

Key concepts:

- There are two types of evil and suffering. (1) **Moral evil**: brought about by human actions. (2) **Natural evil**: natural events beyond human control.

- The logical problem is as ancient as the Greek philosopher **Epicurus** who pointed out that a God who was all powerful and all loving could, and would want to, eradicate evil and suffering. Since suffering exists then God would be either '**not able**' to do this (not omnipotent) or '**able but not willing**' (not omnibenevolent).

- John L. Mackie** called this as an '**inconsistent triad**'; evil and suffering are incompatible with the notions of omnipotence and omnibenevolence.
- Mackie also pointed out that any theodicy depends upon re-interpreting the idea of omnipotence and so is not successful. Either God is omnipotent in its fullest sense or God is not omnipotent. There is no in between.
- Mackie used the '**Paradox of Omnipotence**' to demonstrate this problem at its very basic level: 'Can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot subsequently control' or, 'make rules which bind himself?'
- To answer either yes or no would compromise omnipotence. Indeed, for Mackie, the notion of omnipotence seemed illogical in our world.

- William Rowe** and **Gregory S. Paul** have presented empirical versions of the problem of evil, sometimes called the evidential problem of evil.
- Rowe's argument is that if there are instances of **intense suffering** that God could do something about without impacting the greater good then it is logical to assume that God could, by definition, prevent this.

- However, there are instances of unnecessary intense suffering, for example a fawn that is 'trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.'
- God, by definition, could and should prevent this (because it would not interfere with free will) but does not. Therefore, there are rational ground for rejecting an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly-good being.
- Gregory S. Paul used **statistics** to demonstrate the extent and indiscriminate nature of human suffering through natural evil. For example, demographic statistics that detail the full extent of the early death of immature humans through natural evil: 'the estimated total prematurity loss of conceived humans is in the area of 350 billion.'
- Paul's main point is that there is a complete **denial of free will** to new-born, and premature, human beings. This does not work with any theodicy based in the God of classical theism.

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

The logical problem of evil centres around the notion of omnipotence and omniscience. Rowe and Paul generate empirical arguments, sometimes known as the 'evidential problem of evil' that intensify the logical problem.

Key questions

Are the notions of omnipotence and omniscience compatible with evil and suffering?

Does the notion of a God that does not intervene justify the evidential problem of evil and suffering?

Key quotes:

"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked." (Epicurus)

"Quite apart from the problem of evil, the Paradox of Omnipotence has shown that God's omnipotence must in any case be restricted in one way or another." (John L. Mackie)

"It is said that God is in the details, and that the nature of creation reveals the nature of the creator. This is a valid point, but the implications are not necessarily what Christians wish for them to be." (Gregory S. Paul)

"Intense human or animal suffering is in itself bad, an evil, even though it may sometimes be justified by virtue of being a part of, or leading to, some good which is unobtainable without it." (William Rowe)

Key words:

Epicurus

inconsistent triad

unnecessary suffering

omnipotent

paradox of omnipotence

Paul

omnibenevolent

Rowe

statistical evidence

Mackie

no free will