

The Problem of Evil and Suffering



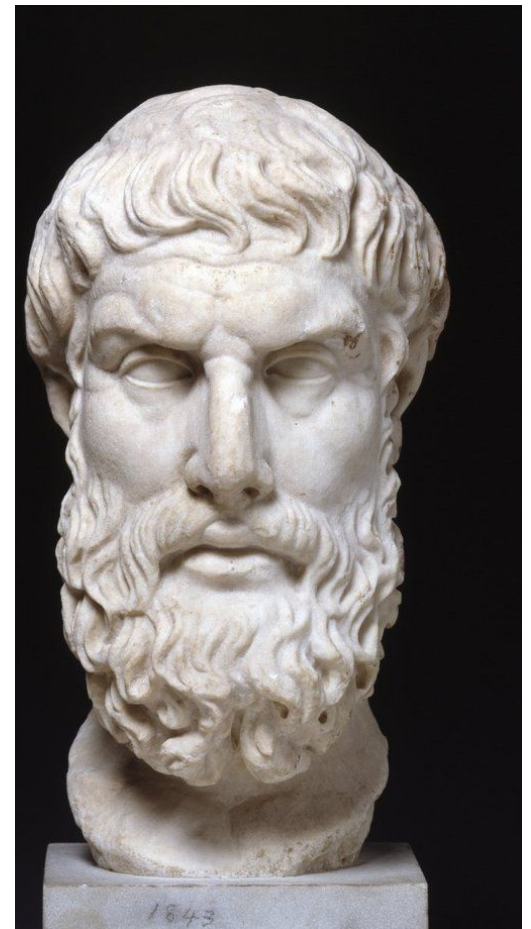
Epicurus

'Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?'



341BC-270BC

The Logical Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil is a problem of logical inconsistency

Modus tollens

If P then Q

Not Q

Therefore, Not P

Modus tollens

If God exists then there would be no evil

There is evil

Therefore, God does not exist

J.L. Mackie

Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955)



1917-1981

Rational Theism - There are rational reasons to believe that God exists

Arational Theism - Believing in the existence of God without supporting evidence

Irrational Theism - Believing in the existence of God in spite of evidence that God does not exist

‘...it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another, so that the theologian can maintain his position as a whole only by a much more extreme rejection of reason than in the former case. He must now be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be disproved from other beliefs that he also hold.’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.200

‘God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all.’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.200

The Logical Inconsistency of God's Existence

1. God Exists
2. God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent
3. An omniscient being knows how to prevent all evil
4. An omnipotent being has the power to prevent all evil
5. An omnibenevolent being would want to prevent all evil
6. A being that knows how to prevent all evil, has the power to prevent all evil and wants to prevent all evil will prevent all evil
7. As God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent no evil exists
8. Evil exists

The Logical Argument Against the Existence of God

1. If God exists then he is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent
2. If God is omniscient then he will know how to prevent evil
3. If God is omnipotent then he will have the power to prevent evil
4. If God is omnibenevolent then God will want to prevent evil
5. If God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent then there will be no evil
6. There is evil
7. Therefore, God does not exist

‘...good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.201

Types of Evil

Natural Evil - Naturally occurring e.g. earthquakes

Moral Evil - Wilfully perpetrated by people

These are subdivided:

Physical Evil - Bodily pain and mental anguish

Metaphysical Evil - Imperfections



David Hume - Logical Problem

‘Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?’

- Hume, David, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* (1779)



1711-1776

The Evidential Problem of Evil

Once we consider the evidence it appears unlikely that the world was created by an omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent being.

An inductive argument

Evil provides evidence that God does not exist

David Hume - Evidential Problem

- A stranger is dropped into this world and shown its misery.
- Someone is shown a house and are told that all the imperfection prevent a much larger structural problem.
- Would we think it unlikely that either were made by a perfect creator



1711-1776

David Hume - Evidential Problem

Causes of Suffering:

- Pain is a motivator for action
- The world is governed by general laws
- Nature is frugal in giving powers
- Nature is inaccurate. Non-optimum levels of phenomena do occur (such as rain)

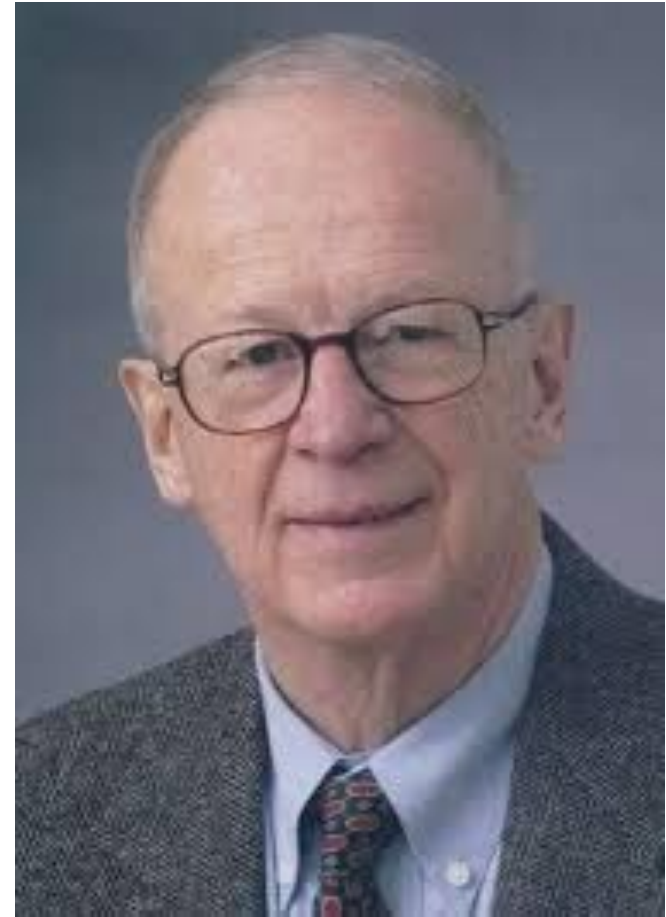
It seems likely that at least one of these conditions could be altered to create less suffering



1711-1776

William L. Rowe

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.
2. An omniscient, 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.
3. (Therefore) There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.
 - Rowe, William L. 'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 1 October 1979, Vol.16(4), p.336



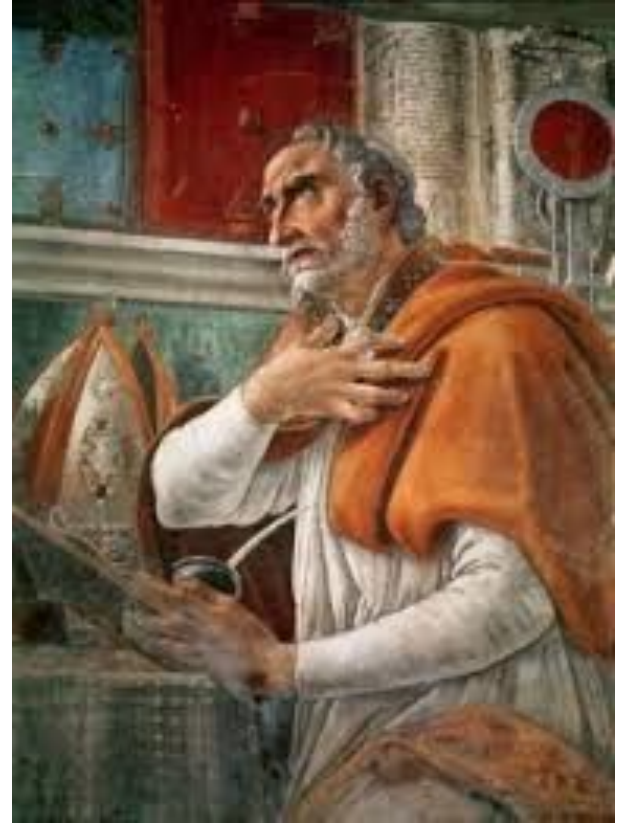
1931 - 2015

Theodicy

Arguments that seek to explain why God would allow for the presence of evil

Augustinian Theodicy

- Classified by John Hick (*Evil and the God of Love*, 1966)
- God is perfectly good
- The world is created out of nothing
- The world is good



Augustine of Hippo
(354-430)

Augustinian Theodicy

- Evil does not exist in itself but is the privation of good.
- God did not create evil and therefore is not responsible for it.
- God created the world without sin or suffering
- Sin is the result of the abuse of free will
- Evil is a justified punishment for sin



Thomas Aquinas

- God's creation is good and lacking in nothing
- Evil is a privation of good and we can only understand evil in terms of good
- Evil cannot be desired in itself, as it does not exist in itself
- Pursuit of evil is desiring something which in itself is good but is not good for humans
- Evil is intentionally doing something which prevents the agent or someone else from fulfilling their potential



1225 - 1274

Thomas Aquinas

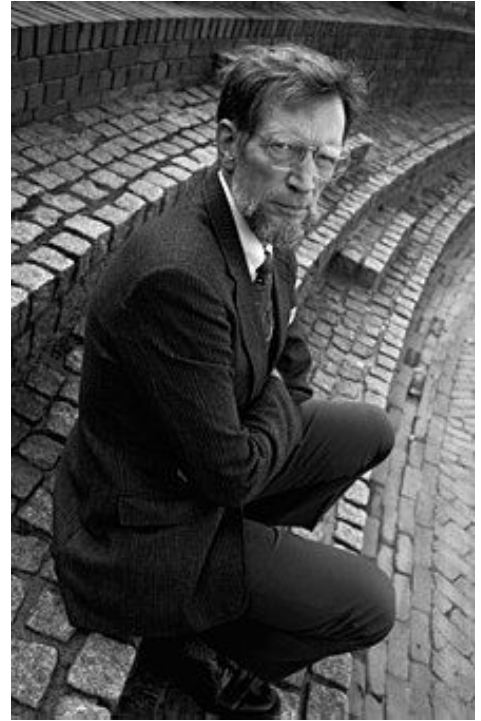
- Punishment is an evil which is required by justice
- Evil can be a tool used to heal, as the surgeon cuts of the infected limb
- This form of evil contributes to the good of the world
- Humans learn right and wrong and how to endure



1225 - 1274

Alvin Plantinga - The Free Will Defence

- Presents a defence against the logical problem of evil
- Evil is the result of free, rational and fallible human beings
- There are some limits on what an omnipotent God can do (he cannot create a world in which he does not exist)
- Even with free will human actions are predictable
- If moral agents make at least one bad moral decision in any possible world then God cannot create a world without evil



1932 -

Irenaean Theodicy

- Humans are made first in the image (the potential to achieve moral perfection) and then in likeness of God (achieving moral perfection)
- To achieve moral perfection humans must have free will
- In order to have free will humans must experience some suffering and God must maintain an epistemic distance
- Evil must exist in order for humans to achieve moral perfection



Irenaeus
(103 - 202)

John Hick

- 'Vale of soul-making'

<https://www.closetotruth.com/interviews/2397>



1922 - 2012

J.L. Mackie

Adequate Solutions:

‘If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omni-potent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent being can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.202



1917-1981

Fallacious Solutions

1. " Good cannot exist without evil " or " Evil is necessary as a counterpart to good."

- God cannot create good without creating evil
 - Limit to omniscience
 - Omnisciences limited by logic
- Evil is required as a counterpart to good
 - Goodness is relative as big is to small
 - Greatness is seen as a thing in itself in relation to God
 - Greatness and goodness have absolute as well as relative forms
 - Are counterparts necessary? Do we need non red in order to have redness?
 - If there was only red we would not notice the redness
 - God could have made everything good we would just not notice

2. " Evil is necessary as a means to good."

‘It would be a causal law that you cannot have a certain end without a certain means, so that if God has to introduce evil as a means to good, he must be subject to at least some causal laws. This certainly conflicts with what a theist normally -means by omni- potence. This view of God as limited by causal laws also conflicts with the view that causal laws are themselves made by God, which is more widely held than the corresponding view about the laws of logic’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.205

3. " The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil"

‘It may be supported by an aesthetic analogy, by the fact that contrasts heighten beauty, that in a musical work, for example, there may occur discords which somehow add to the beauty of the work as a whole. Alternatively, it may be worked out in connexion with the notion of progress, that the best possible organisation of the universe will not be static, but progressive, that the gradual overcoming of evil by good is really a finer thing than would be the eternal unchallenged supremacy of good.’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.206

‘In Hume's rather half-hearted presentation of the problem of evil, the evils that he stresses are pain and disease, and those who reply to him argue that the existence of pain and disease makes possible the existence of sympathy, benevolence, heroism, and the gradually successful struggle of doctors and reformers to overcome these evils. In fact, theists often seize the opportunity to accuse those who stress the problem of evil of taking a low, materialistic view of good and evil, equating these with pleasure and pain, and of ignoring the more spiritual goods which can arise in the struggle against evils.’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.206

First Order Evils:

Pain and misery

First Order Good

Pleasure and Happiness

Second Order Good

1. Evil is a necessary component
2. Heightens happiness in contrast to misery

Second order goods are seen as more important than, and outweigh, first order goods. Therefore, God would want to maximise second order goods, which requires first order evils

Third Order Good

Promoting second order goods

Objections

1. What are seen as second order goods are only instrumental in bringing about 1st order goods
2. God is not benevolent or sympathetic - aims to promote certain goods rather than eradicate evil
3. (Fatal objection) Second Order Evils
 - malevolence, cruelty, callousness, cowardice
 - Increases first order evil / Reduces first order good
 - As God would try to increase second order good he would try to eradicate second order evil
 - Could be justified in terms of third order goods, but this would create third order evils

4. " Evil is due to human freewill."

‘This solution may be combined with the preceding one: first order evil (e.g. pain) may be justified as a logically necessary component in second order good (e.g. sympathy) while second order evil (e.g. cruelty) is not justified, but is so ascribed to human beings that God cannot be held responsible for it. This combination evades my third criticism of the preceding solution.’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.208

- Free will becomes a third order good which justifies the existence of second order evils

Objections

1. '...if God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good ? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several, occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good'

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.209

- If wrong choices are a necessary requirement of freedom then freedom must be completely random

‘Paradox of Omnipotence: can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot subsequently control ? Or, what is practically equivalent to this, can an omnipotent being make rules which then bind himself?’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.209

‘Paradox of Sovereignty. Can a legal sovereign make a law restricting its own future legislative power ?’

- Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.210

‘We must distinguish between first order omnipotence (omnipotence (1)), that is unlimited power to act, and second order omnipotence (omnipotence (2)), that is unlimited power to determine what powers to act things shall have. Then we could consistently say that God all the time has omnipotence (1), but if so no beings at any time have powers to act independently of God. Or we could say that God at one time had omnipotence (2), and used it to assign independent powers to act to certain things, so that God thereafter did not have omnipotence (1). But what the paradox shows is that we cannot consistently ascribe to any continuing being omnipotence in an inclusive sense’

Mackie, J.L., 'Evil and Omnipotence', *Mind*, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Apr., 1955), p.210