

# History of Philosophy A: Lecture Five

## 1. Don't Go Judging God

*God works in mysterious ways*

Claim that all you need is to say that there *could* be a good reason – even if you don't know what it is. This could be an (unsatisfying) refusal to deal with the problem. We'll come back to this later in the lecture.

*God makes moral law*

We've previously looked at DCT. If DCT were true, then the problem of evil cannot be an issue. Given that, God fixes moral laws – so can do what He wants and then declare that whatever He did was moral. So it'd be fine for Him to be omnibenevolent and be really mean to us. But this is then an *indicator* that those philosophers who take the problem seriously *aren't* going to endorse DCT.

*God as sovereign*

On this reading, because God made you He gets to make you however He wants. You don't have a right to complain! This *endorses* the line that there's both an independent moral law that we can know about. It just goes on to say that given God's sovereignty He can screw us around if it pleases Him. Is that true?

*Example:* Raising children for nefarious purposes.

## 2. No Genuine Evil

*Everything is intrinsically good*

Nothing is *intrinsically* evil, according to Augustine. Everything is intrinsically good. So you're intrinsically good, as is everyone else. This even extends to things like the Devil. So Satan is intrinsically good, but just ignores this by freely using his will to do so.

*Natural Evil*

This applies also to natural evils. These things are all intrinsically good too. The freezing cold, the burning hot, the floods etc. are all intrinsically good things. They are, in their own way, perfectly good. That is, there's nothing wrong about them.

*Example:* Being mauled by lions The lions themselves are fine entities. They are intrinsically good things, even though they have caused you suffering.

*Suffering*

Well, you either deserved it or you didn't. If you deserved it, then you're being punished, and God is allowing that punishment to take place. Indeed, if the punishment is deserved then the punishment is *just*. And you can't pick on God for *justly* punishing people. They deserve it!

So that leaves suffering that you don't deserve. Don't worry, says Augustine, it's still *good* for you to suffer in this way. For instance, if God only punished the wicked it'd make us worship God for material ends in this life. That is, if the good always got good things, and the evil always got punished, every one would be good and follow the religious life just to get good things in this life. And that's not right (says Augustine)! You should not be concerned about Earthly matters!

Or take another example. When virgins are raped, it destroys their pride. Or, if they don't have any pride, it destroys their potential to acquire pride. So, in helping them to avoid sin, it's really not a bad thing at all. After all, these things help you get to the afterlife. Which is a really ace place to be, apparently. So it's all for the best that you suffer, so that you can get there.

*Sin*

That leaves sin. Isn't sinning intrinsically evil? Augustine seems to suggest that it is intrinsically wrong to sin, but that the world is somehow a better place anyhow.

*“To the eye that has skill to discern it, the universe is beautified even by sinners, though, considered by themselves, their deformity is a sad blemish”*

This last move, that sin isn't genuinely evil as there's a good reason for it but we just can't see it, might seem like a cop out. Indeed, it looks to be just like the 'God works in mysterious ways' response from above.

### **3. Leibniz: First Response to Problem of Evil**

Leibniz believed that the resolution to the Problem of Evil was to say that our world was the best of all possible worlds. Where 'world' means something more like 'universe' If it turned out this was the best of all possible worlds, then God has indeed succeeded in doing His best and making the best thing He could.

The world *is* the best world, we just can't see *why* it's the best world. Just like Augustine seems to say! If we could work through every detail we'd come to understand the greatness of God's work, and how it all works out for the best. But that's pretty strange. *How* could someone being horrifically tortured somehow turn out to be for the best? Simply saying that, somehow, all of these apparently evil things are somehow for the best in the end seems quite weak. This kind of response is playing on our *ignorance*. Since we are ignorant of what the rest of the world is like (including, for instance, our possible future afterlives) we just aren't noticing how what is going on now is for the best.

### **4. Leibniz: Second Response to the Problem of Evil**

Having just stated that we are irredeemably ignorant of why things are the best, Leibniz does add that we can say *some* things that give us a clue as to why these bad things happen. So Leibniz isn't wholly committed to waving his hands in the air and saying 'Look, for all you know there's a good reason for being horrifically tortured'.

God aims to keep our happiness in mind. He's looking to make us happy. So why is it that we're often unhappy? Because God has other aims in mind.

Other values that God is trying to ensure depend on two further principles, which entail a third. The first is the Principle of Plenitude. This is that it is of value to create more things rather than less. A universe consisting of a single bowl of petunias is *ceteris paribus* not as good as a universe containing 40 such bowls. A universe containing 40 bowls is *ceteris paribus* not as good as universe containing 100 bowls.

The second principle is that God looks for simplicity. So a universe with simple laws is *ceteris paribus* better than a universe with very complex laws. It is simpler, more straightforward, more intelligible – more *elegant*. This is called the Principle of Economy.

These two principles place contrary demands on God. He has to make a world of plenitude, that is also simple. So whilst there *is* a world which is very simple, say containing nothing in it, it lacks plenitude. And whilst there *is* a world full of things, acting in complex ways, it lacks simplicity. So God has to weigh up the options and figure out the best resolution of the two demands. He has to work out the best combination of plenitude and economy, and *that* world is the best world.

That God has to choose that world is known as the Principle of the Best. So according to Leibniz, God can't make a world where we all live lives unharmed by illness and murder. It's not *that* world because it'd be contrary to the principles of economy and plenitude. In making a world where God laws of nature were such that you were, say, teleported away from any natural disaster, or you spontaneously healed any wounds inflicted by Charlie Mason, God would've made a world too *complex* to count as Best. So whilst God notes that there is added suffering, these other values have to be taken into account. And once God takes them into account, He figures that He'd better leave the volcanoes and the murderers in that world. Hence, Leibniz thinks it is reasonable to say that this is the Best of All Possible Worlds.