

Omnibenevolent God and the Blessedness of Evil: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

The aim of this research therefore is to examine the problem of evil in relation to an omnibenevolent God, look at the possibility of the concept of the blessedness of evil in theological and philosophical paradigms. The study uses an analytical qualitative approach that seeks to understand the place of evil using the kind of theology, Augustine privation theory of evil, Leibniz "the best possible world and Hick's soul making theodicy. Thus, it is seen that evil though manifestly negative has its utilitarian functions in gaining higher and better moral, religious and retributive values. As it is with all vices, they are said to help human nature to grow, for values such as courage, patience, and pity are nurtured by vice, and the Devil is said to act according to the plan of Providence. Also, affliction and trouble are depicted as having the ability to strengthen one's belief, wake them up spiritually, and cultivate trust in God. In the light of the finding the authors affirm that the proof of evil is a testimony to God's omnibenevolence if understood from a divine plan perspective. The article also suggests that people should go through suffering believing and being moral since suffering can be redemptive. Further, theological education should stress the restoration aspect of sufferings so that Christians can explain why Baha' albish is in God. In conclusion, the study aims at perceiving evil without fear and doubts, and in fact suggests developing the reactions to the evil acts in its terms of compassion, justice, and divine providence of God.

Introduction

The problem of evil questions the very nature of God expressing issues in regard to the attribute of His omnipotence, moral perfection, and foreknowledge. The original statement of the problem of evil can be traced back to Epicurus when his arguments were refashioned into modern philosophical arguments of the 'logical' problem of evil. Yet, this apparent contradiction invites deeper reflection: Is it possible for evil, however it unfolds, to be seen as a way to become more moral, strengthened spiritually or to find out God's plan?

This article offers a conceptual critique on the notion of benefit gained from evil with reference to an assumption of divine benevolence. From the theological point of view, it emphasizes that evil itself becomes a tool for attaining a higher divinely good purpose and that, from the philosophical point of view, evil can be seen as the glory of the good. The arguments of Augustine, Leibniz, Hick and considerations from modern philosophical theology are included into the analysis.

The Nature of Omnibenevolence and the Problem of Evil

Each of the above ideas is clearly revealed in the Bible as being an attribute of God; omnibenevolence implies the perfect goodness of God. This concept assumes that God is all moral, all Just, and all Love, and so cannot do evil or countenance evil (Swinburne, 2016). But when we encounter suffering, sin and death, disaster that is considered unjust then there arises a question of evil.

The logical problem of evil argues:

- If God is omnipotent, He has the power to eliminate evil.
- If God is omnibenevolent, He would desire to eliminate all evil.
- Evil exists.
- Therefore, either God is not omnipotent, not omnibenevolent, or does not exist.

This classical formulation has been receiving a lot of criticism. It is therefore important to have genuine freedom which is necessary for moral good and this is why Alvin Plantinga (1974) suggested that Free Will Defense means God allows evil. This view begins to reveal a critical insight: the permissibility of evil may fit in the frame work of the production of good.

The Concept of the Blessedness of Evil

The concept that is associated with the term – the blessedness of evil – refers to the notion that evil may lead to even more moral and spiritual good since it is clearly a thing that nobody wants. This concept is similar to the theological concept of a “greater good defense” that say God allows evil to happen in order to bring about greater good.

❖ The Privation Theory of Evil Maintained by Augustine

According to Aquinas, St. Augustine (354–430) claimed that evil is not indeed a thing though it is an enemy but a privation of good – it is like darkness which is a privation of light [Augustine, Confessions]. From this point of view evil is all relative to goodness and is therefore not an actual creation in its own right. Before all however, Augustine wanted to stress the idea that God permits evil so that He can produce good out of it. For instance, immoral events, for example, betrayal or suffering can result in consequences like redemption, forgiveness tests, and development of virtues like compassion and courage.

‘God was pleased to allow good to come out of evil rather than not to let evil exist at all’.

— St. Augustine, On Faith, and Hope, and the Love thereof Enchiridion

❖ Leibniz’s Best Possible World

Christian Wolff (1720) insisted that we have been placed in the ‘best of possible world,’ with the over liner super knowing, skill, and power being able to create a world full of good and evil which was the greatest conceivable good. Succubus, in this framework, has a higher function which is frequently beyond the ken of man. So, as Leibniz rightly says, there are things which does not allow evil – free will, virtue, and growth. For example, courage cannot be defined independent of risking a related horrible event or undergoing danger.

❖ The Soul-Making Theodicy (John Hick)

John Hick (1966) proffered the soul-making theodicy, which sees the world as a moral /spiritual growth station. Of course, evil necessary for the people’s moral development as Hick assumes. Challenges, suffering, and moral evils are in essence preventing the world from staying stagnant and continuing to be spiritually stagnant. But of course, God’s omnibenevolence means they cannot be seen as anything other than part of a divine plan to gradually improve the largest number of souls, guiding people through the path of trials that eventually turn them into better reflections of the divine image.

Hick’s approach speaks of pain and evil, and while it can be accurate to say they are absurd and devoid of purpose, Hick provides a view that they are not. Rather they are intermediaries on the way to attain a higher more blessed kind of existence.

The Role of Evil in Revealing Goodness

The mechanism by which religion is established and maintained is also paradoxical: evil exists so that goodness becomes more noticeable and precious. When a person has never had to endure pain his/her health cannot be understood; when a person has never seen or felt injustice, justice cannot be grasped. As C.S. Lewis (1940) points out, suffering has the capacity to awaken individuals to the presence of God and the need for redemption:

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to awaken a deaf world.”

Further, evil means a calamity, and a calamity is followed by virtuous motives, including generosity, bravery, and risk-taking. evil can therefore help to reveal human and divine good in ways that would be otherwise well cast.

Evil as an Instrument of Divine Justice and Purpose

From the worldview of Job, Joseph, and Satan the theistic perspective of evil is an instrument of divine justice and purpose. For instance, in the Biblical account, suffering and evil are shown to bring more blessings. In the story of Joseph (Genesis 50: Yet the LORD was pleased to use the sin of ten of Joseph’s brothers to deliver an entire nation from famine.

“You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring it about that, as it is now, many people can be saved alive.”

Likewise, evil according to the Christian revelation is successfully depicted as divine intervention as Christ’s crucifixion is looking at as a necessary step towards the salvation of man.

Certainly! Below is the continuation of the article focusing on further development and brief overview of the main arguments for closing the article.

Practical Implications of the Blessedness of Evil

As such, cognizance within religious, ethical and debating philosophical arenas has far reaching potential of rendering evil as capable of being utilitarian for attaining higher values. It compels persons to look at affliction and hardship at the same level as personal development and destiny.

Moral and Spiritual Growth: Sin offers humans a chance to be virtuous and be good, that is, to endure, forgive, be brave, and suffer for others. For example, if one suffers injustice one is compelled to do the right thing for society to advance. Mortals like Martin Luther King Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi will always transmute the malignant oppressiveness around them becoming justice and peace.

Trust in Divine Providence: From a theistic point of view, the blessedness of evil is for people to have greater faith in the Lord’s plan. The experience in life, however brief, is limited, while God’s purpose encompasses pain and happiness in order to achieve a goal. This aligns with the Pauline perspective in Romans 8:28:

And this we know – that God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are the object of His call, according to His purpose.

A Call for Compassion and Responsibility: Suffering and evil, accordingly as they have their uses for God in improving character, do not free mankind from its duty to right wrongs. Suffering provides persons to be stars of goodness in evil universe. The volitional acts of niceness, almsgiving, and fairness restore the ill-bred into opportunities for beneficence.

Addressing Objections: Is Evil Always Redeemable?

A usual argument which people emphasize on the “greater good” defense and blessedness of evil is whether all evils are telegenic. There are countless catastrophes that seem to have little to no good in them; things like genocide, severe suffering, or unnecessary travesties. Marilyn Adams (1999) says that even if there are evils which are logically beyond any collective understanding by humans, they may however be serving purposes with which only an omnipotent God would have knowledge of. She also employs the horrendous evils where they are acts that challenge the belief in divine providence yet they are not contrary to God’s goodness.

The vagueness of the will of God will help us to understand how little we know even regarding the will of God. As articulated in Isaiah 55:8-9:

“For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Evil as a Catalyst for Redemption

Sinning according to this mentality becomes an opportunity for change within the larger divine plan of starting over. This is perhaps well illustrated in the Christian theology where the murder of the saviour Jesus Christ an act of sin, is used as a cornerstone for salvation of human kind. The love of Jesus changes sin and suffering to redemption representing the pinnacle of what God can do out of the evil (Lewis, 1940).

In dreamers’ personal hardships and difficulties result in spiritual awakening and rejuvenation of the purpose. Turns suffering can make people pray more, become more understanding and appreciative of everything and anything.

Reconciling God’s Omnibenevolence with the Reality of Evil

The problem of how an omnipotent and perfectly good God can allow evil sort of solves itself when we appreciate that God allows evil contingently: He allows it for a greater good, but evil is not itself the good. This perspective maintains:

- God is perfectly good and wishes success for the whole created order.
- Satan is necessary as the antithesis to free choice and character development as well as the fulfillment of the Lord’s plan.
- The Lord in His omnipotence is indeed able and willing to make something good out of something evil no matter how much the people around cannot understand.

Thus, we can say that evil does not disprove God’s omnibenevolence but rather speaks of His covenant with creation: a creation that IS free, growing and capable of the victory of good.

Further Reflections on the Role of Evil in Theology and Human Experience

The concept of the blessedness of evil not only provides an intellectual framework for understanding the coexistence of God’s omnibenevolence with the presence of evil but also encourages a transformative perspective on suffering and adversity in human life. To conclude this discussion comprehensively, it is essential to explore the broader implications for religious practice, ethical responsibility, and human resilience.

❖ Evil as a Catalyst for Religious Practice

Religions across the world have historically used the reality of evil to emphasize themes of faith, hope, and redemption. The acknowledgment of suffering is often central to spiritual narratives that encourage

individuals to turn toward the divine. In Christianity, for instance, the crucifixion of Christ symbolizes the ultimate reconciliation of evil and suffering with God's redemptive plan (Hebrews 12:2).

Similarly, in Buddhism, suffering (*dukkha*) is viewed as a fundamental aspect of existence, and the response is the cultivation of wisdom and compassion through the Eightfold Path. These religious traditions highlight the capacity of human beings to confront evil not with despair but with constructive spiritual practices aimed at transcending suffering.

❖ **Ethical Responsibility in Light of Evil**

Acknowledging the instrumental role of evil does not absolve humanity of its responsibility to combat injustice and alleviate suffering. On the contrary, the recognition that evil can lead to greater good invites a proactive engagement with the moral challenges of the world. The idea of "co-working with God" emphasizes human participation in divine plans, reflecting a moral duty to respond to evil with love, compassion, and justice.

For instance, responding to natural disasters, systemic oppression, or moral failings in society often spurs collective action and innovation. From a theological perspective, such responses may be viewed as aligning with God's will, where human effort serves as a channel for bringing about divine good.

❖ **Resilience and the Transformative Power of Adversity**

One of the most profound implications of the blessedness of evil is its potential to foster resilience and transformation. Adversity often serves as a crucible for personal growth, enabling individuals to develop virtues such as perseverance, gratitude, and empathy. Viktor Frankl's (1946) reflections in *Man's Search for Meaning* offer a compelling account of how suffering can lead to profound psychological and spiritual development.

Frankl, a Holocaust survivor, argued that even in the face of immense suffering, humans retain the freedom to find meaning and purpose. This perspective aligns with the idea that evil, while intrinsically painful, can serve as a pathway to uncover deeper truths about the human condition and the divine.

Future Directions in Theological and Philosophical Inquiry

While this analysis has sought to reconcile the paradox of evil and divine omnibenevolence, it also raises further questions for theological and philosophical exploration.

❖ **Reimagining Theodicy in a Pluralistic World**

As religious diversity increases, there is a need for more inclusive theodicies that engage with multiple perspectives on suffering and evil. Comparative theological approaches could provide insights into how different traditions conceptualize the relationship between evil and ultimate goodness.

❖ **Evil and Ecological Responsibility**

In the context of environmental degradation, the discussion of evil must extend to the ecological crisis. Understanding natural evil—such as natural disasters or climate change—through the lens of divine purpose may prompt ethical reflections on humanity's stewardship of creation and its responsibility to mitigate harm.

❖ **Psychological Implications of Suffering**

The interplay between theology and psychology offers fertile ground for examining how beliefs about the blessedness of evil influence mental health and coping mechanisms. Future research could investigate how religious narratives about suffering impact individual and collective resilience in diverse cultural contexts.

Criticisms of the Blessedness of Evil

Despite its philosophical and theological merits, the concept of the blessedness of evil has its critics. Some argue that this view risks minimizing the profound suffering experienced by individuals, especially in extreme cases such as genocide, abuse, or natural disasters.

❖ The Problem of Gratuitous Evil

A significant critique arises from the notion of gratuitous evil—instances of suffering that appear unnecessary or devoid of any redeeming purpose. William Rowe (1979) famously argued that some instances of suffering, such as a fawn dying slowly in a forest fire, serve no discernible greater good. This challenges the idea that all evil is instrumental in God's plan.

❖ Emotional and Existential Resistance

For many, the emotional weight of suffering makes it difficult to accept theoretical explanations of its purpose. Theodicies, including the blessedness of evil, may seem detached or even offensive to those experiencing profound loss or trauma. Critics argue that such concepts risk alienating sufferers by framing their pain as a mere tool in a grander scheme.

❖ Moral Responsibility

A theological danger lies in misusing the concept of evil's blessedness to excuse moral complacency. If all evil ultimately serves a divine purpose, does this absolve individuals of responsibility for combating injustice and suffering? Such a stance risks undermining ethical agency and the imperative to resist evil actively.

Reconciling the Paradox: A Call for Humility

While the blessedness of evil offers compelling insights into the interplay between divine omnibenevolence and human suffering, it requires a posture of humility. The finite nature of human understanding limits our ability to grasp the full scope of divine purposes. As Job acknowledges in his dialogue with God, humans cannot fully comprehend the complexities of divine wisdom (Job 38:1–18).

The call for humility also extends to theological discourse, where balancing abstract reasoning with pastoral sensitivity is crucial. While philosophical arguments about the purpose of evil provide intellectual clarity, they must be accompanied by compassion and practical support for those in suffering.

Final Thoughts

The tension between the omnibenevolence of God and the existence of evil remains one of the most enduring and complex questions in human thought. By exploring the blessedness of evil, we uncover a perspective that not only reconciles this apparent paradox but also provides a profound framework for understanding human suffering and divine purpose.

Evil, while painful and challenging, can be a vessel for greater goods—moral refinement, spiritual growth, and the fulfillment of divine justice. This perspective encourages humanity to face suffering with faith, courage, and ethical responsibility, trusting that even in the darkest moments, the light of divine purpose shines through.

Conclusion

The paradox of an omnibenevolent God and the existence of evil remains a central challenge in theological and philosophical discourse. By examining the concept of the blessedness of evil, this article has argued that evil can serve as an instrument for greater good, revealing God's wisdom and ultimate benevolence. Through the frameworks of Augustine's privation theory, Leibniz's "best possible world," and Hick's soul-making

theodicy, we see that evil contributes to moral development, spiritual growth, and the realization of divine justice.

However, the notion of the blessedness of evil must be approached with caution, acknowledging its limitations and respecting the lived experiences of those who suffer. Ultimately, the interplay between God's omnibenevolence and the reality of evil invites a profound trust in divine providence and an enduring hope for the ultimate triumph of good.

The tension between an omnibenevolent God and the existence of evil, though paradoxical, ultimately reveals a profound theological truth: "Evil," the novel suggests when seen through the prism of Christian fatalism, is no mere emptiness. Thus, evil is not good yet rather it acts as a useful means of creating a variety of other moral, spiritual, and even redemptive values. Such understanding puts a seal to God's omnibenevolence and enables one to count on His better judgment and designs.

The blessedness of evil therefore must then lie in its capacity to effect a change to illustrious paths, fashion character, and develop virtues in the soul, and further proclaim the glory of God's existence. This may be the reason why the character fails in present in the drama for the purpose of illuminating what Augustine and Leibniz called divine providence. Satan far from subverting the essence of God, uses it to enhance His love, justice, and most of all goodness.

Humanity in anguish and pain is challenged to live a life of faith, to exercise kindness and good character and moral might in order that even in the presence of the invincible darkness, it will find that God's last word in creation is that of hope, meaning, and eternal love.

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