Theodicy: An Overview

Introduction

All of us struggle at one time or another in life with why evil happens to someone, either ourselves, our family, our friends, our nation, or perhaps some particularly disturbing instance in the news—a child raped, a school shooting, genocide in another country, a terrorist bombing. The following material is meant to give an overview of the discussion of this issue as it takes place in several circles, especially that of the Christian church.

I. The Problem of Evil Defined

Three terms, "the problem of evil," "theodicy," and "defense" are important to our discussion. The first two are often used as synonyms, but strictly speaking the problem of evil is the larger issue of which theodicy is a subset because one can have a secular problem of evil. Evil is understood as a problem when we seek to explain why it exists (*Unde malum?*) and what its relationship is to the world as a whole. Indeed, something might be considered evil when it calls into question our basic trust in the order and structure of our world.

Peter Berger in particular has argued that explanations of evil are necessary for social structures to stay themselves against chaotic forces. It follows, then, that such an explanation has an impact on the whole person. As David Blumenthal observes, a good theodicy is one that has three characteristics:

1. "[I]t should leave one with one's sense of reality intact." (It tells the truth about reality.)
2. "[I]t should leave one empowered within the intellectual-moral system in which one lives." (Namely, it should not deny God's basic power or goodness.)
3. "[I]t should be as intellectually coherent as possible." (It is an answer that is both coherent and life-satisfying.)

This is not to suggest that every culture deals with evil in the same way. As Amélie Rorty notes, evil and its relationship to the world has been understood in the West in a number of ways, including the following:

- The Neo-platonic: Evil as the privation or negation of the good or being, so that evil is only evil set against the greater good.
- Theodicy and coherentism: Evil can be understood as part of or in relationship to God's larger plans for the cosmos.
- Manichaeanism: Good and evil are equal conflicting powers expressing their opposition in human history.
- Pious rationalism: Human reason cannot understand evil, but reason must postulate a God to explain human morality.
- Pious fidiesm: Human reason cannot understand evil, so a leap of faith is required to trust in God.

- Pessimism: Evil is real, but the world does not make sense nor can it be understood.
- Non-existent: Evil does not actually exist; rather, human beings project their own subjective disapproval onto events and actions.

II. Theodicy Defined

"Theodicy" is a term that Leibniz coined from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *dike* (righteous). A theodicy is an attempt to justify or defend God in the face of evil by answering the following problem, which in its most basic form involves these assumptions:

1. God is all good and all powerful (and, therefore, all knowing).
2. The universe/creation was made by God and/or exists in a contingent relationship to God.
3. Evil exists in the world. Why?

Notice what this problem suggests. It begins with the assumption that such a being as God will want to eliminate evil. If God is all good but not all powerful or knowing, then perhaps he doesn't have the ability to intervene on every occasion. Likewise, if God is all powerful and knowing but not all good, then perhaps he has a mean streak. If God is somehow all these things, but the universe does not exist in a contingent relationship, then God has little to do with evil (even though God's design can still be faulted). However, if God is both good and powerful, then why does evil exist?

Now, this problem assumes several things. The first point implies that God is a personal being, though not all theodicists would agree. Likewise, the second point assumes that God interacts, or at least has interacted at some point, with the world. And that we can recognize evil is in the world assumes that "evil" is something that can be rendered intelligible and, therefore, discussed. Evil is typically defined as any undesired state of affairs and is generally considered to include both *moral* evil, acts done by humans, and *natural* evil, which includes pain and suffering that results from natural disasters, diseases, or genetic defects.

As one can see this is an issue within and surrounding monotheism. Evil, its origin and purpose, takes on a different meaning when seen from the perspective of a polytheistic, atheistic, or non-theistic belief system. A system in which there are multiple divine powers, no power, or some form of impersonal cosmic force (e.g Tao) will not conceive of the problem in this way. Evil can not only be conceived in metaphysical and religious terms as abomination, disobedience, malevolence, impurity, and dishonor (or alternately in some Eastern systems as illusion or imbalance), it can also be understood in essentially natural or secular terms as social vice, egoism, partiality, corruption, criminality, and sociopathology (cf. Rorty). And many of these while not antithetical to a theistic belief system are not dependent upon one either.

As Forrest E. Baird points out, theodicts tend to address one of four audiences:

1. Atheists/atheodicists who reject the existence of God or who charge believers in God with being irrational on the grounds that the above is illogical;
2. "moral" atheists who find the notion of God repugnant because of the amount of evil and suffering;

3. theists who are troubled by the above; and
4. sufferers of all kinds—atheists or theists.

This is important to keep in mind because theodicts and more general reflections and testimonies to the problem of evil are not necessarily addressing the same social and historical contexts. Within the Christian form of monotheism, additional resources involving the Trinity, especially Christ, can and do play a role in formulating a theodicy. And it should also be stressed that among theists there are additional points of debate, especially concerning the nature of God and free will. Often, the theist is asking questions of theodicy in order to better understand God and/or better understand the call to Christian conversion, while a debate between theists and atheists may be more concerned with the very tenability of "God" as a being considering the existence of evil. For the former, the problem takes an "aporetic" approach, teasing out the difficulties and going deeper into the resources of the faith (Adams and Adams 2). For the later, the problem is one of challenge to God or challenge to self as to why such evils exist at all.

III. "Defense" Defined

A "defense' differs from a theodicy in that rather than trying to provide an answer to all of the above, a defense seeks to show that theistic belief in God in the face of evil is *rational*. Strictly speaking, a logical defense is not making claims about how God actually works as much as showing that the atheistic charges can be meet. Having said this, the insights of the defenders and those of the theodicists often overlap, and the term "theodicy" is often used to describe defenses as well.

Key Approaches

Each of these problems could be said to have dual audiences—the various atheists who question the existence of God on their basis, and those believers who because of their belief wish to answer these questions as well. The basic approaches to theodicy can be said to take three forms: logical/deductive, evidential/inductive, and existential.

I. The Logical Problem of Evil: The logical problem of evil is a deductive one. Namely, given the above problem (God is loving, all powerful and all knowing, yet evil exists), is it rational to believe in the existence of God?

The problem is an old one expressed for different reasons in different contexts perhaps first by Epicurus, but clearly expanded upon by Lactantius, Marcion, Boethius, and Aquinas. The modern formulation of this problem by John Mackie is also very similar to David Hume's eighteenth-century version. Mackie's formulation of the problem looks like this:

1. God exists, is all good, all knowing, and all powerful.
2. Such a being has no limits to its ability.
3. A good being will always eliminate all the evil that it can.

4. Evil exists, so God must not.

Theists will agree with the first two claims but call into question the third by qualifying it: "A good being will always eliminate all the evil that it can *unless it has good reason to allow that evil*."

Therefore, a modified version of Mackie's argument looks like this:

1. "If God exists, then there is no evil, unless there is a reason that would justify Him in permitting it."
2. Evil exists.
3. "There is no reason that would justify God to permit evil."
4. So, God does not exist.

The crux of the theistic response is to show that indeed God *is indeed justified* in permitting evil.

II. The Evidential Problem of Evil: The evidential problem admits that God and the existence of evil are not logically incompatible, yet considers if the amount or kinds of evil in the world count as probable evidence against the existence of God. This approach argues that the large amount of evil in the world and/or the existence of unjustified evil (variously called *surd*, superfluous, pointless, gratuitous) mitigate against a plausible belief in God because we assume God would not allow for the existence of evil that appears to have no good purpose. The following are examples of these objections:

*   It seems that God could have eliminated more evil in the world and still accomplished the divine purposes.
*   An overwhelmingly large amount of the evil in the world does not seem to be connected to the divine purposes.
*   How are God's purposes accomplished by the unfair distribution of evil? Namely, some experience far more evil than others.
*   It seems unlikely that any divine goal could justify all of the evil as experienced by the world, in particular the most horrific evils.
*   Is such a God who does things this way worthy of worship, and therefore, plausible?

The crux of these arguments has been put forth by William Rowe. Rowe suggests that there are always events in which it is reasonable for us to assume that something doesn't exist if we have no evidence of it existing. For example, the woman who searches her purse completely and can't find her keys. Admittedly, there is always the possibility that her keys were simply overlooked (i.e. they do exist), but it is highly unlikely.

The theist tends to answer by stressing God's infinite capacity as compared with human limitations. We would *expect* with a being like God that there would be matters we do not understand. There are situations in which we can't expect to be able to see what it is we're looking for, such as most of us trying to solve a quantum physics problem. In the same way, it

cannot be shown conclusively that God would not have a purpose for allowing the kinds, distribution, and amount of evil found in the world.

III. The Existential Problem of Evil: As often called the "religious," "personal," or "pastoral" problem of evil, the existential problem is one that asks, "Why my suffering and/or evil at this time in this way in this place?" In one sense, all theodicy is practical, in that it takes place within a specific social and intellectual context amidst an environment that is often polemical and focused on problem-solving, but the practical, existential theodicy is more concerned with providing answers for those who suffer in specific circumstances. Often, the existential problem turns from asking why God allow such-and-such an evil to what can humans made in the image of God do to alleviate or make manageable suffering and evil. Likewise, the focus turns more to how believers should respond to God while suffering (i.e. faith, protest, mysticism, the sacraments and worship). As Allender and Longman point out, the sufferer has a number of questions beyond whether God is just:

- "Will God let the wicked win?"
- "Can I trust God to protect me from harm?"
- "Can the harm God allows have any good purpose?"
- "Will God leave me empty while others are blessed?"
- "Will God satisfy my hungers?"
- "Will God leave me insolated and alone?"
- "Does God love me, or will he turn away in disgust?"

Related Issues and Problems

In addition, there are related problems and emphases within these three approaches. They include some of the following:

I. Natural Evil: The problem of natural evil involves pain and suffering that results from natural disasters, diseases, or genetic defects, including that of animal pain and suffering. Like the problem of moral evil, the problem of natural evil examines whether the existence of natural evil is compatible with an all-perfect, all-knowing, loving, and powerful being. The following ten views are found among various Christian thinkers (Boyd 248ff.):

1. "Natural evil fulfills a higher divine purpose." Pain, suffering, and disorder in the natural world are ultimately part of a larger good plan of cosmic order. (Augustine)
2. Natural evil is the result of human sin. God subjected or cursed the natural world to decay and death because of human rebellion. In doing so, God brings about a world where we are no longer comfortable in our present moral autonomy from the Creator.
3. Natural "evil" isn't evil per se. It is simply a function of the world of time. Only moral evil is truly evil.
4. "Natural evil is the inevitable by-product of God's aim of developing souls with moral character." (Hick) There must exist between imperfect, immature humans and the perfect

God an "epistemic distance" that makes our growth possible. As such, the world has an imperfect character.

5. "Natural evil is nature's way of participating in the self-sacrificial life of God" (Murphy & Ellis). All of life has a *kenotic* or cruciform quality to it—some must give their lives that others might live.

6. Natural evil exists because nature is imperfect, having been created and being sustained by a God who limits himself to persuasion (Process theology). In process thought, the world may resist God *at every level*, including the natural one.

7. Natural evil results from the potential hazards in a world that makes morally significant choices possible. We cannot conceive of a world which would allow for moral evil without natural evil because natural evil is part of an orderly system with consequences (Swinburne, Peterson).

8. Natural evil results from the random spontaneity that the natural world must have in order to be a changing system that is separate from God (Polkinghorne).

9. Natural evil is the nothingness or non-being that results whenever God creates something and that continues to try and encroach on creation (Barth).

10. Natural evil is the result of demonic forces who control matter in part and oppose God's will for creation (Boyd).

II. Evil and the Demonic: Given the belief in supernatural powers among all three monotheistic faiths, what role does the demonic (and the angelic) have to do with evil? This question has been approached in four basic ways:

1. The role of the demonic powers in temptation, oppression, and possession of individuals. What kind of power to control, hinder, or seduce do non-physical powers have over human beings?

2. The role of demonic powers in social and national evils. Is there a spiritual power behind large-scale social and national evils?

3. The control of angelic or demonic powers over the natural world. Do such powers have any responsibility for animal pain or natural disasters?

4. The moral logic of postulating the demonic to explain certain radical evils, such as serial killers or genocides.

III. The History of Theodicy: Theodicy is a centuries old set of questions. Historical scholarship often looks at theodicy as a history of ideas and/or social ideologies. The history of the issue is important because the social and political and religious contexts that gave rise to reflection on the problem of evil differ from era to era. While various thinkers' reflections may be said to be semi-commensurable or, at least, analogous, one cannot set aside a historical sense of where various insights come from.

The question is whether enough commensurability exists across periods and thinkers to say that a tradition exists or that later theodicts are justified in borrowing earlier ideas. Some have gone so far as to suggest that theodicy is a *modern* problem, that earlier formulations while concerned with evil are in no way attempting to justify God, rather to argue for a specific God (Marcion),

explain the role of wisdom (Boethius), or the purposes of conversion within a history of salvation (Augustine).

A history of theodicy in Christian tradition would have to deal with the following:

- Iraneaus
- Lactantius
- Augustine
- Pseudo-Dionysius
- Augustine
- Anselm
- Thomas Aquinas
- The Mystics
- Luis de Molina
- Luther
- Calvin
- Malebranche
- Pierre Bayle
- Leibniz
- Hume
- Kant
- Schleiermacher
- Karl Barth
- Simone Weil:
- Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne
- Dorothee Soelle
- Teihard de Chardin
- Jacques Maritain
- Austin Farrer

IV. The Literature of Theodicy: Likewise, literature and the arts in general also deal with and interact with issues involving theodicy and evil. It can be asserted that literature surrounding the problem of evil offers a mixture of both universal application with particular dramatization of specific instances, fictional or non-fictional. For some literature, art, or aesthetics also offers models for how the problem of evil may be understood. Some works dealing with this problem include:

- Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*
- Milton, *Paradise Lost*
- Pope, *Essay on Man*
- Voltaire, *Candide*
- Goethe, *Faust*
- Tennyson, *In Memoriam*
- Doestoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*
- T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*
- Camus, *The Plague*

- Elie Weisel, *Night*
- Annie Dillard, *Holy the Firm* and *For the Time Being*
- Walter Wangerin, *The Book of Sorrows*
- Mark Jarman, *Questions for Ecclesiates* and *Unholy Sonnets*

V. Theodicy and Scripture: The issues of God's creation, evil, suffering, pain, oppression, etc. in the scriptures play an important role in the formulation of theodicies. A biblical response to this would need to account for some of the following:

- Old and New Testament concepts of sin and evil
- A discussion of the biblical Fall
- The biblical treatment of the angelic and demonic
- God's suffering in both testaments
- The role of personal, communal, and social evil
- Job
- God's judgment and mercy
- A biblical model of shame, dishonor, and impurity
- The work of the cross
- The large cosmic vision of the Bible--Creation, Fall, Redemption
- The Jewish tradition of protest in prayer

VI. The Politics of Theodicy: What role do theodicies unwittingly have in the experience of oppression and suffering, as well as that of liberation, among various classes of people, especially that of political minorities or women? Why is there an imbalance in the experience of suffering and evil among classes, races, and even among individuals? It is possible, for instance, that a theodicy by explaining the causes of evil and suffering may serve as a justification for both the powerful and the powerless (Berger 59).

VII. The Experience of Suffering: Likewise, in what way does the experience of suffering among peoples and individuals speak to issues of theodicy? What does the bodily experience of suffering have to say about imagination, resistance, and/or psychological damage? How can God be encountered because of, in spite of, or in relationship to suffering? Is suffering ultimately mysterious? Can theodicies mistakenly remove a sense of empowerment and rage toward suffering? The experiences of women have been vital to understanding in this area.

VIII. Horrific Evil: Sometimes called "horrendous" evil, this focuses on the most horrible and intense forms of evil—the Holocaust, child abuse and rape, extreme schizophrenia, torture, mass genocide, etc. Can God be said to be justified in allowing these? Should one even speak of justification before such atrocities? Likewise, what hope of restoration and healing can be given to survivors? What role do purity and defilement, honor and shame, and beauty and ugliness play in such matters?

IX. The Judgment of God: Many theodicy discussions tend to focus on "innocent" suffering and experiences of profound evil while ignoring the profound sinfulness embedded in individuals, in ideas and belief systems, and in social structures. God acts to judge these—both in this life and in the next. Thus, one has to ask the question as to whether a certain experience for an individual,

group, or nation is a judgment upon their sin. Alternately, one can take some comfort in knowing that the oppressor will be judged eventually by God. Likewise, how can the present experience of evil be understood as a kind of battlefield in which God's judgment upon sin and evil is even now being carried out?

X. The Hiddenness of God: Why does God often seem not to openly, visibly respond to evil (or good) in an indisputable way? The divine hiddenness of God (*deus absconditus*) is sometimes considered a subset of theodicy because the way God responds or his refusal to respond is often felt to be part of the problem for atheists and agnostics (as well as theists at times). Some have suggested that God acts this way in part to preserve a freedom of will—his continual revelation of his presence would be coercive.

XI. Metaphysical Evil: What exactly is evil in anyway? What is its origin and essence? One standard response is that evil is the privation or negation of the good or being, so that evil only exists as the absence of the good. Evil is a form of corruption, chaos, even literally "nothing," a weakened or incomplete good. Others suggest that evil must have some positive or actual existence because evil seems to act and destroy in deliberate ways in the world.

Classic and Contemporary Christian Responses

I. The Free Will Model: God wanted us to freely love him, which meant allowing for the possibility that we might choose against him. And we have--all of us since Adam and Eve. Free will provides a great good—self-determination--and carries with it significant responsibility, which is also a great good. This is especially true of relationships involving love: such must be entered into freely. Evil is an unfortunate result of human free will. If God were to intervene at every point of our wrongdoing, our free will would be compromised. So evil in the world is not entirely God's fault; however, this position does not claim that God is not responsible in any way for evil. If you have the power to intervene and do not, that implies choices.

Among theists there are a number of positions on the nature of God and free will. The two most important for our purposes are the libertarian and compatibilist positions. The compatibilist believes that human free will and God's determination of all things are compatible, while the libertarian holds that God has restricted his power in order to make human free will possible.

II. The Soul Making Model: We are incomplete souls in need of improvement and growth. Notice that this model also assumes free-will (Michael J. Murray calls the former "consequent free will" theodicies and soulmaking versions, "antecedent condition free will" theodicies.). Evil is a necessary condition for a world in which we overcome obstacles and struggles in order to develop. In fact, many *higher-order goods* (e.g. self-sacrifice, endurance, courage, compassion on the poor, etc.) are not possible unless we have to overcome evil. This model points out that God often allows the condition of suffering to improve us. We become purified through life's trials. Some versions of this suggest that our purification and growth will continue in the afterlife.

III. The Possible Worlds/ Great Design Argument: This suggests that God designed the world in such a way that it included the possibility of evil, but that if rightly perceived, we would understand that all of it works together for a greater good. This is a subset of the first two because both models assume a world in which moral action/ growth is both possible and meaningful. Namely, a world with free will and the possibility of soul making is a better world than one with only automatons. Some variations of this position, following Leibniz, argue that the present world is the best of all possible worlds. Others simply suggest that this is one of many possible good worlds.

There are a number of approaches taken within this model. One approach is to stress the need for world that has regularity in it. There must be a cause and effect for our actions. Thus, evil can have both actual and possible justifications. Actual evil has its purpose in be necessary for some greater moral purpose, while possible evil warns us against the consequences of our actions (e.g. putting your finger in an electrical socket.) This raises a number of issues, including:

1. Couldn't God have created a world in which we are free and/or our souls improve and yet we always choose the good?
2. Why can't God intervene when evil is committed yet still maintain our freedom or soul improvement?
3. Is human freedom really justified? Are we free enough for our moral choices to be meaningful?

Those who take the soulmaking or free-will position tend to respond by pointing out that it is impossible to actually imagine such a world, that free will makes no sense in a context where God is always intervening, and that significant freedom must have real consequences.

A variation of the possible worlds model is put forth by Alvin Plantinga who suggests that God not only knows all things that will happen, but also all things that *could* happen, so God has *middle knowledge*, or knowledge of all possible decisions in all possible worlds. Based on this knowledge, God chose one possible good world. Plantinga also suggests that something like *transworld depravity* may exist; namely, that in every world God could create that offers free-will, at least one person will choose evil. (Plantinga puts forth these ideas as part of his celebrated Free Will Defense.)

IV. The Eschatological Hope: Granting all the above, God has also promised that such evil and suffering is only for a finite time in human history. God will bring an end to it all, and evil will be rightly answered by its destruction. Furthermore, the future hope that God offers will judge, compensate and/or at least put into perspective this present world's evil. Of course, this model raises the question as to whether good can be said to actually "balance off" evil and suffering. This is alternately understood as either the afterlife and/or the final state of all things.

An extension of this is that the Church should be a community that looks to that future justice by modeling it now: believers are to avoid fatalism and work toward God's promised *shalom, a future of perfect peace and justice* that begins in God's work on the cross. Resistance to evil and suffering can be a form of obedience to God.

V. *The Suffering of God Response:* This response assures us that God has not abstracted himself from the human situation--that he, too, suffers with us. God weeps for Israel, the Holy Spirit grieves over sin, and Christ suffered for us that we might have an example of how to undergo suffering. Strictly speaking, this response isn't about justifying why God allows evil, as much as affirming that *God is involved in the problem.* Some have suggested that God's suffering teaches us to move from self-absorption to cooperation and compassion for others in their suffering. In this view God's own suffering absorbs our hostile self-absorption. Others have gone farther, arguing that God actually feels and experiences our suffering and, by doing so, honors us as the infinite God and that this honoring actually addresses our experience of evil and suffering by defeating it in our own lives.

Not all theists accept the idea that God suffers, pointing to what has been called the impassability of God, that God being an eternal, infinite, perfect being is without change and, therefore, without suffering. And there is something to be said for this. If we hold that God suffers, it must be on a completely different level than ourselves. The question, then, becomes how does God suffer for us and with us and because of us? Marilyn McCord Adams argues that Christ suffers at two levels—in his godhood and in his humanity. In this way, Christ suffers like us as a human, even as he also suffers in another mysterious way as part of the Godhead. Some have suggested, following the lead of Paul, that Christ's suffering on the Christ included the total experience of all human suffering. And Jürgen Moltmann goes so far as to suggest that Christ's experience of separation from the Father on the cross actually allows the Trinity to experience that ultimate element of human suffering—separation from God.

VI. A Theology of the Cross: Contained in each view of the suffering of God above is a suggestion that in some fundamental way the work of the cross is God's answer (or one of his answers) to the problem of evil, even that the cross is the only justification God gives of his responsibility for the existence of evil. In this sense, the work of redemption transcends the role of Christ's suffering, for the cross is atonement for, victory over, and judgment upon evil and sin.

VII. Faith and Trust: Sometimes called simple fideism—this position is one that seeks not to answer the question in any complex way but rather affirm basic Christian truths, such as God is ultimately good; God has everything under the divine control; God is to be trusted despite life's trails and difficulties.

VIII. A Theodicy of Protest: This position is one that complains to God, objecting that God could have and on the surface *should* have intervened in any number of horrific circumstances. The sheer weight of atrocity is often cited. Some versions of this try to escape the classic problem by denying that God is all-loving, or at least appears to be (cf. Roth and Blumenthal). But perhaps it would be better to understand this position as speaking from a wounded position. The believer says to God, "As best I can understand from my limited position you appear to have allowed horrible things to happen. Why? Should you do such a thing?" Then, rather than walk away in disgust or disbelief, the believer waits on God. This is an approach modeled for us in the Psalms. Believers protest from the ground of covenant—this is what God has promised us and who he is; therefore, should not God intervene? (i.e. Ps 44, 74, 88, 102, 142) This position at its best seeks to continue to affirm God's mystery and goodness even amidst confusion and doubt. Likewise,

this position holds it important to identify with the suffering of others, not to make light of their pain by seeking easily to explain it.

IX. Disavowal of Theodicy: This position argues from a number of different directions that the theodicy project is misfounded. Some suggest that theodician language tends to deny, trivialize, or downplay the suffering of others. Or theodicy is seen as a mistaken approach to the problem because it results in closing down what only God can truly answer. For some theodicy, if done at all, must be done within the praxis of sufferers, while theoretical discussions are guilty of the above.

For others, theodicy is misfounded because one cannot "justify" the supreme being. John Howard Yoder goes so far as to suggest that theodicy is a form of presumption and idolatry because it seeks to judge God by human standards and ignores the biblical understanding of Christ's suffering and his mission for his kingdom.

X. Sapiential Theodicy: This practice explores the skeptical limitations of human understanding. Following the Hebraic stance of wisdom as dialectical, sapiential thought recognizes God is both the giver and taker of wisdom. Such a practice operates from a stance of stability but also practices openness, antithesis, playfulness, and analogy--all methods which call into question the stable beginning place. The goal is both to see what can be known about the problem of evil, but also to recognize what cannot be known. The problem of evil becomes a puzzle that one explores in order to reach one's limits and, thus, respond to God in trust, awe, and fear.

XI. Mystical Theodicy: Some in the Christian monastic traditions believe that one can experience Christ's own suffering in moments of spiritual awareness and that this awareness allows one to transcend one's own misery, thus answering the problem of evil not in a rational way but in a moment of intuitive apprehension that is experienced at a higher level. Another version of this holds that the Christian's suffering participates in some way in Christ's own anguish (cf. Col 1:24, also cf. Rom 6:1-14, Gal 6:14, Phil 3:10). Simone Weil takes this even further, arguing that affliction is God's tight embrace as a Lover and that this mystical knowledge balances off the sufferer's experience of ruin.

XII. Narrative Theodicy: Some argue that a post-analytic theodicy should look to the open-ended nature of symbols, myths, and/or narratives involving evil, in part because all traditional arguments (i.e. defenses) considering the logic or evidence of theodicy cannot account for the mystery of evil or for the phenomenology of evil and suffering as humans actually experience it. They argue that symbolic and narratorial approaches offer a more intuitive set of answers that address the actual experiential needs of sufferers. Such approaches involve a larger fund of answers that go beyond the propositional. They are still rational, but not in a limited propositional manner.

The Phenomenology of Evil and Suffering

Phenomenology recognizes that we are always conscious of something, and as a practice, it attempts to recognize how the world always arrives within our consciousness and experience. A phenomenology of evil and suffering seeks to understand how evil makes itself known, either as coming from without us or within us. In this way, while its concerns overlap with the logical, evidential, and practical problems of evil, phenomenology may be said to proceed these concerns, even as it also is partially shaped by them.

I. The metaphysical horizons against which evil is experienced: While much of this also falls under the various attempts to understand evil, particularly metaphysical evil, a phenomenology recognizes that these understandings, not only frame our experience of evil, but they also enfold themselves into our experience, which cannot be separated out from these frameworks. They include:

- Nothingness, *khôra*, evil as negation, privation of the good
- Chaos, the anomic, radical or primordial evil
- Evil as potency, as hostile antagonism, the demonic
- Evil as the impersonal, the non-personal it, as the inhuman
- Absurdity, meaninglessness, futility, vanity
- Evil as mystery, as negative certitude
- Evil as contradiction, paradox, false gnosis
- Finitude, fallibility, contingent or possible evil
- Necessity, Fate, Moria
- Originary exile, the Fall, ancestral malediction

II. The various experiences of evil as that which comes from without to alter us: Evil and suffering have a way of altering how and who we are. They enter and make us a part of themselves, but not necessarily in a moral manner:

- The curse, taboo, magical antagonism
- Defilement, violation, stain, contagion
- Shame, dishonor
- Ugliness, disfigurement

III. Our various responses to its presence: We respond and resist evil entering us and our experience in a variety of intensities and tones:

- Horror, protest, outrage, blame
- Lament, sorrow, loss
- Stoicism, resignation
- Erasure, denial
- Redefinition, reduction

IV. How we commit evil or become complicit within it: What does it mean within our experience that we become evil or that we have done evil actions? This includes a number of ways of describing both our willed choices and our status or condition in having done evil:

- Rebellion, ill will, *harmatia*, *hubris*, divided self, perpetration
- Sin, guilt, condemnation, bad conscience
- Rupture of relations, of covenant
- Law-breaking, criminality, delinquency, systemic evil

V. Our various attempts to constrain or expel the evil within us: There are a wide variety of ways in which a person or persons place themselves in relationship to the possibility of evil within themselves and, thereby, manifest various goods:

- Terror, dread at deserved (or undeserved) threat/divine wrath
- Ritual reenactment of the cosmic struggle
- The scapegoat, sacrifice
- Confession, repentance, return
- Moral struggle, discipline, training
- Scrupulous attention, practice of obedience, *halachah*
- Moral calculus, ethical grading
- Tragedy, catharsis, noble suffering of injustice, pity
- Purification, co-suffering, expiation, ransom, kinsman-redemption

VI. Conditions that mimic permeance within our personhood: Evil as a phenomenon can register a more permeant condition within us, representing fundamental changes in our condition and the relationship of that condition to the good of the world:

- Retribution, judgment, punishment, damnation
- Abandonment, dereliction, alienation
- Anxiety, absence, inability to complete
- Permeant damage
- Transpassibility, numbness
- Boredom, indifference
- Despair, acedia
- Melancholy

VII. Experience of evil as a controlling power: Evil can function as an idol that mesmerizes us, a power that takes up residence within our own flesh (as opposed to an objective body), and as a force that dominates us and our character:

- Evil as fascination, seduction, pathos, spectacle, temptation, insatiable desire
- Bad character, vices
- Passivity of sin, inclination towards evil, auto-affection, *sarx*, the bestial self
- Possession, enslavement, bondage

VIII. Border conditions: Evil can also be experienced within ourselves and/or within others as an alien power that reveals itself as residing upon the border of the non-human. As such it can be also imposed as a screen between ourselves and the authentic regard of another:

- Nihilism, identification with or assigned as evil, the (non-human) outsider
- Perversion, abnormality, psycho or socio-pathology
- The monstrous

IX. The various material conditions that constrain us: A full phenomenology of evil and suffering accounts for the way these physical, material factors are incorporated into our fuller experience. They do not stand outside us per se, but they arrive both without and within us and our suffering:

- Toil, hardship, exposure, famine, diminishing capacities, old age
- Physical pain, anguish, woundedness
- Sickness, deformity
- Death, extinction, non-existence

X. Frameworks that pass beyond evil and suffering: Finally, a full phenomenology of evil and suffering is incorporated in various narratives and other embodied hermeneutics that place (within a greater lived reality) the evil and suffering of ourselves and of others with whom we identify:

- The narrative of evil committed and/or experienced, victim accounts
- Memorials of past suffering or atrocity
- Mystical identification with suffering, empathy
- Eschatological narratives of its reversal, absorption, or elimination

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