

Theiodiocy

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Christians, next time you invent a god, mind the *omnis*. An omnibenevolent, omnipotent god is just begging for some smarty-pants such as Epicurus to come along and point out that you've stepped in a big pile of the Problem of Evil.

The Problem of Evil, as summarized by the above-referenced smarty-pants, is this: *Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then from whence comes evil?*

Ancient Greeks had no such Problem. They made sure that pettiness, rage, jealousy, intemperance, vanity, lust, and other failings were all but written into their pantheon's mission statement. That way, when Apollo murdered children, Narcissus was narcissistic, and Zeus philandered and sucked at not getting caught, no one needed apologists to explain it.

The Romans appropriated the Greek pantheon, character disorders and all, so they had no problem either. On the advice of their attorneys, they outfitted the purloined gods with Roman names, which is why the Greeks didn't file a

civil action for trademark infringement.

Even the Jews knew better than to cook up perfect gods. Yahweh was about as omnibenevolent and omnipotent as oysters are articulate and athletic. Floods, genocide, plague, genital mutilation, slavery, rape, wholesale slaughter of children, setting up people to fail and then punishing them for it, making and breaking rules, and punishing an entire generation for their great-grandparents' sins were all in a day's work for Yahweh. Making no pretensions of being the only god in the firmament, he pushed an exclusivity agreement on his followers and enforced it by means of plague, famine, and war. This prevented the Jews from trading him for a kinder, gentler god. Heaven knows they tried.

But the Jews had painted themselves into a corner. For reasons that remain a mystery to historians, their calendar started with the year 4000 and counted down. With Year Zero looming and no messiah in sight, they placed a Help Wanted ad in the *Jerusalem Enquirer*. "Omnibenevolent" and "omnipotent" weren't in the job description, but "able to destroy our enemies" was.

Jesus surely seemed the ideal candidate, for he'd written on his résumé under Objective, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Perhaps he reminded them of Yahweh when he listed under Job Experience "whipped people—hurled epithets—murdered pigs—killed a defenseless tree—spoke in riddles—passive-aggressively endorsed slavery." And the literal and figurative bastard likely cinched his appointment when he jotted under Additional Comments, "Salvation is only for Jews. btw, I call Canaanites dogs, lol."

Yet in the end, the Jews fired him. One can hardly blame them. After millennia of waiting for a messiah who would destroy their enemies, they were kind of counting on a messiah who would, you know, destroy their enemies. They had little use for a messiah who advocated taking a slap and saying "Thank you, sir, may I have another?"—much less one who went and got himself crucified, by the Romans no less, one of the very enemies he was supposed to crush under his feet.

So now it was the fledgling Christians who'd painted themselves into a corner. Looking for a way out, their chief marketing officer, Paul, came up with a three-phase strategy. Phase One was to redefine "enemies." *Great news! Jesus destroyed the REAL enemy. And the REAL enemy is ... wait for it ... SIN!* Not surprisingly, this left most Jews unimpressed. But displeasing Jews was okay thanks to Phase Two, which called for giving up on the Jews and marketing the new religion to the Gentiles. Pulling that off



required Phase Three, which consisted of a makeover for Yahweh. It began with ditching the name “Yahweh” in favor of “God,” which was like calling a pet hamster “Pet Hamster,” but it caught on. And no longer was God a petulant bully. Now he was a heavenly dad—an all-powerful, all-loving dad at that. Those tantrums riddling the Old Testament weren’t tantrums at all but instances of divine tough love, needful because—ask any anti-Semite—you must mistreat Jews to keep them in line. This tied in nicely with

Christianity’s well-known and enduring mantra, *Blame the Jews*.[®] Like Phase One, the mantra left most Jews unimpressed, but then, see Phase Two.

What Christians hadn’t counted on was the Problem of Evil. Rather than concede, they devoted an entire field of apologetics to making the problem go away. They called it “theodicy,” which etymologists will tell you combines the Greek words *theo* for *god* and *dikē* for *judgment*. They were only half right—which goes to show that etymologists should stick to studying

bugs—for anyone can tell that the *-dicy* part is short for *idiocy*. Either way, theodicy deals with the Problem of Evil as effectively as the average Basset hound deals with unwinding its leash from around a tree.

Sorry, Christians, but our world does not suggest an all-powerful, all-loving deity. If anything, it suggests a screwup like Zeus or a sociopath like Yahweh. Rather than try to convince us to follow your god because he’s all-powerful and loves us, you would do well to take a page from the playbook of earlier, better thought-out religions: (1) admit your god is a jerk; and (2) advise us to follow him because he scares the hell out of us. *That* kind of god makes sense.

The only kind that makes more sense doesn’t exist. **FI**

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