

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN TRADITIONAL THEISM AND WHITEHEAD'S PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

Our traditional ideas of God and evil in philosophy are inspired by Judeo-Christian metaphysical categories. However, the Judeo-Christian notions of God and evil as basically formulated by St Augustine are lacking in two major areas: 'their inability to resolve the problem of evil and their failure to satisfactorily explain the relationship between the immanent and transcendent natures of God or rather, how a God who is divine and transcendent comes to interact with a world that is both fallen and material. Alfred North Whitehead tries to resolve these problems in his 'Philosophy of Organism' where he argued that God and evil are part and parcel of an integral process that is evolutionally moving towards the point of self-actualization. This study employs the method of hermeneutics to argue that Whitehead's theodicy or solution to the problem of evil though, defective in some aspects, offers a robust and more satisfactory explanations of God and evil than the Judeo-Christian inspired theses. The work agrees with Whitehead that the autocratic presentation of God by traditional theism is responsible for some of the power

abuses by political leaders that we see today in society and recommends Whiteheads understanding of God, especially, as a loving and persuasive reality as what is required to build a more respectful and accommodating society. To this end, the use of hermeneutics is informed by the fact that *Process and Reality*, the main primary source Whitehead's process philosophy is written in what many scholars agree is esoteric and abstract diction. The method brings down Whitehead's highly technical vocabulary to conventional philosophical language.

Keywords: God, actual entities, problem of evil, human suffering, moral and physical evil, almighty, creation out of nothing

Introduction

Evil and suffering have long been a puzzle to humanity such that the quest to make sense of its reality with the existence of a God who is omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient is as old as religion itself. Christianity in its early stages did not see the question as a challenge to the belief in God, but as a problem within Christian faith and therefore did not formulate a systematic response to the question (Clement p.51). Christians ascribed the cause of evil to fallen angels. The Apostolic Fathers, such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius, argued that these angels misused their free will, which resulted in alienating themselves from God and His government. The alienation led to a war between God and Satan. Satan, the chief prince of the fallen angels, influenced humans to misuse their free will, which led to human sin as a

cause of evil; however, the ultimate cause of evil is Satan and his angels (Mark, p. xxvii).

A well-defined approach to theodicy began with Augustine in the fourth century A.D. While he was aware of the conceptual difficulties of the problem of evil, his approach to the problem was to wrestle with Manichean dualism (Augustine *City of God* 12.3). Augustine proposed that God is eternal, immutable, infinite, and a perfect Being. He created *ex nihilo* and “the things that He made He empowered to be, but not to be supremely like Himself. To some, He communicated a more ample, to others, a more limited existence, and thus, arranged the natures of beings in ranks.” (Augustine *Enchiridion* 4.12-13). For these reasons, Augustine argued, evil is only a privation of good, which does not exist in itself but only as an aspect of an actual entity, a malfunctioning of good. According to Augustine, the cause of evil, both moral and natural, is the misuse of the will of a being that is changeable, which began first with the highest creature and then man. That is, free will is the cause of pain and suffering, but since all things occur in accordance with God’s will, pain and suffering ultimately play a good role in God’s plan (Augustine *City of God* 12.7).

Augustine’s approach to the problem of evil was very influential for centuries (John Calvin, 1936, 1.14.1-9, 2.4.3). Medieval theologians adopted Augustine’s approach in advancing theistic discussion on the problem of evil as did the Protestant Reformers (Jeffrey, 1986, 85-86). The Continental rationalists René Descartes and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz also adopted Augustine’s

approach in their explanation of the problem of evil (Niels. 2007, 1:26-27). Although, the influence of Augustine's theodicy can be traced beyond Leibniz, with the Enlightenment the strategies adopted for the reflections on the problem of evil became anthropocentric and "... detached from any system of conviction based on divine revelation." The existence of evil was raised as counter-evidence against the belief in the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God (James C. Livingston, 1988 p. 6). In addition, a sharp turn in the influence of Augustine's tradition in formulating theodicy occurred with the repercussions of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment denied Christian theology its epistemological independence based upon the principle of the competence of human reason. The Enlightenment, to a large extent, created a secular society in which natural reason and social experience disposed of the authority of Scripture. Religious beliefs, like any other theories, were evaluated by rational and scientific evidences. Specifically, discoveries of astronomers and geologists discredited the classical theistic interpretation of Gen 1.(James C. Livingston, 1988 p. 17)

This study carries out a comparative analysis of traditional Christian position on the problem of evil and Whitehead's position in order to find out which of the two is rationally defensible. To demonstrate this, this study is divided into.....

Traditional Christian Solution to the Problem of Evil

The main traditional Christian response to the problem of evil was first formulated by St. Augustine and has constituted the majority report of the Christian mind through the centuries. It includes both philosophical and theological strands. The main philosophical position is the idea of the negative or privative nature of evil. Augustine holds firmly to the Hebrew Christian conviction that the universe is good. Evil has therefore, not been set by God but represents the going wrong of something that is inherently good. Augustine points to blindness as an example. Blindness is not a thing. The only thing involved is the eye, which is in itself good; the evil of blindness consists of the lack of a proper functioning of the eye.

Generalizing the principle, Augustine holds that evil always consists of the malfunctioning of something that is in itself good. As it originally came forth from the hand of God, then, the universe was a perfect harmony expressing the creative Divine intention. How, then, did evil come about? It came about initially in those levels of the universe that involve free will: the levels of the angels and of human beings. Some of the angels turned from the supreme Good, which is God, to lesser goods, thereby rebelling against their creator; they in turn tempted the first man and woman to fall.

This fall of angelic and human beings was the origin of moral evil or sin. The natural evils of disease, of “nature red in tooth and claw,” and of earthquake, storm, and so

on are the penal consequences of sin, for humanity was intended to be lord of the earth, and this human defection has set all nature awry. Thus Augustine cited in Idoko (2020) could say, “All evil is either sin or the punishment for sin.” Augustine's theodicy has been criticized in the modern period. The first major critic being the great German Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, the basic criticism is directed at the idea that a universe which God has created with absolute power, so as to be exactly as God wishes it to be, containing no evil of any kind, has nevertheless gone wrong. It is true that the free creatures that are part of it are free to fall.

However, since they are finitely perfect, without any taint or trace of evil in them, and since they dwell in a finitely perfect environment, they will never in fact fall into sin. Thus, it is said, the very idea of a perfect creation's going wrong spontaneously and without cause is a self-contradiction. It amounts to the self-creation of evil out of nothing! (Irenaeus BK 1V). The basic criticism then is that a flawless creation would never go wrong and that if the creation does in fact go wrong, the ultimate responsibility for this must be with its creator. This criticism agrees with Mackie's contention that it was logically possible for God to have created free beings who would never in fact fall.

Whitehead's Solution The Nature of Evil

Every metaphysical system that postulates God's existence must come to terms with the problem of evil. Contrary to traditional theism, Whitehead does not try to explain the problem away by saying that evil is only "apparent" or that it is always a stepping-stone on the way to a greater good. For him, evil is an irreducible real presence in the world.

In *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead examines the phenomena in which evil appears; "evil is exhibited in physical suffering, mental suffering, and loss of the higher experience in favour of the lower experience" (Edwards, *Reason and Religion*, p. 92). He further states that we must focus on the suffering of sentient beings. Thus, Whitehead has an affective notion of evil: evil is found in the painful experiences or experiences of loss of sentient beings. While some approaches to the problem of evil distinguish between natural and moral evils, Whitehead argues that while evil is experienced with all the varied modalities of being, this does not mean that there is a different type of evil for every modality. Furthermore, he asserts that while evil is only found in the phenomena of suffering, the latter is not predicated on any notion of a Metaphysical or primordial evil, such that the world is evil due to its temporal and finite nature, or that there is destructive agency involved etc. Likewise, he rejects the notion of evil as privation of the good. Evil is real, tangible, and affective because human suffering is real.

Nevertheless, Whitehead is insistent that, that evil exists and is real does not make it metaphysical entity or an actual entity or actual occasion, which is Whitehead's unit of existence. Therefore, if evil is real but does not exists as an actual occasion which is the fundamental unit of existence, as Whitehead argues, the question could be asked, what actually constitute evil, what is its nature? According to Whitehead, God is continually enticing the world to fulfill his purpose, which always involves producing greatest intensity of enjoyment, value and harmony. However, finite actualities are not compelled to conform to God's will. Thus, each entity, from a human being to a biological cell, has the freedom to resist God's persuasion and can fail to conform to his aims. "So far as the conformity is incomplete the result is destruction and thus, there is evil in the world." (Edwards, *Reason and Religion*, p. 94)

Here, Whitehead distinguishes between two species of destruction, chaotic discord, and dominance of discord which leads to complete destruction. According to Whitehead, some degree of discord is necessary for the introduction of change and novelty in the world. For this purpose, destructive discord is necessary. If creation did not involve change, the world would be static and not dynamic. This chaotic discord is not evil in itself: rather, evil occurs only if there is a dominance of discord. The resultant destruction is evil in the ultimate sense. The problem is that a greater capacity for good is always correlated with a greater capacity for evil. If there were no conscious beings, there would be no suffering in the world. However, such a world would be of minimal

value compared to ours. When God seeks to maximize the good by supporting his creatures' capacity for freedom and creativity, he thinks that they will use their power to resist his desire for harmony.

Whitehead proposes that God in his primordial activity somehow reconciles all things for the better. He calls this the "subjective aim of God." In this role God is the care-taker of the temporal world that picks up the pieces of human tragedy from the wreckage of the world that is consequent upon chaotic discord. In the larger scheme of things, God is able to salvage the world and keep it harmonious. Whitehead states:

The wisdom of the subjective aim pretends every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system – its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy – woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing.(
Edwards, *Reason and Religion*, p. 525)

In other words, God is not the passive spectator of the world; he is a God in process. "God is the great companions – the fellow sufferer who understands" (Whitehead, p. 532). He is actively involved in his creation and is working with us to increase both his and our fullest satisfaction. However, "... there is no totality

which is the harmony of all perfection” (Cobb, 1965, p. 97). There is always more for God and us to do, and there will always be values that have not yet been realized.

One of the greatest advantages of process theology is that by revising the concepts of divine power and knowledge, two of the most inveterate problems in the philosophy of religion, freedom and evil, can be solved on a rational basis. Each actual occasion is *causa sui* and therefore, determines itself within the limits set by the initial aim. Most actual occasions fall short of achieving the ideal that God sets for it, and it is in this falling short that the basic ontological meaning of evil is to be found. The ethical implications of the general failure of ideal satisfaction are found of course only in human beings, who are offered the most freedom to choose, but more importantly, are aware of the choices they make. As Cobb states, “Every agent is free but not every agent has consciousness” (Cobb, 1965, p. 97).

In contrast to traditional theology, in which God’s will is conceived as truly and definitely being done, Whitehead’s persuasive God can only urge his creature to fulfill the conditions of creative love. To put it another way, Whitehead agrees with the existentialists that human existence precedes any preordained human essence and therefore, the future is open for what Whitehead called the “creative advance” into new forms of experience and human interaction.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Evaluation

Whitehead's approach is an attempt to solve the problem of evil with a rational theodicy. By "rational theodicy" we mean the attempt to account logically for the relationship between God and human suffering that avoids inconsistencies and paradoxes. In the traditional problem, evil is commonly thought to be inconsistent with God's omni-benevolence and God's omnipotence, thus involving a destructive trilemma. The problem is usually presented as a trilemma that occurs any time that three propositions are asserted to be true at the same time: evil occurs, God is omnipotent, and God is omnibenevolent. Whenever we try to resolve the problem by denying any of the three propositions, we run into consequences that seem inconsistent with the traditional conception of God.

P1 If evil occurs, then either God is not omnibenevolent or not omnipotent.

P2 If God is omnibenevolent and evil occurs, then either God is not omnipotent, or evil is only apparent (genuine evil does not really exist).

P3 If God is omnipotent and evil occurs, then either evil is merely apparent, or God is not omnibenevolent.

The traditional Christian attempt to resolve the trilemma without denying any of the propositions is by qualifying, i.e., redefining or supplementing one or more of the major terms. For example, through St Augustine, credited as the initiator of the traditional solution, a number of approaches that try to defend the existence of

an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God in spite of evil have emerged. In Augustine's view, God tolerates these evils in order to allow for human freedom, which he assumes requires that men must be able to disobey God's will in order to be truly free, thus making moral evil a necessary possibility. This is the famous free-will solution. In consonance with it, Christian thought has always seen moral evil as related to human freedom and responsibility. To be a person is to be a finite centre of freedom, a (relatively) self-directing agent responsible for one's own decisions. This involves being free to act wrongly as well as rightly. There can therefore be no certainty in advance that a genuinely free moral agent will never choose amiss. Consequently, according to the strong form of free-will defense, the possibility of wrongdoing is logically inseparable from the creation of finite persons, and to say that God should not have created beings who might sin amounts to saying that God should not have created people.

As discussed above, this thesis has been challenged in some recent philosophical discussions of the problem of evil, in which it is claimed that no contradiction is involved in saying that God might have made people who would be genuinely free but who could at the same time be guaranteed always to act rightly. To quote from one of these discussions:

1. If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good

on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good. (J. L. Mackie, 1955, p. 209)

This argument, as can be seen, has considerable power. On the whole, it shows that the omnipotent proposition is not compatible with the free-will argument.

Another common way the Augustinian approach tries to tackle the trilemma is to simply deny one of the propositions, e.g., that evil does not actually exist. Here, the argument usually is that all evils are merely apparent or privation of the good and that genuine moral evil does not exist. Even though, we may experience evil as genuine, if we had access to an omniscient vantage point, we would see that these apparent evils are actually consistent with the greatest good. It is sometimes added that humans do not have the intellectual capacity to understand the relationship between God and evil, and thus we continue to experience evils as genuine. The problem that is commonly pointed out with these approaches is that it seems to make God oblivious to the individual sufferings of humankind.

What is obvious is that in the traditional Christian solution to the problem of evil, all effort is made to

preserve the Parmenidian categories imported into Christianity by the Medieval. Thus, while Augustine was ready to temper with the idea of evil, describing it as privation, he could not imagine the possibility of Christianity where the omnipotent and omnibenevolent nature of God is questioned. This is the reason why traditional Christian theology is helpless as long as the logical and evidential problem of evil is concerned.

Contrary to this, Whitehead was ready to review all the three categories of traditional theology attributes to God. As discussed, while he accepts the reality of evil and the benevolent nature of God, he believed that the problem of evil is premised on traditional theology's attribution of omnipotence to God. This is the category he questions and denies and that is what constitutes his solution to the problem of evil. Thus, for Whitehead, God is unlimited in power but interacts with the process of the universe which God has not created but is nevertheless able to influence. In other words, in the main Christian tradition, God is the creator and sustainer of the entire universe *ex nihilo* and God's power over the creation is accordingly unlimited. However, in order to allow for the existence and growth of free human beings, God withholds the exercise of unlimited divine power, thereby forming an autonomous creaturely realm within which God acts non-coercively, seeking the creatures' free responses.

Whitehead likewise holds that God acts non-coercively, by "persuasion" and "lure," but in contrast to the notion of divine self-limitation, Whitehead holds that God's exercise of persuasive rather than controlling power, is necessitated by the ultimate metaphysical structure of

reality. God is subject to the limitations imposed by the basic laws of the universe, for God has not created the universe *ex nihilo*, thereby; establishing its structure, but rather, the universe is an uncreated process which includes the deity. Accordingly, as Griffin says, “God does not refrain from controlling the creatures simply because it is better for God to use persuasion, but because it is necessarily the case that God cannot completely control the creatures” (Griffin, 1976, p. 276)

In order words, finite actualities do not exercise power because God has delegated it to them, but because to be a part of the universe is to exercise creativity and hence power. Indeed because to be actual, is to be creative, thereby, exercising some degrees of power, it is impossible for even God to hold a monopoly of power. Every actual occasion is, by its very nature, partially self-creative as well as partially created by previous actual occasions which were themselves partially self-created. Thus, God’s power over each occasion, and in directing the stream of occasions as a whole, is necessarily limited, and the reality of evil in the world is the measure of the extent to which God’s will is in fact thwarted. God continually offers the best possibility to each occasion as it creates itself, but the successive occasions are free not to conform to the divine plan. As Whitehead says, “So far as the conformation is incomplete, there is evil in the world” (Whitehead, 1930, p. 51). However, this particular conception of a limited deity still requires a theodicy, a justification of God’s goodness in face of the fact of evil. Whitehead’s response is that God does not only suffer with hurting

actual occasions, but he as well guides all occasions with tender care towards greater harmony and satisfaction. However, because all evil rests in the necessity of discord, destruction and elimination are the concrete products of obstruction met within the unfolding of temporal reality, not all things can be saved. All that God can save, He saves. God does what He can in Whitehead's theodicy "with infinite patience" (Whitehead, 1930, p. 252)

Whitehead's solution to the problem of evil, appeals in two main ways. One is that it avoids the traditional problem arising from the belief in divine omnipotence. God is not the all-powerful creator of the universe, responsible for its character, but is a part – though, a uniquely basic part – of the universe itself, unable either to vary its fundamental structure or to intervene directly in its changing details. Thus God does not need to be justified for permitting evil, since it is not within God's power to prevent it. The other appeal consists of the stirring summons to engage on God's side in the never-ending struggle against the evils of an intractable world. This was the moral appeal of earlier forms of belief in a finite God who claims our support in the ongoing battle of light against darkness or in the thought of John Stuart Mill, who wrote:

A creed like this . . . allows it to be believed that all the mass of evil which exists was undesigned by, and exists not by the appointment of, but in spite of the Being whom we are called upon to worship. A virtuous

human being assumes in this theory the exalted character of a fellow-labourer with the Highest, a fellow combatant in the great strife.(John Stuart Mill, 1875, pp. 116-17)

However, despite its appeal, Whitehead's solution to the problem of evil has been attacked on many grounds. Nevertheless, it is not the intention here to unpack all these grounds. We shall only limit our investigation to one of these attacks that concern this work: the charge that Whitehead's theodicy makes evil apparent (that evil does not exist), the claim that his solution makes the Christian God both un-worshipful and religiously unsatisfying.

According to this charge, Whitehead's solution to the problem of evil makes God so impotent that Whitehead's God is not only not worthy of worship but is also religiously unattractive. In making this case Basinger claims that in Whitehead's metaphysics, God does not have unilateral, coercive control over everything in the universe. Therefore, it follows according to him, that the Whiteheadian "God cannot override a person's freedom, nor perform miracles that violate the laws of nature, nor perform physical actions such as causing or halting a flood or an avalanche" (Basinger, 1988, p. 14). For Basinger, these are the exact qualities in which our idea of God is coached—qualities which do not only make God religiously attractive but also worshipful. To strip God of these qualities is to make us lose the concept of God.

Nancy Frankenberry on his own stipulates that Whitehead in attributing persuasive power to God ignores a range of power between the two extremes of power, coercion and persuasion. In addition, he argues that Whitehead's understanding of persuasive power is limited. The rendition of persuasive power puts emphasis only on one side of God's nature. He is always showing "mercy never wrath," "loving never judgment," "freeing never confining," and "blessing never cursing" (Nancy Frankenberry, 1981, p. 180)

For Frankenberry, this Whiteheadian concept of persuasion lacks the mutual respect for the individual's rational dignity that accompanies morality of persuasion. An examination of these reactions shows that many theologians deem Whitehead's view inadequate because, as they see it, only an omnipotent God can guarantee a victory over evil. And indeed, such guarantee seems to be one advantage of the omnipotence view.

However, on a closer inspection, that advantage turns into a disadvantage as soon as the model is confronted with real life experience which tells us that victory fails to occur. It is precisely on account of the universal presence of suffering that, God, if omnipotent, should be accused of failing to interfere at least occasionally. Thus, what seems to be an advantage of the traditional 'omnipotence' concept turns into a disadvantage so important as to seriously favour an atheist option. In fact, this existentially religious disadvantage is what prompts Whitehead to reject the idea of God as omnipotent, and as Lewis Ford rightly observed, for Whitehead this classical idea of God's omnipotence was beset by

difficulties so insuperable as to keep him from being a ‘theist’ for as long as he did not see a possibility to dissociate the idea of God from that idea of omnipotence (Ford, p. 90).

Thus, while it is true that Whitehead denies the omnipotence of God in order to escape the horns in the dilemma to the problem of evil, it is wrong to accuse him of making God religiously unattractive and not worshipful as his critics claim. An appreciation of the concept of omnipotent will help us to understand that Whitehead’s position on this. An examination of the conceptual history of ‘almightiness’ shows that each of the three classical languages in which the concept was expressed—successively: Hebrew: *sebaoth* and *shaddai*; Greek: *pantokrator*; and Latin: *omnipotens*—respectively involved a shift in meaning. Those shifts were painstakingly described by Gijsbert van den Brink in his monograph on divine almightiness. (Van den Brink, *Almighty God*) What follows is a condensed summary of the very complex processes of translations and shifts in meaning.

The Greek term *pantokrator*, chosen in the Septuagint (250-50 BCE) as translation of the Hebrew words *sebaoth* and *shaddai*, presents in this Old Testament context primarily God’s power as sovereign dominator, creator, lord, authority, governor, the one who is in control of all that happens in nature and history (Van den Brink, 48).

It denotes God as universal power over all things. Later on, as used in the early Christian literature, the term

pantokrator increasingly also describes God as preserver and sustainer of all things: God who by his loving care holds the whole universe in existence (Van den Brink, 48).

When, in the Vulgate (400 CE), the term is translated into the Latin *omnipotens*, a new shift in meaning occurs. Next to the old meanings for which it is used as the Latin equivalent, the word *omnipotens* (with the Latin *posse* meaning ‘to be able’) favors an emphasis on God’s ability: God’s ability to create and to preserve. Along the way, however, the meaning of *omnipotentia* hardens into the concept of God’s ability to do anything possible, with all the philosophical puzzles this elicits.

However, in the context of a discussion of the topic of almightiness, one must also pay attention to the shift in meaning of the prefix ‘all’ (Greek: *panto*; Latin: *omni*) and to the effect this shift has on the composite concept ‘almighty.’ In combination with the verb *kratein* (to govern, to control or to sustain), ‘all’ refers to everything that factually exists or happens in past, present and future, so that *pantokrator* then expresses the idea that all that exists in past, present and future falls under God’s governance and sustenance, that it owes its existence and its conservation to God. However, in combination with ‘to be able to’ (*posse*), ‘all’ refers primarily to everything possible, so that *omnipotence* accordingly expresses that God is able to do everything possible. Thus, with the translation from *pantokrator* into *omnipotence*, not only the power component of the word shifts (from governance and sustenance to ability or

capacity) but also the object of God's power shifts, viz. from 'all things existing' to 'all things possible.' There is no doubt therefore, that historically, *pantokrator* and *omnipotence* evolved into two quite different concepts, although both are signified in English by the same term 'almightiness.(Van den Brink,66)

And so it came to be that the Latin *omnipotence* stood predominantly for 'the power to do everything possible,' including the capacity to unilaterally bring about what normally occurs through worldly causes. This meaning is rendered by the (German) expression *absolute Alleinmacht* (absolute sole power), which in the end means that all power would belong to God exclusively, i.e., that nothing except God would have power. The Greek term *pantokrator* on the other hand, expresses indeed that everything falls under the dominion of God's governance and sustenance, but without the connotation of *absolute Alleinmacht*. Even a sovereign ruler must rely on others for the realization of his plan.

It is to the idea of God as 'the one who all alone can do everything,' that Whitehead objects. Thus, the fact that God in Whitehead's view is not omnipotent; is not something that 'unfortunately' follows from his conception. On the contrary, Whitehead wanted it that way. Whitehead's rejection of God's omnipotence has to a large extent its reason in the problem of evil:

If this conception be adhered to [in which metaphysical compliments such as omnipotence are paid to God], there can

be no alternative except to discern in Him the origin of all evil as well as of all good. He is then the supreme author of the play, and to Him must therefore be ascribed its shortcomings as well as its success (Whitehead, p. 179).

It is important to notice here that Whitehead disavows God's omnipotence and coercion, not because the latter is always morally worse or less effective than persuasion, for that is evidently not true, but because the implication of a divine omnipotence would be that in the end all suffering and evil must be ascribed to God. The only acceptable solution therefore, is that God cannot coerce, that God as sole agent cannot realize a factual state of affairs, and therefore, in that sense cannot be said to be omnipotent.

All this makes it all the more important to point out that it would be a mistake to think that Whitehead discarded *everything* that is related to the traditional idea that makes God worshipful. On the contrary, Whitehead's philosophy retains essential elements of the *pantokrator* concept, though without using its terminology. There are three such elements that should be mentioned here. The first element is that, by arousing the desire to the relatively best possible as the novel occasion's initial aim, God in fact originates that occasion as occasion. In this way, "[God] is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness"(Whitehead p. 79).

Thus, Whitehead sees God's primordial nature as directing and creating and inspiring with regard to all occasions in all places and at all times. In this sense, it depicts God as All-governor.

The second element is that Whitehead's concept of God also describes God as All-preserver. His concept of God's consequent or receptive nature presents the idea that God preserves and so rescues from meaninglessness all that can be saved. It depicts God as the indestructible 'treasuring' of realized value (Whitehead, 1951, p. 688), and therefore as All-preserver, operating by "a tender care that nothing be lost" (Whitehead, p. 346). Moreover, though, it is true that Whitehead's notion does not entail the guarantee that whatever God is luring toward will also happen, it does entail the guarantee that no particular counterforce can overcome God forever. Because God is the only everlasting entity, God is the only entity whose influence is everlasting, and that is the reason why Whitehead can say that God has more causal influence than other actual entities.

In Whitehead's view of God there is something akin to this image of an influence that though, it can never call the shots all by itself alone or with absolute definiteness, it is in the end 'superior' because of its incessancy. Whitehead expresses this by speaking of the patience of God by which God leads or persuades the world, and he describes this patience as "... the patient operation of the overpowering rationality of his conceptual harmonization" (Whitehead, p. 346). Thus, in Whitehead's view, God's operation is creative, overpowering, all-governing and all-preserving: it

comprehends all times and places, it never gives up, it never ceases. All these elements are essential and classical aspects of God as *pantokrator*.

Conclusion

As a challenge to theism, the problem of evil has traditionally been posed in the form of a trilemma: if God perfectly loves, God must wish to abolish all evil; and if God is all-powerful, God must be able to abolish all evil. But evil exists therefore; God cannot be both omnipotent and perfectly good. The classical Judaeo-Christian Augustine inspired solution sees evil either as the consequences of the abuse of the free-will of rational creature or denies the substantial existence of evil altogether. However, this solution is both experientially and logically unjustifiable not only because the reality of evil is compelling but also because a God who is all powerful, should be able to create free beings who cannot sin or be able to intervene in the face of unjustified human suffering.

The fundamental claim which has been defended in this paper, is that Whitehead offered a more compelling and rationally satisfying solution to the problem of evil. While Whitehead retained the propositions that evil is real and God is all loving, his solution primarily consists in redefining or qualifying the classical claim of almightiness. For Whitehead, Each actual occasion is *causa sui* and therefore, determines itself within the limits set by the initial aim. Most actual occasions fall short of achieving the ideal that God sets for it, and it is in this falling short that the basic ontological meaning of

evil is to be found. In other words, evil occurs not because God chooses to be silent but because by the cosmic nature of things, God does not have power to control evil. Does this mean that God is entirely powerless in the face of evil? Not at all! God's power lies in his ability in luring actual occasions away from evil and hence achieving his purpose for the world in spite of evil. In addition God does not stay aloof in the face of suffering; rather he becomes the co-sufferer who understands. This was why Whitehead placed great emphasis on the importance of the historical Jesus and his teachings. He believed that the essence of Christ's teaching was that God's power is persuasive (not coercive) and that this divine power was revealed in the tenderness and subtleties of creative and responsive love. Jesus' message dwelt upon the "... tender elements in the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love"(Whitehead, p. 520).

Finally, Whitehead's solution supports the ultimate reality and intrinsic value of individuals. If, classical theodicy claims, God is ultimately the sole source of value in the universe, then how can we possibly be praised for the value that some of us apparently create in our lives? In the classical view, it seems that God gets all the credit for the good that happens, but we are left unfortunately with all the responsibility for evil (even for natural disasters which are supposed to be God's punishment for our sin). This is simply a disguised form of a divine totalitarianism which no self-respecting, rational human being should accept. Such a God is not truly God, but simply a projection of a form of social and

political authoritarianism. God did not give human beings a rational faculty in vain; he surely did not mean for us to reject our most unique possession in irrationality's betrayal of creation itself. Therefore, if human reason is to be truly liberated in theological thinking, it must ultimately reject "God as Cosmic Moralist...God as Unchanging and Passionless Absolute....God as Controlling Power....God as Sanctioner of the Status Quo....God as Male...[Whitehead] denies the existence of this God" (Cobb and Griffin, 1976, pp. 9-9).

ENDNOTES/ REFERENCES

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