Theodicy: God and the Problem of Evil

Introduction

Theodicy: From the Greek words for God (*theos*) and justice (*dikē*) - It is an attempt to vindicate divine goodness and providence in view of the existence of evil.

Three facts that seem to be in tension:

1. God is all-good
2. God is all-powerful
3. Evil exists

"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" – David Hume

Summary: How do we defend the facts that God is good and God is powerful if he allows the holocaust, child-molestation, infanticide, wars, terrorism, cancer, rape, etc.

Attempts to solve this tension

1. Simply deny that God is good.

Problems

1 John 1:5 - This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Psalm 106:1 - Praise the Lord! Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

Psalm 119:68 - You are good and do good; teach me your statutes.

Nahum 1:7 - The Lord is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; he knows those who take refuge in him.

James 1:13 - Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

2. Simply deny that God is sovereign over evil.

Problems

Deuteronomy 32:39 - See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god beside me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; and there is none that can deliver out of my hand.

Isaiah 45:5-7 - I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you,

though you do not know me, that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the Lord, and there is no other. <u>I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the Lord, who does all these things.</u>

Exodus 4:11 - Then the Lord said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? <u>Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?</u>

Genesis 50:20 - As for you, <u>you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good</u>, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

Job 1:12 - And the Lord said to Satan, <u>"Behold, all that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand."</u> So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.

1 Samuel 16:14 - Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a <u>harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him</u>.

1 Kings 22:23 - Now therefore behold, <u>the Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets</u>; the Lord has declared disaster for you."

2 Corinthians 12:7-9 - So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, <u>a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me</u>, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness…"

2 Samuel 24:1 compared with 1 Chronicles 21:1. The first says <u>the Lord incited David to number Israel</u> and the second, when recounting this incident, says that <u>Satan incited David to number Israel</u>.

3. Simply deny that evil exists.

    <u>Problems</u>

        -The Bible teaches that some things are evil.
        -Even a non-Christian intuitively knows evil exists.

4. Blame evil on human "free-will."

The "free-will" argument: *It was not logically possible for God to create a world where 1). humans had free choice and 2). there was not the possibility of humans using that free choice in a bad way.*

Explanation: Am I evil if I give a homeless person a pair of shoes and they strangle themselves with the laces? Why not?

Note: I don't like this argument, but it does give a reason for evil in the world that is logically consistent with God being all-good and all-powerful and, therefore, does solve the problem of

evil.

Problems

-There are Bible passages that say that God is sovereign over our wills.
-Some chaos in the universe seems like it didn't come as a result of human sin.
-God could have used people he knew would "freely" choose not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
-God could have not created the devil if he knew the devil would fall and tempt man.
-This position says that God is unable to do something he wants to do (remove evil or overcome someone's will).
-Christians in heaven and angels won't be able to sin for all eternity and yet they apparently have some type of free will.
-God doesn't have even the ability to do evil. Would we say he is not "free?"

5. Say God had to allow evil so that we could see what goodness is.

Example: Light in a dark room.

Problems

-God's decisions for his glory are based on what he wants, not on what humans recognize as glorious.
-One can see that God is good without evil (Adam, Eve, and the angels, for example, knew God's goodness before the fall).
-Are we really willing to say that God allows all the rape and murder just so we can see something we already know? Would you abuse your child and then give them a toy so they appreciate the toy more?
-This answer makes it sound like God needs evil to be glorious.

6. Say that God created the world good, but imperfect, so that humans could grow in moral virtue ("soul-building").

Problems

-It makes God's creation imperfect.
-In this scheme God fails. Many people do not get better through a difficult life.
-Couldn't God have just created people better without them having to suffer?
-It's not biblical. Mankind is seen as morally better in the garden of Eden than after, etc.

Attempts to explain God and evil

1. Without God there is no evil at all.

2. Without God there is no good either.

"We cannot raise the question: How can there be evil if God exists? Without raising the second: How can there be good if He exists not?" -Boethius

3. Evil is not based merely upon the action itself; it is based on the end goal.

Examples: Using a knife to cut someone (surgery or stabbing)? Pushing someone (in a fight or out of the way of an oncoming car)?

If God has a purpose for what we call evil, that is, ultimately good, then it is not inconsistent to say that he is all-good, all-powerful, and that evil exists to serve this good end. This is not saying that God himself can personally do evil for a good purpose. It is saying he can use *human and demonic evil* to do good.

"To put it bluntly, God stands behind evil in such a way that not even evil takes place outside the bounds of his sovereignty yet the evil is not morally chargeable to him: it is always chargeable to secondary agents, to secondary causes. On the other hand, God stands behind good in such a way that it not only takes place within the bounds of his sovereignty, but it is always chargeable to him, and only derivatively to secondary agents." –D.A. Carson

4. Evil is not a thing that exists; rather it is a lack of substance (i.e. a "privation").

Examples: The hole in a shirt where a shirt should be. A shadow.

"Sin is not any kind of essence but a defect and corruption…because the creature [humans]…may thus do something which is not from God, according to God, or because of God. This is sin, which is the corruption of mode, species, and order. Because sin is a defect, it cannot be said to have an efficient cause [i.e. something that directly acts upon it to make it do something]; rather, it has a deficient cause – namely, the defection of the created will." –St. Bonaventure

5. God has a reason for evil that he has not given us, so we trust him even when we do not know the answers.

-If God told us why he did everything, that would actually be bad for us. It would teach us to only trust him when we understood what he was doing instead of just trusting him for who he is as God.

6. God is beyond human critique.

7. The Bible always blames humans for our sin, and it is Jesus who comes to destroy evil.

-You cannot say God is responsible for evil without also saying he is responsible for getting rid of evil in Christ.