

# Issue 3 Good and Evil: Good, Evil and Suffering

What does the specification say?

Good, Evil and Suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Philosophical perspectives on the origin of evil: Original Sin (free will) and 'soul-making' (Irenaeus and John Hick)</li> <li>➤ Philosophical challenges posed by belief in God, free will and the existence of evil and suffering</li> </ul>
Good, Evil and Suffering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Philosophical perspectives on the origin of evil: Berakhot 9:5, Avodah Zarah, 3b, Deuteronomy 30:15-19</li> <li>➤ Philosophical challenges posed by belief in God, free will and the existence of evil and suffering: the diversity of Jewish responses to The Holocaust (Shoah)</li> </ul>

**KEY CONCEPT VOCABULARY (KCV):** *Suffering when an individual is in emotional pain caused by either physical discomfort or psychological issues for example Jesus' suffering on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Free Will the belief that nothing is determined for example the Jewish and Christian belief that God gave humanity the ability to make free choices. Conscience an innate (inner) moral sense that guides actions and responses for example Cardinal John Henry Newman believed conscience was the voice of God.*

## Conscience:

- Conscience and free will are very closely linked. In some ways conscience can be seen as the **thought** and free will the **action** in moral decisions.
- Roman Catholics believe in **synderesis** which is the idea that **people tend to do good and avoid evil** because they were made good in essence by God through creation (Genesis 1:26 – image and likeness).
- God has given people reason in order to work out what the best thing to do in any given situation is. This is a form of conscience. Christians must try to put others first in their decisions rather than acting in a selfish way.
- Some Christians like J H Newman believe that conscience is the voice of God speaking to us and reminding us of the right thing to do.
- Other Christians view conscience as the Holy Spirit trying to guide them. They might pray when they have a difficult decision to make and wait to see what they believe God wants them to do.

## The Problem of Evil and Suffering

Many religious people struggle with the explanations for evil in the world. Atheists pose the Inconsistent Triad; either God is not omnipotent, or omniscient, or omnibenevolent to allow evil to continue. The ways religious people use to answer this is called theodicy, which means giving reasons for why an all-loving, all-powerful, all-knowing God might allow evil to exist. Christians and Jews point to the story of Job where Job's suffering is a mystery to him but he continues to trust God; they might also say that God uses suffering to bring out the best in people; they may say that heaven awaits those who are faithful; they might also say that evil and suffering is a consequence of human free will and ignoring God's wisdom. Christians also say that Jesus' suffering on the cross represents God taking part in human suffering and suffering alongside people; even if he does not remove it, he shares in it. All religious people would agree that human free will causes the most amount of pain and suffering. Many atheists and humanists are not satisfied by these theodicies.



## Christianity – Philosophical Perspectives on the Origins of Evil

### Original Sin:

God created man in his own image. God is personal in nature and so is able to make decisions. Humans are believed to have been given the chance to make our own choices by God: "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness" Genesis 1:26. The world began in a state of perfection. Christians believe that God gave them Free Will. This is seen in the story of The Fall in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve

chose to disobey God of their own free will (Original Sin). God has given people clear guidelines on how to behave through his laws. God has made it clear to people what he expects from them (10 Commandments, example of Jesus and parables) and the consequences (Judgement Day – Heaven and Hell) if we fail to follow God's will. Evil came into the world through the wilful disobedience of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Some Christians take the story literally, others say it is a metaphor for how disobeying God takes people further away from him. Natural evil (hurricanes, tsunamis, cancer or disease) came about as a punishment for Original Sin. Humanity has disobeyed God because we were all seminally present (in Adam's semen—an idea known as homunculus or 'little man' where people are fully formed in semen but miniature) at the time of Original Sin meaning we are all guilty of the same sin. The devil is also seen as responsible for continuing to use temptation of our free will as responsible for leading us astray with our free will. Some have argued that the devil is responsible for natural disasters not God. The idea behind this is that God allows the devil to behave in such a way as a punishment for Original Sin.

Evil isn't God's fault. God created people with free will in Genesis 2. People misuse their free will and this causes evil and suffering. God doesn't force people to murder, torture or bully other people. They choose to do evil themselves. If people followed God or the example of Jesus they could see how they should behave towards other people.

### **Soul Making Theodicies (Irenaeus and John Hick):**

**Irenaeus:** Evil and suffering are part of God's plan. God wants us to learn and grow through how we deal with the experience of evil. Our souls get the opportunity to grow to be more like God. God made human beings in the 'image and likeness' of God in Genesis 1:26 (***Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness"***). We become like co-creators with God when we tackle evil in the world. Evil and suffering allow for positive human reactions like compassion, charity and helping other in need. We learn to behave selflessly rather than selfishly.

Irenaeus said that God had given human beings free will. This free will entailed the potential for evil. He believed that free will was better than ready-made goodness. The gift of moral perfection would not have meant anything to human beings if they did not learn the value of it for themselves. We become like God or move towards the likeness of God by freely choosing the good. When we choose to do evil and sin then we are creating evil in the world. For Irenaeus moral evil is caused by human's misuse of free will. God allowed us to have this free will as it was seen as more beneficial than making ready-made perfection.

God is justified in continuing to allow moral and natural evil because we move to the likeness and God. Natural evil is seen as an instrument of God's purpose. It is clear that Irenaeus believed that only those who accepted God would be saved and those who reject God will be damned. He believed in some form of a continuation of soul-making in the next life to complete their souls in the likeness of God. However, the damned will be sent to hell as they refused the 'workmanship' of God: ***'Your ingratitude, ignoring his goodness in creating you human, will mean you have lost his work on you, you will lose your life'***.  
(*Against Heresies*)

**John Hick Version:** John Hick is a modern theologian. In his book 'Evil and the God of Love' he outlines an updated version of Irenaeus' theodicy. This theodicy relies upon the notion of soul making. It is important to note that in this theodicy God is partially responsible for evil. This is because God made the world in the state that it is, it relies on the total of evil we experience being justified in the end.

Once we accept that this world is a 'vale of soul making' then a number of things must logically follow: 1) we had to be created imperfect, 2) we had to be at a distance from God, and 3) the natural world could not be a paradise.

**Good qualities such as bravery, compassion, empathy or justice could not have existed in a world where there were no consequences to our actions.** God is responsible for natural evil because it was the only way that we could free choose the good and grow into God's likeness. This world is like a **moral playpen** where we learn how to behave.

God can only be justified through allowing all of us to enter heaven and become morally perfect. Some people who cause evil in this world are necessary for others to achieve moral perfection. It would be unjust if the few were sacrificed for the majority.

## **Judaism – Philosophical Perspectives on the Origins of Evil**

### **Innocent Suffering – The Book of Job:**

In the early Jewish tradition, suffering was seen as a sign that someone had sinned. It was G\_d's way of punishing them. However, the Book of Job tackles this belief by using the example of Job.

The book can be understood as an extended allegory. Job was the most faithful servant of God. The devil asks God to test Job's faith. Job loses his possessions and his family. His wife and three friends say that he must have sinned and so should repent / confess to God. Job maintains his faith in God and continues to be a good man. He does not blame God. The devil takes away Job's health and status in society, still Job does not blame God

Eventually Job questions God and God answers:

*"Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!" Job 38:1-5* – This quote shows Jews: G\_d knows more than we do and so we should not question G\_d. G\_d has a plan for suffering that we cannot understand. Suffering is a part of this plan and it affects the innocent and guilty alike. Jews are expected to be like Job and to keep the faith in G\_d and his covenant in the face of evil and suffering.

### **Judaism on Good and Evil**

God is good and will always protect and care for people. The goodness of God is shown by the creation of the world, by the giving of the ten commandments, and the times when God saved the Israelites (eg from slavery in Egypt). Jews also believe God gave humans free will (see Genesis in Christianity opposite) and people need to live in a world where there is the possibility of making wrong choices. We have the inclination to do good (**Yetzer ha tov**) and the inclination to do evil (**Yetzer ha ra**). The choices we make determine which inclination becomes the stronger for us. Evil also comes from God as he can use it to cause suffering and discipline, to punish or test. The story of Job is shared by Christians and Jews to show how God is good and merciful but sometimes there is no clear answer to why people suffer in the face of evil.

*"A person is obligated to bless upon the bad just as he blesses upon the good. As it says, "And you shall love the Lord your G\_d with all your heart and with all your soul, and all that you have.""* Berakhot 9:5 (Talmud). This quote shows the fact that G\_d has created us all with the inclination to do good (**Yetzer ha tov**) and the inclination to do evil (**Yetzer ha ra**).

***“Why is man here compared to the fishes of the sea? To tell you, just as the fishes of the sea, as soon as they come on to dry land, die, so also man, as soon as he abandons the Torah and the precepts [incurs destruction]. Another explanation: Just as the fishes of the sea, as soon as the sun scorches them, die; so man, when struck by the sun, dies. ....but the Holy One, blessed be He, brings the sun out of its sheath, so that it is fierce: the wicked are punished by it, the righteous are healed by it. The wicked are punished...”***

**Avodah Zarah, 3b** – This quote echoes the Book of Job’s claim that we all suffer equally but hints to the fact that the righteous (good people) will be rewarded in some way by G\_d at a later date.

***“See! Today I have set before you [a free choice] between life and good [on one side], and death and evil [on the other]. I have commanded you today to love God your Lord, to walk in His paths, and to keep His commandments, decrees and laws. You will then survive and flourish, and God your Lord will bless you in the land that you are about to occupy”.*** Deuteronomy 30:15-19 - This means that good and evil both have a purpose in life. Jews also believe that the punishment for giving in to temptation to do evil is death and destruction, whereas the reward for resisting temptation is protection and prosperity.

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## Diversity of Jewish responses to The Holocaust (Shoah)



Many Jews and non-Jews alike have asked the question “Where was G\_d during the holocaust?”. The **Final Solution** saw the culmination of the dehumanisation process and subsequent attempt at total eradication of the Jewish nation through genocide. Six million Jews, around two thirds of the Jewish population in Europe were murdered by the Nazis. **Holocaust** means ‘burnt offering’ but many Jew prefer the term **Shoah** which means ‘catastrophe’ as it is a more appropriate term than ‘offering’. There are many Shoah memorials in modern synagogues. The surviving Jewish communities were and are still deeply affected by the events of those days. **Yad Vashem** is the



world centre for Shoah (Holocaust) research, education, documentation and commemoration. Jews may feel it important to honour their family members murdered in the Shoah. It is considered to be a site of pilgrimage for Jews.

**Example of Eva Kor (Jewish Holocaust survivor)** Eva was with her sister Miriam during the Holocaust and tested upon by Josef Mengele at Auschwitz. Both her parents and older sisters were killed in the camp. Only Eva and Miriam survived. ***“My forgiveness...has nothing to do with the perpetrators, has nothing to do with any religion, it is my act of self-healing, self-liberation, and self-empowerment. I had no power over my life up to the time that I discovered that I could forgive and I still do not understand why people think it’s wrong. I forgave the Nazis not because they deserve it but because I deserve it.”***

**Elie Wiesel’s (Famous Author and Survivor of the Holocaust) Response to the Holocaust:** “After the Holocaust I did not lose faith in G\_d. I lost faith in mankind”. Elie Wiesel’s book Night introduces the idea of G\_d on the gallows of the camps. The belief is that G\_d suffered with his chosen people throughout the ordeal of the holocaust.

**Memory of a Holocaust Survivor questioning a rabbi who lost his wife and 11 children:** “Why did miracles occur only during biblical times? Why don’t they happen now? The rabbi replied, “The fact that there are holocaust survivors who, after they endured, can still keep faith, is itself, the greatest miracle of all.”