Phil. 114 1/20/2016

1. Forms of the Problem of Evil

2. The Problem of Horrendous Evils

3. The Basics of the Free Will Defense

-Limitations: natural evils, excessively harmful and very predictable actions, the possibility of better chances

-Does God Take Risks?

4. Cause and Effect Theodicy

5. A World in Which Things Never Got Very Bad?

G.G.: How about an argument against God’s existence?  
K.D.: I’m going to have to be conventional here and go with the usual suspect: the argument from evil. Without getting into any details, you can feel the force of the argument by choosing a suitably horrific example (the Holocaust, children dying of cancer) that leads you to say, “There’s no way a perfectly good God would have allowed *that*!” There is a huge, often fascinating, discussion that tries to refute such arguments. But I find this intuitively powerful case does stand up to scrutiny, at the very least to the extent that someone could reasonably accept it at the end of the day. I suspect that even God thinks there is something wrong with you if you are not at least tempted by such an argument from evil. http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/18/why-take-a-stance-on-god/

We turn next to the hypothesis that God permits evil-doing for the sake of its good effects. And indeed we know that sometimes good does come of evil, and doubtless in more ways than we are able to discover. But omnipotence is not bound by laws of cause and effect. God can make anything follow anything; He never has to allow evil so that good may come. Cause-and-effect theodicy cannot succeed. Not all by itself, anyway; the most it can be is part of some theodicy that also has another chapter to explain why God does not pursue His good ends by better means. –David Lewis, reading #2, pp. 149-150

But the second stage of the creative process is of a different kind altogether. It cannot be performed by omnipotent power as such. For personal life is essentially free and self-directing. It cannot be perfected by divine fiat, but only through the uncompelled responses and willing co-operation of human individuals in their actions and reactions in the world in which God has placed them. Men may eventually become the perfected persons whom the New Testament calls ‘children of God’, but they cannot be created ready-made as this.

The value-judgement that is implicitly being invoked here is that one who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state either of innocence or of virtue. In the former case, which h is that of the actual moral achievements of mankind, the individual’s goodness has within it the strength of temptations overcome, a stability based upon an accumulation of right choices, and a positive and responsible character that comes from the investment of costly personal effort. I suggest, then, that it is an ethically reasonable judgement, even though in the nature of the case not one that is capable of demonstrative proof, that human goodness slowly built up through personal histories of moral effort has a value in the eyes of the Creator which justifies even the long travail of the soul-making process. –John Hick, reading #3, pp. 168-169

There would be nowhere to stop, short of a divinely arranged paradise in which human freedom would be narrowly circumscribed, moral responsibility largely eliminated, and in which the drama of man's story would be reduced to the level of a television serial. We always know that the rugged hero who upholds law and order is going to win the climactic gun fight. And if every time a tyrant set out to trample upon human freedom we could be sure in advance that some apparent accident would providentially remove him from the scene it would no longer be true that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance; and indeed vigilance, and the willingness to make sacrifices for human liberty, would no longer be virtues and would no longer be evoked in mankind. If we knew in advance that no really serious threat to them could ever arise, the struggle for righteousness and human dignity would become unreal. Once again, then, we are confronted by the integral character of the existing order of things such that bane and blessing are intimately bound together within it, and such that not even an unfettered imagination can see how to remove the possibility of the one without at the same time forfeiting the possibility of the other. –Hick, p. 181