

"What is the Doctrine of Theodicy?" (student copy)

Genesis 18:25 (NET 2nd ed.)

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Theodicy is a branch of philosophy dealing with the issue of evil in light of the existence of God *who is Holy*.

Development

Theodicy is based on the belief in an orderly universe which is created by a beneficent God. It seeks to answer how a benevolent, omnipotent, omniscient God allows suffering and pain in His creation.

What evil is, *and* is "not"

The primary issue with the "Problem of Evil" is defining what evil actually is. Evil is typically seen *by many people* as a force opposed to good, forming a *sort of* yin and yang or two poles of a magnet.

Any premise that requires God to have created, formed, or generated evil is immediately invalidated. All that is required, then, is for God to have "allowed" it.

"Did God create evil?"

In summary, God did not create evil, but permits its existence. By allowing evil, God gave both humans and spirit beings the freedom to choose rather than serving out of mere obligation.

He did not and does not desire "robots" who follow His will without choice or thought; instead, God made it possible to have genuine free will and make our own decision whether to serve Him or not.

Our will versus God's will

First, God could simply not create anything at all, *thereby eliminating the possibility of both good and evil in the world*.

Second, God could create but allow nothing in His creation the capacity for moral free will. In other words, *allowing no deviation from His will that leads to "evil."* But this makes a mockery of every other emotion, ideal, and benefit that critics of God want to uphold. In short, a universe logically incapable of evil is also one logically incapable of love, nobility, sacrifice or success *or even goodness because there would be no moral standard for either*.

A being unable to partake in evil is also incapable of exhibiting mercy, compassion, or love, *once again because there would be no moral standard for such. In fact, he may see them one and the same*. It's not hard to see how, if God had created things with this limitation, creation would seem like a *useless activity and waste of time*.

Logically, it stands to reason that God allows the potential for evil because such freedom is intrinsically the same that allows the potential for nobility and virtue. Without that potential no love or other “good” things can actually occur.

So why allow evil?

Logic says that God does not have to create evil in order for there to be evil. *That is evident when we make the decisions to commit evil acts on our own accord.*

The first point that must be realized is that God is consistent in His “allowance” of our free will and the natural function of His creation.

The second point to make is that God is not motionless, silent, and inactive in the face of evil. Here, again, is a point where the critic becomes inconsistent.

God has already taken steps to neutralize and counter evil. Saying He does “nothing” is simply untrue. Complaining that He does “too much” to stop evil is all well and good, but that makes theodicy irrelevant and, *therefore*, the problem of evil moot.

The third point is that we have a limited perspective. This is not a very persuasive argument, especially for someone hostile to the idea of God.

But, logically, it has to be said that the God under examination is omniscient, omnipotent, eternal, and omnipresent. We, of course, are not.

The Bible makes it clear that the struggles we experience now are not the purpose for which we exist, nor do they define our value. Instead, there is a point to the suffering and a plan that involves making all wrongs right.

Back to the beginning

The “problem of evil” refers to the apparent conflict between the idea of an all-powerful, loving God and the reality of suffering and wrongdoing in the world. Some critics argue that the presence of evil disproves the existence of the omnipotent, benevolent God described in the Bible. They suggest that because bad things happen to good people, either God does not exist or is less kind or less powerful than religious texts claim.

An all-powerful, all-good God can allow evil in order to obtain the greater, eternal good.

Conclusion:

Human beings will always struggle with the problem of evil. Theodicy is not an attempt to make God appear as palatable as possible. In fact, the opposite is true.

The Bible makes it clear that evil is something God neither intended nor created. Rather, moral evil is a necessary possibility. If we are truly free, then we are free to choose something other than God’s will—that is, we can choose moral evil.

Scripture points out that there are consequences for defying the will of God—personal, communal, physical, and spiritual.

The Bible “frames” the problem of evil by keeping it in the proper context. “Evil” is meaningless without something to compare it to. For comparison, we have the original creation of God, called “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

We have the standard of goodness in God Himself. And we have an explanation for the various causes of evil and suffering.

Likewise, we see that this physical world is not all there is. Nor is this mortal life all we have been made for. We can experience physical struggles such as “mourning” and “persecution” (Matthew 5:4, 11) while looking to a greater, more permanent state of being “blessed.”

A truly rational theodicy has to begin with the admission that our dislike of something does not make it false.

The question is not whether God is compatible with our personal preferences. The problem of evil is simply the debate over whether or not God is logically possible.

Theodicy, taking all logic and evidence together, clearly says He is—whether we like Him or not.

Taken as a whole, as it is intended, the Bible describes evil as something God allowed, but never condoned, for the sake of our free will. All through history, God has taken steps to limit the influence of evil.

And, most importantly, God Himself took the consequences of our sin, so every person can have access to forgiveness and salvation.

As a result, all sin, evil, and suffering will someday be completely ended. Beyond the philosophical or theological aspects of this issue, Scripture in and of itself goes a long way to neutralizing the power of the “problem of evil.”