

# Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil

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## Chapter 6



Providence of God and the Mystery of Evil

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## Key Terms

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P Providence – “God’s continuing care for all creatures” (100)

- Sometimes characterized as “God in control”

P Natural evil – ‘suffering and evil that creatures experience at the hands of nature’ (101)

- Natural disasters, disease, etc.
- Related to our finitude and mortality, but these are not evil in themselves (God created us good with these things)
- Would natural evil seem evil if there were no moral evil?

P Moral evil – “the suffering and evil that human beings inflict on each other and on the world they inhabit” (101)

- Brought forcefully to fore by Holocaust, modern genocides, etc.

P Theodicy – defense of God in face of reality of evil



Key Terms

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## Augustine & Calvin

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P They affirm that God works through all things, even evil, for good

P “Tightrope between ascribing everything to God at the expense of [human] freedom ... and compromising the omnipotence of God” (105)

P To believe that evil is under God’s control teaches:

- Humility to accept adversity though we don’t understand
- To give thanks in times when things are good
- We are free from anxiety and care



Augustine & Calvin

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## Statement of the Problem of Theodicy

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P If God is all powerful, God could prevent evil;

P If God is all good, God would want to prevent evil (to the righteous);

P Evil exists (befalls righteous)

P Therefore, either God is not all powerful, or God is not all good, or both, or there is no God.



Statement of the Problem of Theodicy

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## Three Traditional Answers

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P Incomprehensibility of God – associated with God’s speech to Job and his friends out of the whirlwind

- ▶ We don’t know why there is so much evil, but we must trust God and have patience (106)
- ▶ Problem with this is that it tends to suppress questioning and implies we should accept all suffering
  - Job is about questioning God and he is affirmed by God
  - Not all evil should be accepted, but rather fought



Three Traditional Answers

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## Three Traditional Answers (cont.)

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P Evil is evidence of divine punishment of wicked and/or chastisement of God’s people (106)

- ▶ Shows us that God is just
- ▶ Problem is that it can easily blame victims for evil that they suffer
  - Those with cancer must have done something bad to deserve their fate...



Three Traditional Answers (cont.)

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## Three Traditional Answers

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P Divine pedagogy – God uses evil to get us to turn to God and grow in faith

- ▶ There is a difference between evil and suffering that one willingly endures on behalf of God and neighbor and evil and suffering of innocent victims
- ▶ Implies that evil is really good



Three Traditional Answers

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## Barth on Providence

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P God's providence, understood through Christ, is seen as God preserving, accompanying, and governing

- ▶ God as omnipotent is not the same as "omnicausal"
- ▶ God chooses to work through and with free creatures
- ▶ Evil is "nothingness" which God will overcome (110)

P Problem – seems to encourage passivity on our part (leave evil to God to deal with)



Barth on Providence

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