

The discussion of evil and suffering carries the technical term THEODICY.

It is a word made up from the Greek words for 'God' (Theos) and 'Justice' (diké)

Theodicy seeks to justify the righteousness and justice of God despite the presence of evil and suffering in the world.

Educationally we do not have to justify anything. We may conclude that evil and suffering do lead to the conclusion of the absence of a God. Or we can try out explanations.

Moral cause – Suffering caused by agents who are decision makers and aware of the impact of their decisions. Some element of evil therefore, by intention.

Natural cause – This is suffering which is not caused by something that makes a moral decision, for example animals (we think) or natural events. Therefore it is not evil at all. However, if a God is all powerful and all loving, these should not happen or should be overridden.

Examples of moral agency caused suffering (human evil that a God did nothing about):

6 million Jews killed by Hitler

20 million Russians and satellite state citizens killed by Stalin

2 million Cambodians killed by that government in 1970's

Millions killed in Chinese Cultural Revolution

Famine brought about by war and government policy (eg Zimbabwe)

Examples of suffering (natural events that a God does not prevent):

Famine (assuming purely natural causes)

Floods

AIDS

Cancers

Some link these natural events with moral agency and a purpose, but this makes false assumptions or gives a direct responsibility to a God for lack of intervention, which is a different argument.

Assume the existence of God...

Traditionally, God is all powerful or almighty. God is love. God is perfect.

If God is omnipotent then God should stop evil and suffering.

If God is omniscient then God knew this world would result in evil and suffering.

If God is all good then God should want to remove evil and suffering.

Even more traditionally there is Satan who first appeared as a serpent. The devil is an angel who disobeyed God and was thrown out of heaven to roam the earth. In the Tanakh, in the book of Job, the devil asks God if he can tempt Job away from God. God agrees and the devil then delivers pain and difficulty on to Job. Job loses everything, including his health and his family, but retains faith in God and accepts that his suffering is a part of life. God does not really explain to him why he suffered.

Jesus resisted the devil's temptations even after fasting in the wilderness for forty days (Matthew 4:1-11).

By God we mean here a Judaeo-Christian God that is said to act in history, the

problem being when this God does not act in history in the face of suffering, or even acts to cause suffering, including the creation of the universe itself.

God seems to be unable or unwilling to prevent the vast amount of evil and suffering in the world. If God is unwilling, then that makes God vengeful even evil. God would be more evil than any devil. God would not be love. We might be morally justified in opposing this God, and suffering for our beliefs (Jesus suffered – it could be Christian to oppose God!)

On the other hand, God may be unable to do anything about evil and suffering. In this case such a God hardly seems worthy of worship in the traditional sense. Of course this does not mean such a God, who may be a suffering God weeping at his creation, cannot exist. God may indeed be weak.

Some post war theology speaks of the suffering God, which is also a reference to Jesus' suffering. In fact this God, as a loving God, may be a preferable God because it rejects power. However, such a God would underline the tragedy of life, and suggest all the more important a search for transcendence, signals of the good, and hoped for resurrection.

The problem of suffering happens because we are moral, free, choosing agents. We also need to make mistakes as a process of growing into something more fulfilling.

As well as this, in order to survive and adapt, we need pain. Pain is a very useful signal to stop doing something harmful. With freedom, people can misuse pain and turn it into torture.

We must assume heaven (theoretically, or really) would be a place of pure perfection, but as such would be without challenge. The Garden of Eden is a story of a place that was perfect and heaven like and yet had challenge (and involved human failure).

Similarly the natural world has processes of change which cause difficulty in their transition. Both pain and transition are necessary for adaptation and growth.

For Christians, the existence of pain and suffering is a test for spiritual resolve. Also human motivation for giving pain is evidence for belief in original sin, literally or figuratively happened in the Garden of Eden.

Christians who believe in a traditional God of power would say we have free will. Humanity with it is fallen (sinful) and this explains the difference between God and humankind. The Christ figure is a saviour figure and so the evangelical position is that salvation comes through faith in (acceptance of) this saving Christ who took suffering upon himself so that we do not have to (but we still do, don't we, including Christians...?)

Bible:

The universe, however, is called good, even very good but not perfect. People are themselves far from perfect. The only thing perfect would be heaven on earth.

For God to enter into relationship with his creatures needs free will. Without the possibility of sinning, there is no meaning to being good. In a sense then God must permit evil to get meaningful good. Yet this does not remove objections from the moral point of view.

That relationship involves prayer. Prayers are also made to God to help those who are suffering. Such intercession is for individuals and the world and leaves the puzzle why so few seem to be answered, and what is the meaning of those that seem to be answered (seem to be in each case).

Again, David Hume the philosopher argued if God is willing but not able then God is impotent. If God is able but not willing then God is corrupt. If God is able and willing: why then evil?

Other options:

- o Atheism solves the problem by denying that God exists. This might be criticised as a no hope solution.
- o Pantheism, the belief that God is everything and that everything is God, allows that God is both good and evil. This is as good or bad as atheism.
- o Polytheism, the belief in many gods, has characteristics among many gods. So this is a battle of the Gods.
- o Idealism has reality like evil within the mind. Yet suffering is real or at least real within transience.

Other religions:

Biblical References:

And we have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (1 John 4:16)

"Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48)

And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering of the waters He called seas; and God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:10)

And God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was

evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:3)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (Revelation 21:1)

"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. (Isaiah 65:17)

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
(Revelation 21:4)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." (Romans 8:28)

'To the woman [God] said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you." To Adam [God] said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:16-19)