



PHIL 107

Winter 2008



## Self, World, & God

## Epicurus's Old Questions

- Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered.
- Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able?
  - then he is impotent.
- Is he able, but not willing?
  - then he is malevolent.
- Is he both able and willing?
  - whence then is evil?

## Evil as Evidence

**E<sub>1</sub>.** The world contains vast amounts of *moral evil* -- human pain, suffering, and misery caused by the actions, choices, and oversights of other human agents engaging in (free) human actions.

**E<sub>2</sub>.** The world contains vast amounts of *natural evil* -- human pain, suffering and misery caused by non-human natural occurrences like disease, genetic defects, and natural disasters.

**E<sub>3</sub>.** The world contains -- and has contained for millions of years before the evolution of humans -- vast amounts of *animal pain*.

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**T<sub>0</sub>.** The God of western theism does not exist -- there is no omnipotent and morally perfect who bears any responsibility for the pain and suffering of this world.

## Some Rival Explanations

- T<sub>1</sub>.** Free will -- The pain, suffering and misery we see is the result of freely chosen actions on the part of human (and perhaps angelic) agents. God can intercede in the choices of free agents only at the expense of turning genuine freedom into pseudo-freedom.
- T<sub>2</sub>.** Soul-making -- The evil of this world is a necessary part of creating a challenging environment that allows for genuine spiritual growth. God desires eventual spiritual communion with fully formed human souls; the evils of this world are required for the production of these fully formed souls.
- T<sub>3</sub>.** Causal and epistemological regularity -- Pain, suffering, and misery is the result of the world's operation under consistent and understandable causal laws. God could intercede, but this would require interfering with the causal regularity.

## The Best Explanation?

- **Subjectivity and inter-subjectivity**
- **Free will and moral evil**
- **Van Inwagen's principle**

It seems to me that the theist should not assume that there is a single reason or a tightly interrelated set of reasons for the sufferings of all sentient creatures. In particular, the theist should not assume that God's reasons for decreeing, or allowing, the sufferings of non-rational creatures have much in common with His reasons for decreeing, or allowing the sufferings of human beings.

- **Modest natural theology and atheology**

## Limitations of the Human Cognitive Condition

- **My first article**
- **The Eastern class**
- **Developments in the literature**
- **A old rival to be given more serious thought**

T<sub>4</sub>. Limitations of the human cognitive condition – God's morally sufficient reason for the vast amount of moral and natural evil, as well as animal pain, simply exceeds human understanding.

- **How to assess this rival**

## Appeals to Mystery

- **We simply have no serious explanatory candidates. -- We have a murder victim, but no suspects.**
- **We have explanatory candidates, but they are profoundly flawed. -- We have suspect, but she seems to have an airtight alibi.**
- **We have reason to think that our data is flawed, biased, or untrustworthy.**
- **We strongly suspect that we fundamentally lack the intellectual resources to even begin to understand the problem.**

## A Crucial Analogy

- **A morally sufficient reason**
- **Could we know it?**
- **The infant and the adult**

[T]he outweighing good that is at issue is of a special sort: one proposed by the Creator of all that is, whose vision and wisdom are therefore somewhat greater than ours. How much greater? A modest proposal might be that his wisdom is to ours, roughly as an adult human's is to a one-month old infant's. (You may adjust the ages and the species to fit your own estimate of how close our knowledge is to omniscience.)

## **An Atheistic Response**

- **Taking the analogy seriously**
- **Too seriously?**
- **Infants and understanding**
- **Adjusting the ages**
- **Seven year olds and understanding**
- **From an adult to a genius and "saint"**
- **Child's judgment of unfairness**
- **Our adult perspective**
- **Is the judgment inappropriate?**
- **When the genius chooses to remain silent**

## **Practice Exam Questions**

- **Critically analyze the "classical" and "new" teleological arguments.**
- **Critically analyze the strength of Darwin's evidence for common descent and natural selection.**
- **Critically analyze the atheist's case against the existence of God by means of the evidential argument from evil.**