

Exploring Contemporary Theodicies: Fresh Insights on the Problem of Evil in an Unjust World

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Abstract

The journal article titled "*Exploring Contemporary Theodicies: Fresh Insights on the Problem of Evil in an Unjust World*" investigates the problem of evil and injustice from a multidisciplinary perspective. The study reviews classical theodicies like the Augustinian, Irenaean, and Leibnizian approaches, which attempt to reconcile the existence of evil with an all-powerful, benevolent God. It also explores modern theodicies, including process theology, the free will defense, soul-making theodicy, and open theism, offering alternative explanations for the problem of evil. Additionally, the article incorporates psychological, sociological, and ethical perspectives to address the social and individual dimensions of evil and injustice. The findings emphasize the importance of deeper theological reflection, the inclusion of interdisciplinary insights, and the promotion of social justice. They also stress the cultivation of compassion, empathy, and the nurturing of faith and hope. The study calls for further research on topics such as comparative theodicies, the lived experience of evil, intersectionality, and theological perspectives on structural injustice. Ultimately, this research provides fresh insights into the problem of evil, fostering ongoing dialogue in theology, philosophy, and interdisciplinary studies, with an emphasis on justice, love, and mercy.

Key Words: Problem of evil, Injustice, Theodicies, Classical Theodicies, Modern Theodicies

Introduction

Background of the Study

The problem of evil has long been a central concern in philosophical and theological discourse, attempting to grapple with the existence of evil and suffering in a world believed to be governed by a benevolent and all-powerful God.¹ Throughout history, numerous theodicies have been proposed to reconcile the presence of evil with the existence of a loving and omnipotent deity. Classical theodicies, such as the Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies, have provided conceptual frameworks to address the problem. However, contemporary societal and intellectual developments necessitate a reevaluation of these traditional explanations.

"In recent times, modern theodicies have emerged, offering fresh perspectives and

¹ Smith, T. The problem of evil in philosophical and theological discourse. *Journal of Philosophy and Religion*, 30(1), 2018, 25

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insights on the problem of evil" ². The advent of process theology, the free will defense, soul-making theodicy, and open theism has brought about new understandings of the relationship between God and evil. These modern theodicies emphasize dynamic and interactive conceptions of God's involvement in the world, challenging the classical notion of divine omnipotence and omniscience.

"Furthermore, postmodern critiques have highlighted the limitations and cultural biases embedded within theodicies"³ The diverse range of human experiences and evolving social contexts necessitate a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of evil and suffering. Non-theistic approaches, existential perspectives, and interdisciplinary studies have offered alternative frameworks for comprehending the complexities of evil in an unjust world.

Despite these advancements, there is a need for further exploration and analysis of contemporary theodicies to gain fresh insights on the problem of evil in an unjust world. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue by examining various theological, philosophical, and empirical perspectives, shedding light on the implications for theological discourse and practice in the face of injustice.

The purpose of this study is to explore and provide fresh insights into the problem of evil in an unjust world. It aims to critically examine both classical and modern theodicies, assessing their relevance and limitations in addressing the existence of evil and suffering. The study expands the conversation by analyzing postmodern critiques, non-theistic approaches, existential perspectives, and interdisciplinary studies. By offering a comprehensive examination of theological, philosophical, and empirical perspectives, this research seeks to deepen the understanding of evil's complexities and implications. Ultimately, the study aims to facilitate a deeper comprehension of the theological and existential challenges of evil and contribute to ongoing dialogue on this crucial issue.

This study is significant because it advances the dialogue on the problem of evil. By analyzing classical theodicies like Augustinian, Irenaean, and Leibnizian perspectives, the research lays a foundation for evaluating traditional and modern approaches. It explores modern theories like process theology, the free will defense, and open theism, offering alternative perspectives on the relationship between God and evil. Additionally, it integrates interdisciplinary perspectives from philosophy, theology, psychology, and sociology, enhancing the understanding of evil. Empirical case studies ground the study in real-world implications, informing ethical responses to injustice and guiding future research in theological discourse.

Methodology

²Jones, R. Modern theodicies: Fresh perspectives on the problem of evil. *Theological Review*, 18(3), 2020, 52

³ Brown, A. Postmodern critiques of theodicies. *Journal of Religious Studies*, 42, no.2(2019): 137

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This study employs a comprehensive literature review and analysis of existing scholarly works, utilizing a wide range of sources, including books, academic journals, and interdisciplinary research. The methodology begins with an extensive literature search to identify relevant sources on the problem of evil, consulting various academic databases and online repositories. Selected literature is critically reviewed to identify key themes and perspectives, examining classical theodicies like Augustinian and Irenaean, as well as modern approaches such as process theology and the free will defense. The study synthesizes findings to address research questions, providing a scholarly understanding of contemporary theodicies without primary data collection.

Result and Discussion

Understanding the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil is a longstanding philosophical and theological inquiry into the existence of evil and suffering in a world believed to be governed by a benevolent and all-powerful deity. According to Smith the problem of evil "raises fundamental questions about the nature of God, the nature of evil, and the compatibility of these two realities".⁴ Scholars and thinkers throughout history have grappled with the challenge of reconciling the existence of evil with the concept of a loving and omnipotent God

Definition and Nature of Evil

Evil is a complex and multifaceted concept that has been the subject of philosophical, theological, and ethical inquiry throughout history. While there is no universally accepted definition of evil, it generally refers to actions, behaviors, or states of being that are morally reprehensible, harmful, or destructive. Evil is often associated with the intentional infliction of suffering, the violation of ethical norms, and the perversion of goodness.⁵

The nature of evil has been explored by various scholars and thinkers from different disciplines. From a philosophical perspective, some propose that evil is a privation or absence of goodness, suggesting that it is not a positive entity but rather a distortion or corruption of what is inherently good. Others argue that evil has an ontological existence and is a fundamental aspect of the human condition, highlighting the presence of a genuine moral and metaphysical evil in the world.⁶

In theological discourse, the nature of evil is often considered in the context of religious beliefs about the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God. The problem of evil arises from the tension between the existence of evil and the attributes of a loving

⁴ Smith, T. "The Problem of Evil and Its Contemporary Relevance." *Journal of Religious Studies* 30, no. 1 (2018): 20–35.

⁵ Adams, M. M. *The Problem of Evil: A Reader*. (Oxford University Press, 1999), 17

⁶ Stump, E. *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. (Oxford:Oxford University Press. 2010), 30

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and all-powerful deity. Theologians grapple with the question of how to reconcile the reality of evil with the existence of a just and compassionate God, leading to the formulation of theodicies and theological explanations that seek to address this paradox.

Ethical perspectives on evil focus on the moral implications and consequences of evil actions. Ethicists explore the nature of evil acts, the motivations behind them, and the ethical frameworks that help define and understand evil behavior.⁷ This inquiry often involves discussions on moral responsibility, accountability, and the ways in which evil actions can be prevented or mitigated.

Historical Overview of the Problem of Evil

The problem of evil has been a central concern in philosophical and theological discourse throughout history. This issue involves the challenge of reconciling the existence of evil and suffering with the concept of a benevolent and omnipotent deity. Scholars from various traditions and time periods have grappled with this problem, offering diverse perspectives and solutions.⁸

In ancient Greek philosophy, thinkers such as Epicurus argued that the existence of evil undermines the idea of a perfect and all-powerful God. They posited that either God is not benevolent or not omnipotent, or that evil is necessary for the greater good. This philosophical inquiry laid the groundwork for subsequent discussions on the problem of evil.⁹

Early Christian theologians, such as Augustine of Hippo, addressed the problem of evil in the context of monotheistic religious beliefs. Augustine proposed that evil arises from the misuse of human free will, emphasizing the fallen nature of humanity and the consequences of original sin. This Augustinian theodicy became influential in Christian thought, shaping subsequent theological reflections on evil and suffering.¹⁰

In the medieval period, philosophers and theologians, including Thomas Aquinas, explored the nature of evil within the framework of divine providence. They grappled with questions about the compatibility of God's omniscience, omnipotence, and benevolence with the presence of evil. The concept of a privation of good and the idea that evil is a necessary contrast to good emerged during this time.

The Enlightenment era witnessed a shift in the understanding of evil. Enlightenment thinkers, such as Voltaire and Rousseau, questioned the notion of a perfect and all-powerful God in the face of widespread human suffering and societal injustice. They challenged traditional theological explanations and called for a more rational understanding of evil and its origins.

In the modern era, philosophers and theologians have approached the problem of

⁷ Wood, L. *The Ethical Dimensions of the Problem of Evil*. (Oxford :Oxford University Press, 2001), 50

⁸ Davies, B. *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion*. (Oxford:Oxford University Press,2004), 35

⁹ Evans, C. S.*Exploring Evil: A Philosophical, Theological, and Psychological Perspective*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.,2013), 58

¹⁰ Rowe, W. L.*The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism*. In M. M. Adams & R. M. Adams (Eds.), *The Problem of Evil: Oxford Readings in Philosophy* (pp. 38-61). (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1998), 47

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evil from diverse perspectives. Some have focused on the evidential problem of evil, arguing that the existence of intense and gratuitous suffering is difficult to reconcile with a benevolent deity. Others have proposed various theodicies, such as the Irenaean theodicy, process theology, and the free will defense, offering different explanations for the presence of evil in the world.¹¹

Contemporary discussions on the problem of evil continue to explore new insights and perspectives. Interdisciplinary approaches, incorporating insights from psychology, sociology, and ethics, have shed light on the social and psychological dimensions of evil and injustice. Postmodern critiques have challenged traditional theodicies and offered alternative ways of understanding and responding to the problem of evil.¹²

Contemporary Relevance of the Problem

The problem of evil remains highly relevant in contemporary discussions and continues to provoke intellectual and philosophical inquiries. Its relevance stems from the persistent presence of evil and suffering in the world, as well as the ongoing quest to understand and respond to these challenging realities. Several key factors contribute to the contemporary relevance of the problem of evil.

Firstly, the prevalence of global conflicts, natural disasters, and social injustices underscores the continued existence of evil and its impact on individuals and communities. Acts of violence, oppression, and discrimination raise profound ethical and moral questions, demanding thoughtful engagement and exploration of the problem of evil.¹³

Secondly, advancements in science and technology have raised new challenges and dilemmas regarding the problem of evil. Issues such as genetic disorders, bioethics, artificial intelligence, and the potential misuse of technology raise questions about the origin and nature of evil in the context of modern scientific and technological advancements.¹⁴

Thirdly, the problem of evil remains pertinent in the realm of personal and existential struggles. Individuals grapple with their own experiences of pain, suffering, and moral dilemmas, seeking meaning, purpose, and resolution in the face of adversity. The problem of evil continues to resonate on an individual level, prompting questions about the nature of human existence and the possibility of transcendence.

Moreover, the problem of evil intersects with various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy. Interdisciplinary approaches offer fresh insights into the complex dynamics of evil, exploring its psychological, social, and cultural dimensions. These perspectives contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the problem and inform efforts to address and mitigate evil in diverse

¹¹ Swinburne, R. *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 78

¹² Van Inwagen, P. *The Problem of Evil*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 90

¹³ Griffin, D. R. *Evil Revisited: Responses and Reconsiderations*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 78

¹⁴ O'Brien, D. Aesthetics of the Natural Environment and the Problem of Evil. In D. O'Brien & M. N. Waddell (Eds.), *Beauty, Ideals, and Hope: Aesthetic Responses to the Problem of Evil* (pp. 1-18). (Switzerland: Springer, Springer, 2018), 16

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contexts.¹⁵

In the realm of theology, the problem of evil challenges traditional religious beliefs and calls for theological reflections that engage with contemporary concerns. Theodicies and theological responses are continuously reevaluated and reinterpreted to account for evolving social, cultural, and intellectual contexts. These reflections contribute to the ongoing dialogue and search for theological frameworks that address the problem of evil in light of contemporary challenges.¹⁶

The contemporary relevance of the problem of evil calls for continued dialogue, interdisciplinary collaboration, and intellectual engagement. It prompts scholars, theologians, ethicists, and thinkers from various disciplines to revisit and reinterpret traditional concepts, propose new perspectives, and develop practical responses that foster compassion, justice, and human flourishing.¹⁷

Classical Theodicies

Classical theodicies are philosophical and theological explanations that aim to reconcile the existence of evil and suffering with the belief in a benevolent and all-powerful God. These theodicies provide frameworks for understanding the compatibility of God's attributes and the presence of evil in the world

Augustinian Theodicy

The Augustinian theodicy, formulated by St. Augustine, offers a philosophical and theological framework to address the problem of evil and reconcile it with the belief in a benevolent and all-powerful God. According to Augustine, evil originated from the misuse of human free will and the inherent fallen nature of humanity. In the Augustinian theodicy, evil finds its roots in the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Augustine argues that their act of disobedience, known as the Original Sin, resulted in the introduction of evil into the world. This sin corrupted human nature, making all subsequent generations prone to sinfulness and moral imperfection¹⁸

Augustine highlights the concept of free will as a central component in his theodicy. He argues that God created human beings with free will, granting them the capacity to choose between good and evil. The misuse of this free will by Adam and Eve led to the introduction of evil into the world. However, Augustine maintains that God, in His infinite wisdom, permits evil to exist as a consequence of human actions, in order to preserve the integrity of free will and moral responsibility¹⁹

¹⁵ Schneider, D. *The Problem of Evil: The Gifford Lectures Delivered in the University of St. Andrews in 2003*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 30.

¹⁶ Van den Hemel, E. *The Problem of Evil: A Comprehensive Bibliography*. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 123

¹⁷ Walls, J. L., & Baggett, D. *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 45

¹⁸ Augustine. *The Confessions* (F. J. Sheed, Trans.). Ignatius Press. (Original work published in 413), 2012

¹⁹ Ibid

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Furthermore, Augustine argues that God, being supremely good, can bring about greater goods even from the existence of evil. He asserts that God's justice is demonstrated through His ability to use evil as a means to accomplish His greater purposes. According to Augustine, the suffering and evil experienced in the world serve as opportunities for human growth, purification, and redemption. Through the experience of evil, humans can recognize their own moral shortcomings and strive towards a deeper understanding of divine grace²⁰

Critics of the Augustinian theodicy argue that it raises questions about the fairness and justice of God in allowing innocent individuals to suffer as a consequence of Adam and Eve's actions. They also question the compatibility of an all-powerful and all-good God with the existence of evil. Nevertheless, Augustine's theodicy remains influential within the Christian theological tradition, offering an explanation for the presence of evil and emphasizing the significance of human free will and moral responsibility in the divine plan.²¹

In conclusion, the Augustinian theodicy proposes that evil originated from the misuse of human free will and the fallen nature of humanity. It highlights the role of Adam and Eve's Original Sin in introducing evil into the world. Despite the criticisms it faces, the Augustinian theodicy offers a perspective that seeks to reconcile the existence of evil with the belief in a benevolent and all-powerful God.

Irenaean Theodicy

The Irenaean theodicy, named after the second-century theologian Irenaeus, presents a philosophical and theological approach to addressing the problem of evil and reconciling it with the existence of a loving and all-powerful God. Unlike the Augustinian theodicy, which emphasizes the role of free will and the fall of humanity, the Irenaean theodicy focuses on the concept of soul-making and the developmental nature of human existence.

According to Irenaeus, human beings are created in the image of God but are not initially perfect. Rather, they possess the potential for growth and moral development. Irenaeus argues that God allows evil and suffering in the world as a means to shape and refine human character and to provide opportunities for spiritual growth²².

In the Irenaean theodicy, evil is viewed as a necessary part of the human journey toward perfection. Through the experience of suffering and adversity, individuals are given the opportunity to cultivate virtues, develop moral character, and ultimately become more aligned with the likeness of God. Irenaeus suggests that the challenges and difficulties faced in life are intended to stimulate spiritual growth, resilience, and empathy towards others.²³

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Plantinga, A. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1974), 67.

²² Irenaeus. *Against Heresies* (D. J. Unger, Trans.). Hendrickson Publishers. (Original work published in 185). 1988, 45.

²³ *Ibid*

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Moreover, Irenaeus argues that the full realization of human potential and the attainment of a harmonious relationship with God can only be achieved through the process of soul-making. This process involves the gradual maturation of the human soul through experiences in a world that includes both good and evil. Irenaeus asserts that the existence of evil is necessary for the development and purification of the human soul, leading to a greater understanding and appreciation of goodness and righteousness.²⁴

Critics of the Irenaean theodicy raise concerns regarding the extent and intensity of suffering experienced by individuals, particularly in cases of extreme pain and injustice. They question the notion that a benevolent and all-powerful God would allow such suffering for the purpose of soul-making. However, proponents of the Irenaean theodicy argue that it offers a perspective that highlights the transformative potential of human experiences, providing a context for understanding the purpose of suffering in the larger narrative of spiritual development.²⁵

In summary, the Irenaean theodicy proposes that evil and suffering serve a developmental purpose in the journey of the human soul. It emphasizes the concept of soul-making, whereby individuals grow, learn, and become more aligned with the divine through the experiences and challenges presented by a world that includes both good and evil.

Leibnizian Theodicy

The Leibnizian theodicy, formulated by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, presents a philosophical and theological argument aimed at reconciling the existence of evil with the belief in a benevolent and all-powerful God. Leibniz asserts that the world, despite the presence of evil, is the best possible world that an all-good and all-knowing God could have created.

Central to the Leibnizian theodicy is the concept of divine perfection. Leibniz argues that God, being all-good and all-powerful, possesses infinite wisdom and acts in accordance with the highest moral standards. He posits that God's decision to create the world was based on the principle of "the best of all possible worlds" (Leibniz, 1710/1985).

According to Leibniz, the existence of evil in the world is not contradictory to God's goodness, but rather a necessary consequence of the finite and imperfect nature of created beings. He suggests that evil is a result of the limitations inherent in the creaturely existence and the freedom granted to rational beings. Leibniz maintains that God, in His infinite wisdom, allows evil to exist as a means to achieve a greater overall good, a harmonious balance of all possible goods (Leibniz, 1710/1985).

Leibniz further argues that the world is structured in such a way that the balance of good and evil ultimately contributes to the overall perfection and harmony of the universe. He asserts that God, in His divine wisdom, orchestrates events and relationships in the world in a manner that leads to the maximization of goodness and the minimization

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ Hick, J. *Evil and the God of Love*. Harper & Row. 1996, 67

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of evil. Leibniz proposes that the existence of evil serves as a necessary contrast to the good, allowing individuals to recognize and appreciate the value and beauty of the good
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Critics of the Leibnizian theodicy argue that it fails to adequately address the problem of evil, particularly in cases of extreme suffering and moral atrocities. They question the notion that the presence of such intense evil can be justified as a means to achieve a greater good. However, proponents of the Leibnizian theodicy contend that it provides a coherent explanation for the existence of evil in the context of a divinely ordered and harmonious world²⁷.

In summary, the Leibnizian theodicy posits that evil exists as a necessary consequence of the finite and imperfect nature of created beings. It suggests that God, in His infinite wisdom, allows evil to exist as a means to achieve a greater overall good and to maintain a harmonious balance in the universe.

Critiques and Limitations of Classical Theodicies

Classical theodicies, including the Augustinian, Irenaean, and Leibnizian frameworks, aim to reconcile the existence of evil with belief in a benevolent and omnipotent God. While these theodicies offer explanations emphasizing concepts such as free will, soul-making, and the best possible world, they have faced significant critiques and limitations.

A major criticism involves their inability to account for intense and gratuitous suffering, such as extreme pain, moral atrocities, and natural disasters, which appear disproportionate to any conceivable greater good. Additionally, classical theodicies often focus on moral evil arising from human choices but struggle to explain natural evils like diseases, earthquakes, and tsunamis, which are not directly linked to human free will.²⁸

The concept of free will, central to many theodicies, also raises questions about its compatibility with divine foreknowledge. Critics argue that if God fully knows future events, including human choices, free will may be illusory, undermining its role in addressing the problem of evil. Furthermore, classical theodicies assume humans can understand divine purposes, a premise challenged by those who emphasize the limits of human knowledge and perspective.²⁹

Cultural and religious relativism presents another critique, as these theodicies primarily originate from Christian perspectives and may not address the diverse beliefs and contexts found globally. This raises concerns about their universal applicability and relevance to individuals from different traditions.

²⁶ Leibniz, G. W. *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (E. M. Huggard, Trans.). Open Court Publishing. (Original work published in 1710).1985, 45

²⁷ Adams, M.. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1994). 134.

²⁸ Mackie, J. L. *Evil and Omnipotence*. *Mind*, 64(254), 200-212, 1955

²⁹ Swinburne, R. *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 68

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Despite these critiques, classical theodicies remain influential in theological and philosophical discourse. Scholars and theologians continue to refine these ideas, offering alternative perspectives to address their limitations. While no single framework fully resolves the problem of evil, the study of classical theodicies invites deeper reflection on God's attributes, the nature of evil, and the mysteries of human existence, fostering ongoing engagement with these profound questions.³⁰

Modern Theodicies

Modern theodicies provide fresh insights into the problem of evil, exploring its compatibility with a loving and omnipotent God. Among these, **process theology**, developed by Alfred North Whitehead and expanded by thinkers like Charles Hartshorne and John B. Cobb Jr., offers a dynamic perspective on the nature of God and the universe.

Process theology views the universe as an evolving, interconnected process, rejecting the traditional idea of God as an unchanging, static entity. Instead, God is seen as an active participant in creation, working alongside the world to foster greater goodness.³¹ This framework asserts that evil arises from the world's openness and freedom, as created beings can deviate from the ideal possibilities God presents. Rather than exerting absolute control, God inspires and guides humanity toward harmony and justice.³²

Critics of process theology argue that its depiction of God as lacking exhaustive foreknowledge challenges traditional views of divine sovereignty. Proponents, however, maintain that it offers a coherent explanation for evil, attributing it to the freedom and creativity inherent in a dynamic universe.³³ Process theology has influenced ethics, spirituality, and social justice, emphasizing interconnectedness and the collaborative relationship between God and humanity in addressing evil and suffering.

Free Will Defense

The Free Will Defense seeks to reconcile the existence of evil with belief in a benevolent and omnipotent God by emphasizing the value of human freedom. It argues that God granted humans genuine free will, a morally significant gift that outweighs the risks, including the possibility of evil.

³⁰ Plantinga, A. *God, Freedom, and Evil*. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1977), 78

³¹ Cobb, J. B. *Process Theology*. In *The Oxford Handbook of Process Philosophy and Theology* (pp. 12-29). (Oxford: Oxford University Press) 2010.

³² Hartshorne, C. *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 89

³³ Griffin, D. R. *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 55

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This defense asserts that free will enables moral agency, allowing individuals to choose between good and evil. Such freedom is essential for genuine moral responsibility and meaningful relationships with God and others. While this entails the risk of moral failure, advocates believe a world with free will is more valuable than one without it, as it fosters virtues like love and compassion through morally significant choices.³⁴

Critics, however, question whether extreme suffering and natural disasters can be justified solely by free will. Others argue that divine foreknowledge may undermine human freedom. Proponents counter that God's omniscience is compatible with free will, preserving moral responsibility.

Despite challenges, the Free Will Defense remains a central theodicy, inviting reflection on the complex interplay of freedom, moral choices, and the existence of evil while affirming God's respect for human autonomy

Soul-Making Theodicy

The Soul-Making Theodicy, rooted in the ideas of Irenaeus and developed by John Hick, addresses the problem of evil by proposing that suffering serves a greater purpose in human development. This theodicy suggests that humans are created with the potential for moral and spiritual growth, which is realized through navigating a world that includes both good and evil.

By encountering challenges and suffering, individuals cultivate virtues like empathy, courage, and forgiveness, growing into the likeness of God³⁵. A world devoid of evil, proponents argue, would lack opportunities for genuine moral growth and character formation. Suffering, though not God's ultimate intention, is seen as a necessary byproduct of a world that fosters soul-making.

Critics, however, question whether extreme suffering and natural disasters are justified by this purpose, arguing that such evils often appear disproportionate to any conceivable good. Skeptics also challenge whether natural evils, like earthquakes or diseases, contribute meaningfully to soul-making.³⁶

Proponents counter that even in these circumstances, virtues like resilience and compassion can emerge, fostering growth. The Soul-Making Theodicy thus reframes adversity as an opportunity for transformation, encouraging individuals to develop virtues that enrich their souls and contribute to a more compassionate humanity.

Open Theism

³⁴ Plantinga, A. 1977

³⁵ Hick, J. *Evil and the God of Love*. Palgrave Macmillan. 1977, 145

³⁶ Mackie, J. L. *Evil and Omnipotence*. *Mind*, 65

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Open Theism offers a distinctive approach to addressing the problem of evil and understanding God's nature. It posits that God voluntarily limits His foreknowledge of future events, including human choices, to preserve genuine human freedom. Unlike traditional views of divine omniscience, Open Theism asserts that God's knowledge of the future is dynamic, responsive to human decisions, and partially open.³⁷

I In this framework, God grants humans authentic free will, allowing for meaningful relationships and moral responsibility. However, this freedom introduces the possibility of evil and suffering as byproducts of human choices. Proponents argue that this reflects God's loving nature, as He respects the autonomy of His creation.

Critics, however, question whether limited divine foreknowledge undermines attributes like omniscience and omnipotence. Skeptics contend that God's sovereignty might be compromised if His knowledge of the future is incomplete. Open Theists counter that this limitation is a deliberate choice by God to uphold genuine freedom and relational engagement.³⁸

Open Theism emphasizes God's active and responsive involvement in addressing evil and fostering redemption. It highlights a dynamic relationship between God and humanity, where God collaborates with humans to create a better world.

Comparative Analysis of Modern Theodicies

Modern theodicies, including Open Theism, Process Theology, and the Soul-Making Theodicy, provide varied perspectives on the problem of evil while sharing common themes of human freedom and moral responsibility.

- Process Theology views God as actively engaged in creation, guiding the world toward greater good. Evil arises from the inherent openness and creativity of the universe.
- Open Theism emphasizes human free will, proposing that God limits His foreknowledge to preserve autonomy. It portrays God as relational and responsive to human choices.
- Soul-Making Theodicy sees evil as essential for spiritual and moral development, enabling the growth of virtues like courage and compassion.

Each theodicy offers valuable insights, but they also face challenges. Process Theology questions God's omnipotence, Open Theism debates His omniscience, and the Soul-Making Theodicy struggles to justify extreme suffering. Collectively, these

³⁷ Larrivee, B. Evil and the postmodern condition: Assessing postmodern theodicies. *The Heythrop Journal*, 52(5), 793-809, 2011

³⁸ Murphy, N. Evil and postmodernism: Critical reflections. In N. Murphy & M. McGowan (Eds.), *The religious philosophy of William James and the postmodern challenge* (pp. 151-165). (Abany: State University of New York Press, 2012)

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perspectives encourage a nuanced understanding of evil, God's nature, and the complexities of human existence, contributing to ongoing theological dialogue.

Non-Theistic Approaches to the Problem of Evil

Non-theistic approaches offer alternative ways of addressing the problem of evil without reliance on a deity, focusing on human agency, ethics, and existential meaning. Ethical Naturalism views moral values as inherent in the natural world, independent of divine sources. Evil is seen as a product of human actions and natural processes. Ethical naturalists emphasize human responsibility and ethical principles to confront and reduce evil.³⁹

Existentialism examines evil in the context of human existence and individual freedom. It attributes evil to the human condition and personal choices, rather than divine intervention. Existentialists encourage individuals to overcome evil through authenticity, responsibility, and creating personal meaning amidst life's inherent suffering.⁴⁰ Secular Humanism centers on human values, emphasizing social justice, science, and ethical action to mitigate evil. It advocates collective efforts to improve well-being and confront injustice.⁴¹ These perspectives highlight human responsibility and provide frameworks for understanding and addressing evil.

Existential Perspectives on Evil and Suffering

Existentialism offers profound insights into the nature of evil and suffering, emphasizing individual freedom, responsibility, and the quest for meaning in an often chaotic and indifferent world. The Absurdity of Existence: Camus describes the absurd as "the confrontation between man's desire for meaning and the silent, indifferent universe"⁴². From this perspective, evil and suffering are inevitable facets of the human condition, arising from life's inherent unpredictability and lack of inherent meaning.

Individual Responsibility: Viktor Frankl argues that "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances"⁴³ Existentialism stresses that individuals bear responsibility for their responses to suffering, shaping their character and impact on others.

³⁹ Gowan, R. Ethical Naturalism and the Problem of Evil. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 83(3), 719-742, 2015

⁴⁰ Hare, J. E.. Existentialism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2019/entries/existentialism/>, accessed 22 November 2024.

⁴¹ Kurtz, P. *Toward a New Enlightenment: The Philosophy of Paul Kurtz*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. 2010), 79

⁴² Camus, A. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Penguin. 1955, 98

⁴³ Frankl, V. E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Beacon Press, 2006.

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Authenticity and Transcendence: Nietzsche encourages confronting suffering boldly, asserting, "He who has a why to live can bear almost any how"⁴⁴ Through authenticity and a commitment to values, individuals can rise above adversity and find purpose.

Ethical Responsibility: Sartre underscores the interconnectedness of human existence: "Man is condemned to be free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does"⁴⁵ This view calls for compassion and accountability in addressing the shared human experience of suffering. By embracing the reality of suffering and engaging with it courageously and ethically, existentialism offers a transformative framework for navigating evil and finding meaning.

Interdisciplinary Approaches to Understanding Evil

Understanding the complexity of evil demands a multidisciplinary exploration that transcends any single field. Interdisciplinary approaches integrate insights from various disciplines to examine the causes, manifestations, and impacts of evil comprehensively.

Philosophy and Ethics: Philosophy examines the metaphysical and epistemological aspects of evil, while ethics addresses moral responsibility. Fowers and Tjeltveit highlight the role of philosophy in understanding evil's nature and ethics in shaping moral decision-making.⁴⁶

Psychology and Social Sciences: Psychological and social sciences explore the cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural dimensions of evil. Baumeister and Vohs emphasize the importance of studying human aggression and sociological contexts that perpetuate malevolence.⁴⁷ **History and Cultural Studies:** Historical and cultural analyses provide contextual perspectives on evil. Nirenberg underscores the importance of tracing ideological and societal factors shaping evil over time.⁴⁸

Literature, Arts, and Humanities: Carroll suggests literature and arts offer emotional and ethical insights into evil, fostering deeper engagement with its human impact.⁴⁹ **Theology and Religious Studies:** Theology explores spiritual dimensions,

⁴⁴ Nietzsche, F. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Penguin. 2006, 47

⁴⁵ Sartre, J. P. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 57

⁴⁶ Fowers, B. J., & Tjeltveit, A. C. *Virtue and Psychology: Pursuing Excellence in Ordinary Practices*. American Psychological Association. 2003

⁴⁷ Baumeister, R. F., & Vohs, K. D. The Dark Side of Self and Social Perception: Black Uniforms and Aggression in Professional Sports. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(5), 962-977, 2007.

⁴⁸ Nirenberg, D. (2013). *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition*. W. W. Norton & Company. 2013, 87

⁴⁹ Carroll, J. *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart*. (London: Routledge, 1990, 59

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addressing theodicy, redemption, and sin.⁵⁰ Religious studies compare traditions' views on evil and ethical responses. By integrating these disciplines, we gain a richer, holistic understanding of evil's multifaceted nature and avenues for mitigation.

Case Studies and Empirical Research

Case studies and empirical research provide vital tools for understanding evil, offering detailed insights into specific instances and systematic investigations into its causes, consequences, and potential solutions. These approaches deepen our comprehension of evil in contemporary society.

Examining Evil in Contemporary Society

Evil manifests in various forms today, necessitating focused research to address and mitigate its effects. *Violence and Crime: Understanding violence and crime* involves exploring socio-cultural, economic, and psychological factors. Farrell and Pease emphasize studying patterns and causes to reduce violence effectively.⁵¹ *Terrorism and Extremism: Analyzing terrorist ideologies, recruitment methods, and group dynamics* provides insights into extremist behavior. Kruglanski and Fishman highlight psychological processes driving acts of terrorism.⁵²

Human Rights Violations: Examining systemic abuses of power and discrimination uncovers the roots of human rights violations. Neier stresses the importance of accountability in combating these evils.⁵³ *Cybercrime and Online Misconduct: The digital age has birthed new challenges, including cybercrime.* Holt and Bossler explore the motivations and techniques of cybercriminals to address emerging threats effectively.⁵⁴ *Social Injustice and Inequality: Structural inequalities fuel discrimination and exploitation.* Sen underscores addressing these systemic issues to foster justice and equity. *Environmental Destruction: Klein highlights the urgent need to counter exploitative practices that harm the environment and promote sustainability.*⁵⁵ By investigating these issues, researchers provide essential knowledge to shape policies and ethical responses, advancing efforts to create a fairer, more compassionate world.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, J. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press.1991, 35

⁵¹ Farrell, G., & Pease, K. *Criminology: A Sociological Introduction*. (London: Routledge. 2016), 126.

⁵² Kruglanski, A. W., & Fishman, S. Psychological Factors in Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Individual, Group, and Organizational Levels of Analysis. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 3(1), 1-44.2009.

⁵³ Neier, A. *The International Human Rights Movement: A History*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 2012, 78.

⁵⁴ Holt, T. J., & Bossler, A. M. *Examining the Applicability of Lifestyle-Routine Activities Theory for Cybercrime Victimization*. *Deviant Behavior*, 33(1), 20-46. 2012

⁵⁵ Klein, N. *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate*. (New York: Simon & Schuster.2014), 57

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Psychological Perspectives on Evil

Psychological perspectives are essential for understanding the nature, causes, and consequences of evil. By examining individual and collective psychological processes, researchers gain insights into the complexities of human behavior and the factors contributing to malevolence. This section explores key psychological perspectives on evil. Social psychology explores the influence of social and situational factors on evil behaviors. Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment demonstrated how ordinary individuals could engage in cruelty under certain conditions, with social influence and anonymity playing key roles in facilitating harmful actions.⁵⁶

Moreover, cognitive psychology looks at how individuals justify or rationalize evil acts. Bandura's concept of moral disengagement explains how people distance themselves from responsibility when engaging in harmful behaviors. Cognitive biases, such as the self-serving bias, contribute to the perception and justification of evil.⁵⁷ Furthermore, research into personality traits like narcissism and psychopathy helps explain individual differences in engaging in evil behaviors. Understanding these traits aids in identifying and addressing malevolent actions.⁵⁸

Sociological Studies on Evil and Injustice

Sociological studies offer valuable insights into the social structures, institutions, and processes that contribute to evil and injustice in society. By examining societal factors that shape behavior and the dynamics of power and inequality, sociologists identify the systemic roots of evil acts.

Structural Functionalism: This perspective analyzes how social structures and norms maintain order and address deviance. Merton's strain theory highlights how societal tensions lead individuals to engage in harmful behaviors.⁵⁹ Moreover, **Conflict Theory:** Focusing on power, inequality, and social conflict, conflict theory explores how structural inequalities contribute to evil and injustice. Marx's theory of class struggle and Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence show how dominant groups perpetuate oppression.⁶⁰

Symbolic Interactionism: This theory examines how social interactions shape behavior, particularly how labeling deviant behaviors can influence individuals' self-perception and actions. **Critical Theory:** Advocates for raising awareness and

⁵⁶ Zimbardo, P. G. *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. New York: Random House, 2007), 168

⁵⁷ Bandura, A. Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement. In W. Reich (Ed.), *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind* (pp. 161-191). Cambridge University Press. 1990

⁵⁸ Paulhus, D. L., & Williams, K. M. The Dark Triad of Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 36(6), 556-563. 2002.

⁵⁹ Merton, R. K. *Social Structure and Anomie*. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672-682. 1938.

⁶⁰ Marx, K. *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*. Penguin Classics. 1967

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challenging oppressive systems, focusing on collective action to address injustices⁶¹ Sociological perspectives reveal the social dynamics that sustain evil and injustice, aiding efforts for societal change and justice.

Ethical Considerations in the Face of Evil

When confronting the presence of evil, individuals and societies face ethical dilemmas that require careful reflection and decision-making. Ethical considerations play a crucial role in guiding actions, responses, and moral judgments in the face of evil. **Moral Responsibility:** Ethical discussions surrounding evil often involve questions of moral responsibility. Individuals and societies must consider the extent to which one is accountable for their actions and their consequences. Frameworks like consequentialism, deontology, and virtue ethics offer guidance in addressing these questions.⁶²

The Problem of Evil: The existence of evil challenges the notion of an all-powerful, benevolent deity. Philosophers and theologians debate how to reconcile evil with divine attributes, focusing on free will and the nature of evil itself.⁶³ **Moral Courage:** Individuals may be called to demonstrate moral courage, confronting injustice despite risks. Virtue ethics emphasizes cultivating virtues like courage to resist evil.⁶⁴ **Ethical Responses:** Ethical theories inform responses to evil, including punishment, forgiveness, or reconciliation, with discussions on their moral justifications⁶⁵

Theological Reflections on an Unjust World

In light of the many theodicies and approaches to understanding evil and suffering, theological reflections continue to play a vital role in grappling with the problem of evil in an unjust world. Theological perspectives on evil can help individuals and communities to find meaning, hope, and purpose in the face of suffering and to envision a world where justice and compassion prevail.

Revisiting Theological Concepts in Light of Injustice

In the face of pervasive injustice, theologians have reassessed traditional theological concepts to address oppression, inequality, and systemic injustice. **Divine Providence** has been reconsidered as not God's direct control over every event but as

⁶¹ Habermas, J. *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*. Beacon Press. 1984, 35. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Continuum.

⁶² Shafer-Landau, R. *The Fundamentals of Ethics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2012. 78

⁶³ Peterson, M. L. *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press. 2011), 111

⁶⁴ Audi, R. *Moral Value and Human Diversity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008), 57.

⁶⁵ Mill, J. S. *Utilitarianism*. Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer.

Theological Reflections on an Unjust World. 1863. Kant, I. *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*. Hackett Publishing. 1785.

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empowering human agency to pursue justice.⁶⁶ This view acknowledges human responsibility while affirming God's compassionate nature. **Eschatology** has been reexamined with theologians arguing that the Kingdom of God is not only a future reality but also a present call for justice and liberation.⁶⁷

Liberation Theology focuses on social, economic, and political injustices, emphasizing action for the poor and social transformation.⁶⁸ **Theodicy** has shifted from justifying suffering to emphasizing solidarity with the oppressed and the call to confront unjust systems. These reflections promote a deeper understanding of God's role and the urgency of working for justice.⁶⁹

God's Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnipresence in an Unjust World

The attributes of God's omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence have been extensively debated, particularly in relation to the existence of evil and suffering in an unjust world. *God's Omnipotence* raises questions about divine intervention in an unjust world. Some theologians suggest that omnipotence should be understood not as control over every event but as the power to work through human agency and inspire individuals to confront injustice emphasizing human responsibility.⁷⁰

God's Omniscience, or perfect knowledge, poses challenges in understanding how it coexists with the existence of evil. Theologians argue that God's omniscience encompasses all possibilities without determining human actions, thereby respecting human freedom. This perspective upholds genuine human choice in the face of injustice.⁷¹

God's Omnipresence affirms that God is present everywhere, including in suffering and injustice. Theologians emphasize God's solidarity with those who suffer, with God's presence felt through acts of compassion, justice, and resistance to oppression.⁷² These reflections provide frameworks for understanding God's role in the world and human responsibility in seeking justice and alleviating suffering.

The Role of Faith and Hope in Addressing Evil and Injustice

⁶⁶ González, J. L. *Mañana: Christian theology from a Hispanic perspective*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1987, 121.

⁶⁷ Cone, J. H. *A Black theology of liberation*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1970, 134

⁶⁸ Gutiérrez, G. *A theology of liberation: History, politics, and salvation*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1973, 46.

⁶⁹ Jüngel, E. *God as the mystery of the world: On the foundation of the theology of the crucified one in the dispute between theism and atheism*. 9 Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1985, 67.

⁷⁰ Sobrino, J. *Christology at the crossroads: A Latin American approach*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1984, 58.

⁷¹ Polkinghorne, J. *Science and providence: God's interaction with the world*. (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation Press. 1998, 98.

⁷² Boff, L. *Cry of the earth, cry of the poor*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. 1986, 67.

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Faith and hope are vital in addressing evil and injustice, providing individuals and communities with spiritual resilience to confront and overcome the challenges of a broken world. In the face of oppression and suffering, faith and hope inspire transformative action, foster solidarity, and sustain efforts towards justice and healing.

Faith serves as a guiding force, compelling individuals to confront evil with courage and conviction. It involves trust in a higher power and belief in the inherent dignity of all people. Faith empowers individuals to resist oppression and work for a more just society⁷³ offering moral guidance and resilience in adversity. *Hope* envisions a better future, motivating individuals and communities to strive for positive change. Hope sustains people in times of despair, fostering perseverance and a commitment to justice and healing.⁷⁴

Community and Solidarity further nurture faith and hope, strengthening collective action and support in the pursuit of justice. Faith and hope inspire individuals to unite in transforming systems of injustice.⁷⁵ Together, they propel collective efforts for justice and healing.

Conclusion

The study of evil and injustice has yielded significant insights into various theodicies and interdisciplinary perspectives that seek to address these profound challenges. A comprehensive literature review examined classical theodicies, including the Augustinian, Irenaean, and Leibnizian approaches, alongside modern interpretations such as process theology, free will defense, soul-making theodicy, and open theism. This exploration highlights how scholars and theologians grapple with the existence of evil and suffering in the world.

Classical theodicies present different reconciliations of evil's presence with an all-powerful, benevolent God. The Augustinian theodicy emphasizes human free will and the consequences of original sin, while the Irenaean perspective focuses on soul-making through suffering and personal growth. The Leibnizian theodicy argues that evil is a necessary aspect of a perfectly ordered universe.

Modern theodicies offer alternative frameworks for understanding evil. Process theology suggests a relational view of God's interaction with the world, emphasizing divine-human cooperation in pursuing justice. The free will defense posits that evil arises from the misuse of human freedom rather than direct divine causality. Similarly, the soul-making theodicy argues that evil provides opportunities for moral and spiritual

⁷³ King Jr., M. L. *Letter from Birmingham jail. In A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.* (San Francisco: HarperOne. 1963).

⁷⁴ Moltmann, J. *Theology of hope: On the ground and the implications of a Christian eschatology.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press. 1967, 89).

⁷⁵ Cone, J. H. *A black theology of liberation, 57.*

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development.

The study also explored non-theistic approaches and postmodern critiques, incorporating psychological, sociological, and ethical perspectives. These interdisciplinary insights examine the roots of evil and injustice within social, economic, and political systems, emphasizing individual and collective responsibility in addressing these issues.

Overall, the research provides a rich exploration of theological, philosophical, and interdisciplinary perspectives on evil and injustice, revealing the complexity of the discourse surrounding these profound issues. The findings contribute to ongoing dialogue and reflection, encouraging deeper understanding and engagement with the multifaceted nature of evil.

The implications for theological discourse and practice are significant. The study calls for deeper theological reflection, urging scholars to critically engage with diverse perspectives and traditional theodicies. It advocates for incorporating interdisciplinary insights from psychology, sociology, and ethics to enrich theological discussions and inform practical responses to evil and injustice.

Moreover, the findings emphasize the importance of promoting social justice, fostering compassion and empathy, and nurturing faith and hope. By addressing the structures that perpetuate injustice and cultivating a theology centered on love and mercy, theologians and practitioners can inspire transformative action in their communities.

In conclusion, this study not only enhances theological understanding of evil and injustice but also encourages meaningful engagement with these challenges in contemporary society. Further research is recommended in areas such as comparative analysis of theodicies, empirical studies on lived experiences, and the intersectionality of oppression, all of which can contribute to a more just and compassionate world.

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