



God and Natural Evil

CONVERSATION WITH JOHN POLKINGHORNE'S CHAPTER ON "EVIL" IN
EXPLORING REALITY: THE INTERTWINING OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Theodicy, not “The Odyssey”

- ▶ *Theos* = God & *dikaious* = righteousness
- ▶ and not “theodiky” but **theodicy**

Theodicy: God's Righteousness in a World with Evil

- ▶ *"Of all the difficulties that hold people back from religious belief, the question of the evil and suffering in the world is surely the greatest."* p. 138
- ▶ *"How can such a world be considered to be the creation of a God who is both all-good and all-powerful"* p. 138.

Two categories of evil:

Moral Evil: human choices that lead to cruelty

Natural Evil: arising *outside* human control: disaster, disease

Three Trajectories of thought in theodicy over the centuries

- ▶ **The fall of Adam and Eve put a curse on all creation:**
 - ▶ *“History of mass extinctions in history does not permit us to believe that the origin of physical death is directly related to human disobedience to God.” p. 139*
 - ▶ Romans 5:12 “death came through sin.”
 - ▶ Now understood not as physical death, but sense of ‘mortality’, bitterness at finitude of life
- ▶ **Deny the absolute reality of evil**
 - ▶ The absence of good
 - ▶ But last century of evil makes this almost impossible to hold

Third Trajectory: *Free Process*

- ▶ Moral evil parallel - the free will defense:
 - ▶ *“a world with freely choosing beings, however bad some of their choices may prove to be, is a better world than one populated only by programmed automata.”* p. 141
- ▶ Same in nature: Creation allowed to make itself:
 - ▶ *“as a part of such a world, viruses will be able to evolve and cause new diseases; genes will mutate and cause cancer and malformation through a process that is also the source of new forms of life.”* p. 143

Free Process (continued)

- ▶ **We think we could do better.** But it's a package deal.
 - ▶ Example: genetic mutation: engine of evolutionary fruitfulness and source of malignancy.
- ▶ **Creation = self – emptying act of God in self limitation in creation:**
 - ▶ act of love allowing the creature to be;... creaturely freedom
 - ▶ Sounds **bleak**: but reality of a “world given independence through the loving gift of its creator.”
- ▶ **Our Christian hope of the ultimate triumph of good over evil**
 - ▶ Not used to explain away evil
 - ▶ *Still, nothing can separate from God's love in Christ*

Theology offers something

▶ **Passion of Christ**

- ▶ Unique to Christianity: “the Creator shares the load.” 146
- ▶ *“the Christian God is the crucified God, not a spectator from the outside but truly a fellow sufferer who understands creatures’ pain from the inside. Only at this most profound level can theology begin truly to engage with the problem of evil and suffering of this world.” 146*

▶ **Providential care:** (Doug Kelly)

- ▶ Without taking away creaturely agency, God still *preserves, accompanies, and ultimately governs.*

Our God and our World

- ▶ God so loves the world that God allows it to be itself, create itself.
An act of love, self emptying
- ▶ Free process of the world means suffering, but also fruitfulness.
- ▶ Is that it, then, we're on our own?
 - ▶ No, God in Christ shares the suffering from the inside.
 - ▶ Providential care:
 - ▶ A Personal Note from Doug: Pastoral surprise