

The problem of Evil and its relation to God's existence

The problem of evil is one that is earliest brought up by Epicurus (341BC - 270BC) as he asks if God is willing to prevent evil but is unable, can he really be called omnipotent? In the same vein he asks if God is able but not willing, then he cannot be called omnibenevolent. Finally, he asks if God is able and willing to prevent evil, and if so, why does evil exist in the world? If this is the case, Epicurus ponders on why we call him God at all (Hume, 1779, p. 186). This sentiment is echoed by many philosophers and challenged by religious scholars, all working off his original explanation of the Inconsistent Triad. Most believers in a monotheistic religion subscribe to the idea that God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnibenevolent, however, because evil exists in the world i.e. pain and injustice, God could be said to lack any or all of these attributes. William L. Rowe proposes that if God is omniscient then he knows that evil is happening, and if he is omnibenevolent then he loves us enough to stop our suffering at the hands of evil. Nevertheless, evil still occurs. And if he is unable to stop evil, he cannot be omnipotent either. Therefore, he does not exist (Rowe, 1979, p. 336). This shatters the three core elements of God's nature and places a lingering doubt in the back of believer's minds about God's existence (Hick, 1966, p. 3).

There are two types of evil; the first being natural evil e.g. natural disasters, physical evils such as pain and mental anguish, and metaphysical evils like imperfections in a person's temperament that cause aggressive behaviour, the second type of evil is moral evil, evil acts that are willfully perpetrated by people e.g. name-calling, assault and murder (Hick, 1966, p. 18). One of the first morally evil acts is detailed in the Bible in Genesis 4:4–15, where Cain murders his brother Abel. One of the main theories as to why Cain did this is because his fruits of the soil were not looked on favourably by God, whilst Able's offering of fat from some of his flock was, and Cain is believed to have killed him in jealousy. He lies to God when he asks where Abel is and even retorts 'Am I my brother's keeper?' (International Bible Society, 1979, p. 3) not only showing that he has little remorse for the murder but also showing that he thinks of himself as above the consequences of it, revealing the metaphysical imperfections of his psyche. This event could be argued to show that God does not possess Omnibenevolence as he is already shown to know what happened to Abel, 'Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.' Surely God would love Abel enough to save him from his brother's attack, and yet he doesn't. This is an instance in which Evil coincides with the existence of God, within the Bible. In spite of the many other instances of evil in the Bible, most Abrahamic religions can still be said to believe in God's three core elements. As J.L.Mackie says in '*Evil and Omnipotence*':

If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omni-potent, or that evil does not exist,... then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

(Mackie, 1955, p. 202)

This is true for many followers of polytheistic religions where it is seen as more acceptable for the Gods to have flaws, and evil is seen as a consequence or deliberate creation of an evil God.

Religious scholars and Philosophers have challenged the Inconsistent Triad as an explanation of how God does not exist. One of these is proposed by Saint Augustine and details that evil does not exist itself, it is a privation of good. Augustine insisted that 'whatever evil may be it neither comes from God nor detracts in any way from His sole and

majestic sovereignty' (Hick, 1966, p. 45). Written in Augustine's autobiography *Confessions* is the belief that a wholly good being, i.e. God could not create evil and Augustine found it better to believe this to be true (Augustine, 397-400AD, p. 65). This means that God is not responsible for evil that occurs on Earth as he was not the one to create evil, keeping his Omniscient and Omnibenevolent nature intact. This theodicy is expounded upon by Alvin Plantinga who states that evil is the result of free-willed, rational and fallible human beings. God cannot create creatures who are morally good without creating ones that are morally evil, and he can't give them the freedom to perform evil and also prevent them from doing so, justifying the existence of evil and why God had to create it. This does not go against God's omnipotence or his moral perfection, he still has the power to stop evil existing however doing so would erase the point of him granting us free-will in the beginning (Plantinga, 1977, p. 30). This free-will was given to us by God and it truly shows that evil can be a tool used to heal us, for humans can endure much suffering without dying and end up as more morally perfect after it. John Hick calls this endurance the 'Vale of Soul making', further proving why certain kinds of evil materialised by our free-will need to exist to keep the morally good among us resilient from inflicting evil onto others.

To conclude, both the Inconsistent Triad's followers and its detractors make compelling arguments as to how their positions on the problem of evil prove or disprove God's existence, however, J.L.Mackie puts it best on why evil does not disprove God's existence, 'the gradual overcoming of evil by good is really a finer thing than would be the eternal unchallenged supremacy of good' (Mackie, 1955, p. 206).

Reference List

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