**God, Evil, & Suffering: What Shall We Say?**

1. **The Logical Problem with Evil and Suffering:**

The Logical Problem with Evil and Suffering as pertains to a Good, Loving, and Powerful God is sometimes addressed in this way:

1. God is Omnipotent (all powerful)
2. God is Omniscient (all knowing)
3. God is Good and Loving
4. There is Persistent Evil and “Innocent” Suffering in the world.

Logically one of these statements must not be true.

* **Theodicy:** An answer to “the problem of evil”; a defense of God’s goodness and justice given the existence of evil in creation.
* Most people will hedge on one of these statements in an attempt to solve the problem.
* Are these the terms by which God should be defined? Is there another way to frame this argument?
1. **Some Common Responses:**
2. **Ministry of Presence/Silence:**
	1. Some Jewish theologians, rather than try to justify God in the face of suffering, quote scripture which follows the report of the death of Aaron’s two sons by divine fire: **Leviticus 10:3 And Aaron was silent.**
	2. However: **1 Peter 3:15-16**  *Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence.*
3. **God is not Omnipotent:**
	1. Rabbi Harold S. Kushner – “When Bad Things Happen to Good People”
		1. God limit’s God’s self so that God does not interfere with Human Freedom
			1. Pain is the price for being alive.
		2. Religion should not be in the business of defending God.
		3. Book of Job – 3 possible positions according to Kushner.
			1. God is both Just and Powerful therefore Job must have sinned and deserves the punishment he is receiving. (Job’s friends)
			2. Job is good but God caused his suffering anyway: God is not just. (Job)
			3. Job is good and God is just. Therefore, God is not powerful. (Kushner believes this is the author’s stance)
	2. Problems?
		1. Assumption of Human Goodness
			1. Sin as morality vs. Sin as distortion of human freedom
		2. Impotence of God
			1. Problem – God is either Good or Powerful not both
			2. Douglas John Hall responds – Problem is Love
4. **God’s Good and our Good are Different:**
	1. C.S. Lewis – “The Problem of Pain”
		1. Human freedom allows the possibility of suffering
			1. Sin increases suffering
		2. God’s knowledge is beyond our understanding.
		3. God sometimes uses pain to draw us back to God

Now God, who has made us, knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him.  Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for.  While what we call "our own life" remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him.  What then can God do in our interests but make "our own life" less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible sources of false happiness?...

… And therefore He troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency that one day they will have to discover.  The Problem of Pain: 84-85

* + 1. Heaven is the answer
			1. **Romans 8:18**  I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.
	1. Problems?
		1. God using planning and using pain as a way to draw us back to God is inconceivable when confronted with the suffering of children or atrocities manifest in genocide.
		2. Heaven is the answer – is not the answer
			1. Scripture speaks of a God who loves and is redeeming this world.
			2. “To make a child feel better by telling them how beautiful it is in heaven… is another way of depriving him of the chance to grieve.” -Kushner
		3. Ultimately it didn’t work for C.S. Lewis
			1. A Grief Observed pg 17-19 – Written after his wife died.

Meanwhile, where is God? ... Whey you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to him with gratitude and praise, you will be - or so it feels - welcomed with open arms.  **But go to him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face... After that, silence...** Not that I am ( I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God.  The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him.  The conclusion I dread is not "So there is no God after all."  but "So this is what God's really like.  Deceive yourself no longer."

1. **It is a Mystery that must be lived through:**
	1. Hans Kung: Credo

“Having been constantly preoccupied for decades with all attempts at theodicy, I can confidently say quite bluntly that there seems to me to be no theoretical answer to the problem of theodicy. On the basis of an attitude of faith only one thing can be said: “

“If God exists, then God was also in Auschwitz! Even in this death factory, believers of different religions and confessions held on to the conviction that despite everything, God exists.

“At the same time, however, the believer has to concede that there is no answer to the question, ‘How could God have been in Auschwitz without preventing Auschwitz?’

“… suffering, excessive, innocent, meaningless suffering, both individual and collective – cannot be understood theoretically, but can only be lived through. For Christians and Jews there is only a practical answer to the problem of theodicy.”

1. It can be recognized in the light of Jesus, the suffering servant of God.
2. That even when suffering is apparently meaningless, God is nevertheless hiddenly present.
3. That while God does not preserve us *from all* suffering he does preserve us *in all suffering.*
4. That wherever possible we should show solidarity in suffering and attempt to share in bearing it.
5. In this way we are not only enduring suffering but where possible, fighting against it.
	1. Problems?
		1. There are times when “It is a mystery” is an insufficient response. Our hope is not founded in mystery but in the definitive actions of God as He meets us in Jesus Christ.

**Other Resources:**

**Paul Sponheim – Luther Seminary Professor Emeritus**

**Moral Evil:**

1. **While God is responsible for the possibility of moral evil, God does not foreknow the actual coming of that evil. That fits the general point that in relationship of freedom there is true temporal contingency of events, evil or good which are not known in advance.**
2. **To locate the origin of moral evil, Adamically, in the misuse of human freedom is not to deny that “the individual does not begin afresh,” but comes into being caught in the cumulative history of sin.**
3. **An Adamic understanding can accommodate a more than human morally evil power as “freedom writ large,” so long as one grants an original goodness to this being and does not slide into saying “The Devil made me do it.”**
4. **The most important distinction within the causality of moral evil is to recognize that we do not merely act toward ourselves, we act toward each other. Made in the image of a relational God, we are created in and for relationships. We bear on each other, and we can hurt each other. And we do. To rood the origin of moral evil strongly in the misuse of freedom is clearly not to embrace and individualistic psychology that would often require us to blame the victim. There is ample place in an Adamic understanding to emphasize the place of compassion.**

**In addition to these distinctions within moral evil understood Adamically, one needs to distinguish moral evil from those sufferings which come to us either as sheer givens for finite creatures as such or those sufferings which derive from our being part of the natural world. Douglas John hall has written helpfully of the first of these specifying four dimensions of created being: loneliness, limits, temptation, and anxiety. The dimensions seem essential for a being created with freedom for relationship.**

**Directions:**

1. **Teach that God is not punishing you through suffering.**
2. **Believe that God is at work for good within the weave of causes that is the world.**
3. **say something by acting, by responding to the call to care for the suffering and indeed love the enemy.**
4. **Look to the end believing God will establish a new heaven and a new earth.**

**Terrence Fretheim – Luther Seminary Professor Emeritus**

**The why of suffering:**

1. **Human beings are created with limits – of intelligence, agility, and strength.**
2. **God has created a dynamic world; earthquakes, volcanoes, glaciers, storms, bacteria, and viruses have their role to play in the life of this world. Because we are part of this interconnected world, we may get in the way of these processes and get hurt by them. Sin, however can intensify the encounter and the associated suffering (for example, improper use of alcohol by a mother-to-be can damage the fetus.)**
3. **Individual sins can cause suffering to those who commit them because God created a world in which our actions (and inactions) have consequences both for individuals and communities, though not in some mechanistic fashion. The Bible names these effects as Divine Judgment, as God, usually in non-forensic ways, sees to the workings of the created moral order and mediates “the fruit of their schemes” (ex: through the Babylonian armies (Jer.6:19,21:14) or authorities more generally (Rom. 13:4).**
4. **We often experience suffering not because of what we have done but because of what others have done unto us. Israelites in Egypt – God’s response = salvation.**
5. **We also suffer because we belong to communities that have had a long history of sinfulness with the result that its effects, which can be named “evil,” are integrated into the very structures of our life together. Manifested in such realities as ageism, racism, and sexism, everyone will make their own contribution to these systemic evils to be experienced by coming generations.**
	1. **In thinking about how these evil forms take on a life of their own, we move toward the biblical thinking about the demonic. In the latest OT texts and the NT there emerges something approaching a limited cosmic dualism (Satan). This reality is represented as a metaphysical power that stands temporally (not eternally) between God and world, opposing and subverting God’s work. In terms of the development of such thinking, one may speak of anti-God forces, initially embodied in historical figures (Pharaoh), which in theological reflection over time are thrown onto a cosmic screen, taking on metaphysical proportions (Below). Or, in more objective terms, a build up of historical evil over time becomes systemic, affecting even cosmic spheres.**