

Can the problem of evil be solved?

This essay will explore different philosophers' views, arguments and theodicy's; attempts to explain God's ways to man in order to solve the problem of evil. And will look at problems with these in order to conclude whether evil can be solved and if so which type of evil.

The problem of evil is if God is willing to prevent evil but not able then he is not omnipotent and if he is able but not willing then he is not benevolent. He can't exist and be able and willing as there is evil.

There are different types of evil, moral and natural.

Moral evil is the evil human beings conflict e.g. crimes such as murder and on a lower level, bullying.

Natural evil or non-moral evil is the evil that is caused by human activity e.g. natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes.

Many philosophers attempt to overcome the problem of evil one of these being Saint Augustine 345-430AD.

Augustine's theodicy attempts to overcome both types of evil both natural and moral. It suggests that natural evil is a fallen angel interfering with God. It also suggests that moral evil enters the world through freewill.

Augustine's theodicy states that everything is created good, God cannot create evil as God is wholly good, there is no evil in God. Therefore anything he creates is also good and contains no evil. Augustine interprets the goodness of the world to mean that there is a hierarchy of beings. He believes each plant and animal has a place in the hierarchy of beings and is good.

Augustine says that evil is nothing in itself it is not a force rather is simply lack or absence of goodness. Augustine believes that evil exists when something turns away from its proper place in the hierarchy of being and thus renounces its proper role in the divine scheme; it ceases to be what God meant it to be.

Augustine believes that all angels and humans have freewill so when things run away from their proper role in creation they are exercising their freewill. This exercise creates evil in the world. Augustine summarizes that; the angels and humans who turn prefer themselves to God, they prefer a lesser to a greater good. Augustine believes this causes an account not only for moral evil but also natural evil as he believes fallen angels cause natural evil.

Augustine says that the world is good to God. Augustine likens the universe to a work of art "some blobs of black may seem ugly if looked at in isolation on the canvas but if viewed in the context of the world as a whole we see they are

necessary to the overall beauty of the work". Therefore in God's eyes what looks evil to our limited perspective is necessary to the overall beauty of the world.

If Augustine's theodicy is correct then it solves the problem of evil both moral and natural however there are many weaknesses and criticisms of Augustine's ideas. One being that Augustine's theodicy is "old fashioned" as in today's, modern society there is strong disbelief in the devil and fallen angels which there wouldn't have been in Augustine's day.

Also critics say that to compare a painting to the world is too unrealistic as they are on completely different levels.

I believe that Augustine gives adequate reasoning for moral evil; the exercise of freewill e.g. a murderer has the choice, free will whether to murder that person, however I do not believe the murderer prefers himself to God. I do not personally believe that fallen angels cause natural evil however that may be my modern views affecting my opinion.

Irenaeus (ca. 130-202 CE) has a different theodicy. Irenaeus has a different theodicy. Irenaeus also believes in man has freewill but he believes man was not made perfect, even though God could have made him perfect. He believes man is made in the image but not the likeness of God, as a man is not perfect. Irenaeus says that man must develop as life is the testing ground in which human's struggle for perfection he believes mistakes such as Adam's and Eve's were made out of immaturity.

Hick continued the Irenaean theodicy he said that during life man developed from immaturity to maturity, God is a parent and we are the children. Parents want their children to have pleasure and to grow up to be ethically mature. Children only develop such qualities if they do not lead lives devoted solely to pleasure, as they must confront difficulties and learn to overcome them. Hick believes that God has arranged the world similarly so that human's can develop. This involves the world containing much more that seems to frustrate man's purposes and aims. Hick says that by facing some frustrations humans can develop souls, which can grow and move towards God.

Hick argues that it is normal to think God is hidden, this is so our love can be freely given. Hick says we are integral part of God's creation. We have not yet reached the "final day" of creation; God is still in a way creating humanity. "This earth is seen as a factory for making souls". So Hick is saying we suffer in order to provide incentive for improvement.

Hick believes we need tests otherwise none of us would learn very much. He believes that diseases are a "test" we have to "pass". Hick states that in some areas we are passing, as we know how to avoid most diseases and how to treat those we cannot avoid. It can be seen as a sign of immense progress that the most persistent problems are the treatment of AIDS, cancer and genetic ailments. Even with these

persistent diseases, these sorts of problems have solutions, since this is a world in which certain physical laws apply without exception. Hick says without these “problems, there could be no science, no consistent laws of causation etc. In fact, a “Paradise” without suffering would be the worst sort of world for motivating people to learn and advance morally. To conclude Hick says that the “evils” of the world can result in the growth of human character

Hick does not attempt to solve the problem of evil just give reason to why we have it, to test ourselves and contribute to the growth of ones soul to become perfect. Although Hicks reasoning at first appears to give a purpose to evil, his theodicy seems incomplete as the idea that this soul making goes on after death cannot do anything to guarantee that there will not be pointless suffering in a post-mortem state. It does not seem right to say that the bliss of Heaven, however great it is could compensate for the suffering that some have undergone. Critics of Hick argue why do we have to have the extent of suffering that we do have? And why so we have to have such tests?

Plantinga’s freewill defence is not a theodicy, as he does not give real reason why evil exists. He tries to show that the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good God is logically consistent with the evil in the world. Plantinga is saying God has given us freewill, to have freewill we must have evil, to exercise the freewill. Gods concepts are not affected as if God interfered then it would not be freewill.

Plantinga argues that omnipotence does not extend to what is logically impossible, therefore there are some world’s God cannot actualize, such as a world where there is not freewill. But God is still omnipotent. Further it is possible if free to do what is right and wrong. So to summarize Plantinga is saying that we are free rational beings and we are created free. It is not possible to create free beings that are not able to choose right and wrong. Choosing both right and wrong is compatible with God as benevolent and omnipotent, as God does not interfere as to do so would undermine his creation.

Mackie is a critic of Plantinga. He argues that if it is possible for a person who is free to do the right or good thing on one occasion then it is possible for a person to do the right or good thing on all occasions on which he could do something right or good. So why Mackie asks could god not have created free human beings who always do the right and good thing? If this were possible the Plantinga argument is undermined. Plantinga must show that it is possible that God could not have created human beings who are free but never do anything wrong. He does not have to show that this in fact is the case.

Like Plantinga, Swinburne supports the freewill defence.

He dismisses the idea that natural evil is caused by devils as there is no independent evidence of the existence of such devils. Swinburne's argument attempts to explain the existence of natural evil.

Swinburne says that it is good for humans to have freewill he says God has reasons for giving it to us he believes humans need to understand the consequences of their actions if freewill is to make sense. If they do not know the consequences they could not know what reasons there are to explain their will in one way or another. We know the consequences through experience. The world has to operate according to law-like regularities in nature for human beings to learn about the consequences of their own actions. So there is a purpose to natural evil.

Critics of Swinburne argue that some human beings learn about the consequences of actions by seeing others suffer e.g. a man murders, he sees the consequence of his actions by seeing the victim suffering. It seems unjust that some learn about evils at the expense of others.

Swinburne would defend himself by saying God is creator, thus he has the right to allow some humans to suffer for the good of others.

However the critic may argue can we ascribe rights to God? Rights imply duties.

Only those in a moral community have rights and duties, God is not a member of a moral community.

The amount of suffering in the world threatens to undermine Swinburne's theodicy. There is far more suffering than is necessary for us to have knowledge of good and evil consequences of our actions. Could God not have created the world with just enough to let us have knowledge.

Swinburne would argue the fewer natural evils there are, the less opportunity man has to experience his freedom and response.

Evil cannot completely be overcome as with every argument there are many criticisms. However I believe that moral evil has been overcome; through freewill that God gave to us, as we have the choice to conflict the evil, that some do although I do not completely support any of the above philosophers' views, I can relate and agree with most, Plantinga's and Swinburne's.

However I believe that moral evil is only moral evil, when done for the wrong reasons e.g. stealing a bag because it is nice. In comparison something that I do not believe to be evil is when something "bad" is done with good morals e.g. stealing food to feed the family that has none.

I do not believe that natural evil can be overcome. My reason for this is that I believe natural evil is a mistake in God's geographical design of the planet however my theory undermines God's omnipotence therefore I would conclude natural evil is still a mystery to today's world although it is likely to be discovered in the future.