

What about God?

Philosophy of Religion in the Western Tradition

6



Upon completing this chapter, students should be able to meet the following Learning Outcomes:

- 6.1** Articulate the views of Anselm and Gaunilo regarding the ontological argument.
- 6.2** Compare and contrast Freud, Nietzsche, Tolstoy, and Kierkegaard on the rationality of religious belief.
- 6.3** Explain and evaluate the problem of evil.

Your parents may have told you to never discuss religion or politics—nothing leads to a bigger debate or perhaps the loss of a friendship faster. Unfortunately, in a philosophy class, we discuss both. Existence, life, and death are complex matters. Religions have existed since the beginning of human history and, in many cases, pre-date any written word. Many older religions have morphed into or been absorbed into existing ones. Some even have secret, unknown histories that are only revealed by heretics.

In this chapter, we will focus on Western conceptions of God and discuss the God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims (who, ironically, is the same being—which has been interpreted in different ways by various Holy books and religions). The discussion will mainly focus on proofs of God's existence, the rationality of religious belief, and the problem of evil (both logical and evidential).

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: DOES THE PRACTICE MATTER OR THE BELIEF IN GOD?

Does it matter what religion you follow? Do good people go to heaven and the wicked go to hell regardless of their faith?

The Existence and Nature of God

The God of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims is purported to have three main qualities or attributes. These qualities and attributes have not been assigned or gleamed by philosophers, but rather, by theologians (religious scholars), who study ancient Holy books and documents. The qualities that God (also known as the three omni God) have are omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence. That is to say, God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good.

St. Teresa of Ávila

This extraordinary woman made religious belief a personal, sensual matter. Teresa Sánchez de Cepeda y Ahumada, canonized as **St. Teresa of Jesus** and popularly known as **St. Teresa of Ávila** was both a revolutionary theologian and a pioneer of women's rights. The great Castilian poet and mystic, while remaining cloistered among her Carmelite sisters in Ávila most of her life, managed to outwit the Spanish Inquisition, refined what would become the language of Cervantes in the Golden Age of Spanish literature, and hold her own as a philosopher and theologian.

"Let nothing disturb you
Let nothing frighten you
Everything passes
But God never does
Patience brings everything
With God you lack nothing
God is enough"

—St. Teresa of Ávila, 1515–1582



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St. Teresa of Ávila was a key figure in the Catholic Counter-Reformation that began with the Council of Trent (1545–1563) as the Catholic Church found itself besieged by the newly minted protestant faiths. Sixteenth-century Protestants such as Luther and Calvin brought on what was in effect a return to Augustinian—which is to say, Platonic—approaches to faith. Popular and populist, this revivalist Christian spirit contributed to the spread of Protestantism in Europe and presented the Catholic Church in its Thomistic apex with a formidable challenge. Reason, of the brand that St. Thomas Aquinas preached as he perverted Aristotle into Natural Law, now was seen as part of the problem. Teresa's importance to the Catholic Church lay precisely in not resting on a foundation of reason—and in this she anticipated Kierkegaard and the twentieth-century existentialist Christians including Gabriel Marcel. She made faith an intensely personal affair.

Teresa's mysticism took the theological conversation away from reason and into a very personal realm of quiet prayer and meditation that led to spiritual ecstasy. Gian Lorenzo Bernini's marble statue *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in the church of Santa Maria della Vittoria in Rome illustrates a famous episode from Teresa's *Autobiography* (*Libro de la Vida*), where an angel came to her:

"I saw a golden spear in his hand, with what looked like fire at the tip. He thrust the spear into my heart, my breast, and he left me on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great it made me moan. And yet the pain also was so overwhelmingly sweet that I did not want it to end."

The sheer sensuality of Teresa's ecstasy as she describes it was not without controversy. But her desire to make the intangible tangible, to make religious belief physical and personal, even sexual, itself calls for piety. Teresa, along with her fellow Spanish mystic and poet St. John of the Cross (1542–1591), embraced the dangerous sensuality of the religious experience, and she proved that it may well be the essence of Christianity to court that danger. Later readers, in or outside the Catholic faith, found recognition and inspiration in the depth of St. Teresa's vivid description of the practice of quiet, private prayer and meditation. Apart from any considerations of the metaphysics of religion, Teresa got the psychology of religion right.

Particularly in her masterpieces, *The Interior Castle* and *The Road to Perfection*, as well as in her spiritual *Autobiography*, Teresa's work was a call to freedom, a challenge for men and women alike and as equals to reach the greatness of human possibilities. She was canonized in 1622 by Pope Gregory XV, and she was declared a Doctor of the Church by Pope Paul VI in 1970. St. Teresa today is celebrated as the patron saint of Spanish writers.

St. Anselm

Various philosophers and theologians have attempted to provide either inductive or deductive logical proofs for God's existence. From the outset, we may note that none of the proofs seem to work—if they did, they would most like be carved into every church, temple, or mosque across the world. Nevertheless, they are worth considering. St. Anselm (1033–1109) attempts to produce a deductive proof for God's existence. He argues that a perfect being necessary exists. His argument is deductive in nature. It is based upon the meaning of certain terms and does not rely upon empirical evidence.

His argument is sometimes called the **ontological argument** because it is based upon the nature of being. He says that if we imagine two objects, both identical, but one exists and the other does not, then the one that exists is more perfect. Since God is already a perfect being, he cannot be more perfect, therefore he must exist. Gaunilo, a French monk of Anselm's time, provided a counterargument to Anselm. He argues that existence does not make something more perfect. He employs a **reductio ad absurdum** (reduce to an absurd conclusion) argument. A reductio argument employs the same structure but changes one word, thereby making the conclusion absurd. In logic, if the argument works in one case, it should work in all cases, all things being equal.

In this case, Gaunilo claims that if perfection entails existence, the by the same token, a perfect island must exist, because, after all it is perfect. Gaunilo does not doubt God's existence, nor does he believe in the perfect island. His point is that, in his view, Anselm's arguments do not work.

Again, in Gaunilo's view, if Anselm is correct in his assertion regarding God's necessary existence, then the same would be true for a perfect island. Does believing in the perfect island make it real? This is absurd—hence this is a reductio ad absurdum (reduce to an absurd conclusion) argument. According to Gaunilo, it is an absurdity to conclude that God necessary exists simply because we can imagine or conceive of him. Anselm agrees that it is absurd to conclude that the perfect island exists just because you think of it, and yet, he claims that in the case of God it is a different matter all together. He maintains that God's existence is guaranteed by his perfection.

In the end, this twelfth-century debate was left unresolved with both men claiming victory. Ultimately, Anselm became Saint Anselm and Gaunilo was lucky to not be excommunicated for his heretical objection to the argument.

St. Thomas Aquinas

In the *Summa Theologica*, which was written between 1265 and 1274, St. Thomas Aquinas' explained the sacred doctrines of Christianity in the clearest way possible. In the work, Aquinas provides **five proofs (or ways) for God's Existence**.

The first four ways fail for various reasons, but the fifth way has some promise and has found its way into our contemporary thought. The five proofs for Gods existence are Motion, Efficient Cause, Possibility and Necessity, Degrees of Perfection, and Design.

From each of these arguments, he attempts to draw conclusions from things that we see in everyday life (empirical evidence) regarding the nature of reality. He starts with motion: if something is in motion, then it must have been set into motion by something else and there is not an infinite chain of movers; so, the first unmoved mover who sets the world in motion is God. This argument is a version of Aristotle's "unmoved mover" argument. Aristotle took existence and creation very seriously and thought it was logically impossible for the universe to be eternal. His answer was to maintain there was a first thing or force that he termed the unmoved mover that set the universe into motion and created, well creation. The problem with the argument is that one premise states that all things are set into motion by something else, but the conclusion says there is one thing that is not set into motion by itself—it is either one or the other but not both, so the argument commits a logical contradiction. All of the other arguments (Efficient Cause, Possibility and Necessity, Degrees of Perfection) have similar logical flaws.

The only argument that does not suffer from serious logical flaws is the Design argument, although it does not prove a number of things.



ST. THOMAS AQUINAS AND DESIGN

St. Thomas Aquinas and the Argument from Design

- 1) Among objects that have goals or a purpose, some have minds and others do not.
- 2) An object that has a goal, but does not have a mind, must have been designed by a being that had a mind.
- 3) So there exists a being with a mind who designed all of the mindless objects that act for ends.
- 4) Hence this Being is God and he does exist.

In the argument, Aquinas claims all objects have a goal or purpose. A pen, for example, has a purpose but does not have a mind. The fact that it has a purpose means it was created by a being with a mind which assigned that purpose. In his view, if an object has a goal or purpose but no mind, then something with a mind must have designed it. Therefore, there is one, single being that has a mind that designed all the mindless objects that have goals or a purpose—of course that Being is God.

From the outset, you may see an issue, pens are mindless objects, but they were not created by God. Furthermore, any human creation or artifact was not created by a single individual or person. By analogy, we could argue that natural creatures and

objects may not have a single creator (or a creator at all). Why should we assume there is a single being that created all natural creatures and objects?

William Paley and a Watch on the Beach

William Paley (1743–1805) asked us to imagine that we are walking on a beach and find a watch. He says we may question, how did it get there? One answer is that it was created randomly—perhaps by the action of the waves and the sand on the beach. Paley, however, thinks this is an absurd idea. He thinks that given the complexity of the watch, it would be reasonable to conclude that the watch had a creator or designer—even if we had never seen a watch in our lives. Of those two hypotheses which seems to be the most likely? Paley thinks, just as you most probably do, that it makes more sense to talk about the watch having a designer. Paley's version of the design argument is an argument from analogy. He wants to draw an analogy between the watch and nature. He wants us to look at the complexity of the watch and compare it to the complexity of nature and natural organisms. He thinks that if we consider how complex natural creatures and the universe as a whole is, we will conclude that they must have a designer as they are much more complicated than a simple watch.

David Hume (1711–1776) argues that this is a poor or weak analogy. It is one thing to talk about watches, it is another to talk about living organisms, and still another to talk about the universe. He claims that the argument does not make it rational to conclude that the universe has a designer. Hume thinks Paley is comparing apples to oranges or better human artifact (watches) to natural creatures and the universe. Watches are manmade, living creatures are not. Watches are inanimate things, organisms are alive. A Gucci and Rolex watch will not procreate and create a Golex. So in Hume's view, Paley is drawing a bad comparison and making a weak inference. Ultimately, it seems Hume may be mistaken, it is not the living or innate nature that is at issue, it is the complexity. And no matter how complex my watch might be, our little pinky finger has more complexity in it. The question is, was it the result of a random or natural process or the result of design?

POWERFUL IDEAS: PROBLEMS WITH THE DESIGN ARGUMENT



- 1) It does not prove there is an interactive designer. (God could be an architect who creates the universe and moves on to other realms—this view is known as Deism.)
- 2) It does not prove there is only one designer. (There could be many god or goddesses.)
- 3) It does not clearly show who the designer is. (It does not prove one religion over another.)

A Scientific Alternative: Evolution

A few years ago, scientists from Harvard University published an article in the journal, *Nature*, providing the result of a genetic analysis of humans and many other primates. The genetic analysis suggests a messy split between the two lineages that lead to humans and the other great apes lineages. According to the scientist, the evolutionary split between humans and our nearest evolutionary cousins, chimpanzees, may have occurred more recently than we thought, according to a new comparison of the respective genetic sequences. Previous estimates put the split at as much as 7 million years ago. This would mean that Toumai, a fossil dating from at least 6.5 million years ago in Chad and assigned to the species *Sahelanthropus tchadensis*, which had been thought to be the earliest known member of the line that gave rise to modern humans is in fact an ancestor to both species.

Researchers led by David Reich of Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, now calculate that the split may have occurred no more than 6.3 million years ago, and possibly as recently as 5.4 million. That would make Toumai older than the time of the split. The researchers make their claim after comparing the genetic codes of humans, chimpanzees, gorillas, and other primates in unprecedented detail—more than 20 million DNA “letters” in all. By checking the differences between different species’ DNA sequences, they were able to estimate the time since they first diverged. The research involved the study of fossils, mathematical algorithms (to calculate the amount of change in the human and ape DNA as well as the time required to produce those changes), and finally genetic analysis. Ultimately, the research helps to confirm the ideas first put forth by Charles Darwin in 1859 in his book, *The Origin of Species* and supports the view that humans evolved from earlier forms of life on the planet.

“When we read about Creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so, He created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that he gave to each one so they would reach their fulfillment. Evolution in nature is not opposed to the notion of Creation, because evolution presupposes the creation of beings that evolve”

—Pope Francis, October 27, 2014 at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences

There is, however, one great irony in this notion, Charles Darwin, the creator of evolutionary theory was a theist and Christian when he wrote his book to explain his theory. He went so far as to place this quote in the beginning of his book “But with regard to the material world, we can at least go so far as this—we can perceive that events are brought about not by insulated interposition of Divine power, exerted in each particular case, but by the establishment of general laws” —William Whewell, *Bridgewater Treatise* (1833), as found in Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859)

The above quote is by William Whewell (1794–1866), a British philosopher, scientist, and theologian. He argues that events in this world are not caused by God acting in each particular case, but rather by the establishment of laws of nature. In other words, when objects fall, we do not think God makes each of them fall in

every instance, but we believe that gravity (a law of nature) dictates their fall (and for theist is a law of nature created by God).

Darwin, in the same way, feels he has stumbled upon laws of biology that dictate how events will unfold. We do not worry that dogs will give birth to cats or vice versa, as we now understand that genetics and other laws of biology require dogs to give birth to puppies and cats to give birth to kittens. God does not need to employ his will or divine powers to make such things happen, rather, on this view, God established laws of nature that include laws of biology and genetics, which govern these events.

Finally, there is good news for Catholics. In 2014, Pope Francis declared that evolution does not conflict with Catholicism. As Pope Francis states at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences in 2014 “When we read about Creation in Genesis, we run the risk of imagining God was a magician, with a magic wand able to do everything. But that is not so, He created human beings and let them develop according to the internal laws that he gave to each one so they would reach their fulfillment . . . Evolution in nature is not opposed to the notion of Creation, because evolution presupposes the creation of beings that evolve.”

Although persons on both side of the debate feel they are in the right, creation by a God and evolution are not mutually exclusive. It could be the case that there is no God and that humanity is the result of natural law and processes or it could be the case that God employs those natural laws and processes to create humanity.



POWERFUL IDEAS: HYPOTHESES THAT EXPLAIN LIFE ON EARTH

Of the four likely hypotheses for the creation of the universe and humanity, only two seem possible:

- Hypothesis 1: Random (false)
- Hypothesis 2: Designer (false)
- Hypothesis 3: Evolution and No Designer (possible)
- Hypothesis 4: Evolution and Designer (possible)

Evolution does not rule out the possibility of “intelligent design” for the universe. The notions of evolution and a creator deity are not mutually exclusive.

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: GOD'S EXISTENCE

Can science resolve the issue of God's existence?

Hopes, Bets, and Beliefs

There are numerous other statements and arguments for and against God's existence. The arguments against will be discussed later in the section on the “The Problem of Evil.” Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) claims that we should all hope that God exist. In that way, justice will be served to those who have lived a wicked and unjust life and yet prospered in this world. In Kant's view, if you are a moral agent (which I do hope you believe in ethics), then you must assume the God's existence in order to be rational. Having said this, plenty of philosophers and people are atheist and still hold to ethical truth and values.

“The heart has reasons that reason does not know”

—Blaise Pascal



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Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) thought belief in God served our rational self-interest. He proposed a **prudential argument** for God's Existence. He felt that it was in our self-interest to believe in God, as the benefits of such a belief far outweighed any loss.

POWERFUL IDEAS: PASCAL'S WAGER

Your Belief	God Exists	God Does Not Exist
You believe in God	Infinite bliss (heaven)	+/- some small amount
You don't believe in God	Infinite damnation (hell)	+/- some small amount

Possible outcomes:

- 1) If you believe in God, and he exist, then you are going to heaven and are going to reap infinite rewards.
- 2) If you don't believe in God, and he does exist, then you are going to hell and suffer infinite pain.
- 3) If you believe in God, and he does not exist, you have wasted some small measure of energy.
- 4) If you don't believe in God, and he does not exist, then you have saved some small measure of energy.

There are, of course, a few flaws with Pascal's prudential argument. To begin, if this were the only reason you believed in God, I doubt you would get passed the pearly gates of Heaven. Second, it is an oversimplification of the options. There are thousands of religions and gods? Which one ought you to choose? Even if you were to choose, Christianity, Judaism, or Islam, each of those faiths have specific practices and the orthodox teaching hold all other believers are destined for hell. In other words, Pascal's wager is much more of a long shot than he appears to understand or maintain.



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William James (1842–1910) thinks that the existence of God cannot be proved or refuted by science. He feels that is something we can make ourselves believe. He thinks belief in God is “open” for most of us to believe in even though there is not sufficient evidence for it. In fact, he goes so far as to say we can “Will ourselves to believe” in God. James says we may believe any “open” hypothesis. James defines a hypothesis as a proposed belief. Such a hypothesis may be live or dead, forced or avoidable, momentous or trivial.

A “live” hypothesis is something we are open to. If we have already made up our minds on an issue, then such a hypothesis is “dead” and we cannot make ourselves believe it. Another two conditions for James are that a hypothesis must be forced and also momentous. In other words, we must be having some sort of existential crisis or serious problem in our life, which forces us to consider the issue. Also the belief must be momentous and very important. We cannot will ourselves to believe trivial or mundane things. When a hypothesis is live, forced, and momentous, then it is a genuine option for us to choose to believe in it. At which point we would attempt to obtain the belief. As far as religion goes, that would mean engaging in the practices of those that do believe, such as going to temple, reciting mantras, or reciting prayers. James feels that over time a person can eventually believe just as any other believer.

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: COMPELLING ARGUMENT?

Is there any argument that you feel is compelling for the existence of God?



POWERFUL IDEAS: CHRISTIANITY AND THE LINK TO MITHRAISM

The First Council of Nicaea also known as First Ecumenical Council of the Catholic Church was called in 325 AD under the leadership of the Roman Emperor Constantine. At the council, Constantine organized the early church and codified the books of the Bible. There was not a single Christian Holy book at that time and various churches had different gospels or books.

Constantine himself, claimed to have converted to Christianity after he had a vision of the cross and of Jesus before the battle of Milvian Bridge (a battle he won during a Roman civil war). It is interesting to note, however, in 312, when his biographer wrote of the battle with Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge he omits any discussion of Constantine's visions.

In fact, as was the custom at the time, after he won the civil war and became undisputed emperor of the Roman Empire, he built a victory arch in Rome (an arch that stands to this day). Although he later claims to have been inspired to victory by Jesus, he omits any Christian symbolism from the arch. Further, he adds various pagan gods including the God Mithra.

Mithra is a son of the Sun god, Apollo, who was born on December 25 to a virgin mother, crucified, and rose from the dead—although he predates Jesus by hundreds of years. (Not unlike the Egyptian god, Horus, who predates Jesus by a few thousand years). Interestingly, in 325, just prior to the council of Nicaea, Constantine “remembered” his visions and makes his biographer rewrite his biography. Found in many early Roman churches, under the church in catacombs, are alters to Mithra. Although belief in Christianity had swept over the slaves and soldiers of the Roman Empire, the Roman elite continued to practice pagan worship and held belief in various gods, including Mithra.

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: PAGAN EMPEROR

If the Roman Emperor Constantine was a pagan, is it problematic (for a Christian) that he was able to shape and mold the Christian Bible and Christian Church into the image he saw fit?

The Rationality of Religious Belief

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) famously said, “God is dead!” Although in truth he did not believe God had died, but rather, he had never existed in the first place. It was his view that if you are an intelligent person that is able to reason, then you understand that God is a fable, a fairy tale used by the powerful (like Roman Emperors) to control the weak.

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) had a similar take upon religious belief. In the book, *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), Freud applies his psychological theory to religious belief. According to Freud, most religious belief is captured by the idea that there is a God, one who cares about us, and that will provide us with a eternal happiness after this life. An archetypal protective father figure. Freud argues that the origin of such a belief, which is lacking almost any empirical evidence, is wish fulfillment. It is the result of the psychological desire for protection from a cold brutal reality. Ultimately, belief in God is simply wishful thinking on our part. As Freud says, “Ignorance is Ignorance; no right to believe anything can be derived from it . . . Scientific work is the only road which can lead us to knowledge of reality outside of ourselves.” And in Freud’s view, the logical conclusion is that belief in God is not a rational, rational belief.



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In an opposite vein, Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) argues that belief in God and Jesus is not (or perhaps, beyond human rationality). True understanding of God is beyond our comprehension. In his view, God exist in a realm that is beyond time and space and yet Jesus became part of time part of space. Jesus, as the son of God and part of the trinity (in which the father, son, and Holy Spirit are all one) became a contradiction, a paradox. In Kierkegaard’s view, truth is subjective and relative. And although belief in God is contradictory and irrational, it is still possible.

Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) expresses a similar view to that of Kierkegaard in his work, the *Confessions* (1880). In the *Confessions*, he notes that the notion that faith is irrational has long been pervasive in philosophy. The dichotomy between faith and reason dates back to antiquity and was taken for granted by medieval thinkers such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas. Tolstoy was searching for the meaning and purpose of life. He says that “I realized that it was impossible to search for an answer to my questions in rational knowledge; rational knowledge had led me to recognize that life is meaningless. My life came to a halt and I wanted to kill myself.”

He felt that science and reason could not provide any answer to the question as to why we are here, only the how—if that. He goes on to say, “As I looked around at people, at humanity as a whole, I saw that they lived and affirmed that they knew the meaning of life. I looked at myself—I had lived as long as I knew the meaning of life. For me, as for others, faith provided the meaning of life and the possibility of living.” Tolstoy would not disagree with Nietzsche or Freud, he would simply say there is more to life than rational belief.

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: IS RATIONALITY REQUIRED?

Does belief in a higher power have to be rational or quantifiable by science? Can our irrational beliefs still be true?

The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil can be put as follows: Can an all knowing all powerful all good being allow evil to exist? If God is all powerful, all knowing and all good, then why does Evil exist in the world? There are no easy answers to these questions. Theologians have been struggling to provide answers, known as theodicies for ages. J. L. Mackie (1917–1981) argues that if we consider the notion of three Omni being with the attributes mentioned above, then he argues that an omni-benevolent being will attempt to stop all evil; that an all powerful being could stop all evil.

Therefore, if such a being exists, then evil should not. In Mackie's view, the fact that the world is filled with pain, suffering, and evil, three omni God does not exist. This argument is known as the logical problem of evil. It is to be distinguished from the evidential problem of evil, which basically says that there is so much evil in the world (and so little good, that clearly God does not exist). Mackie and many philosophers after him maintain that we don't need to employ induction or abduction to resolve the issue of God's existence; we can simply use deductive logic.

POWERFUL IDEAS: J. L. MACKIE'S LOGICAL PROBLEM OF EVIL



J. L. Mackie's deductive argument can be constructed as follows:

- 1) If a being is omnibenevolent, he will try to stop all evil.
- 2) If a being is all powerful, he can do anything (including stopping all evil).
- 3) If a being is all knowing, then he knows everything (including every instance of evil).
- 4) So if such a being existed, he would not permit any evil; for such an omnibenevolent being will try to remove all evil from the world and an omnipotent being can do anything.
- 5) Since evil exists, three omni God does not.

Mackie's conclusion is that if God does exist, he must lack one of the three qualities. Either God is not all-knowing, so He cannot stop all evil, He is not all-powerful, so He cannot stop all evil, or He is not omni-benevolent, in which case He is indifferent to evil.

Theologians respond in different ways. Often, they claim that evil is necessary or that it is the result of human free will. Mackie argues that it should not be necessary, and that humans could still have free will even if God prevented us from committing evils. Does humanity needs evil to know good? But why should this be the case? Must we know and experience evil in order to know good? How many rapes or

murders do we need before we all know evil? This line of thinking is a limitation upon God's power. God could (if he were all powerful) allow us to know good and evil without having to experience it. He does not need Sally to die in order to save Jim because he can save both.

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?"

—God, Book of Job, Chapter 38, verse 4



POWERFUL IDEAS: WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I LAID THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE EARTH?

The book of *Job*, which is found in the Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament, is an interesting piece of literature (historical or otherwise). To summarize the story succinctly: Satan visits God in Heaven and the two make a wager on Job's fidelity and loyalty to the Lord. Satan says Job is a good servant because God has "built a hedge around his house" and has rewarded him. To this the Lord says test his faith. The Lord tells Satan, he can do anything to Job, or his family, but he may not kill him. Satan does just that. He destroys all his land and livestock, kills all his children and inflicts great pain upon Job. In the end, Job asks God why? . . . to which God says, "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?" And then God goes on to list the various things he has done, which are beyond Job's power and how he has the audacity to question his creator. In the end, Job gets double of everything and all is well.

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: IS IT MORAL TO BET ON A PERSON'S LIFE?

If a powerful person (in a position similar to God) made a similar bet, on a man's life and the lives of his children, would we consider him moral?

Theodicy

St. Augustine (354–430) argues that evil is not really, real—it is a privation. A privation is a lack of something. For example, it is not evil or bad that a person is blind, they simply *lack* sight. He goes on to say that "All evil is either sin or punishment for sin." Which would be plausible if evil only befell the wicked, but it does also happen

to children for whom the sins they have committed could never equal the pain and suffering they endure.

St. Irenaeus (130–202 AD) has a more interesting explanation of evil. It serves a purpose (one God could have resolved in other ways). On his view, evil provides the necessary problems through which we take part in what he calls “soul-making.” Evil, ultimately, is a means to an end. If it did not exist, there would be no means of spiritual development. He maintains that creation is a two-step process. God first made man in his image, as it is stated in genesis and is now making us into his likeness.

According to this view, God’s purpose in creation was not to make a perfectly comfortable dwelling place for fully formed human beings, but to put rational creatures with the potential for growth in an imperfect environment where they could, through their freely chosen responses to difficulties they encounter, attain maturity. In other words, we need to struggle in order to grow spiritually—if we are never tested, we can neither fail nor succeed.

What the world would be like with three omni god around would be nearly unfathomable.

Earthquakes could be stopped before they started. Hurricanes would meander harmlessly over the open ocean. Bullets could stop in midair; infants falling out a high rises would land softly on the ground as those they had wings. God could interact with this reality and bring peace and happiness to all. And yet, it does not seem that such a world does exist. Our existence is not one where we interact with such a powerful deity—or rather where such a powerful deity has any interest in helping us. The three omni God appears not to exist because of the vast amount of evil in the world. God seems to lack omnipotence, omniscient, or omni-benevolence—otherwise, God could stamp out all evil. In the end, this topic is a matter of faith, and faith does not need a rational justification. In order to have faith, all you need to do is believe.

“God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.”

—Reinhold Niebuhr

POWERFUL ANALYSIS: IS EVIL A PROBLEM?

Does the problem of evil casts doubt on the existence of a three omni God?