The Mystery of and Argument from Evil

Why is there evil in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people? Most arguments made by non-believers against the existence of God tend to be skeptical arguments; they raise questions about arguments for the existence of God by raising questions about the arguments themselves, that they employ this or that indefensible assumption or contradict themselves or, in those cases, where evidence is given, the non-believer denies the evidence or sees equally good grounds for accepting counter-evidence. But non-believers have accepted one argument for disbelief by agreeing with those who claim that were God to exist and were God to be all knowing, all powerful and all good, then why is there evil in the world? Since there is evil and a good deal of it, God, at least an all knowing, all powerful, all good God, cannot exist. The “problem” evil presents for believers in God is the most common objection to God’s existence Western and Eastern religion, in Judaism, Christianity, and the Muslim and Hindu traditions.

Two sorts of objections are made: One is deductive, arguing that it cannot follow from God’s all PKG-ness that there is any evil, any evil at all, in the world. And one is probabilistic: given the amount of evil in the world (just look at the last century, the Terror under Stalin, the Holocaust, the slaughter of the Armenians by the Turks, genocide in Cambodia, Rwanda, Kurdistan and East Timor, the “disappeared” in Chile) it is unlikely there is a God. Some non-believers do not question that the presence of some pain and suffering, such as the pain a child might experience when a splinter is removed. “Why,” they ask, “should there be so much gratuitous, apparently pointless evil?”

Faced with the problem some theologians have abandoned, backed away from, one or more of God’s defining features, denying, for example the God is all knowing and all powerful. Others have gone the “route” of arguing that is good, but not in the sense that we might understand the term or have argued that God, unlike you and me, is above good and evil, and in Hume’s words has no more regard for the distinction than God has for preferring heat over cold. Another strategy is to deny the existence of evil altogether, arguing that all is good, even what appears so terribly, terribly evil to us. A difficulty with these “solutions” is the three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Islam and Christianity all give great credence to the existence of evil. Indeed to deny the existence of evil – for whatever reason – would appear to involve a rejection of these traditions as well. If evil does not exist, what is the point of liberating the people of Israel from slavery) or of the resurrection or of Allah as an all-just, all-merciful prophet?

Other Defenses Revisited/What is a Theodicy?

• As a Means of Knowing the Good
• Soul-building and Character-building Evils
• The Free Will Defense
• Two Kinds of Evil
• Knowledge of God, God’s Ways, the After-life and the Point of it All

Other Arguments

• Pascal’s Wager and Benefit-type arguments,
• Faith and Human Action (William James),
• Faith as the highest form of love (Soren Kierkegaard),
• God as an Illusion, albeit a convenient one,
• Is the Existence of God he Testable?
• Auxiliary Assumptions and Falsification,
• Logical Positivism and Observation statements,
• Religious experience and miracles.