

### Question 5: Why is there evil in the world?

#### **Theodicy:**

The question of why is there evil in the world is an age-old question. The implications of this great mystery were pondered by civilizations of long past like the Egyptians, Greeks, and Babylonians. The question can be simplified to the term theodicy. Theodicy is the pursuit of an answer to the predicament of how there can be an all-good god but yet evil is present in the world. Many of the ancient civilizations settled this debate by creating a dualistic world. In a dualistic world good and evil are caught in a tense battle for the world. Good battling against evil and evil battling against good. We, as mere humans, are caught in the tensions between these two great powers. The Greeks and Romans understood the world in the sense of the clash between the gods. Earthquakes, floods, storms, sickness, and death were all part of the very humanistic struggles that vexed the Greek gods. Hinduism took a different path. In Hinduism the gods control the balance of the universe and are ambivalent to humanity. The Asuras are lower evil spirits who war with the gods but never win. Out of Hinduism came Buddhism. Buddhism largely rejected the notion of deities and focused on oneness with all creation. The gods of Buddhist cosmology are those who try to tempt one away from enlightenment. These evil spirits are meant to be avoided at all cost and thus cause the pain and suffering of the world. The Christian world view is that God is all-powerful and all-good. The devil is a fallen angel who wars against humanity. The evil and suffering of the world are caused by sin and the state of fallenness away from God. Paganism, aka witchcraft, Wicca, nature worship, takes a dualistic approach. The world is inhabited by spirits and god of varying types, some good some bad. The goal of the pagan is to cultivate the good spirits so as to benefit the world and bring peace. This quick overview is meant to explore the variety of ways that people have attempt to answer this question.

#### **Evil:**

What is evil? I am sure that we could name many different things that we would associate with the term evil: wars, violence, mass shooting, disease. I am sure that if we tried to find another word that categorizes all of these terms the word would be bad. Evil is something different than bad. Within the realm of philosophy is a discipline called metaphysics. The study of metaphysics explores the premises and ideas that relate to what is at the core of all things, what underlies the world. Some of these topics include existence, essence, and being. One of the issues central to the discipline of metaphysics is evil. Evil, according to metaphysics, is the privation of good. In other words, those things that we characterize as evil are things that are good that have been distorted or have turned away from their original goodness to something bad. All things were created good. The reason why we can claim that all things were created good is that all things are formed for unity and order. Unity and order are directly opposed to disorder and disunity. (notice how both of these words started as the original word with a prefix dis-) Unity and order strive for wholeness, which is directly related to God. Since God is the author of all things, God must have created everything as good. God cannot create anything that is not good. Once the thing is created as good, it is intended to be used for the purpose for which it was created, namely to be used for good. In the event that the object is used for a different purpose or turned against its

original purpose, then it would become evil. The more something becomes distorted from its original goodness, the more evil the object has become.

Let's say that I want to challenge the basic premises that led to the conclusion that evil is privation of the good. Premise Challenge 1: all things were not created good. The underlying assumption of this statement is that in this world there are some things that are considered good and some things that are considered evil at the core of their existence. These objects were either good or evil and cannot be otherwise. Therefore there must exist a creator who created good things and a creator who created evil things. Otherwise the same creator has to create both good and evil things. Therefore the world is a place in which there are two ruling deities who create good and evil things and are at odds with each other. Neither of these deities are all-powerful or all-good since both are powerful and both are not the supreme creator. Parts of the world are complete chaos and parts of the world are ordered. The world is divided into these two camps with a clear sense of tension between good and evil.

Premise Challenge 2: The universe is random and tends towards chaos therefore unity and order are not the core attributes of all things. In one sense this statement is true. The Law of Entropy states that all things tend to a lower state, which is a state of disorder. Once a building is built, if it were left alone without any upkeep, the building would eventually fall apart and break down into its constituent parts. If we examine the universe carefully, however, it is not random but highly logical. The planets revolve around stars and black holes with mathematical precision. The order inherent in living things not only shows great unity but also the desire to preserve unity and wholeness. If I could create a universe that was completely random and tended towards chaos, the universe would be in constant flux. A law one moment would be completely different the next. Imagine if we could not predict what gravity would do. If one moment we were seated in our seats watching a movie and the next moment hurtled into the sky headed toward the black void beyond. This image characterizes a random world.

Premise Challenge 3: evil is not the quality of an object but the moral state of an object. Therefore all things are neither good nor evil but neutral. This statement is true, but needs some clarification. Animals and things are considered morally neutral. A moral action requires the consent of the will. If the animal or object does not have the power to will an action that could be good or evil, then the action contains no moral culpability. A dog who jumps on the couch when the owner is home knows that the owner does not like this action. The dog does not see this action as good or bad but as receive a disproving reaction by the owner. The same dog who gets up on the couch when the owner is gone from the house does not see this action as good or bad but as a logical place to rest. In the above discussion of evil and good I am not referring to evil in a moral way but as the state of an object. All objects are considered good because they come from the creative power of God who is all good. Therefore an object does not have moral weight but does have the qualities inherent in it from the one who creates it. For example if I were to create a vase out of clay. The vase would resemble something of myself who is the creator. The object itself is not evil but can be used for an evil purpose. Similarly a good action such as caring for a person can be turned into an evil action but demanding money in return for helping that sick person.

### Origin of evil:

If God did not create evil nor could he create it, where does evil come from? This is the question we will explore throughout the next few topics.

### Free-will:

God gave humanity free will so that we can freely choose to love him. Inherent in the gift of free will is the choice between good and evil. Without the choice between good and evil we are forced to comply with whatever he chooses for us, in other words we would have no freedom. The power to choose evil causes a chain of event that leads to more evil in the world. For example if I choose to lie. As soon as I have told the lie, the trust between those to whom I have lied and I is broken down. The more that I choose to lie, the more these bonds of trust are reduced. This chain of broken relationships expands into those they warn about my tendency to lie and thus the world is different because I choose to lie. This example may seem like a slippery slope argument – as soon as I lie, the world becomes worse – but I think that we can all see the logic and the practical implications of this choice in daily life. The power to choose good over evil is one of the most powerful abilities that we as humans possess.

Within this power of choice I want to make one clarification. Although we have the power to choose good and evil, we technically never choose evil. I am going to make a bold statement that I think many people may disagree with at first, so let me explain. Every person on this planet always makes the choice for the good; conversely, no one ever chooses evil. Every person wants the good and wants to live a good life; no one chooses to live an evil life. This choice, however, does not mean that we choose the best good or even a better good. In many of our choices we choose to accept lesser goods because they lead to the best outcome in a limited sense. I chose to stay up late watching a TV show because I enjoyed it. My decision caused me to sleep less, become irritable in the morning, less productive at work, and my coworkers did not want me around. The choice for a lesser good caused many implications all of which were negative except for the enjoyment I got from staying up late watching the TV show.

### Original sin:

The Christian church proclaims that the “original sin” – the first sin that led to a world in which things are deprived of their greatest good – was the sin of Adam and Eve. The first parents of humanity made a choice in the Garden of Eden to choose eating of the forbidden fruit and disobey God’s command. This disobedience led all humanity into a state that tends towards choosing against God, aka concupiscence. As Scripture proclaims, through one man sin entered the world (Romans 5:14). Many people struggle with the idea that humans caused sin, and sin is depriving the world of its greatest good. Therefore humans are the cause of all the problems in the world. Let’s explore this.

### Evil and humanity’s fallen state:

I have already stated the effects of choosing a lesser good. Some people take this claim to its furthest extreme. The sins that we commit result in earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, volcanoes, and plagues. I have heard these arguments several times and I want to iterate only a few: the

crimes of homosexual people caused the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The same argument was used when Hurricane Katrina destroyed New Orleans. The statement that the HIV/AIDS epidemic was worsened by those who practiced unprotected sex with many partners which happens to be the promiscuous homosexuals is true. But this same idea can be used for any group of people or culture who committed the same acts. Therefore, the conclusion that the mistreatment of our bodies for sexual pleasure led to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is far more accurate. The idea that black people caused the downfall of society has merit when we expand the issue. Action and the subsequent reactions are the focal point not the prevalence of evil.

### **Implication of evil:**

Evil requires a good:

The presence of something that is evil precludes a good. In order for something good to be twisted into something evil, it must have been good from the beginning.

Personal fault for the evil in the world:

One of the most common questions asked, especially by those who are sick, is am I at fault for this? The answer is too complicated to explain fully. We live in a world that is already inundated with evil; we cannot escape it. Although we are at fault for many things, we are also not the cause or source of many evils. Therefore we have to be careful where we put personal fault. Some actions are our fault, others are not.

Sickness and death:

Is sickness and death the result of personal choices? Yes and no. The original choice against God led to death. Sickness intends death, but not necessarily. Sickness is a time when we encounter the limitations of the world and see evil face-to-face. The encounter with the problems of the world opens our eyes to see more fully the issues with which we are presented. Some illnesses are caused by the person, i.e. I am prone to diabetes and I choose to eat sugary and fatty foods. Many illnesses are a result of the world we live in. Fault is not the issue.

Limitations, Reconciliation, and Resurrection:

A world inundated with the effects of evil is not the end. God never intended a broken world. The state of the world as broken was always meant to be redeemed. Our power of choice was meant to be purified. Through the evil we see in the world we should always strive for something better and something more pure. The prevalence of evil only helps us to seek the greater goods and never settle for the lesser. Thus in the midst of a broken world is a great light that is calling us to something greater. Buddhists call this Nirvana, the Jewish people call this the Holy Land, Christians call it Heaven.