THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Chapter checklist

This chapter examines the philosophical problems raised by the classic expression of the 'problem of evil'. Various theodicies are considered and their strengths and weaknesses assessed.

1 The problem stated

Key people

Epicurus (342–270вс) was a Greek philosopher who founded Epicureanism and taught that the highest good was pleasure or freedom from pain.

Key quote

'Either God cannot abolish evil, or He will not; if He cannot then He is not all-powerful; if He will not then He is not all-good.'

AUGUSTINE

Key question

Why is evil a problem?

Key word

Classical theism: belief in a personal deity, creator of everything that exists and who is distinct from that creation. The so-called 'problem of evil' was first formulated by Epicurus (342–270BC), and has been restated in various forms down the centuries. Augustine (354–430) in his *Confessions* expressed the dilemma as:

Either God cannot abolish evil, or He will not; if He cannot then He is not all-powerful; if He will not then He is not all-good.

The assumption is that a good God would eliminate evil as far as He is able. Given that He is all-powerful, He should eliminate it all. However, evil exists. In other words God has the means (power) and the motivation (love, goodness) to eliminate evil. So why does He not do it?

When put in its simplest form it is seen as essentially a logical problem:

- God is omnipotent.
- God is all-good.
- God opposes evil.

Therefore evil does not exist in the world.

The argument seems to be valid, at least from a theistic point of view, in that believers in God would agree with the premises. However, most would admit that evil does exist. There is therefore a contradiction, and if one is to remain logical it suggests that one of the premises is wrong. However, that would deny classical theism. In one sense, the problem is really only a problem for the believer in God. If there is no God there is no problem.

What is moral evil?

What is natural evil?

Key quote

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'Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are Nature's everyday performances.'

JS MILL

Key questions

What is the origin of evil?

How is the problem of suffering different from the problem of evil?

It is usual for philosophers to include God's omniscience in God's omnipotence, for a God who can do anything, but does not always know what is the best way of doing it, might be said to be less than all-powerful. Also, it is usual to maintain that God cannot do the logically impossible, for example, make square circles. Neither can He do what is inconsistent with His nature. However, it must be acknowledged that philosophers still debate these points. 'God is all-good' implies that He opposes evil and will wish to remove it. Attention is often drawn not just to the presence of evil in the world, but to whether the existence of God is compatible with the amount of evil in the world.

The illustration of evil is an important aspect of clarifying what the 'problem of evil' actually is, since different types of evil raise different philosophical issues. It is usual to divide evils into:

- Moral which arise from the responsible actions of groups and individuals who cause suffering or harm. They include such things as stealing, lying and envy, as well as the evils of some political systems.
- Natural which arise from events which cause suffering but over which human beings have little control, for example, earthquakes and disease.
- Some make further groupings such as physical which refers to pain itself and mental anguish – and metaphysical – which refers to imperfection and contingency as a feature of the cosmos.

At various times certain events have been used as classic illustrations of evil. At one stage it was the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, but in the present day it is the Holocaust that illustrates moral evil, and AIDS, cancer or the tsunami of 2004 that illustrate natural evil.

A further issue is the actual origin of evil. If God created or caused all things, then clearly He is the originator of evil. The fact that God is all-powerful and so all-knowing also raises problems about our free will and hence responsibility for doing evil. Also the fact that God is the originator and doer of evil implies that followers of God should copy His example.

The problem of suffering highlights a slightly different emphasis. It focuses on the *experience* of the evil. It raises different questions because of the experience. It deals with the problem on a more personal level, namely, how does the individual respond to suffering? The questions that are raised here are more of the form: Why me? Why now? Why this particular form? Why this intensity? Why this length? These seem to be questions that struggle to find purpose and explanation in what is being experienced.

Quite clearly, the rather academic and cold discussion about the philosophical problems of evil are often inappropriate for someone battling with their own personal pain and grief, and this raises

Key word

Theodicy: a justification of the righteousness of God, given the existence of evil.

Key question

Is the fact of evil and a belief in an omnipotent all-loving God a logical contradiction?

Key question

What do the theodicies have in common?

questions of whom the discussion is aimed at. Possibly most discussions have been levelled at the atheist, and an attempt has been made to show that evil is not logically incompatible with the existence of God. Such attempts include Swinburne's 'free-will defence' which particularly concentrates on the problem of the amount of evil. In contrast, others focus on the moral issue, assuming God exists but unsure whether one can trust such a God. Such a stance is found in the character of Ivan Karamazov in Dostovevsky's novel The Brothers Karamazov (1880). Likewise, John Roth's 'protest theodicy' is addressed to such an audience. Yet another audience are believing theists who want to understand why God allows evil. Such books as CS Lewis' The Problem of Pain (1940) fit this category. As I said earlier, being in anguish does make a difference to how one approaches the problem of evil and many books have been written from this perspective. A Grief Observed (1961) is a classic book by CS Lewis about the death of his wife.

It is important to recognise the different audiences to whom the writings on the problem of evil are addressed, since they are written for different purposes, to achieve different results. Hence in assessing an argument, it seems unfair to accuse it of saying nothing about some issues, given that it was only attempting to address another issue, and unfair therefore to conclude that what it says is worthless.

Many have argued that there is a contradiction involved in the fact of evil and the belief in an omnipotent all-loving God. However, it does not seem logically contradictory, since it is not the same as saying 'there is a God and there is no God'. It is not logically necessary that an omnipotent, all-loving God prevents evil, and a theodicy is an attempt at a solution of the problem of evil, without denying God's omnipotence or love or the reality of evil. It shows how God is justified in allowing evil. The word 'theodicy' is from the Greek theos meaning God, and dike meaning righteous. Alternatively, a defence argues why it is reasonable to believe that God has reasons to allow evil without actually demonstrating that those are the reasons. Hence, theodicy could be defined as a philosophical and/or theological exercise involving a justification of the righteousness of God. Clearly, this justification requires the theodicist to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and morally perfect divinity with the existence and considerable scale of evil.

I think if I were to try and state what all the theodicies share in common in their solution, it would be that evil is a necessary condition or consequence of some otherwise unachievable good, which God desires to create. This could be summarised as all being justified by some kind of greater good, for example, free will or a maturing process.

Figure 18 The problem of evil

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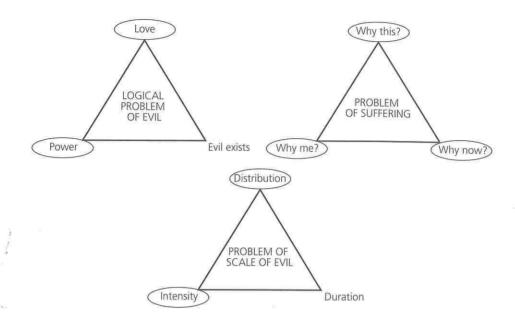
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2 Some possible approaches

Key question

Does evil exist?

a) Does evil exist?

One approach to the problem of evil is to deny the problem by denying the existence of evil. Monism states that everything is of one nature; assuming that this nature is good rather than evil, it means that evil is an illusion. Monists would acknowledge that we may 'feel' that such a view of reality is false since we 'seem' to experience evil. However, our feelings are false.

In reply, Ninian Smart (*Philosophers and Religious Truth*, 1964, p. 140) commented that even if 'from the standpoint of eternity' we are mistaken in our imaginings of suffering, we will still have experienced what other people would regard as real suffering.

b) The nature of God

Another approach to the problem would be to challenge the nature of God: either His goodness or His omnipotence.

Is God all good?

Key people

Elie Wiesel (b 1928)

a Holocaust survivor and author of Night which described experiences in a concentration camp.

Key question

Is God all-powerful?

Key word

Process theology: emphasises 'becoming' rather than 'being'. God is not seen as omnipotent but is changeable and persuasive.

i) God is not all-good/all-loving

This suggests that God is generally unconcerned about destroying evil and so presents a rather sadistic picture of the character of God. Clearly this is not the God of classical theism because it requires God to be morally imperfect.

However, recent writings, for example, John Roth (in Encountering Evil, ed. Stephen Davis, 1981) and Elie Wiesel (The Trial of God, 1979), particularly in the aftermath of the Holocaust, have seen the development of a 'protest theodicy'. Given God's omnipotence, events in history such as the Holocaust demonstrate that such a wasteful God cannot be totally benevolent. In the foreword to Wiesel's play Trial of God, he recounts an occasion when he saw three rabbis put God on trial in Auschwitz, find Him guilty and then go off to pray. It is that sort of tension that this theodicy advocates. In a sense it is not a new response since it follows the pattern set by Abraham, Moses and Job, all of whom contended with God. The Psalms are full of protest to God (for example, Psalm 90). Nevertheless, despair is not the response, but rather a defiance of God, reminding Him of His promises and a risky hope for the future. Such an approach has brought forth criticisms such as whether a God depicted by this theodicy is worthy of worship.

ii) God is not omnipotent

This would provide a solution by recognising that God is incapable of destroying evil. For instance, dualism argues for two co-eternal substances locked in conflict and that the continuance of evil is indicative of the lack of power of God. Certainly such a view can be found in ancient mythologies of Greece and Rome and contributed to the belief that matter (for example, the body) was evil.

A modern form of this approach is called 'process theology'. Amongst its proponents are AN Whitehead and David Griffin. The problem of evil is removed by redefining the meaning of omnipotence. It is a reaction against the classical Christian theodicies in which God seems unaffected by our suffering, even immune to it, and this world and its experiences are seen as relatively unimportant. The emphasis in salvation on escaping from this realm illustrates such views.

In contrast, process theology stresses this life and maintains that the most real thing about a person is the series of experiences which make up the process of their life here and now. God is seen as one intimately involved with this world and its suffering. Indeed, God is called a 'co-sufferer'. The different understanding of God's omnipotence derives from process theology's view that creation was not *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Rather, creation was the achievement of order out of a pre-existing chaos. This limits God's power since these pre-existing materials are not totally subject to God's will.

What is the nature of the God of process theology?

Hence God is depicted not as a powerful, almighty despot but rather as someone who creates by persuasion and lures things into being. God is in time and both affects and is affected by the world. He even depends on His creatures to shape the course of His own experiences. Such a God cannot control finite beings, but can only set them goals which He then has to persuade them to actualise. Evil occurs when such goals are not realised. Natural evil is also explained. For instance, Griffin states, 'If cancerous cells have developed in your body, God cannot lure them to leave voluntarily' (in *Encountering Evil*, ed. Stephen Davis, 1981).

Needless to say, such a view has not passed without criticism. It is seen as a major departure from the God of classical theism. Certainly it is admitted that there is no guarantee that good will ultimately overcome evil. It is not even clear that there is life after death, and some process theologians speak in terms of existing in the memory of God.

3 The two classical theodicies

In Western history there have been two main theodicies, those of Augustine (354–430) and Irenaeus (130–202).

a) The Augustinian theodicy

It should be noted that Augustine approached the problem from different angles; his various thoughts on the issue can be found in a number of his writings including The Confessions and The City of God. It is difficult to conclude exactly what Augustine's answer was since he had strands of thought rather than a worked-out theodicy. The central theme of Augustine's thought is that the whole creation is good. It is also a realm that has great variety of forms of existence, each having its appropriate place in the hierarchy of being. As God is the author of everything in the created universe, it follows that evil is not a substance, otherwise it would mean that God created it, which Augustine rejects. Thus for Augustine, evil is a privation. A privation is the absence or lack of something that ought to be there. It is the malfunctioning of something that in itself is good. For instance, sickness is a real physical lack of good health. Evil cannot exist in its own right. Evil enters when some member of the universal kingdom, whether high or low in hierarchy, renounces its proper role in the divine scheme and ceases to be what it is meant to be.

God created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) as opposed to *ex Deo* (out of God). God cannot be less than perfect but his created beings can be destroyed or deprived. God cannot be the author of this corruption, so for Augustine the answer is found in free will. It is good to be free but with that freedom comes the capability of

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Key word

Privation of good: an absence or lack of good. A malfunctioning of

something that in itself is good.

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Key quote

'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.'

GENESIS 2:16-17

actualising evil. Augustine argues for a belief in the fall of angels and of man. God foresaw man's fall 'from the foundation of the world' and planned their redemption through Christ. In Augustine's writings it seems clear that he saw the angels that fell as predestined by God to do so. In the case of man he sees that, through Adam, all are in a state of guilt and condemnation but God brings some to repentance and salvation.

From these general ideas have stemmed a number of variations so that it is usual to refer to theodicies that use Augustine's main ideas of privation, the fall and free will as 'Augustinian-type theodicies'.

Augustine (354-430cE)

Augustine was Bishop of Hippo, in north Africa, and is regarded as the first major Christian philosopher. He was distinctive in that he thought through philosophical issues in the light of his faith and his understanding of the Bible. His various approaches on the issue of the problem of evil can be found mainly in *The City of God* and in his autobiography *The Confessions*.

Key guestions

Is Genesis literal?

Is God to blame?

b) Criticisms of Augustinian-type theodicy

i) Modern science rejects the picture of a fall of humanity from perfection. Rather it suggests an evolutionary development. A literal approach seems to contradict modern science. Hence, some have taken the book of Genesis as a symbol/myth depicting the fact that all humans do sin, by choice.

If humans are finitely perfect, then even though they are free to sin, they need not do so. If they do, then they were not flawless to start with - and so God must share the responsibility of their fall. (Note that Augustine argues that some angels were predestined to fall. If this view is not accepted then how did angels fall, given that they were perfect?) Surely in a perfect world they would have no reason to sin? In response, it is argued that God could have brought about a world where creatures were free but never sin, since Jesus was free to sin and did not. Alvin Plantinga (God, Freedom and Evil, 1974) argues that it is logically impossible for God to create another being such that it by necessity freely performs only those actions which are good. For God to cause them to do right would be a contradiction of their freedom. Others have argued along different lines, pointing out that even if it is logically possible, not everything logically possible is actually achievable. Love cannot be programmed. The fact that heaven is pictured as containing people who will never sin suggests that perhaps God

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Key question

Why did God choose to create a being whom He foresaw would do evil?

Key questions

Can a loving God send people to hell?

Do we have free will?

Key words

Soul-deciding: people's response to evil decides their destiny.

Soul-making: the presence of evil helps people to grow and develop.

Key quote

'And God said "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."' GENESIS 1:26 RSV could have created such beings on Earth. However, we will have chosen to be in heaven which may entail some restrictions to our free will as a result.

- iii) It is hard to clear God from responsibility for evil since He chose to create a being whom He foresaw would do evil. Many see 'love' as the key to this issue. God wishes to enter into loving relations with His creatures. But genuine love is an expression of the free commitment of both parties. Love between God and His creatures is therefore possible only if the creatures are free that is, if they are able to reject His love as well as respond to it. Without freedom we could not share in God's goodness by freely loving Him. Nevertheless, the creation of free creatures involved the risk that persons would misuse their freedom and reject the good, and this is what happened. God could have chosen to make a world without free creatures in it. This would mean that the creatures would be robots, and therefore it would be a non-moral world. It may be physically better but it cannot be regarded as morally better, since it is non-moral.
- iv) The existence of hell is not consistent with an all-loving God. Hell seems contrary to a loving/good God. As a result, some argue that all are saved whilst others suggest annihilation rather than eternal damnation and suffering.
- Augustine's view of evil as a privation is challenged. It is not sufficient to say that it is a lack or absence. Many would argue that it is a real entity.
- vi) If everything depends on God for its existence, then God must be causally involved in free human actions. Do we have free will?

c) The Irenaean theodicy

In general terms, the Augustinian theodicy is a soul-deciding theodicy. In contrast, the Irenaean theodicy is soul-making. In the writings of Irenaeus (130–202), there appears the idea that humans were not created perfect but are developing towards perfection. Irenaeus distinguished between the 'image' and the 'likeness' of God (Genesis 1:26). Adam had the form of God but not the content of God. Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden of Eden because they were immature and needed to develop, that is, they were to grow into the likeness (content) of God. Thus they were the raw material for a further stage of God's creative work.

John Hick (Evil and the God of Love, 1968, p. 290), commenting on this further stage, says:

it is the leading of men as relatively free and autonomous persons, through their own dealings with life in the world in which God has placed them, towards that quality of personal existence that is the finite likeness of God ...

Key people

John Hick (b 1922) is an English theologian and philosopher who has been influential in popularising a soulmaking theodicy. He has also argued for religious pluralism. Hick has developed the Irenaeus theodicy in his book *Evil and the God of Love*.

Key word

Epistemic distance: a distance from knowledge of God. God is hidden and so this allows human beings to choose freely.

Key question

Why would God create imperfect beings?

Key word

Second-order good: a moral good that is a response to evil.

The fall of humanity is seen as a failure within this second phase (likeness), an inevitable part of the growing up and maturing. The presence of evil helps people to grow and develop. Thus the emphasis in this theodicy is *soul-making*.

Irenaeus himself never developed a full theodicy as such, but his approach represents the type put forward by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834), and in more recent times by John Hick. Hick sees the first phase, of God making man in His image, as the culmination of the evolutionary process, whereby a creature has been evolved who has the possibility of existing in conscious fellowship with God. The second phase involves an existence of making responsible choices in concrete situations. It is a necessary pilgrimage within the life of each individual. The value of this world is:

... to be judged, not primarily by the quantity of pleasure and pain occurring in it at any particular moment, but by its fitness for its primary purpose, the purpose of soul-making. (Evil and the God of Love, 1968, p. 295)

Hick goes on to argue that:

... in order to give people the freedom to come to God, God creates them at a distance – not a spatial but an epistemic distance [a distance from knowledge of God]. He causes them to come into a situation in which He is not immediately and overwhelmingly evident to them. (p. 317, my emphasis)

In other words, the world is ambiguous and it could equally well be reasoned that there is no God as strongly as there is a God.

An essential part of this theodicy is that this process is worthwhile because of the eventual outcome. If the process is not completed in this life, then Hick argued that there is another life in another realm to which we go, until the process is complete.

The reason why God creates imperfect rather than perfect beings is twofold, according to Hick:

- Human goodness that has come about through the making of free and responsible moral choices, in situations of difficulty and temptation, is more valuable than goodness that has been created ready-made.
- If humans had been created in the direct presence of God they could have no genuine freedom. Hence the epistemic distance. It is best that free beings freely choose to love God.

The Irenaean-type theodicy also has an element of 'greater goods'. For instance, some moral goods are responses to evils and hence could not exist without them, for example, courage, compassion, forgiveness. Sometimes this is referred to as a 'second-order good'. The moral goods are those that result from alleviating,

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resisting and overcoming evil and involve intelligent and informed responses to evils. This could be seen as a necessary part of the soul-making process.

Irenaeus (130-202cE)

Irenaeus is thought to have been a Greek from Smyrna (modern-day Izmir in Turkey). He was raised in a Christian family and became the second Bishop of Lyon. Almost all of his writings were directed against gnosticism, which he considered a heresy. Gnosticism preached a hidden wisdom or knowledge which was only given to a select group. This knowledge was necessary for salvation or escape from this world.

One of his most influential arguments concerns the conception of human beings as created imperfect. This theory later influenced Eastern theology and was used by John Hick for his modern soul-making theodicy.

Irenaeus is referred to as an 'Early Church Father'. This is the term used of the early and influential theologians and writers in the Christian Church, particularly those of the first five centuries of Christian history. It does not generally include the New Testament authors.

Key questions

Is it possible to never get to heaven?

Does the end justify the means?

Key word

Atonement: the reconciliation of human beings with God through the sacrificial death of Christ.

d) Criticisms of Irenaean theodicy

- If the end result is guaranteed by God, what is the point of the pilgrimage? Indeed, if there is universal salvation, then do we have free will to refuse to mature? Some point out that we could forever refuse, while others comment that there is infinite time. This issue of the end result being realised is crucial to the theodicy. If the end result is not realised, then how can the evil experienced be justified?
- Does the end justify the means? The suffering experienced (for example, Auschwitz) cannot justify the ultimate joy. Indeed, in the Holocaust, people were ruined and destroyed more than made or perfected. It is hard to see how this fits God's design and human progress.
- iii) Could not the greater goods be gained without such evil/suffering? For instance, cannot co-operation be learnt by teaming together to win an athletics match?
- iv) As a Christian theodicy, it seems to make the atonement superfluous and unnecessary. The response is that Jesus is an example to show us one who has the content of God. Perhaps a more Christian approach would be to see the theodicy more in terms of 'faith-making' than 'soul-making'.
- v) A number of criticisms involve suggestions of better ways to achieve this process. For example, why did the natural environment have to be created through a long, slow, pain-filled evolutionary process? Why could an omnipotent God not do it in 'the twinkling of an eye'? Equally, if we go on to another life

What is the free-will defence theodicy?

Key people

Richard Swinburne (b 1934) is an Oxford professor of philosophy who has devoted himself to promoting arguments for theism.

Key quote

'the less God allows men to bring about large scale horrors, the less the freedom and responsibility He gives them.'

SWINBURNE

to reach maturity, then why did God not simply make our earthly spans much longer, so that we could reach the Celestial City on earth, or at least get closer? Indeed, is there any evidence for other lives? (see chapter 13).

e) The free-will defence theodicy

Implicit to both the Augustinian and the Irenaean theodicies is the free-will defence. It is argued that the evil that exists in the world is due to humanity's misuse of the gift of free will. God wished to create a world in which created rational agents (that is, human beings) could decide freely to love and obey God. Recently Swinburne (*The Existence of God*, 1979) has addressed the problem of the sheer quantity of evil, which many feel is unnecessarily large. He points out that a genuinely free person must be allowed to harm herself and others. God could intervene to stop her or let her learn from consequences. However, the latter is more in keeping with the exercise of moral freedom.

What of free choice to bring about death? Swinburne argues that death is good in that it brings an end to suffering. It would surely be immoral for God to allow humans to have unlimited power to do harm. Also actions matter more when there is a limited life. Death makes possible the ultimate sacrifice; it makes possible fortitude in the face of absolute disaster. When it comes to the Holocaust, he says 'the less God allows men to bring about large scale horrors, the less the freedom and responsibility He gives them'. In other words, we can make real choices.

For Swinburne, natural evil is necessary so that humans have a knowledge of how to bring about evil. Rational choices can only be made in the light of knowledge of the consequences of alternative actions. He cites the example of earthquakes. A choice of building on earthquake belts, and so risking destruction of whole populations, is only available if earthquakes have already happened due to unpredicted causes (see *The Existence of God*, p. 208).

f) Pain and suffering

Hick comments in *Evil and the God of Love* (1968) that the removal of pain in a material world would require:

... causal regularities to be temporarily suspended ... and would approximate to a prolonged dream in which our experience arranges itself according to our own desires. (pp. 341–42)

One can intend to harm someone only if one thinks it is possible to do so. Richard Swinburne has argued that an intention to cause harm supposes the knowledge that certain sorts of behaviour will cause harm and an appreciation of what pain, mental anguish and other harms are like. As we have seen, some argue that suffering is estial

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Key quote

'... Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

ROMANS 5:6–8 (NIV)

sometimes necessary for a higher good to be achieved, for example, courage.

Attempts at understanding pain and suffering will be dependent on which theodicy one favours. Those in the Augustinian tradition would see it as the result of the fall of man and the consequence of rebelling against God. Shouts of 'Why doesn't God do something?' receive the reply of 'God has' – in that the Cross is the ultimate solution. God has reversed the effects of evil both here and now, and ultimately. The Bible suggests that linking your life with God starts putting evil in reverse, so that in heaven pain and suffering will be totally absent.

Another Biblical idea is that God suffers with us. He is with us in our suffering. Also the omnipotent God can turn evil and suffering to good account. Alternatively, the Irenaean tradition sees it as necessary for soul development. It is through suffering that character and virtues are often developed. The Old Testament story of Job describes him as suffering as part of a test. The test is whether he will continue to love God, in spite of his sufferings. The outcome is that Job ceases to look for an explanation — it is sufficient to experience God. On an individual level this is the Christian approach to coping with pain and suffering, recognising that it is a Christian responsibility to work for the removal of evil.

g) Natural evil

JS Mill said in Three Essays on Religion (1874):

Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are Nature's everyday performances. Killing, the most criminal act, Nature does once to every being that lives!

The Augustinian tradition would argue that our rebellion against God has affected all of creation and distorted it, so that our environment is not as God intended it (Romans 8:22). In addition, Augustine saw natural evil caused by fallen angels who by their free decisions wreak havoc.

Others note that things like volcanoes and earthquakes are in themselves neutral. Like a powerful waterfall, there is nothing inherently evil in them; rather, they become evil when people are hurt by them. Hence some have argued that if we had remained in perfect fellowship with God, then God would guide us away from these dangers, and hence we would not be hurt by them. In this case they would not be regarded as evil. An illustration of this is of a three-year-old child living near a busy road or deep river. Both are life-threatening but, close to and protected by her parents, both road and river can be a source of usefulness and life. In contrast, the Irenaean theodicy sees natural evil as the best possible agent for the purpose of soul-making. It is also part of the epistemic distance.

Key quotes

'Killing, the most criminal act, Nature does once to every being that lives.'

J S MILL

'We know that the whole of creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.'

ROMANS 8:22

Key question

Are volcanoes and earthquakes evil?

Can animal suffering ever be justified?

h) Animal suffering

Reconciling animal suffering with a good God causes many people the most difficulties. This is because it seems to have no connection with free moral actions, nor brings about a greater good. Attempts at a justification include:



Denial that animals feel pain.

 Animals are different from humans in that we recall past and predict future, hence reflect on our suffering.

 Most animal sufferings occur when they are removed from their natural habitat. CS Lewis develops this idea in his book *The* Problem of Pain (1940).

 Pain is not useless. Although animals do not have a moral nature to develop, they are physical and pain can act as a warning system.

• The natural order has been affected by the fall of man and perverted animal life.

 In some way animals serve the soul-making process, possibly by contributing to the 'epistemic distance' by which man can exist as a free and responsible creature – free to harm God's creation.

Natural selection aids evolution.

i) Conclusion

Are the theistic responses adequate? Certainly many people find the existence of evil a persuasive argument against the existence of God. It is an issue that affects every one of us and so moves beyond the merely academic interest.

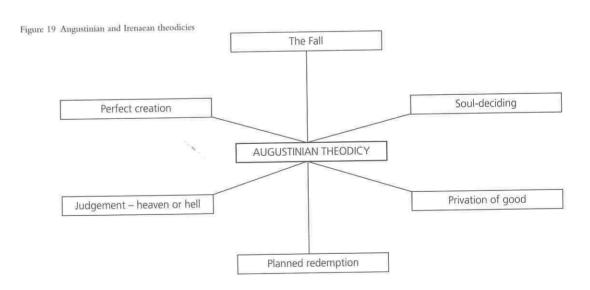


Figure 19 Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies continued

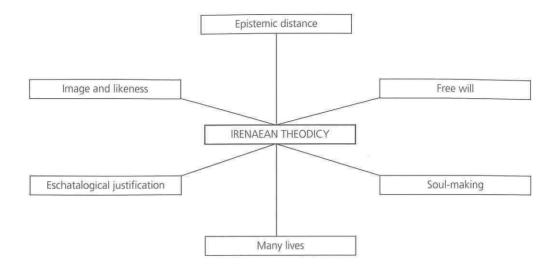
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Study guide

By the end of this chapter you should know and understand why the existence of evil raises problems for classical theism. In addition to this, you should be able to explain and critically assess the main theodicies that have been proposed in attempts to resolve the problem of evil.

Revision checklist



Can you explain how each of the following words/phrases is connected to the problem of evil?

- Theodicy
- Epistemic distance
- Second-order goods
- Privation of good.

Do you know the difference between the following?

- Soul-making-soul-deciding
- Process theodicy-protest theodicy
- Natural evil-moral evil
- Theodicy-theology.

Can you list the strengths and weaknesses of each of the main theodicies discussed in the chapter?

Example of exam question

'If God were the omnipotent, wholly good, creator of all things, then evil would not exist. Evil exists. Therefore, God is not the omnipotent, wholly good, creator of all things.'

Examine this argument.

Lower level answers will tend not to make specific reference to the particular quote given. The logic of the quote needs to be explained. God has both the means and the motivation to remove evil. Higher level answers will also discuss the phrase 'evil exists'.

The AO2 would involve examining some theodicies that challenge the conclusion and assessing their strengths. Higher level candidates might well challenge the actual premises, for example, does evil exist? Process theodicy might be referred to, as it denies the omnipotence of God and therefore changes the classic form of the argument.

Lower level answers will tend to go for breadth whilst higher level ones will tend to go for depth. As a result the weaker answers will tend to result in a 'list' approach rather than understanding and evaluation being demonstrated.

Further questions to consider

- 1 'The problem of evil can never be satisfactorily solved.' Discuss.
- 2 'The Irenaean theodicy is unacceptable as an answer to the problem of evil.' Discuss.
- 3 Compare and contrast the approaches associated with Augustine and Irenaeaus to solving the problem of evil.