

The Case Against Theodicy

a lecture by
Dr Matheson Russell

What is theodicy?

Definition

‘demonstrating that God is just’ (Surin)

‘justify the ways of God to man’ (Milton)

The problem of evil

‘The problem of evil is a very simple one to state. There is evil in the world; yet the world is said to be the creation of a good and omnipotent God. How is this possible? Surely a good omnipotent God would have made a world free of evil of any kind.’ (McCloskey)

- I. God exists, and is essentially omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good;
- II. Evil exists

Some theodicies:

- (1) Best of all possible worlds (Leibniz)
- (2) Soul-making theodicy (John Hick):
- (3) Free Will Defense (Plantinga):

Objections to theodicy

1. Theodicy and enlightenment

2. The question of God

2.1. The Thomist objection: comprehending God as an object

‘*Si comprehendis non est Deus*’ (St Augustine)
[‘If you think you have conceived something, then it is not God’]

2.2. The Lutheran objection: defining God apart from Christ

Summary...

3. The question of Evil

3.1. Marilyn McCord Adams: the global problem of evil vs. the individual problem of evil

3.2. Terrence Tilley: neglecting certain types of evil

3.3. Kenneth Surin: effacing the demand to practically respond to evil

3.4. David Benley Hart: effacing God's opposition to evil in the gospel

'[I]f it is from Christ that we are to learn how God relates himself to sin, suffering, evil and death, it would seem that he provides us little evidence of anything other than a regal, relentless, and miraculous enmity: sin he forgives, suffering he heals, evil he casts out, and death he conquers. And absolutely nowhere does Christ act as if any of these things are part of the eternal work or purposes of God.' (Hart, *The Doors of the Sea* [Eerdmans, 2005], pp. 86–87)

'Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?'
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'
(1 Cor 15.55–57)

'And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'" ' (Rev 21.3–4)

4. A comment on 'divine sovereignty'

'[T]here are those who suffer from a palpably acute anxiety regarding the honour due the divine sovereignty. Certainly many Christians over the centuries have hastened to resituate the New Testament imagery of spiritual warfare securely within the one all-determining will of God, fearing that to deny that evil and death are the "left hand" of God's goodness in creation or the necessary "shadow" of his righteousness would be to deny divine omnipotence as well.

Nevertheless, and disturbing as it may be, it is clearly the case that there is a kind of "provisional" cosmic dualism within the New Testament: not an ultimate dualism, of course, between two equal principles; but certainly a conflict between a sphere of created autonomy that strives against God on the one hand and the saving love of God in time on the other.' (Hart, *The Doors of the Sea*, pp. 62–63)

5. Conclusion