

Whence Evil? Summary

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Motivation

In our meetings we frequently bring up the idea of beauty. As physicists we delight in the elegance of the laws of nature. We have even found the beauty of the laws so compelling as to consider it evidence for the existence of some supreme mind or god.

Indeed the abundance of beauty found in our universe (in any form) is a compelling reason for the existence of god.

As philosophers we are motivated by a love for wisdom. Presumably if we continued to stumble upon only ugly but true ideas we would no longer want to practice philosophy.....Yet here we are.

Then what about **evil? How can we reconcile our love for wisdom and our reverence for beauty when there is so much **evil** present.**

Statement of the problem:

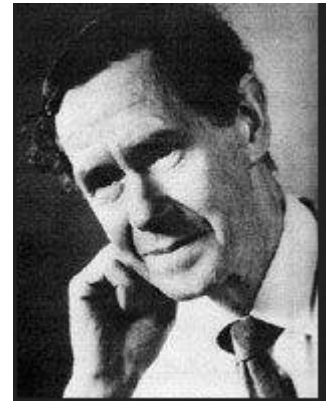
Lets first consider the logical problem of evil.

- 1) God is all good
- 2) God is omnipotent
- 3) God is omniscient
- 4) Evil exists

Immediately there is a sense that these 4 statements can not all be true. For the atheist this looks like an opportunity to disprove the existence of a God (or at least one with these attributes). The boldest claim an atheist can make here was said by J.L. Mackie:

“Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another”

Evil and Omnipotents-J.L Mackie



Attempts to solve the logical problem

Mackie presents (and refutes) common arguments in order to back up his claim

- the universe is better with some evil in it

- The free will defense

Plantinga (theist) rises to Mackie's challenge. He points out that despite the apparent contradiction in statements 1-4, it is logically possible for all four to exist at once if we have Free Will.

Plantinga makes no attempt to find the reason why an all good God would allow for evil. To refute Mackie he doesn't have to.



John Hick and the 'Vale of Soul making' philosophy

Hick presents an alternative to the 'free will defense' theodicy. The central idea is the evils in this world are part of the soul making process

".....leading of men as a relatively free and autonomous persons, through their own dealings with life in the world in which He has placed them, towards that quality of personal existence that is the finite likeness of God"

Some points of this philosophy as it relates to suffering:

- Without evil morally important decisions have no consequences.
- If suffering always occurred as a consequence of wrong doing there could no sympathy. Additionally moral decisions would be motivated by reward/consequence rather than 'good will' or doing what is right because it is right.
- For instances where the amount of suffering truly seems completely counterproductive there is an appeal to 'the positive value of mystery'. The mystery of suffering might be part of the process.

Hick points out that there is a necessity for God to have an **"epistemic distance"** for this soul making process.

From this I take it that suffering wouldn't be suffering if there was absolute (evidential) certainty that it was working towards some "infinite future good". Suffering would be like pain felt during vigorous exercise, at the moment unpleasant but completely bearable given the certainty of reward.

Still it is a big leap to (on faith alone) truly believe that even the most heinous of evils is working towards a good.....