

The Problem of Evil

FILM ONE

Length: 12 minutes

TEACHERS

To assist your lesson plans here are fifteen questions, with time-codes

- {1}. What did Voltaire, a philosopher of the time, say about the Lisbon earthquake? {01:03 – 01:15}
- {2}. What did Elie Wiesel say about Almighty God, given his experience of Auschwitz? {02:16 – 02:35}
- {3}. How did Epicurus formulate the problem of evil? {02:50 – 03:20}
- {4}. How is the problem of evil sometimes philosophically presented? {03:28 – 03:51}
- {5}. How might the contradiction that Mackie speaks of, be resolved? {03:53 – 04:32}
- {6}. What is 'Natural Evil'? {04:56 – 05:02}
- {7}. Explain in a sentence what John Stuart Mill say about nature and the natural world? {05:06 – 05:56}
- {8}. What is 'Moral Evil'? {05:58 – 06:04}
- {9}. Explain what happened at the Arnstadt Concentration Camp before and after it was liberated by American troops? {06:07 – 07:50}
- {10}. What does John Hick say in his book *Evil and the God of Love*? {07:56 – 08:44}
- {11}. What is a 'Theodicy'? {08:45 - 09:15}
- {12}. What are the difficulties of trying to justify God's existence in the face of evil in the world? {09:25 – 10:00}

{13}. Fill in the missing words: “Any theodicy therefore needs to be philosophically----- , credible, and consistent with ----- laws and acceptable to the religious ----- in which it’s grounded, but, more importantly, any theodicy needs to be sensitive to the fact that it’s essentially dealing with ---- -----, real suffering and real pain”. {10:01 – 10:30}

{14}. What concerns does Dewi Zephaniah Phillips have about ‘philosophizing about the problem of evil’? {10:34 – 11:04}

{15}. What does Richard E Bernstein think about justifying or reconciling evil with a benevolent and omnipotent God? {11:10 – 11: 21}

AFTER SCREENING

**When *The Problem of Evil* FILM ONE finishes, ask
Your pupils/students to engage with:**

TASK 1

WRITE or SKETCH the most memorable image or statement that sticks in their mind. **SHOW** a friend their image or statement and explain the reason why they chose it. **DISCUSS** what they consider to be the most important message of the film. **EXCHANGE** their findings with the rest of the class.

TASK 2

RECALL what they’ve just watched. If they were able to interview any **ONE** of the people mentioned or representatives of any of the groups mentioned in the film **WHO** would they most like to cross-examine? **WRITE DOWN** a question they would want to ask that person?

The people mentioned in the *Problem of Evil* film PART ONE were:

Voltaire: French Philosopher {1694-1778}

Elie Wiesel: {born 1928} survivor of Auschwitz and author of “*Night*”, awarded Nobel Peace Prize {1986}

Epicurus: Greek Philosopher {341 - 270 BCE}

J L Mackie: Australian Philosopher {1917 – 1981}, Author of *Evil and Omnipotence*

John Stuart Mill: British Philosopher {1806-1873}, Author of "Nature", *Three Essays on Religion*

John Hick: British Philosopher, {1922-2012}, Author of *Evil and the God of Love*

Dewi Zephaniah Phillips: British Philosopher, {1934-2006}, author of *The Problem of Evil & The Problem of God*, and, *The Concept of Prayer*

TASK 3

Split up into groups of three/four. Nominate a scribe from your group to take notes. You have 20 minutes for each group to discuss the following, before exchanging your group's thoughts and feelings to the rest of the class:

DISCUSSION ONE

"Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent! Is God able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent! Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?" {David Hume, 1711 – 1776, ACE}

DISCUSSION TWO

Could God accomplish his purpose without the magnitude and immensity of suffering that exists, suffering seemingly so unfairly distributed? Is *any* divine purpose justified by horrendous suffering? Is a God who works in this way worthy of worship? Should one *even speak* of justifying such a Being's existence?

DISCUSSION THREE

*"What does any ultimate purpose mean for the death camps where six million Jewish men, women and children were deliberately and scientifically murdered? Was this in any sense willed by God? The answer is obviously no. These events were utterly evil, wicked, devilish and, so far as the human mind can reach, unforgivable; they are wrongs that can never be righted, horrors which will disfigure the universe to the end of time, and in relation to which no condemnation can be strong enough, no revulsion adequate. It would have been better – much, much better - if they had never happened. Most certainly God did not want those who committed these fearful crimes against humanity to act as they did. His purpose for the world was retarded by them and the power of evil within it increased." {John Hick, {1922-2012}, *Evil and the God of Love*}*

DISCUSSION FOUR

"In a place like this, words fail; in the end, there can only be a dread silence - a silence which is itself a heartfelt cry to God: Why, Lord, did you remain silent? How could you tolerate all this? In silence, then, we bow our heads before the endless line of those who suffered and were put to death here; yet our silence becomes in turn a plea for forgiveness and reconciliation, a plea to the living God never to let this happen again." {Pope Benedict XVI, Speech given while visiting Auschwitz, 2006}

DISCUSSION FIVE

"The rulers of the Third Reich wanted to crush the entire Jewish people, to cancel it from the register of the peoples of the earth. Thus the words of the Psalm: "We are being killed, accounted as sheep for the slaughter" were fulfilled in a terrifying way. Deep down, those vicious criminals, by wiping out this people, wanted to kill the God who called Abraham, who spoke on Sinai and laid down principles to serve as a guide for mankind, principles that are eternally valid. If this people, by its very existence, was a witness to the God who spoke to humanity and took us to himself, then that God finally had to die and power had to belong to man alone - to those men, who thought that by force they had made themselves masters of the world. By destroying Israel, by the Shoah, they ultimately wanted to tear up the taproot of the Christian faith and to replace it with a faith of their own invention: faith in the rule of man, the rule of the powerful." {Pope Benedict XVI, Speech given while visiting Auschwitz, 2006}

HANDOUTS FOR PUPILS

Presentations

- **Presentation is a key skill in today's world and this exercise aims to enhance the way you present powerful ideas to an audience in SEVEN MINUTES, and, in the process improve IT, research and expressive skills, and most importantly work with others**
- **You will work in small groups in which everyone from your allocated group will be expected to address the rest of the class during your presentation, *without notes*, and *all members* of the group will be active in producing one of the following: a visual/dramatic/ musical presentation/short film/ power-point/ debate/drama/dance/'epic' poem/piece of artwork/ textile/ montage/ 'graffiti wall'/ poem/play/comedy routine/historical reconstruction/opera/choir/song/ musical/ or rap; relating any presentation back to the Problem of Evil and, producing something that will enhance audience understanding**

- Each group will be marked for knowledge, understanding and evaluation in the same way as an individual is marked for an essay. So take it seriously, but above all be creative and express yourselves and enjoy the search for the “X” factor
- Your Presentation will take place in.....
- The most highly marked groups of presenters will be encouraged to perfect their presentations with a view to recording them as a resource for future use in the classroom.

Planning Suggestions

Each group has three lessons to create a dramatic and dynamic SEVEN MINUTE PRESENTATION on their allocated task to the rest of the class.

Each group will have over three lessons to prepare and its suggested that you spend the 1st lesson ensuring that *everyone* in your group knows and understands their allocated subject; the 2nd lesson planning a strategy for a dynamic and informative presentation, and the 3rd lesson in creatively putting your ideas into practice, ensuring that you have a dress rehearsal before the big day.

GROUP ONE: A Presentation on “*The Holocaust: Crimes Against Humanity*”

“*Holocaust*” is a word from the Greek words: *hólos* "whole" and *kaustós* "burnt" and usually refers to the systematic extermination of six million Jewish men, women and children, and the slaughter of Romani "Gypsies", gays, lesbians, Jehovah's Witnesses, people with disabilities, political opponents, and Polish and Soviet civilians during World War Two, by Adolf Hitler's fascist political party, the Nazis. The crimes they committed are among the worst crimes in human history and are called “*Crimes against Humanity*”.

GROUP TWO: A Presentation on “*The Inconsistent Triad*”

The problem of evil is sometimes philosophically presented as a logically inconsistent triad of propositions, whereby the three statements - God is All Loving, God is All Powerful, and Evil exists - cannot logically all exist together: “*God is all powerful. God is all loving, and yet evil exists. There seems to be a contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theistic positions*”. {J L Mackie, {1917 – 1981}, Philosopher, *Evil and Omnipotence*}

GROUP THREE: A Presentation on “*Theodicy*”

Justifying God's existence in light of the existence of evil in the world is called a "Theodicy": a word originating from two Greek words: *Theos* {"God"} and *Dike* {"Justice"}. A theodicy should be coherent, credible, consistent with scientific laws, acceptable to the religious tradition in which it's grounded and sensitive to the fact that it's essentially dealing with real people, real suffering and real pain.

GROUP FOUR: A Presentation on "Natural Evil"

"That there is immense suffering in the world no one disputes. Some have attempted to explain this by imagining that it serves for human moral or spiritual improvement. But the number of humans in the world is as nothing compared with that of all other creatures and these often suffer immensely without any moral improvement. A being so powerful as a God who could create the universe, is to our finite minds omnipotent and it revolts our understanding to suppose that his benevolence is not unbounded, for what advantage can there be in the terrible sufferings of millions of animals throughout almost endless time?" {Charles Darwin, Scientist, {1809-1892}, Autobiography}

GROUP FIVE: A Presentation on "Moral Evil"

By the end of the 20th century more than 100 million people had died violent deaths at the hands of their fellow human beings. As well the two world wars - which cost an estimated 75 million lives - there has been the slaughter of one million Armenians by their Ottoman rulers, the murder of millions of political opponents in the Soviet Union under Stalin, countless internal conflicts such as the Spanish Civil war or during the Khymer Rouge regime in Cambodia when almost a quarter of that country's population were murdered. We only have to watch the news on television to realize that moral evil and these crimes against humanity have not abated...and continue into the 21st century.

GROUP SIX : A Presentation on *The Book of Job*

The Book of Job is one of the most famous formulations of the problem of evil in Western thought. In it, Satan challenges God regarding his servant Job, claiming that Job only serves God for the blessings and protection that he receives from Him. God allows Satan to plague Job and his family in a number of ways, with the limitation that Satan may not take Job's life {but all his children are killed}. Job discusses this with three friends and questions God regarding his suffering which he finds to be unjust. God responds in a speech and then more than restores Job's prior health, wealth, and also gives him new children.

Statements

Below are ten quotations related to the problem of evil. READ THEM ALL and CHOOSE a quotation you consider to be the most interesting. After you've made your choice, compare, contrast and share your chosen quotation with TWO other people in your class. Be prepared to support your choice, with reasons. Are there quotations your classmates have chosen that are different from yours? Argue the case for the importance of YOUR chosen quotation, above theirs.

Now exchange your views with the rest of your class.

Here are the quotations:

{1} *"Not even on the most distorted theory of good which ever was framed by religious or philosophical fanaticism, can the Government of Nature be made to resemble the work of a being at once good and omnipotent."*

JS Mill, British Philosopher, {1806-1873}

{2} *"In this life we find a great deal of injustice, and that's a reason for supposing that justice doesn't rule in this life, nor probably in any after life, and therefore affords a moral argument against an omnipotent and benevolent God and not in favour of one. Blind to good and evil matter rolls on its relentless way. No one can believe in a good God if they've ever sat at the bedside of a dying child....."*

Bertrand Russell, Philosopher, {1872-1970}, *Why I am Not a Christian*

{3} *"As the wires still hang aimlessly in the air and as the tracks are overgrown which lead through the ridiculous battlement to the long platforms where no more trains arrive to unload children from trucks, so they who caused the misery recede like ghosts into the cold air. The dark night of the day of wrath remains for them. No judgment is given, no trumpet sounds, no summons is issued, no books are opened. The chant to the king of tremendous majesty for pity, for salvation, cannot be sung for them. No archangel descends to collect their souls in the world-wide offering of sacrifices and homage. In the darkness the shades blend with the blackness until complete indifference engulfs them. May they never rise, again!"*

Ulrich E. Simon, Theologian {1934 -1997}

{4} *"The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones"*

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, Act 3, scene ii

{5} “I believe if there was a God there would be less evil on this earth. I believe that if evil exists here below, then either it was willed by God or it was beyond his powers to prevent it. Now I cannot bring myself to worship a God who is either spiteful or weak. I defy him without fear and care not a fig for his thunderbolts”.

Marquis de Sade, French Writer {1740 – 1814}, *The Misfortunes of Vice*

{6} “My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too--for the argument depended on saying the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my fancies”.

C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

{8} “God is omnipotent; God is wholly good and yet evil exists. There seems to be a contradiction between these three propositions; so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theistic positions”

J L Mackie, {1917 – 1981}

{9} “Many human beings need no supernatural mentoring to commit acts of savagery; some people are devils in their own right, their telltale horns having grown inward to facilitate their disguise”

Dean Koontz, American Writer, *Odd Thomas*

{10} “God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist”

St. Augustine, *Enchirid*, xxvii

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR FURTHER WORK

The Script

FILM ONE

Lisbon, Portugal, All Saints Day, 1755

It is all Saints Day, and in this devoutly Roman Catholic country the beautiful churches are packed. Suddenly, without warning all hell breaks loose as a devastating earthquake destroys this great city in an earthquake so violent that its shock waves can be felt all over Europe, in North Africa and even across the Atlantic. Within seconds tens of thousands of people lie dead or dying as Lisbon is reduced to rubble in an eighteenth century equivalent of a nuclear holocaust. Ten minutes after the quake gigantic tsunamis twenty metres tall hit North Africa and the coasts of Europe, causing more death and devastation. Voltaire a philosopher of the time, stunned and horrified by what had happened asked: "How can anyone believe in a benevolent and omnipotent God after this?" A question that *had* been asked many times before – and one that *has* been asked many times since

Auschwitz Concentration Camp, 1944

"I shall never forget Auschwitz a death camp that forever murdered my God and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things I saw, never shall I forget. Blessed be God's name? Blessed because in His Great Might He created Auschwitz and so many other factories of death? Blessed because He caused millions of human beings to die in His mass graves or burn in His crematoriums? How could I bless Him as an Almighty Loving Master of the Universe? How could I bless Him as our parents, brothers, sisters and children were tortured and slaughtered day and night? Every fibre in me rebels!"

{Elie Wiesel, Holocaust Survivor, Author of "Night"}

"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked. If God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?"

{Epicurus, Greek Philosopher, 341 - 270 BCE}

There's no greater challenge to religious belief than the problem of evil – a problem sometimes philosophically presented as a logically inconsistent triad of propositions, whereby the three statements - God is All Loving, God is All Powerful, and Evil exists – can't logically all exist together:

"God is all powerful. God is all loving, and yet evil exists. There seems to be a contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theistic positions"

{J L Mackie, {1917 – 1981}, Philosopher, *Evil and Omnipotence*}

Natural Evil: suffering caused by natural phenomena

"In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are Nature's every day performances. Killing, the most criminal act recognized by human nature, Nature does once to every being that lives; and in a large proportion of cases, after protracted tortures. All this Nature does with the most supercilious disregard both of mercy and of justice, emptying her shafts upon the best and noblest indifferently with the meanest and worst... I will call no being good, who is not what I mean when I apply that epithet to my fellow creatures; and if such a being can sentence me to hell for not so calling Him good, to hell I will go."

John Stuart Mill, Philosopher {1806-1873}, "Nature", *Three Essays on Religion*

Moral Evil: *suffering caused by human actions, or inaction*

"Can a world in which sadistic cruelty often has its way, in which selfish lovelessness is so rife, in which there are debilitating diseases, crippling accidents, bodily and mental decay, insanity, and all manner of natural disasters, be regarded as the expression of infinite creative goodness? Certainly all this could never by itself lead anyone to believe in the existence of a limitlessly loving and powerful God. And yet even in a world which contains these things innumerable men and women believe in the reality of an infinite creative goodness, which they call God."

**John Hick, Philosopher, {1922-2012}
*Evil and the God of Love***

Theodicy

"A justification of God"

In order to have their belief in the existence of a Benevolent and Omnipotent God taken seriously, theists need to justify God's existence in light of the existence of evil in the world. Such a justification is called a theodicy: a word originating from the Greek words: *Theos* {"God"} and *Dike* {"Justice"}. Anyone who attempts to justify God's existence in the face of evil however faces difficult questions: Could God accomplish his purpose without the magnitude and immensity of suffering that exists, suffering seemingly so unfairly distributed? Is any divine purpose justified by horrendous suffering? Is a God who works in this way worthy of worship? Should one even speak of justifying such a Being's existence? Any theodicy therefore needs to be philosophically coherent, credible, and consistent with scientific laws and acceptable to the religious tradition in which it's grounded...but, more importantly, any theodicy

needs to be sensitive to the fact that it's essentially dealing with real people, real suffering and real pain.

"Philosophizing about the Problem of evil has become commonplace and theodicies abound. However, such philosophizing should always be done in fear and trembling! Fear that in our philosophizing we'll betray the evils people suffer and have suffered and in that way sin against them; trembling because betrayal occurs every time explanations and justifications of evil are offered which are simplistic, incredible or obscene"

Dewi Zephaniah Phillips, Philosopher, 2004

"After Auschwitz it's obscene to speak of evil and suffering as something to be justified by or reconciled with a benevolent and omnipotent God"

Richard J Bernstein, Philosopher, *Radical Evil*

WATCH-WORDS!

The following words and phrases have been used in the film and in the resources - sometimes more than once - and are useful words and phrases for pupils and students to know, and understand:

Auschwitz, benevolence, benevolent, coherent, 'crimes against humanity', death camps, debilitating, '*Dike*', impotent, inconsistent triad, logical, malevolent, moral evil, natural evil, Nazis, omnipotence, omnipotent, systematic extermination; The Holocaust, The Shoah, theism, theist, theistic, theodicy, '*theos*', Third Reich.

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