

THE COSMOS UNDER THE REIGN OF “THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD”: A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The problem of evil is one that seems to elude humanity. Some philosophers and theologians have favoured the traditional theodicy or justification of the divine. This study is a shift from theodicy through Satan centredness (the handwork of the evil one) to *Deus Incognito* – (Unknowability of God). From the hypothetical “having sympathy for the divine (Theodicy and Freewill Defense)” which rationally must birth the standpoint of those who actually suffer; to focusing less on defending an age long irrationality of religious belief and more on rational academic as well as therapeutic effectiveness with respect to suffering. Qualitative research method which is premised on logical analysis, presentation and historical explanations is adopted. The study uncovers that in reality humanity is subject to pains and suffering. Various theories to justify suffering/evil include: the world under the reign of Satan, Theodicy, *Dues Absconditus*, Dead of God theology, *Deus Incognito*, among others. The work affirms that it is either the Cosmos is under the control of the Prince of this World thereby portraying Divine Hiddenness as a problem of religious language or *Deus Incognito* (The unknowable God) is the solution to the Problem of Evil. The purpose is to lend religio-philosophical voice to the current debate on problem of evil. This work will invariably add to knowledge both in the field of arts or social sciences and increase the volume of literature in religion and philosophical studies.

Keywords: Prince of this world, evil, theodicy, *Deus Absconditus*, *Deus Incognito*

Introduction

The problem of evil is one problem that has occupied thinkers both ancient and modern. David Hume echoes the Epicurus Greek Philosophers’ questions on the problem of evil in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?” Thus, the history of theories of evil are traceable to various attempts to reconcile the existence of evil (in the broad sense) with an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God or Creator. The problem of evil is a serious challenge to the defense of Christianity.¹ Actually, there are many problems relating to evil; for example, its origin, nature, purpose and avoidability. Philosophers and theologians have proffered varied solutions to resolve the problem of evil in the world. Below are some of the theories.

Description of Terms

Evil

Evil in its broad sense, which includes all natural and moral evils, tends to be the sort of evil referred in philosophical and theological contexts, such as in discussions of the problem of evil. The problem of evil² is the problem of accounting for evil in a world created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God.

The Nature of Evil

What is the description and nature of evil? This has to do with the description of the essence and identity of evil. This is a classical theistic problem in philosophy of religion. God is good and eternal, and all that he created is good. God is the author everything. Therefore, if evil is something, it follows that God is its author. Though do not vehemently reject the first premise, they challenge the premise that evil is something. The reality of evil does not necessarily imply that it is a substance or thing. Evil could be a privation or a lack of some good thing. Accordingly, evil could exist in a good thing as an imperfection in it.

¹ David Hume, Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, London: Penguin Books, Limited 1779: p. 186

² Geisler, N. L. “Problem of Evil” in Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics. Grand Rapids: Baker, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 1999, p. 219

The theist rejects dualism. Evil is not a coeternal principle outside God. Not all opposites, like good and evil, are first principles – that something can be essentially good (God) does not mean that something can be essentially bad. Nevertheless, once dualism is rejected, one has great difficulty explaining the reality of evil. If evil is not something outside God, and it cannot be anything inside of God, then what is it? Hence the problem is stated thus:

1. God is the Author of everything.
2. Evil is something.
3. Therefore, God is the Author of Evil.

The rejection of the first premise amounts to dualism. Likewise, denying the second premise leads to illusionism which denies the reality of evil. Neither is acceptable to a theist. Where then lays the solution.³

One of the more well-known statements of the logical form of the problem of evil is traced to the contemporary philosopher J. L. Mackie. Mackie posits: It is contradictory to affirm that God exists and is wholly good and Omnipotent, yet admit that evil exists. He maintained that the contradiction is not immediately obvious to show it because some additional premises must be added which spell out the meaning of terms like "good," "evil," Omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an Omnipotent thing can do. From these, it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.⁴

To say that God did not create all things is to deny his sovereignty. To agree that evil is nothing denies the reality of it. But then, to admit that God caused all things and evil is something is to acknowledge that God caused evil – a conclusion rejected by Aquinas but that seems to follow logically. Unless we reject the truth of one of the premises we must accept the truth of the conclusion. Theist argue that evil is not a thing or substance. But, it is a lack or privation of a good thing God made. Evil is a deprivation of some particular good. This is summed up thus:

1. God created every substance.
2. Evil is not a substance (but a privation in a substance).
3. Therefore, God did not create evil.

Evil is not a substance but a corruption of the good substances God made. It is important to note that a privation is not the same as mere absence. Evil is privation not a mere negation of some good that ought to be there.

To postulate that evil is not a thing, but a lack in somethings, is not to argue that it is not real. Evil is a real lack in good things, as the blind person knows only too well. Evil is not a real substance but a real privation in good substances. It is not an actual entity but real corruption in an actual entity.

Evil as privation comes in different kinds. There are physical privations, such as mutilations, and there are moral privations, such as sexual perversions. Privation can be in substance or in relationships. There are not only bad things but there are bad relations between things. A relationship of love is a good one; hate is an evil one. Likewise, when a creature worships his Creator, he relates well; blaspheming the Creator is an evil relationship. From the foregoing, it follows that there is no such thing as something totally evil. If it were totally deprived of all good, it would be nothing.

³ David Horton, *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in one Volume*, (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, 2006), p. 260

⁴ J. L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence" in Rowe and Wainwright, eds., *Philosophy of Religion: Selected Readings*, p. 206, reprinted from *Mind* 64, no. 254, April 1955.

The Purpose of Evil

No evil is good, but some evil has a good purpose. Warning pains, for example, are painful, but their painfulness has a good purpose. Of course, not all evil seems to be of this type. What of evil that seems not to have good purposes?

1. An all-good God must have a good purpose for everything.
2. There is no good purpose for some suffering.
3. Therefore, there cannot be an all-good God.

It seems evident that there is useless suffering in the world. Some people get better through suffering, but others get bitter. Broken bones are stronger when they heal, but some never heal. many die. Theistic position to apparently purposeless evil is in fourfold⁵ namely:

1. God has a good purpose for everything. That the finite minds cannot conceive of a good purpose for some evil does not mean there is none. God is omniscient, he knows everything. And since he is omnibenevolent, he has a good purpose for everything. God does know a good purpose for all evil.
2. We do know a good purpose for much evil. Though we may not everything but we know that there is a good purpose for much evil. We know that pain is God's megaphone to warn a morally deaf world. And if we as finite beings know a good purpose for much evil, then surely an infinite mind can know a good purpose for the rest.
3. Some evil is a byproduct of a good purpose. Not every specific evil needs a good purpose. Some evil can simply be a byproduct of a good purpose. Thus, evil results indirectly from good because it is the consequences of a good purpose. Hence, God has a good purpose for everything he does; some good purposes have evil byproducts; therefore, some evil is a byproduct of a good purpose.
4. God is able to bring good out of evil. Yes, God is all-powerful and able to redeem good from even evil. God in his providence is able to redeem much (if not all) good out of the evil byproducts in the world. God would in no way permit evil to exist in his works unless he were so almighty and so good as to produce good even from evil.

This does not mean that this present world is the best of all possible worlds. It means God has made it the best possible way to attain his ultimate goal of the greater good. No one has demonstrated that any alternative world is morally better than the one we have. Hence, no antitheist can show that God did not create the best world, even given the privation of good. This, of course, does not mean the theist is committed to the belief that this present world is the best world that can be achieved. God is not finished yet, and Scripture promises that something better will be achieved. The theist's assumption is that this world is the best way to the best world achievable [heaven].

Theistic theory: Theodicy and Freewill Defense

Yes, every worldview has to deal with the problem of evil, but it is a special acute problem for theism. For instance, atheism affirms the reality of evil and denies the reality of God. Pantheism affirms the reality of God but denies the reality of evil; whereas, theism strongly affirms the reality of both God and evil. As compared with the other worldviews that affirm both God and Evil, theism would seem to be in a more disadvantageous position. Finite godism, for instance, can claim that God desires to destroy evil but is unable to because he is limited in power. Deism in the same way, can distance God from evil by stressing that God is not immanent in the world, at least not supernaturally – we are on our own. And for pantheism, evil is a necessary part of the ongoing progress of the interaction of God and the world (his body).⁶

⁵ Horton, *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in one Volume*, p. 364-365.

⁶ David Horton, *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in one Volume*, p. 257.

The major problem of theistic view is that it not only believes God is all-powerful and could destroy evil, but also that he is all-loving and should destroy it. Further, the theistic God is all-knowing and created this world fully aware of what would happen.

Where did evil come from? Can an absolutely good God create evil? Or, would it seem that a perfect creature give rise to imperfection. Hence the problem is thus:

1. God is absolutely perfect.
2. God cannot create anything imperfect.
3. But perfect creatures cannot do evil.
4. Therefore, neither God nor his perfect creatures can produce evil.

The basic elements in the theistic response to this problem are found in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.⁷ Theists since have followed the contours of their thought. Both have variably agreed on the response that can be stated as follows:

1. God is absolutely perfect.
2. God created only perfect creatures.
3. One of the perfections God gave some of his creatures was the power of free choice.
4. Some of these creatures freely chose to do evil.
5. Therefore, a perfect creature caused evil.

The good God created good creatures with a good power called free will. Unfortunately, they used this good power to bring evil into the cosmos by rebelling against their Creator. So evil did arise from good, not directly but indirectly, by the abuse of a good power called freedom. Freedom in itself is not evil. It is good to be free. But with freedom comes the possibility of evil. So God is responsible for making evil possible, while free creatures are responsible for making it actual.

One of the questions surrounding the free-choice solution is, what caused the first creature to choose evil? Theists distinguish between the primary cause of a free will action (God) and the secondary cause (a human being). God gave the ability to choose. However, God is not responsible for the existence of evil as a result of man's free choice hence man should be held responsible for his action(s). God does not perform the free action for us. Human beings are the efficient, albeit secondary cause of their own free actions. God produces the fact of free choice, but each human performs the act of free choice. God then is responsible for the possibility of evil, but we must bear the responsibility for its actuality. God neither wills evil to be done nor wills it not to be done. He wills to permit evil to be done, and this is good.⁸ But if God cannot will evil, then what is the cause of it? No action can be uncaused, since this violates the first principle of causality, which demands that every event has a cause.

Religious believers have had recourse to two main strategies. One approach is to offer a theodicy which attempts to account for why God chooses to permit evil in the world. Many critics have rejected theodicy as inherently unbelievable or as unwise attempts to go beyond the bounds of human knowledge to discern God's inscrutable purposes. On the other hand, free will defense, claims that evil is caused not by God but by human beings, who must be allowed to choose evil if they are to have free will. The argument in freewill defense is that God does not create evil, yet evil cannot be avoided without depriving humans of the fundamental freedom of will. This tends to preserve God's goodness, because he created the best possible world. It also preserves his omnipotence and omniscience, because although he does know about evil and could stop it, the reason he chooses not to interfere is to ensure humanity's freedom. By this justification, checks off all requirements to explain away evil while maintaining that God is omniscient, omnipotent, and

⁷ Geisler, "Problem of Evil" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 221

⁸ Horton, *The Portable Seminary: A Master's Level Overview in one Volume*, p. 258.

omnibenevolent. This response presupposes that humans are indeed free, and it fails to reckon with natural evil, except insofar as the latter is increased by human factors such as greed or thoughtlessness.

***Deus Absconditus* and *Deus Reveletus*(The Hiddenness of God and the Revealed God)**

The Latin: *Deus absconditus*⁹ refers to God who has withdrawn totally from the world having no interference with the affairs of the world. This is in tandem with the fundamental Christian notion of God as beyond human comprehension. It is a biblical notion from the Old Testament¹⁰ It is closely linked to the problem of evil, for divine hiddenness is most productive of suffering for those already in the midst of suffering: the inability of such persons to perceive God or his purposes intensifies their sufferings by making it feel to them as if God does not care, or that their suffering are meaningless, or that God has forsaken them or does not love them, and so on. Divine hiddenness also intensifies the problem of evil by seeming to undermine a common strategy in theodicy, namely, treating the way God acts in relation to his creatures as analogous to the way loving parents' acts toward their children. The premises of the argument are open to challenge, however. Some theists argue that God has good reasons for not revealing himself to everyone who seeks him, and different theories have been developed as to what God's reasons might be. It is often claimed that just as loving parents sometimes must subject their child to some painful experience that is for the child's wellbeing, but that the child is unable to understand, so God sometimes allow us to experience suffering for similar reasons.

The early reformers (Martin Luther and John Calvin) connect divine hiddenness to divine revelation. Luther writes "God hides *in order to be found* where God wills to be found."¹¹ For Calvin, "the invisible divinity is made manifest in such spectacles [that is, faith] but that we have not the eyes to see this unless they be illuminated by the inner revelation of God through faith."¹² The reformers' thinking on hiddenness is the emphasis of Karl Barth who states "hiddenness of God necessarily reminds us of our limitation."¹³ For Barth, the matter is simple: between God and humans there stands the hiddenness of God, in which He is far from humanity and foreign to them except as He has of Himself ordained and created fellowship between Himself and humanity—and this does not happen in the actualizing of their capacity, but in the miracle of His good-pleasure.¹⁴ By implication, divine hiddenness is not a problem to be solved but is rather related to God's gracious self-disclosure.

Herbert Onyema Anyanwu has observed that scholars of the early theories painted the African "God" generally as a Supreme creator of the universe who is not represented by any symbols but is regarded as a God who retired after creating and commencing the organization of the world and went into his eternal rest. They maintained that the idea of God among the people is confusing and obscure and imbued with polytheism. Further, they represented God as leaving the world to the lesser deities while Himself has gone away to a repose of eternity. One can therefore say that they were giving expression to what is in fact European deistic philosophy, the kind of philosophy which has led them to speak of God in the whole of Africa as a withdrawn God – "*Deus Otiosus*."¹⁵ This theory postulates that God does not interfere in the affairs of the world and human beings. God is held to be too remote in the African Traditional Religion and absent from the daily lives of the people. However, most African anthropologists and experts in African Traditional Religion argue on the contrary that the *Deus Otisus* in relation to the

⁹ Herbert. O. Anyanwu, *African Traditional Religion from the Grassroots*, Owerri: Lasen, 1999: p. 71

¹⁰ See Isaiah 45:15; 59:2; Micah 3:4; Psalm 10:1; 22:1-2; 30:7; 44:22-23; 88:13-14; 89:46; 104:27-29)

¹¹ Steven Paulson, Paulson, Steven (2014). Luther's Doctrine of God. Oxford Handbooks Online.

<https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604708.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199604708-e-034>, 1999, p. 366

¹² (1966).

¹³ Karl Barth, *Dogmatics: in Outline*, New York Harper & Row, 1959, p. 20

¹⁴ Barth, *Dogmatics: in Outline*, p. 21

¹⁵ H. O. Anyanwu, *African Traditional Religion From the Grassroots*, Owerri: Lasen, 1999: p. 70

African God is a sheer introduction of 'ethnocentric chauvinism' by the Westerners in the African Traditional Religion. For instance, Anyanwu posits that this idea of a withdrawn God was formulated to distinguish the Westerners' god from the God of the Africans.¹⁶ By implication, those who use the term or believe in it, think that God is not totally unknown to the people. According to J. O. Awolalu and P. A. Dopamu:

We can thus see that the notion of a withdrawn God is an academic invention perpetuated by the obstinacy and dishonesty of those who will refuse to learn in partiality that the living God shows no discrimination or partiality in his universal self-disclosure. The fact that God cannot be perfectly known is not to be blamed on West Africa peoples. It is universally significant fact that God who is a *Deus Absconditus* is also a *Dues Reveletus* – God who is hidden is also God who is revealed. The imperfect knowledge of the nature and character of God is a result of the limitation of the human kind.¹⁷ However, in recent philosophy, scholars like J.L. Schellenberg argue that, divine hiddenness constitutes putative evidence for atheism.¹⁸

Death of God Theology

Close to the narrative of the hiddenness of God is the death of God theology. Proponents of this theology argue that, the word "God" is meaningless. A being who has never lived before cannot logically be said to have died. Pierre Bayle (1647-1706) his argument thus: "If God were all-good, he would destroy evil. If God were all-powerful, he could destroy evil. But evil is not destroyed. Hence, there is no such God."¹⁹ Others, again, speak of the death of God as a cultural fact, meaning that in the technological civilization the concept of a transcendental realm has disappeared from the consciousness of self-reliant, sophisticated modern men.

Indeed, it would seem that some at least for the death of God theologians have been strongly influenced by their discovery that their own inherited "cultural" conception of God was mortally wounded in conflict with the modern scientific world-view. For William Hamilton God disappeared when he (Hamilton) discovered that God was not a "need-fulfiller" or a "problem solver." Ever since then, Hamilton has experienced the sense of the real absence of God but he maintains a steadfast attitude of prayerful waiting upon God. Thus, he can hardly be said to be in the strict sense a believer in the "death" of God.²⁰

Deus Incognito

The idea of *Deus Incognito* (The Unknowable God) like *Deus Absconditus* does not represent any theological position but a trend. It was a term used frequently in the medieval mystical era. Perhaps, the diction was purely conventional, but it nonetheless carried within it certain implications. The "unknown God" captured a core theme of this mystical understanding, born in the pagan Platonic academy and maturing in the salons of the French enlightenment. The summary of the view is that, God or the ultimate Reality is not fully knowable. All language used to describe this God is inadequate²¹ and insufficient. David Daiches notes well, "In an outburst of spectacular cosmic poetry the voice of God hammers home the point that the going-on in the universe are far beyond the wit of man to comprehend; that nature was not created for man and has its otherness and its mysteries that man can never penetrate; and it is against

¹⁶ Anyanwu, *African Traditional Religion From the Grassroots*, p. 71

¹⁷ J. O. Awolalu, and P. A. Dopamu, *West African Traditional Religion*, Nigeria: Onibonoje, 1979: p. 15

¹⁸ J.L. Schellenberg, Stanford encyclopedia of Philosophy, (April, 2016) Hiddenness of God.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cusanus/>

¹⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, and David F. Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology*, (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), p.242

²⁰ William Hamilton, Hamilton, William (Spring 1965), "the Death of God Theology," *Christian Scholar*, XLVIII Spring: 1965, pp. 33-34

²¹ (Matthew Claridge, 2012: 23

this background of miracle and mystery which dwarfs man that the problems of human suffering must be set.”²²

Whereas in the Medieval and ancient world, the unknowability of God was held in check by an optimistic view of human nature, in Modern time that naïve confidence has been lost. Man is a purely temporal, physical epiphenomenon. There is no ‘divine’ spark resident in his bosom. As such the unknowability of God has significantly hardened. The underlying ethos of this Modern *Deus Incognito* is fundamentally pessimistic, cynical, and Darwinian.²³

Vulgate translation was the first to use *Deus Absconditus* in biblical translation.²⁴ Luther saw this as a problem of religious language and picked it up and fashioned it into an entire theological perspective. For Luther, the notion of God as *Deus Incognito* smacked of everything wrong with the Medieval theology on which he was reared. The idea of *Deus Incognito* which drank deeply from pagan springs accounts for mankind’s separation from God, misinformation and ignorance of his dealings with humanity. In the original pagan metaphysics, creation itself is a kind of Fall and mankind is separated from God purely by accident. Man, being a heavenly spark imprisoned in earthly matter, he must diligently work to ascend back to God from whence he came.²⁵

Pantheism

This is one of the certain ways of resolving the question of the problem of evil as posed by Philosophy of Religion while perhaps logically adequate though not welcomed by the theist.²⁶ This philosophical position simply denies the reality of evil, to view evil as an illusion. This view aside from the difficulty that it must still face the problem of the evil of a widespread, illusory belief – is simply not consistent with Christianity, Judaism, Islam and African Traditional Religion which take evil as something too real and which must be treated with great seriousness.

The Origin and Reign of the Prince of this World

In Isaiah and Ezekiel references²⁷ are made of the king of Babylon, but seems to apply to someone more than the king of Babylon, with similar ambitious pride. Isaiah 14:12 pictures a person identifies as Lucifer, “morning star, son of the dawn.” He is revealed to have an ambition to rule all the angels and to make himself like God (Isa. 14:13-14). There seems to be a strong possibility that Ezekiel 28:11-18 and Isaiah 14:12-14 are talking about the same angel, and that is Satan.

Through his pride and his carefully planned decision to rebel against God, Satan seems to have introduced evil into the universe. Pride was the root from which all other sins came. Rebellion against god cuts a person off from the life and holiness of God. God is the source of all life, goodness and holiness. The absence of life is death. The absence of good is evil. The absence of God’s holiness is sin. Satan’s rebellion created the conditions for evil and sin to develop in the universe. Thus pride and conceit of Satan led to the existence of evil and death.

The Bible identifies Satan as a real person, a fallen angel, who is the “ruler of the darkness” of this world. He is also called the “ruler of the kingdom of the air.” The Apostle Paul says that it is this satanic spirit

²² David Daiches, “God under Attack,” pp.37-61 in *The Book of Job*, Ed. Harold Bloom. Modern Critical Interpretations. New York: Chelsea House, 1988.

²³ Claridge, p. 23

²⁴ Vulgate Bible, Isaiah 45:15.

²⁵ (Claridge, 2012:23).

²⁶ J. L. Mackie, “Evil and Omnipotence,” in *Philosophy of Religion: An Anthropology*, ed. Louis P. Pojman and Michael Rea, 5th. ed. (Belmont, Calif: Thompson Wadsworth, 2008), pp. 173-181; reprinted from *Mind* 64, no. 254 (1955).

²⁷ Isaiah 14:12-14, and Ezekiel 28:11-18

that dwells in the "children of disobedience" or in those human beings who choose to go their own way rather than the way of God the creator.²⁸ The Creator's will has been revealed to us through the prophets, apostles and Jesus Christ Himself. This was recorded and passed on to us in what we call His Word, the Sacred Scriptures.

Satan's people – "the children of disobedience" – can appear to be rational and even good, but their plans are ultimately exposed in the light of day to be destructive because Satan is a hater, the "father of all liars" and not a lover of truth or mankind. By definition, what is destructive we call "immoral." That which we call "moral" is what is "constructive." The true Creator God is "constructive" and therefore "good" by definition. He created everything and determines right and wrong with reference to Himself and to His will. Whereas the Creator God, Unmoved Mover is "The Builder," Satan is called "The Destroyer – the Prince of this World."

Yet. If God is the perfect author of all things, everything he makes has to be perfect. How then, can his creatures be the origin of evil? Theist agrees that God is the perfect Creator. In fact, and that free creatures are one of the perfect things God created. Without free choice, neither good nor evil could be chosen. Hence, if man is ever to choose the good, he must have the freedom to choose evil as well. Therefore, since freewill is the cause of evil, imperfection (evil) can arise from the perfect (not directly), but indirectly, through freedom).²⁹ In other words, whereas God created the fact of freedom, man perfects the acts of freedom. God makes evil possible; creatures (Prince of this world and man) make it actual.

Theory of "the Prince of this World" as the solution to the Problem of Evil

The most enduring challenge to traditional monotheism is the problem of evil, which attempts to reconcile three incompatible propositions: God is all-good, God is all powerful yet evil persists. However, by the description above, "the Prince of this World" traces the story of one of the most influential attempts to square this circle: the offloading of the responsibility for evil to one of God's rebellious creatures. By inference, the story of the devil is bitterly ironic, full of tragic reversals. He emerges as a theological symbol who promises to help oppressed communities cope with the trauma of unjust treatment, persecution, torture and death in the hand of a negligent God and eventually becomes a vehicle to justify oppression at the hand of political, economic and religious rulers. In this theory also, the devil evolves alongside the biblical God and the philosophical Necessary Being, who at first presents himself as the liberator of the oppressed but ends up a cruel ruler who delights in the infliction of suffering on his friends and enemies alike.

The above claim agrees with Wilbur O'Donovan when he argues that:

With his great army of fallen angels, Satan set up an invisible rebel movement in this world. The present world system of values is not God's will. It is Satan's will. Satan is called the "prince" of this world by Christ (John 12:31, John 16:11) and the "god" of this world by Paul (2 Cor. 4:4). In his capacity he controls the present world system of values. Since the present world system of values is under the control of Satan and other evil angels, Christians are [therefore] warned that they must not love (desire) [and submit to the] world . . . The present world system is based on pride, selfishness, lust and greed (1 John 2:16). He probably does this so that God will be required by his justice to bring punishment on his own people whom he loves.³⁰

This carries the notion that evil is being perpetrated through the activities of Satan – "the Prince of this world." This understanding exonerates God of evil in the world but pushes the blame on Satan. It is not a

²⁸ See Letter to the Ephesians 2:1-3

²⁹ Sinclair B. Ferguson, and David F. Wright, *New Dictionary of Theology*, p.242

³⁰ Wilbur O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, United Kingdom: The Paternoster Press. 1996, p. 191

surprise that Satan is labeled the “evil one” in the light of Matthew 13:19, the “tempter” according Matthew 4:3 and also the “ruler of the kingdom of the air” as seen in Ephesians 2:2. From the above discussions, there is no doubt that the governments of this world are influenced by a vast host of evil angels, who control the world system of values under Satan.

The book of Job also provides a rare glimpse into the activities of Satan as he endeavours to drive a wedge between God and his people. Job describes how Satan – the accuser attempts to call into question the integrity of humans such as Job who are seeking to live in a way that honours God. As Job’s experience portrays, this adversary working within the freedom granted by the sovereign Yahweh schemes to undermine the faith and destroy the joy of those who live for God.³¹ Job affirms that one source of suffering/evil, then, is the malicious activity of Satan as he opposes God’s plan by afflicting his people.

Implication(s) of the theory of “the Prince of this World”

- a. **Departmentalization of the World:** It is either God created the cosmos for Satan and hid himself as the theory of Divine Hiddenness portrays otherwise how can he take pleasure in the suffering of His people? How can we account for disasters and COVID 19 and post COVID 19 impact on a world under the watchful eyes of a good and powerful God? If God had created a world in which it was guaranteed that no one would ever do anything wrong, hence the “freedom” of man which is the basis of Satan’s exploitation of creatures would that not have been real? Some have interpreted it to mean that God is absent. And his *absence* is not a passive stance, but an active one. That is, God’s absence from the temple is intentional and ethical—God cannot stand us, and, in some sense, we cannot stand Him. His absence is an indication of an estranged relationship between the Creator and his creatures. This suggests the dramatic conflict of Scripture driven by God’s gradual retreat from the circle of the world.
- b. It is either the world is under the care of “the Prince of this World” or *Deus Incognito*- unknowability of God. The ways of God are higher than the ways of men.
The problem of evil is the problem of accounting for evil in a world created by an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good God. It seems that if the creator has these attributes, there would be no evil in the world. But there is evil in the world. Thus, there is reason for some to believe that an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good creator does not exist, but we cannot deny the existence of the Necessary Being due to the evidences before us.
Yes, we may choose to ignore but we can nowhere deny the presence of God. The world is crowded with him. He walks everywhere incognito. Therefore, we cannot deny his existence as suggested and proposed by the Dead of god theologians. He walks everywhere incognito, and his works are obviously stirring at our faces therefore *Deus Absconditus* is a fallacy of the mind. Then, if God is perfectly good, all knowing, all powerful and can actualize a possible world containing free creatures without evil as argued by theodicy; and we have a cosmos where he is actively involved in the affaire of his people, ultimately it is illogical and irrational to believe in him. Hence, it is either the cosmos is under the control of “the Prince of this world” thereby portraying Divine Hiddenness” as a problem of religious language. He walks everywhere incognito, his actions are glaring and he is divine and mysterious, therefore *Deus Incognito* – we simply do not understand his ways and actions. In summary, it is either he is hidden from humanity and handed the cosmos over to “prince of this world” to punish the world for sin (a succor to those suffering) or *Deus Incognito* –God is not fully known to us (a thought that celebrates his sovereignty). We simply do not understand God and His activities. This balances the reality of the philosophical problem of evil against other philosophical and theological theories in favour or against the existence of God. Again, because God cannot be under the reign of the “prince of this world” it better to chiefly conclude is in-charge of creation.

³¹ Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academics, 2005), p. 26

The theory that states that the World is under the authority of the “Prince of this World” is highly questionable because it doubts the sovereignty of God thereby making the “Prince of this World” the author of evil. This theory negates the question of Job “Shall we receive good from Him [God] and not receive evil? This also questions the authority of God as Creator of all things. God as the creator of all things includes evil and good. Again, the Bible posits “All things work together for good to them that are called according to His purpose.” If the “Prince of this World” is author of evil, it makes him creator alongside with God. This claim tends to justify the position of the early Greek philosophers who alluded to “the good god and the evil god.”

Again, it is logical to assume that, since God’s mind is infinite and man’s mind is finite, man will never fully comprehend the divine intellect. So even if we do not know God’s purpose, he may still have a good purpose for evil. Moreover, we do know some good purposes for evil: to warn us of greater evil; to keep us from self-destruction; to help bring about greater goods; and to defeat evil. If finite man can discover some good purposes for evil, surely infinite good and wise God has a good purpose for all suffering. The obvious is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Submission and Conclusion

The problem of the existence of God has always pre-occupied the attention of human beings in the history of religion. In addition, the problem of evil in the world arouses human curiosity and probe into God’s existence. The problem has not only dominated human curiosity in the past, but also in the present; holding sway on the human intellectual enquiry and theological search. This curiosity and search revolve around the central question: how can a good and benevolent God tolerate the reality and presence of evil in the world? Philosophers preoccupy themselves with such questions as, if God really exists, He must be a good and powerful being. In the light of this pre-supposition, they go on to maintain that there are too many vestiges of evils and sufferings in the world. God is therefore, neither good, since He does not bother about the sufferings, nor powerful, since He cannot do anything to suppress them.³² J. P. Lefebvre, puts such question bluntly in a disturbing, but existential manner: “*Would an almighty God ... not bother to create a being in his own image only to abandon him forever to the fate of genetic lottery? Could an almighty God forget the parable of the talents on Judgment Day and bring back to life those born of good soil, leaving those born in a hellish world to perish in limbo or in the fires of Hell?*”³³ In this dilemma, human being arrives at the false conclusion that God does not exist or that he is dead. This is the stride which the philosopher, Epicurus, had reached three hundred years before the coming of Jesus Christ on this earth in the human form.

In contrast, the biblical tradition clearly comes out with a sharp theological understanding of the solution to the presence of evil and suffering in the world, namely the existence of a good God and of a wicked Devil, the Satan.⁸⁸ In the biblical sense, Satan is subjected to God, as a creature, though one that has gone astray. It was he, who tempted Eve and Adam in the guise of a serpent and afflicted Job with sufferings after getting permission from God to carry out his test on Job in order to prove Job’s fidelity to God. In the biblical sense, God is beyond good and evil. Through history the book of job has been read and studied particularly by philosophical theologians because it surfaces the perennial problem of evil: If there is a God who is all good and all powerful, then, why do innocent people suffer in his world? Retributive theology, which infers the patterns of practical wisdom into a rigid formula, denies the problem of evil by saying that suffering/evil is always explained by prior personal sin. This position was assumed and articulated by Job’s friends but Job insisted that it was invalid for his situation. Some scholars have posited that the problem of evil can be resolved by denying either that God is good or that he is

³² Innocent C. Onyewuenyi, “A Philosophical Reappraisal of African Belief in Reincarnation” in *Presence Africaine* 123 (3), 63-78, 1982, p. 65.

³³ P. J. Lefebvre, *The Empty Cathedral: An Open Letter to the Pope*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1994), p. 133-134.

omnipotent. Others went further even to deny his existence. In either case, God is diminished either from absolute moral rectitude or from sovereign power to non-existence.

Although human experiences and the writings of Job are not structured to give answer to the problem of evil in precise theological or philosophical terms, but a careful reflection and study of these disclose several insights that combine to provide a solution. First, it demonstrates that some suffering falls outside of retribution. Friends of those who suffer like Job, insist on double retribution: not only are the just rewarded and the wicked punished, but also “those who are suffering evil must be sinners who deserve the suffering.”³⁴ Yahweh’s assessment clearly shows that this is not the case in Job’s situation. Job shows that in some situations there is human suffering that is not caused by personal sin.

A second answer to the problem of evil is that Satan uses suffering to destroy the faith of God’s people. In the book of Job, Satan insists that Job serves Yahweh only because of the blessedness that he derives from God. Satan claims that if Job were to suffer affliction, he would curse God rather than serve him. Given divine permission to test his assertion, Satan proceed to destroy Job’s possession, family, health, and relationships. Satan’s ultimate purpose is to bring people’s faith in Yahweh to the point of collapse by the means of intense pain and loss – evil.

Despite Satan’s malicious attempts to destroy people of God’s faith, God uses that very ordeal of evil that Satan intended for destructive purposes to strengthen their faith and godliness. Just as Joseph recognized in retrospect that what his brothers intended for evil, God meant for good to preserve many people.³⁵ This is same with Job and many others through harrowing experience comes to comprehend the ways of Yahweh more deeply than ever before.

In the final submission, this work answers the question posed by the problem of evil by affirming that humans cannot comprehend fully the ways of God – *Deus Incognito*. Rather than compelling God to act in accordance with the tidy demands of human logic, we must see God as mysterious. We are ignorant of the ways of the sovereign Yahweh. Refusing to resolve the mystery of the problem of evil by insisting on death of God theology, *Deus Absconditus*, Theodicy, rigid retribution, or diminishing God’s goodness, or reducing God’s power, this research leaves this problem squarely in the realm of mysteries of God that cannot be discerned by mere finite human minds. In doing so, it directs the reader back to Yahweh himself rather than to a continues theological and philosophical exercise.

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³⁴ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: Old Testament Library*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), p. 61

³⁵ Genesis 50:20

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