

Problem of Evil

The Philosophical-Theological problem of evil results from wanting to ascertain 3 propositions which seem inconsistent (which means that not all three can be true). These statements are:

1. God is All-Powerful (hence all knowing),
2. God is All-Loving,
3. Human Suffering (called "evil" in the Philosophical context) exists in the world.

The most common solution to this problem is that God gave free-will to his human creation, hence evil is the result of that Free-Will.

Here are some thought questions based on "free-will" theodicies:

Remember, your answers should NOT limit the power of a Deity, or the Knowledge of a Deity, or the fact that the Deity is all loving (since it is the apparent inconsistency between these three facts that causes the Problem of Evil, if one is denied or omitted, then the problem goes away).

Remember you need to answer these questions ONLY AFTER READING THE TEXTBOOK READINGS ON THE SUBJECT!

1.

Free-Will only explains the evil caused by other human beings or beings with a "mind" capable of choosing. This seems to leave unresolved the entire problem of human suffering caused by non-human (natural) causes, such as disease, earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, floods, natural disasters, etc.

Why would an all-powerful all-loving god create a world with such an abundance of natural evils?

Can "free-will" explain the necessity of these natural evils?

2.

If one assumes that such natural disasters were let into the world by the free actions of others (e.g. Adam and Eve partaking of a forbidden fruit, or Pandora opening the box) then one is seemingly faced with a God who punishes other people for the actions of someone else - which seems clearly unjust (imagine going to hell on the judgment day because your neighbor cheated on HIS wife!)

Can you think of a way that free-will could explain this discrepancy?

3.

The Free-will defense also seems to run into problems when it comes to *continued malevolent actions*. Since it seems just to incarcerate (take away one's freedom) those who have done bad to prevent them from doing further bad, it seems at least plausible that a just God would do the same, once one has done a sufficient amount of evil, then that person is no longer free to do more evil. Or on comparison of a Parent with a child unaware of the consequences of playing with Drano or some caustic acid, or gasoline. The parent takes away the child's freedom to play or use such things simply because the child is not fully aware of the consequences of those actions. Humans and a deity may very well be seen as at least sometimes an example of that relationship, since not all humans can foresee the consequences of their actions. So if it is just for humans to take away other's freedom to prevent further evil, then why is it not also just for a Deity to do so (for example, must 6 million Jews have died just so the Germans could have absolute unfettered freedom)?

4.

On the necessity for evil to exist in order to know good - how much evil must exist for good to be known? Must real evil exist, or can the "memory" of an imaginary evil suffice? (By example, must we ourselves experience a holocaust to know that it is wrong, or be burned again and again to remind ourselves that grabbing the hot pan will hurt, or is a memory or even a description sufficient) ? If one must experience human suffering in order to know good, does that not force us to abandon attempts to improve our lives, cure diseases, abolish poverty, protect people from natural disasters etc? Since, after all such things are necessary!

5. Seemingly, human memories are frail – lessons learned from the past must be re-learned again and again. This "fault" in our memory is certainly the cause of much human suffering – why would a god, who could create humans with a much better (or perfect) memory, require us to learn, forget, and re-learn again and again and again, at the price of human suffering?

6.

This leads to a further question, is evil ever abolished? Is evil also necessary in heaven or some other after-life. If not, then why here?

7.

On the Augustinian conception of evil being the result of a malfunctioning free-will, it seems that a free-will that malfunctions is contradictory, since free-will means not caused or not necessary, and

if something malfunctions, that seems to indicate a correct functioning, which is governed by a set of laws (hence not free). How might an Augustinian respond?

8. Does one run a risk of trivializing human suffering (or perhaps even worse, making suffering something desirable rather than to be avoided) by such attempts to explain its necessity in theological terms?

If human suffering is somehow good, or necessary, then is it unethical to help others (since their suffering is necessary, why bother?)

9. Which world view best explains human suffering (both natural, and caused by humans) ? A world view that posits an all powerful, all knowing, and all loving god, or a world view that is naturalistic, in that evolution and the mindless forces of nature are the ultimate cause of such evils (from earthquakes, to diseases, to un-ethical human behavior)?