and *particular* logically dependent goods. Instead the claim is that unless the world contained evil, it could not contain a certain sort of good. The principle 'For every particular evil there occurs a particular countervailing good' is abandoned. This third approach is known as the Freewill Defence. See Plantinga (1975) and Swinburne (1977 and 1996) for convenient short expositions.

Firstly, we need to notice some special terminology:

- a *(morally) significant action* is an action that it would be (morally) right, or (morally) wrong to perform;
- *(morally) significant freedom* is the freedom to choose between morally significant actions. Such freedom presupposes that its subjects have the power to do what is right, and the power to do what is wrong. When a person is exercising significant freedom, say in choosing between actions X and Y, it must be supposed that the agent has a motive for doing X, and a motive for doing Y.

The next step is to assert that God has given human beings significant freedom. This implies that he has given them powers to do wrong things, and has also given them motives which will on occasion make wrong actions attractive to them. That is, God has made moral evil a real possibility. If God had not made moral evil, the free choice of wrong actions, a real possibility, then free choice of right actions would not have been logically possible. The free choice of right actions is the countervailing good for whose existence the possibility of moral evil is a logically necessary condition.

This reply has implications for the Phillips-Karamazov objection (see **Document 20**, [B] and [C]). That objection was aimed against a view that implies, of a particularly evil action, that the world would be better with that action plus the right response to it than it would be without that action and the response. The Freewill Defence is not committed to saying, about any particular evil action, that it, combined with the right response, improves the world. All it says is that *unless* there is a real possibility of choosing evil actions, there is no possibility of choosing right actions; and a world in which there is no choosing of right actions is a world lacking a great good.

DIFFICULTIES ABOUT THE FREEWILL DEFENCE (1)

Does the real possibility of morally wrong actions logically require the actual occurrence of such actions? If it doesn't, i.e., if a world in which everyone has significant freedom but never chooses wrong actions is conceivable, then why didn't God create that world? For that world would surely have been better than ours, and God can bring about any logically conceivable state of affairs.

Plantinga's reply distinguishes two powers in God:

- (1) an *absolute* power to bring about the existence of any possible world in which a given free agent S exists;
- (2) a merely *conditional* power to bring about a world in which S freely does X rather than Y, where this choice is morally significant. That is, God has the power to bring about the existence of this world if, and only if, S, when created, freely does X rather than Y. For it would be self-contradictory to hold that God has the power *bring it about that S freely* does X rather than Y. That is, it is up to S whether the world God has created is one in which S freely

does X rather than Y. In general, it is because human beings have exercised their freedom in the wrong ways that the world created by God is not one in which everyone freely does what is right.

Comment: But even if God can't (logically) predetermine free actions, surely he can foresee them? Couldn't God have created a world in which he foresaw that people would freely act better than they do in the actual world? And if so, isn't God to blame for not creating that world?

Plantinga's reply is that God created this world because he foresaw that no free agents in any other possible world would have behaved any better than us. He speaks of 'transworld depravity'. God created not the best of possible worlds, but the best of the worlds possible for him to create. This reply leads us into complex issues about whether it makes sense to speak of knowing how a nonexistent free agent would have behaved if created. What would be the basis of such knowledge? See Kenny (1979), ch.5.

THE FREEWILL DEFENCE AND NATURAL EVIL

How does the Freewill Defence deal with natural evil, so far unmentioned?

Plantinga's treatment, although it has roots in the Old Testament (Genesis 3:16-19), is disappointingly perfunctory: the existence of natural evil is due to the activities of Satan and other rebellious angels, and their existence and activities are consistent with the existence of God (Plantinga (1967), pp.149-51). Plantinga may be able to hold that, if God had prevented Satan from introducing natural evil, he would necessarily have annulled Satan's freedom of action; but this does not explain how natural evil's *being caused by Satan* is logically necessary for the possibility or achievement of a countervailing human good. Unless this is done, it seems that God put Satan's freedom above the human suffering caused by natural evils. So is it possible to construct a theodicy consistent with the Freewill Defence, and which takes the existence of natural evils as given, without any reference to Satan? We'll consider Swinburne's treatment (see Swinburne (1977) and (1996), ch.6).

Swinburne gives two reasons why God permits occurrences of natural evil:

- the operation of natural laws producing evils (and goods) gives humans knowledge (if they choose to seek it) of how to bring about such evils (and goods) themselves, and thus opens up for them a wide range of choice (see Swinburne (1996), p.108). They are enabled to act purposefully in a wider range of situations, for good or for evil;
- the occurrence of natural evils 'increases the range of significant choice':
 - a particular natural evil, such as physical pain, gives to the sufferer a choice—whether to endure it with p[ati]ence, or to bemoan his lot. His friend can choose whether to show compassion towards the sufferer, or to be callous. (Swinburne (1996), p.109)

Comment: whether discussing moral or natural evil, the Freewill Defence defends God's allowing evil by arguing that to eliminate evil would of necessity involve eliminating the *possibility* of certain goods. However, the Defence can hardly rest on the claim that the possibility of those goods would outweigh the actuality of evil, if it so happened that people, and nature, went in for evil much more often than for good. (See **Document 21** [A] – at the end of this block - for an experience of the way most people actually respond to sickness and pain.) Using the Defence involves making some claim about what actually goes on, and its value. But do we have any idea of how many occurrences of good and evil there are in the world past, present and future? Do we have any conception of what it would be to compare the total gross values of those occurrences, with a view to deriving the net value, positive or negative or equal? It seems obvious that the believer's claim that the evils of the world are a

price worth paying for certain actual goods is an expression of trust in God. (See **Document 21 [B]**)

SWINBURNE AND IRENAEUS

Please read **Document 22**:

There is thus to be found in Irenaeus the outline of an approach to the problem of evil which stands in important respects in contrast to the Augustinian type of theodicy. Instead of the doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his maker. Instead of the fall of Adam being presented, as in the Augustinian tradition, as an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God's plan, Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, as an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt. And instead of the Augustinian view of life's trials as a divine punishment for Adam's sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards the perfection that represents the fulfilment of God's good purpose for him.

(J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985), pp.214-5)

Let's assume, that in some areas at least (e.g. healthcare in the developed nations) there is less natural evil than there used to be, and in some, maybe, less moral evil (e.g., international charity). If the present state of affairs is better than the earlier, and if God could have realized the present state of affairs earlier, without destroying the possibility of freewill, why didn't he? What is the meaning of the tens of thousands of years in which there was little or no effective protection against, or cure of, disease and injury?

Swinburne's reply, in Swinburne (1977) is broadly Irenaean. He says that God created a basically good but half-finished universe: a universe that is not basically hostile to human life, but in which many things need improving, and can be improved by cumulative human effort. And by tying imperfections in the world to unpleasant sensations he created beings subject to non-moral stimuli to perform beneficial actions. By their responses to these stimuli humans would acquire moral characters shaped by themselves. In these ways God would have given human beings the privilege of helping to form their world and of shaping their humanity. This is the value in terms of which the progressive character of human history is justified, or might be justified.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Please read **Document 23**:

The morning after [the 11th of September, 2001], very early, I was stopped in the street in New York by a youngish man who turned out to be an airline pilot and a Catholic. He wanted to know what the hell God was doing when the planes hit the towers. What do you say? The usual fumbling about how God doesn't intervene, which sounds like a lame apology for some kind of 'policy' on God's part, a policy exposed as heartless in the face of such suffering? Something about how God is there in the sacrificial work of the

rescuers, in the risks they take? I tried saying bits of this, but there was no clearer answer than there ever is. Any really outrageous human action tests to the limit our careful theological principles about God's refusal to interfere with created freedom. That God made a world into which he doesn't casually step in to solve problems is fairly central to a lot of Christian faith. He has made the world so that evil choices can't just be frustrated or aborted (where would he stop, for goodness sake? He'd have to be intervening every instant of human history). They have to be confronted, suffered, taken forward, healed in the complex process of human history, always in collaboration with what we do and say and pray.

I do believe that; but I don't think you can say it with much conviction outside the context of people actually doing the action and the prayer. In the street that morning, all I had was words. I wasn't surprised that they didn't help. He was a lifelong Christian believer, but for the first time it came home to him that he might be committed to a God who could seem useless in a crisis.

(Rowan Williams, *Writing in the Dust: Reflections on 11th September and its Aftermath* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2002), pp. 7-8)

A strength of theodicies that try to link each particular evil to a particular countervailing good is that they recognize the need to answer the question, 'Why did this happen to me?' The Freewill Defence avoids this question. Many want an answer. Answers that are presented as parts of a theory, even if they avoid being morally repugnant, do not seem to do the job. It may be that they have a use only in the context of an attempt to come to terms with an evil that has affected one personally. Simone Weil said that religion provides not a justification for evil but a use for it. evil.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, M.M. & R.M., *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press, 1990). A collection of influential articles, following parameters set by Pike.
- Cohn-Sherbok, D. (1996), *God and the Holocaust* (Leominster: Fowler Wright Books). A critical study of Jewish theological responses to the Holocaust
- Davies, B., *Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*, new ed. (Oxford University Press, 1993), ch.3. Follows up issues raised by Holland.
- Helm, P., *The Providence of God* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993). A penetrating study by a philosopher and a Christian.
- Geach, P., *Providence and Evil* (Cambridge University Press, 1977). An unyielding Catholic view.
- Griffin, D. (1981), 'Creation out of Chaos and the Problem of Evil' in S.T.Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark). An article by a leading process theologian.
- Hick, J., *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1985). An historically authoritative study.
- Holland, R.F., 'On the Form of "The Problem of Evil"', in his *Against Empiricism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980). Argues that the 'Problem of Evil' is a false invention. A rare original contribution. **Document 24**
- Lewis, C.S., *The Problem of Pain* (Fontana Books, 1965). An orthodox Christian treatment.
- Mackie, J.L., *The Miracle of Theism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), ch.9. A reasoned hostile treatment of standard theodicies.
- McCloskey, H.J., 'God and Evil', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1960). Repr. in Pike (1964).

Peterson, M. (ed.), *The Problem of Evil* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992). More recent leading articles.

Phillips, D.Z. (1977), 'The Problem of Evil', in S.C.Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press). A passionate rejection of Swinburne's approach.

Pike, N. (ed), *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964). Readings that set parameters for much subsequent discussion.

Swinburne, R. (1977), 'The Problem of Evil', in S.C.Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press). Repr. in B.Davies (ed.), *Philosophy of Religion: a Guide and Anthology* (Oxford University Press, 2000).

Swinburne, R. (1996), *Is There a God?* (Oxford University Press), ch.6

Taliaferro, C., *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publ., 1998), ch.9.

An extremely useful, careful and progressive treatment, including process-theological and suffering-God theodicies.

Document 21 [A] At that time (a time to most people of sufficient ease, when peace seemed certain and prosperity secure) there was a school of writers who enlarged upon the moral value of suffering. They claimed that it was salutary. They claimed that it increased sympathy and enhanced the sensibilities. I set down in my note-books, not once or twice, but in a dozen places, the facts that I had seen. I knew that suffering did not ennoble; it degraded. It made men selfish, mean, petty and suspicious. It absorbed them in small things. It did not make them more than men; it made them less than men; and I wrote ferociously that we learn resignation not by our own suffering but by the suffering of others.(W.Somerset Maugham, cited in D.Z.Phillips, 'The Problem of Evil' in S.C.Brown (ed.), *Reason and Religion* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 114)

[B] How do we know that, as the result of a computation performed by God, the global amount of good in such a world is incomparably larger than in any world of sinless mechanisms? It is obvious that we cannot derive this knowledge from any empirical investigation: not only could we never finish the calculation which implies a complete account of all possible facts and relationships in all real and possible worlds, but we could not even start our work since we lack any conceptual instruments for measuring the relative amounts of good and evil; there is no means of reducing the infinite variety of moral and physical evil to homogeneous quantifiable units. Therefore the faith that the universe generates the minimum amount of evil or that ultimately 'whatever is, is right' can be founded only on trust in God (which is what the Christian word 'faith' originally means). Without this act of trust any speculative theodicy is futile. From the belief in a God who is both omnipotent ... and good the relative perfection of the world may be deduced; however, since God's goodness cannot be known from collecting empirical evidence faith in the sense of 'trust' has to precede any reasoning. Yet trust cannot form a link in logical procedure. It is an act of moral, not intellectual, commitment. Thus, if a theodicy is possible at all, it cannot be a positive proof of any theory concerning perfection or the balance of good and evil in the actual world. It might only be, if successful, a proof that a world with as much evil as ours and both created and ruled by a benevolent and almighty providence is not an inherently impossible or self-contradictory entity. And it would imply that in any case we can never know how it is not self-contradictory. (L.Kolakowski, *Religion* (Fontana Paperbacks, 1982), pp. 33-4)

