

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

By Aslihan Aida Abdikoglu

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Tristan Nash Ph.D.

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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There is no doubt that evil exists in our world, whether it is in the forms of one's suffering from the inside or the destruction of entire populations, evil is real, and it causes terrible pain. But it is difficult to comprehend why do we suffer, could it be a punishment for our crimes? Though if we are innocent, it is troubling to think our omniscient, all-knowing God let this much evil exist in the World. We are God's children and he or she wants the best for us, but it's hard to accept since there are deadly sicknesses and wars. Is God a just God if the innocent children die? We can try solving this problem by considering, that God might not be all-powerful as we know it if he isn't strong enough to defeat evil. God is still good because there are beautiful things and happiness in the world like a birth of a child or pancakes for breakfast on a Sunday morning, but perhaps God isn't as strong to stop people from turning bad or to stop terrible things from happening. Even so, we hope that God has a plan for all of us and everything happens for a reason, but that doesn't justify why we suffer. Our God might not be all-powerful after all, but let's not give up on him just yet, there must be an explanation for the actions of God in our precisely built Universe.

However, the solution for the nature of evil in our world can also be found in a theory where if God were to stop people from becoming evil, he would need to take away the free will of humans, and he wouldn't be a Just God then. This is called the Free will defense developed by Alvin Plantinga. In this case it would mean we are no longer able to practice freedom and this argument could explain why there are terrorists and murderers. He is just because he gives us the freedom to become whoever we want to be, he has no control over what we choose to do with our lives. Yet, this isn't good enough of an argument, because it raises another problem; As I've mentioned above, if God has a plan for all of us, we don't have free will. We trust that we know

what we have control of, we like to believe that it is we that decide which socks we pick out to wear for the day, we have no further evidence to contradict this, so God may have a plan for us and he may show us and try to influence the directions in which we need to take to achieve that plan, but it is our actions, what we choose to say and do is what controls our lives.

That means that the free will defense wasn't satisfactory to solve our problem of evil, but even then, it half answered only the moral problem of evil. Plantinga suggests that the natural evil that is found in our world is the punishment we must suffer for Adam and Eve's sin that was influenced by moral evil. So, either we are still paying for Adam and Eve's sins anytime there is a natural catastrophe or perhaps our moral evil actions could cause the natural evil we suffer if we follow Plantinga's argument (Anon, n.d.).

Even so, how could we measure the level of what kind of moral evil causes what level of natural evil? I don't believe this argument is satisfactory to handle the natural problem of evil. Thus, we continue to ask what about the evil that is unnecessary that we call "gratuitous evil" (Peterson and Al, 2013) and the evil that comes from unintentional human actions? Earthquakes, floods that claim everything underwater, fires that turn everything into dust...pure destruction. There is an old saying, that we wouldn't be able to see the stars without the darkness. That good cannot exist without the bad, because we wouldn't know what is good if we didn't know any suffering. Still, that doesn't explain why we need to suffer to this extent to know the difference between good and bad... God could teach us the balance of good and that of evil with less evil. So far, we've discussed that God's powers cannot be so easily measured or judged solemnly by the actions he makes towards evil and that the free will defense fails when we take our lives into our own hands.

Therefore, the problem of evil still stands. Many before having tried to find an answer to the problem of evil and thought that maybe the answer is in some of the qualities God is known to have or not have. Theodicy is the word made up for the argument of why our perfect God allows evil to exist in our world (Sherry, 2015). Some have tried to see the equation if maybe God lost a few of his qualities. Such as what if he's not all good? The God figure in the Old Testament sure doesn't resemble the God most of us know today. Would a truly good being destroy an entire city or flood the whole planet? Interestingly the Old Testament God resembles our human qualities much more than the God figure in the New Testament, that God was also much more active in appearing in the lives of common folk and if we go back even before the Bible and look at the ancient Greek or Roman or even the Egyptian civilization, God figures were human like, some Gods lived among humans, some only visited them occasionally. Whereas if we had demigods and a God or Gods resembling a human form today, I doubt we would be as intimidated as people used to be by Zeus for example. This may be simply because of human evolution.

Nevertheless, I think to attempt to understand God and his actions we must look at his biggest enemy, Satan. We can consider that he might be almost as powerful as God, and, definitely as evil, as good God is and as cunning as God is all-knowing. There is no guarantee that Satan is incapable of doing good or that God is incapable of doing evil, we have no evidence of it, and it would be wrong to prejudice, but in the Book of Job, we do see some type of agreement being made between Satan and God, that raises our worry for the latter's trust.

In the Book of Job, Job's faith in God is tested. First of all, if God is all-knowing God should have known Job's loyalty to him, but then the whole story would be over in the beginning. So, God accepted the challenge to test Job even though he was a good man and

completely innocent. He lost his family and his cattle along with everything, he became ill and miserable, but he still prayed to God. In reality, Job was broken and furious because he knew he was innocent even when people tried to blame him for his losses and at one point he says “If I sin, what do I do to you, you watcher of humanity? Why have you made me your target? Why have I become a burden to you?” (Job, 7:20). His quote suggests some confusion in his faith, and if it's even worth it to be a good person if God doesn't care who suffers. Yet, he never gives up on God and teaches the reader that the question of true faith will come to us in the darkest of times and that is when we have to hold on. In the end, Job receives a gift from God and gets everything that he had in double, but not as a reward for his loyalty to God. Why would God do such a thing to an innocent man, when he must have known his true beliefs, considering he is all knowing. Elihu helps Job understand God's actions were not against Job, but for him, when he says “far be it from God, that he should do wickedness; and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity” (Job, 34:10) and that “Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out: he is excellent in power, and in judgment, and in plenty of justice: he will not afflict” (Job, 37:23). Elihu tries to make Job understand that it is pointless to go against God and pity ourselves to trust that whatever he does he does it for good reason. Well, when God takes Job and shows him the wonders of the universe, he begins to understand that there are many things we do not and cannot know, only God has access to the small details and the knowledge of it all. God has caused pain to Job, but he did it for something much greater than us that the human mind fails to understand. This suggests that doing evil can be justified by good reason, but at what cost? Or perhaps the wrongdoing of some in higher authority can be looked past. This theory is all perspective. Evil is evil, no matter the motivation behind it and we shouldn't use this method because people could easily have a debate on what is meant by “for the greater good” and could

end up doing terrible things living in the belief that it's a small sacrifice to pay for such a big cause. This problem still stands, but as another possible solution, we can look into the Soul-Making theory delivered by John Hick, that proposes "our suffering on this earth and the amount of it will help build our characters and our souls" (Peterson and Al, 2013). Explaining that whatever evil we face in our lives is to become stronger and it will help us get to where we want to go. Some people have it worse than others. We are created to be imperfect, unfinished beings to have the freedom to find our own ways and purpose in life whether that comes with only a little or much suffering. According to Hick's theory, a child that is born in poverty and have to fight for survival every day has more character building to do than someone who only has to deal with lesser evil, such as getting a flat tire on the way to work. This theory is incorrect and doesn't solve our problem and it also only attempts to solve the moral problem of evil. Despite being an unfair way by God to decide who needs to suffer more, character building has never proved to be successful by causing pain and suffering. For starters, what about the people that end up dying in their suffering?

Further, Eleonore Stump in her paper of the problem of evil in 1985 developed a theory that assessed both John Hick's, Richard Swinburne's and Alvin Plantinga's response to the problem. She had a fairly different solution to the problem of evil, approaching it from a Christian theological perspective. "She claims that a world full of evil and suffering is "conducive to bringing about both the initial human [receipt of God's gift of salvation] and also the subsequent process of sanctification" (Stump cited in Anon, n.d). She holds that the evil we must face in our lives serves as a reminder for our own fragility and makes us appreciate the good in our lives even more. That she believes is one of the most sufficient way for us to realize. As cited in The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy "But evil of this sort is the best hope, I

think, and maybe the only effective means, for bringing men to such a state” (Stump cited in Anon, n.d).

According to this, we should be able to develop a more intimate relationship with God, where experiencing both the natural and moral evil should bring us to both an understanding and humble state of mind. I cannot agree much with this argument as it raises questions in me towards the nature of God again and the kind of relationship, we ought to have with him. This sounds as if we must be led into blind belief by fear and that we must be grateful to our own lives especially after suffering from evil. There has to be a healthier way in which our belief is not led by fear from the evil.

The problem of evil is essentially the attempt to make sense out of the possibility if the good and the evil could coexist, and if so in what form? We may know more about the nature of good than we do of the nature of evil, but both of those things are quite similar as much as they are complete opposites and perhaps that is why it's such a hardly resolvable philosophical problem, but none the less even after Stump's argument, we continue to ask why we must have misery and tragedy assuming we are innocent, and we should continue to trust God, but Evil is not that simple. As soon as God tries to intervene in our lives, whether it is stopping something from happening or someone from doing something, we immediately loose our free will. So evil, is not just famine and murderers or sicknesses like cancer. Evil is cunning and it constantly surrounds us. Evil can lure into corners of the classroom, it can be heard in the news and even found in parts of ourselves. But so, as good, these two energies are in constant flow, some people have it balanced and some less so. Good people can do small evil just as bad people can do small, good things. We humans are forevermore being tested at our actions and in going for what is good for us only or do something for the greater good. The problem of evil is one that

questions a lot about our faith in God and even our whole existence and our trust in the way of life, it might be one problem we can either accept with its flaws or forever continue searching for until we shall find everything out before our journey to the other world. As Job realized, there are many things in this world we may not understand the meaning of, Job said “Agree with God, and be at peace, thereby good will come to you. Receive instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart” (Job, 22:21-22). We can keep searching for answers, but we should consider that the answer to our questions is within, because we are all part of the big picture. Sometimes to find what we’re looking for all we have to do is let go of worry and listen with an open mind.

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