

Law, Justice, & Evil

Law

Definitions:

- Just (adjective) – based on right; rightful; lawful
- Justice (noun) – the moral principle determining just conduct

To think about justice we must therefore first think about law. Views about what law is generally falls into one of two categories:

- Positive law – “The only binding laws in humanity are laws imposed by human government” (UF, pg 191)
Positive law comes from “posited by human beings,” has nothing to do with negative vs. positive
 - There is no necessary connection between morality and law
 - Legal validity is determined ultimately by reference to certain basic social facts
- Natural law – “All human beings are aware of certain laws that exist for the purpose of governing human conduct and protecting the rights of individuals” (UF, pg 190)
 - Romans 2:15 – “The requirements of the law are written on their hearts, , their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them” referring to people being aware of commandments even without seeing the writings of Moses.

Justice

We defined Justice as what is right. The question then is do humans have inherent rights?

- Positive law view: Humans only have the rights given to them by their government.
- Natural law view: There are basic human rights that everyone is aware of and of which no one should be deprived.

Problems:

- How do we measure justice without a basis/foundation?
- Can there be absolute justice if everything is relative?
- Do the definitions of good and just always come down to “what works best for me”?

Two examples in history are the Holocaust and American slavery. For each of these, what would positive law supporters think? Natural law supporters?

We find that governments make laws that may require revising and a reliance on a greater authority.

The following are some naturalist conclusions:

- Might is not right
- Majorities can be tyrannical and unjust
- Principles of justice and of natural right enable us to assess the justice or injustice of man-made laws and constitutions
- justice is universal and immutable, always the same everywhere and at all times, whether or not recognized at a given time or place
- positive laws have authority as well as force, obeyed by criminals only because of fear of punishment if caught disobeying them but obeyed by the just individuals by virtue of the authority they exercise when they prescribe just conducting
- there are mala in se as well as mala prohibita, that is, acts that are wrong in themselves whether or not they are prohibited by positive, man-made laws

Evil

One of the most common apologetics questions: Why does an all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, and just God allow evil and suffering to exist? Two possibilities are:

- God is not all that the Bible says he is.
- There is an explanation of how God can be all that the Bible says he is while evil and suffering still exist.

The following are some questions and answers about evil.

- What is evil?
 - The lack or absence of good (like darkness is the absence of light)
 - The lack of God
- Did God create evil?
 - The greatest good is God.
 - Greatest good for people is a loving relationship with God.
 - A loving relationship requires the freedom to choose to love or not.
 - *Therefore, in order to allow people to choose to love him (the greatest good), He also had to allow people to choose to not love him (evil).*
- Why doesn't God stop evil?
 - *If God stopped evil, he would in effect stop free choice.*
- What is the purpose of evil and suffering?
 - Some useful reasons for pain:
 - Develop character
 - Teach individuals that certain types of behavior are wrong and have physical or moral consequences
 - Warn people of an impending danger
 - Help people avoid greater suffering
 - Used by God to get people's moral attention
 - *Just because people may not know the reasons for pain and suffering does not mean that God does not have good reasons.*
- Why is there so much evil and suffering?
 - Suffering is limited on an individual basis
 - Consequences of natural processes
 - Physical degradation of the world – increasing entropy
 - Evil spirits in the world
 - Cascading consequences of other peoples bad moral choices
 - *God's goal for this world is to provide a way for people to choose to love Him and make it to the best possible world (Heaven), not to minimize evil and suffering in this world.*
- Can God be sovereign and still allow for human freedom?
 - God sees all time and space at once. He knows what people will freely choose to do.
- Lead-in to next week at YAF: Predestination vs. Free Will!

Discussion Questions

1. How do morality and ethics compare with law and justice? Are their connotations that come with these words that are no inherent in the definitions?
2. How does God balance justice and love?
3. Why did God not want Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Why would that knowledge be bad?
4. Does God (who is good) have knowledge of evil?