

How effective is the Free Will Defence as an account for the problem of evil?

The Free Will Defence is an account for the problem of evil which seeks to explain evil as a result of the misuse of God-given human free will, thereby removing it from the status of being the responsibility of God. It basically argues that the world gives us choices which enable us to be free and consequently humans; this ability to make our own choices is our freewill. The misuse of this free will is what is said to result in evil.

This defence maintains that while God is not responsible for evil in the world, he allowed or condoned evil for certain reasons. This reason is contained in the argument that human beings are made to engage in a loving relationship with God and love cannot be forced but is a result of free will. Human beings, if given the ability to choose to be courageous, kind and other just virtues, must also be able to choose the opposite path and be cruel or unjust. Thus, the cost of giving human beings the ability to act just is also giving them the ability to be unjust. Human beings seek happiness and pleasure and try to avoid misery and pain. In order to lessen the pain and suffering of others, some may have to endure pain themselves. In order for the wicked and cruel to be truly free, they must be able to cause other's pain. God is all-powerful (omnipotent) and could prevent all suffering and pain, but this would result in the taking away of human freedom.

The Free Will Defence is dependent on the idea that the world, as John Hick wrote in *Evil and the God of Love*, is a vale of soul making. We need to endure suffering and evil in order to grow and develop towards God. Richard Swinburne uses the analogy of God as a good parent who gives his child greater freedom in order to grow up. There are certain cultures or families in the world who would let a child put his hand in fire and feel the pain so as to teach the child the danger of fire and enable him to grow in the wisdom that fire is dangerous.

Irenaeus' theodicy centrally features on free choice or human freewill as the cause of evil in the world. The theodicy rests vastly upon the idea of soul making in that evil helps people to grow and develop, as has been explained above. It is however important to note that Irenaeus admits that God is partially responsible for evil in the world as he wanted to give us the task to develop and grow towards him through enduring evil and suffering. Irenaeus believes that if humans were made perfect and

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God continually policed his creation, the concept of free will would be undermined.

We are thus given free will to develop into God's likeness, as Irenaeus interpreted Genesis 1: 26, "*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.*"

This theodicy has been developed by more modern philosophers such as John Hick and Peter Vardy, mostly with the aim of explaining why it is necessary for man to develop himself and for God to not just make him developed. John Hick says that goodness developed by free choice is better than ready made goodness of 'robots' in the same way love which is chosen is of far more value than love injected into us. Peter Vardy uses an analogy of a king who falls in love with a peasant girl. Although the king has the power to force the girl to marry him, he chooses to instead win her round of her own accord, since love cannot be created by compulsion. Similarly, God had to allow humans to develop themselves, so that their love for him would be genuine. As perfection works by development, three things must be certain and these are that human beings are created imperfect and distanced from God (this distance is known as epistemic distance), and the natural world could not be a paradise.

The *counterfactual hypothesis* in this case, which examines what would happen if a situation had been brought about contrary to what it is, establishes that God's purpose would be impossible without evil and suffering in the world. John Hick thus stated that the world is not "...*designed for the maximalisation of human pleasure and the minimalisation of human pain, it may nevertheless be rather well adapted to the quite different purpose of 'soul making'.*"

John Hick believes that there are two phases to God making man in his own image and these are the culmination of the evolutionary process, whereby a creature has evolved who can possibly exist in conscious fellowship with God, and an existence of making responsible choices; a necessary journey in the life of every individual.

St Augustine (AD 354- 430) had a differing view from Irenaeus and his contemporaries, but his views were still based on the Free Will Defence in that we are all guilty of sin as we were seminally present in Adam who committed original sin, and natural evil is our punishment. Generally, Augustine believes that God created a perfect world, and evil is an absence of 'good' (which Aquinas further developed to be a *privation* of good), therefore could not have been created by God. He blames evil on angels and human beings who deliberately chose to turn away from God. Augustine

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thus differs from Irenaeus in that he concentrates on soul deciding (people's responses to evil decides their destiny) rather than soul making. Notably, he differentiates between natural evil such as earthquakes, other natural disasters and such, and moral evil such as murder, theft, etc. Natural evil first developed following original sin, and this destroyed the delicate balance of the world and leading to a new, damaged world distanced from God and this brought about moral evil. Both types of evil are seen as a punishment for sin.

Both theodicies, though with differing views, depend on the idea of free will. However, the Free Will Defence has been criticised by many, attempting to prove it as an ineffective account in solving the problem of evil. One of the most common criticisms is the amount of suffering experienced in the world, especially that suffered by innocent babies and children. It is questioned that can the amount of pain and suffering undergone by human beings in such situations as the Holocaust and slavery be an expression of divine love?

Evil is seen as a result of people choosing to turn away from God, but the Free Will Defence does not explain why people choose to turn away from God. This enables us to question whether God created human beings who would never have chosen to commit evil. In *Evil and Omnipotence* J. L. Mackie states that if there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on an occasion, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was thus not faced with a choice of creating innocent automata or giving free will. God's failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being omnipotent as well as wholly good.

For John Hick, however, while humans might have appeared to be freely choosing the good on all occasions, they would not be free in relation to God who would have made them in such a way that He knew they would never choose evil. Thus, from God's point of view, such humans would be no more satisfying than robots. However, this can be questioned in that if God knows in advance what His creation will do in any case, does this not mean he has preordained evil? And if he hadn't preordained evil, does this not undermine his omnipotence and omniscience?

Some may respond to Mackie with saying that God is timeless and it makes no sense to talk of Him choosing between different alternatives. Aquinas believes that God could create different worlds but at this point there is a flaw in his logic in that if

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God is literally timeless and has no potential to be other than He is, then it follows

God has no potential to act other than He acts. Another alternative response is to see God not as timeless but as an everlasting Spirit, and in this case it would make sense for God to choose between alternative universes.

The Free Will Defence is thus a strong account for the problem of evil, covering with detail many areas. However, it can and has been challenged and this undermines the strength of the argument. Nevertheless, the Free Will Defence takes an important step into solving the problem of evil in that God is omnipotent, God is benevolent, and evil exists.