

# The Problem of Evil

Christians have traditionally offered a justification for God's existence in light of the real presence of evil. The theological name applied to this question is \_\_\_\_\_. This study will be divided into three sections as follows:

1. How Some Have Dealt with the Problem of Evil
2. A Christian Response to the Problem of Evil
3. Concluding Remarks

## **I. How Some Have Dealt with the Problem of Evil**

### **a. Evil is an illusion**

This system is called *illusionism* and may be represented by certain Eastern philosophies and religions (Pantheism, Hinduism, etc.) Things that appear to be really evil are actually an illusion. This view has many forms and is no stranger to the Western world. In ancient times, **Parmenides** (c. 550 B.C.) pioneered this view with his philosophy which said that even if things appear to be many and evil (our senses are deceived), "all of reality is one" and good (absolute pantheism").

The beliefs of Christian Scientist, **Mary Baker Eddy**, are an example of illusionism in the modern Western world. She writes, "Evil is but an illusion, and it has no real basis," (Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*, 1906, p. 113, 289, 480).

### **Problems with the illusionist's view.**

1. It does not account for the origin of the illusion. How did this come to dominate our illusions?
2. How is this illusion passed on through the generations?

3. Finally, the illusionist may confess with his words that evil is an illusion but in fact deny the same view by his actions.
4. How can one distinguish an illusionary evil from a real evil?

### **b. Evil is the eternal opposite of God**

This view is called dualism and differs from the illusionist's view by acknowledging the reality of evil. It attempts to explain the real presence of both good and evil in the world. Zoroastrianism believed a cosmic struggle existed between the Good, *Ahura-Mazda*, and the evil, *Angra-Mainyu*. One form of Zoroastrianism believed that both Good and evil came from Zurvan. It soon became major religion in Persia for over a millennium and is an example of dualistic religion/philosophy.

Another is Manichaeism (which rejects the notion that good and evil can be traced to the same source which was developed by the Persian prophet Mani (AD 217-276). This view differs from the Christian view in that evil is *eternal* instead of *temporal* (theism).

Problems with dualism:

1. No assurance or hope of final victory over evil.
2. Second, there remains the question as to how both good and evil can be present in God's nature and He still be considered an All-Good God?
3. A God that is part good and part evil implies parts, thus implying composition in God. A composed God needs a composer.
4. Dualism implies differences in the two principles (or beings), implying a lack in the beings –which means both are finite and cannot be considered ultimate.

## II. Christian Response to the Problem of Evil

### a. Objections to God by way of evil

#### 1) Problem of the **Nature** of Evil

1. God is the author of everything
2. Evil is something
3. Therefore, God is the author of evil

Solution:

1. Christians do not deny this first premise (Isa 45:7, **ra**; 1 Jn 1:5; Hab 1:13; Jms 1:13)
  - a. **ra** in the sense of calamity/judgment (not moral)
  - b. *Indirect* author but not *direct* author of moral evil
  - c. Possible vs. actual
  - d. Permits vs. promotes
  - e. Henry Ford's automobiles
2. We reject that evil is *something* like a material object or a "thing" with molecules.

Evil is:

- a. Real but not material
- b. A lack in good things, a *privation*
- c. It's the absence of what should be present
- d. It's like a moth eaten garment, rust to a car, or rot to a tree. What is a *totally* moth eaten shirt?  
Nothing Therefore:

- e. There cannot be *total or pure evil*, because evil does not exist “in itself,” But only in other things as a lack.
- f. There are two kinds of evil:
  - a. **moral evil**-a lack in one’s nature such as depravity (will, morality, actions, etc.). This has a bearing on one’s eternal destiny.
  - b. **Physical or Metaphysical evil** –a lack in one’s physical body such as amputated leg, arm, finger, etc. This type of evil has no bearing on one’s eternal destiny. (Mk 9.43-37)
  - g. St. Augustine said, “What is evil? perhaps you will reply corruption. Undeniably this is a general definition of evil, for corruption implies opposition to nature...but corruption exists not by itself, but in some substance which it corrupts; for corruption itself is not a substance So the thing which it corrupts is not corruption, is not evil; for what is corrupted suffers loss of integrity and purity. So that which has no purity to lose cannot be corrupted (*On the Morals of the Manichaens*).

3. Therefore, it does not follow that God directly created evil.

## 2) The **Origin** of Evil

- 1. Every Creature God made is perfect
- 2. But perfect creatures cannot do what is imperfect
- 3. So, every creature God made cannot do what is imperfect (evil)

Solution:

1. The Christian does not deny this first premise. (Gen 1) However, one of the perfections God gave His creatures (i.e. man) was free will
2. Evil is the *byproduct* of free will. If this is not true one would have to answer the question: who tempted Satan with evil?
3. So, imperfection (evil) can arise from a perfection (free will)

Free will:

- a) Free will means the ability to make an unforced decision between two or more alternatives
  - b) Free will renders love meaningful
  - c) Free will preserves individual moral responsibility
  - d) Free will provides the ability to choose between good and evil
  - e) Free will detaches God from the direct origin of evil. God makes the *fact of freedom* and man performs the *acts of freedom*. God makes evil acts *possible*, man makes them (evil acts) *actual*.
- 3) Why Doesn't God **Stop** Evil? (Persistence)
1. If God is all-good, He *would* destroy evil
  2. If God is all-powerful, He *could* destroy evil
  3. But evil is not destroyed
  4. Hence, there is no such God

Solution:

- a. If God is good, He *will* destroy evil

- b. If God is powerful, He *can* destroy evil
- c. Evil is not yet destroyed
- d. Therefore, God *can and will one day* defeat evil

False assumptions:

- 1. This argument assumes one knows the future (“yet”)
- 2. To destroy evil would mean the destruction of free will. The *preservation* of free will is more important than the *destruction* of evil.

#### 4) The **Purpose** of Evil

- 1. An all-good God must have a good purpose for everything
- 2. There is no good purpose for suffering
- 3. So, there cannot be an All-good God

Solution:

- a. The first premise is true.
- b. The Christian would disagree with the second premise, namely because there is a difference between our knowing a good purpose for suffering and God having a good purpose for it. God must have a good purpose for everything. For example, sometimes God allows evil to warn us of greater evils.
- c. Therefore, God does have a good purpose for all suffering. Such as:
  - i. To warn us of greater evils (root canal)

- ii. To preserve us from self-destruction (leprosy)
- iii. To bring us to the end of the works of our own flesh (2 Cor 2:8-9)
- iv. To arouse a deaf world (C.S. Lewis)
- v. Just as a parent may permit the pain (evil) of the dentist's drill in order to promote healthy teeth, God permits evil to bring about a better world in the end.

#### 5) God Could have **Avoided** Evil

- 1. God knows everything
- 2. God knew evil would occur when He created the world
- 3. God had other non-evil possibilities, He could have;
  - a. created nothing (no world)
  - b. created a non-moral world
  - c. created with no free creatures
  - d. created free creature that would not sin but all be saved
- 4. Therefore, God could have created a world where evil and Hell do not exist.

Solution:

- a. The first premise is true
- b. The second premise is true
- c. However the third premise has several flaws:

- i. To assume that a non-world is better than a world is to assume nothing is “better” than something. “Nothing” cannot be compared to something because nothing is nonexistence.
- ii. Second, the claim stands on moral ground to say a non-moral world is “better” than a moral world. There is a difference between no moral value and some moral value.
- iii. Without free creatures, man is no more than a robot which would render love and responsibility meaningless.
- iv. It is possible to create free creatures that do not sin (Adam) but God could not guarantee that these free creatures would never sin.

NOTE: It is better to have the chance to achieve the greatest good (Christ/God/heaven) than to be confined to achieving lesser goods with no evil. In other words, it is better to live life, love, and risk than not to have the opportunity at all (it cannot be compared).

- d. Therefore, God could not have actually done any better any other way with free creatures

Note: This world may not be the best of all possible worlds but it is the best way to get to the best of all possible worlds with free creatures involved.

## 6) The **Consequences** of Evil

- 1. The greatest good is to save all men
- 2. Even one person in Hell would be less than the greatest good
- 3. Therefore, God cannot send anyone to Hell

Solution:

- a. True, God wills that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9), however, God will not force man to love Him.
- b. A world in which *some* are in hell is *not* less than the greatest good. Only if there was *one more* person in Hell that *should* be there would it be less than the greatest good.
- c. All who go to Hell chose to go there:
  - i. Even though man does not *want* to go to Hell, he *wills* it by his actions (e.g. alcoholic, drug addict)
  - ii. God doesn't send people to Hell, man does. God is for man, Satan is against him, man casts the deciding vote.
  - iii. God does not fall short of the greatest good when there is some in Hell because what does not fall under God's perfect *grace* is satisfied in His perfect *justice*.

### III. Conclusion

Although the hideous scars of evil have had their devastating effect in this world, the Christian is much better off than Adam was before the fall. We now can experience God's grace, forgiveness, love (the cross), and His indwelling power firsthand (Gal. 2.20). Further, Satan has been defeated (Col 2) and will one day be separated forever (Rev 20), from God and man. Not only are there spiritual benefits to his fall in the garden, but there are also physical ones as well. The believer will one day have a physical resurrected body (1 Cor 15) that will never grow tired, sick, and hungry. During Adam's life, Satan had free reign in heaven and earth with no end in sight, today we look forward to an unhindered eternity with God knowing for sure that evil will never again touch us.

**Sources and Books on the Problem of Evil:**

Aquinas, Thomas, *On Evil*

Augustine, *City of God*

\_\_\_\_\_, *Confessions of St. Augustine*

Geisler, Norman L., *Roots of Evil*

\_\_\_\_\_, *If God, Why Evil?*

Lewis, C.S., *The Great Divorce*