

Still, even if this discussion is quick, that is not exactly terrible. The final chapter provides fast food for thought and does so with the same energy that permeates the rest. On the whole, then, NE is great. Easily as great as William Lycan's introduction to the philosophy of language, which is also very great. It is an exciting book that teaches everyone how to do philosophy, and how to do it well.

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**The Problem of Evil**, by Peter van Inwagen. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 2008 (Pbk), Pp. xiv + 183.

This is a slightly revised version of van Inwagen's 2003 Gifford Lectures. His focus is on what he calls the 'apologetic problem', namely the problem, for a theist, of how we may account for the claim that both God and evil exist together. As with all of van Inwagen's work, this is a clearly written and richly thought provoking study which repays careful study.

One form that an apology may take is that of a 'theodicy', this being 'an attempt to state the real truth of the matter, or a large and significant part of it, about why a just God allows evil to exist ... [I]t is an attempt to *exhibit* the justice of his ways' p. 6. Van Inwagen contrasts this with a 'defense'. A defense, like a theodicy, consists of 'a story according to which both God and evil exist' p. 7. But whereas a theodicy is presented as the real truth of the matter, a defense is presented as an account that may be true (true for all anyone knows). The aim is to create 'reasonable doubt' about the prosecution's claim that it cannot be the case that both God and evil can exist together. Reasonable doubt can be generated by showing that we do not know enough to rule out a consistent story of how God and evil may exist together.

Van Inwagen distinguishes two general types of argument from evil: the 'global' argument from evil (which considers the vast amount of evil the world contains), and the 'local' argument (which considers particular evils) (p. 8). A defense which may provide an

account of global evil will not necessarily be adequate to provide an account of why God permits a particular instance of evil (p. 9).

I will consider three strands of van Inwagen's discussion.

The first, and I think least successful, strand is the discussion of the 'global' argument from evil with respect to the human world. Van Inwagen suggests that only the free-will defense has any hope of succeeding (p. 70). But even if we concede that the free-will defense provides a reasonable story, one that is possibly true, for why there are at least some evils, it doesn't without further elaboration provide a convincing defense of why there is so much evil or why there is natural evil. To account for the amount of evil Van Inwagen constructs an 'elaborated' free-will defense (pp. 84-91).

The story is that at a point in time God took the members of a small breeding group of our ancestors and miraculously raised them to rationality (giving them language, abstract thought, disinterested love, free will). He also took them into a kind of mystical union with himself. Given this, these primates (who had now become human beings) lived together in perfect love and possessed preternatural powers (enabling them to protect themselves from wild animals, disease, and random events such as earthquakes). There was no evil in the world. It was God's intention that they should never become decrepit with age or die. But for some reason our ancestors abused the gift of free will and separated themselves from God. They now faced destruction from the random forces of nature, were subject to old age and death, and drifted further away from God.

God now saw a ruined world and put into operation a plan to restore humanity to union with himself. The object of the plan is to bring it about that human beings once more love God. Since love essentially involves free will it cannot be imposed from outside. Humans must freely choose to be reunited with God and love him. Those being rescued must cooperate with the rescuer; humans need to know that they need to be rescued, they need to know that what it means to be separated from God is to live in a world of horrors. Whilst God does shield us from much evil, 'he must leave in place a vast amount of evil if he is not to deceive us about what separation from him means' p. 88. If God simply canceled all horrors of this world by an endless series of miracles, he would frustrate his own plan of reconciliation – the people he wanted to rescue would be content with their lot and not see any reason to cooperate.

This story allows that evil is random. There will be no general explanation for why a particular evil happens to a particular person. To be separated from God in part involves being ‘the playthings of chance’ p. 89. It means living in a world where innocent children die for no reason at all, a world where the wicked may prosper.

Van Inwagen requires not only that this story be ‘possible’ but that it be a story that a neutral audience could accept as reasonable – reasonable enough to throw doubt on the prosecution’s claim that global evil gives us sufficient grounds for doubting the existence of God. I doubt that van Inwagen has succeeded in telling a ‘reasonable’ story. Van Inwagen maps a theological theme (of ‘fall’ followed by ‘atonement’) into an account of the origins of the human species, and I suggest that even many theists will find this implausible. Further, it is apparent that van Inwagen thinks there is reason to believe this story is true, stating at one point that he has ‘a hard time believing’ that the gulf between humans and other higher-level animals could be bridged ‘by the ordinary mechanisms of evolution in the actual time in which it was bridged’ p. 128. This looks more like a theodicy than just a ‘defense’ given that it seems to be the belief that the story must be true that underlies the role the story plays. Van Inwagen does immediately concede that ‘for all he knows’ rationality could have had a purely natural origin (p. 129). He then says that his primary reason for positing a miraculous origin for human rationality is that ‘the plausibility of the story would be greatly reduced if it did not represent the genesis of rationality as a sudden, sharp event’ p. 129. It is now not clear what the argument is. We seem to have shifted from a story that a ‘neutral’ person should allow to be possible (for all we know) and reasonable to a story that is required in order to maintain consistency with what may appear to many as a naive approach to certain New Testament texts (in particular van Inwagen’s remarkable wish to assert that death is the result of our rebellion from God, see e.g. p. 130).

The second strand to the discussion is the story which is offered for countering the ‘local’ argument from evil: many particular evils are obviously gratuitous and, irrespective of the story about evil in general, an omnipotent God could have stopped these particular evils (being gratuitous, there would be no loss of any other greater good).

Van Inwagen suggests that the theist can construct a story which casts considerable doubt on a premise that is often taken as unquestionable, namely, the premise that a morally perfect creator would, if

able, have left out a horror from the world if the world would have been no worse without that horror. He argues that this premise is based on an incorrect principle. Suppose you are an official who has the power to release people from prison. A prisoner has served almost all of his 10 year sentence and petitions you to release him one day early. Arguably no good to the prisoner will be served by requiring him to serve the final day. The moral principle on which the premise is based would require you to release the prisoner a day early.

Van Inwagen then extends this with a 'little by little' type of argument: if one less day doesn't make any difference to the constructive reason for a custodial sentence neither will two less days make any difference; if two less makes no difference neither will three less, and so on. If the moral principle is true, the criminal ought not to spend any time in prison. Van Inwagen describes this as a *reductio ad absurdum* of the moral principle.

In practice we have to draw a line somewhere, and this will be an arbitrary line. 'The principle fails precisely *because* it forbids the drawing of morally arbitrary lines' p. 102. The precise length of time that someone serves in prison is essentially arbitrary.

The expanded free-will defense allowed that God does remove many horrors from the world. ('God ... removes many horrors from the world ... But he cannot remove *all* the horrors from the world, for that would frustrate his plan for reuniting human beings with himself' p. 104f.). We can now add to this an account for why God does not remove some particular horror even if to do so would not result in any loss of good. God has to draw a line somewhere, and wherever it is drawn it will be an arbitrary line (p. 105). Wherever the line is drawn there will be horrors that are left in place, and from any one of those horrors the argument from local evil could be repeated.

A possible criticism of this argument is to wonder if van Inwagen has considered realistically enough the picture of God that we might be left with. We are to imagine a God who does prevent a lot of evils, but chooses to draw an arbitrary line. This still requires a choice as to where to draw the arbitrary line. Are we to imagine God as drawing lots for which evils will be actual and which evils will be prevented? How can a truly 'arbitrary' line be drawn which does not depend on God making use of some purely random decision proce-

ture? This type of reflection might undermine to some extent the plausibility of the story.

A third strand of van Inwagen's argument is the story he gives to account for the suffering of beasts (see p. 114). Every world that God could have made that has higher-level sentient creatures either contains patterns of suffering morally equivalent to those of the actual world or else is massively irregular (that is, due to massive interference by God). Being massively irregular would be a defect at least as great as the sufferings we find in the actual world. Some important intrinsic good, which outweighs the sufferings that are found, depends on the existence of higher-level sentient creatures.

Van Inwagen suggests this story is true 'for all anyone knows' and that we cannot assign any particular probability to the likelihood that this story is true. Imagine an urn which I have filled with 100 balls. There could be any number of black balls (from 1 to 100), this number having been chosen randomly. The remainder are white balls. We therefore have no way of knowing what the proportion of black to white balls is, and hence no way of assigning a probability to the hypothesis that the first ball drawn randomly from the urn will be black. Van Inwagen suggests that our epistemic position with respect to assigning this probability is similar to our epistemic position with respect to the hypothesis that, given God exists, the above story is true.

We would have reason to reject the defense if we had reason to suppose that an omnipotent being could create a world in which higher-level sentient creatures inhabited a hedonic utopia. To justify doubt about this van Inwagen appeals to the nature of this universe. He suggests that we have reason to doubt that a deterministic world could be possible, at least if there is to be the development of higher-level sentient beings: 'there is good reason to think that a deterministic world that contains complex life – or any life at all – may not be possible' p. 118. 'Life depends on chemistry, and chemistry depends on atoms, and atoms depend on quantum mechanics ..., and, according to the Copenhagen interpretation ... quantum mechanics is essentially indeterministic' p. 118. His claim is that, for all we know, only a universe very much like ours could support life (p. 119). Our universe seems to evolve naturally, and for higher-level beings this seems to require millions of years of evolution and suffering. For all we know the amount of suffering there has been is necessary for the evolution of conscious animals.

Van Inwagen runs similar styles of argument for the other elements of the story. He suggests that we have no basis for making any judgement about the claim that the sufferings of the beasts constitute a greater defect than a massive irregularity would (p. 122). And we do not know enough to rule out the possibility that if we did live in a massively irregular world we would lose a good of great intrinsic value (p. 123).

Again we may wonder whether this story is not in fact being presented to us as a 'theodicy' – a story that is not just presented as 'true for all we know' but as a story whose role in the defense is based on our having reasonable grounds for thinking it to be true. In particular van Inwagen seems to be appealing in this story to an intuition that we should understand the natural world as operating independently of God. Van Inwagen appeals to the nature of atoms and quantum physics in a way that implicitly gives our scientific description a validity qua description of a purely 'natural' world that has its own independent integrity. This may stand in some tension with the claim, which van Inwagen endorses (p.29), that the very stuff of the universe depends, in some absolute way, on the continuing sustaining act of God. Given that claim, it may seem that any particular law of nature or physical principle depends absolutely and wholly and freely on God's creative will. If so it is not clear why we should think there are any constraints on how the fundamental stuff of the universe should behave. Van Inwagen's story may be making implicit appeal to the belief that there is a 'way of being' which is determined by constraints that come from the natural realm itself. If so this may point away from a model of total dependence on God towards a model in which, precisely by being 'omnipotent', God is able to create in such a way that what is created is truly given its own independent status (a line of thought that van Inwagen explicitly rejects, p. 29).

Even if you disagree with van Inwagen's position you learn a great deal in working through his arguments. Perhaps there is a task for combining his philosophical expertise with a more theologically informed account.

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