

The Problem of Evil

FILM TWO

The Augustinian Theodicy

Length: 13 minutes

TEACHERS

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

- {1}. What Biblical idea is St Augustine's theodicy based on? {00:43 – 01:00}
- {2}. According to St Augustine what is 'evil'? {01:17 – 01:36}
- {3}. Explain in your own words St Augustine's '*Principle of Plenitude*'? {02:12 – 03:09}
- {4}. Explain in your own words St Augustine's '*Aesthetic Theme*'? {03:10 – 03:52}
- {5}. According to St Augustine how did evil and corruption enter the world? {03:56 – 05:12}
- {6}. According to the Biblical story of The Fall, what were the consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience? {05:18 – 05:42}
- {7}. What do you understand by the term '*Original Sin*'? {05:44 – 06:10}
- {8}. Explain in your own words the meaning of the word '*Atonement*'? {06:16 – 06:50}
- {9}. Explain in your own words the meaning of the phrase '*Soul – Deciding Theodicy*'? {06:56 – 07:45}
- {10}. How does St Augustine clear God of any blame for the existence of evil in the world? {07:48 – 08:20}
- {11}. Why did Pelagius dispute Augustine's theodicy? {08:21 – 08:34}

{12}. Why did the philosopher Friedrich Schleiermacher think Augustine's theodicy contained a 'logical error'? {08:36 – 09:29}

{13}. In what ways has the theodicy been challenged by modern scientific thought? {10:31 – 11:08}

{14}. What is the 'moral error' contained in Augustine's idea of humanity being 'seminally present in the loins of Adam'? {11:12 – 11:23}

{15}. According to the film what is the most serious criticism of Augustine's theodicy? {11:25 – 12:15}

AFTER SCREENING

**When *The Problem of Evil* FILM TWO 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 TWO were:

St Augustine: Early Church Father {354-430 CE}.

Adam & Eve: the first human beings {according to a literal reading of the Book of Genesis}.

Jesus Christ: Founder of Christianity and according to Christian thought the Saviour of human-kind

Pelagius: British Theologian, {354-420 CE}, who rejected Augustine's Doctrine of Original Sin and taught that evil is *done by us, not born with us*.

Friedrich Schleiermacher: German philosopher {1768-1834} sometimes known as The Father of Modern Liberal Theology.

Charles Darwin: English Naturalist {1809-1882} and author of *On the Origin of Species* {1859} in which he established that all species of life have descended over time from common ancestors, proposing a scientific theory that this branching pattern of evolution resulted from a process he called 'natural selection'.

John Hick: {1922-2012}, British Philosopher and author of *Evil and the God of Love*. This series of films is dedicated to the memory of John Hick who died while the films were being made.

TASK 3

Split up into groups of three/four. Nominate a scribe from your group to take notes. You have 30 minutes for each group to discuss the following quotations, before exchanging your group's thoughts and feelings to the rest of the class:

DISCUSSION ONE

"What after all is anything we call evil, except the privation of good? Sickness is nothing but the privation of health, darkness the absence of light. When a cure or a light is administered, the 'evils' which were present {that is the sickness or the darkness} don't retreat and go elsewhere, rather, they simply don't exist any more, for such 'evil' isn't a substance but a defect of the substance of good"

{St Augustine, *Enchiridion*}

DISCUSSION TWO

"Of this order the beauty does not strike us because by our mortal frailty we are so involved in a part of it that we cannot perceive the whole in which these fragments that offend us are harmonised with the most accurate fitness and beauty"

{St Augustine, *The City of God*}

DISCUSSION THREE

"In what's become one of the key sentences in the literature of theodicy St Augustine says: 'God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist' {Enchiridion, xxvii}, but Hell, as understood by Augustine is endless suffering that's never turned to good and so remains forever a blot upon God's creation"

{John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*}

DISCUSSION FOUR

"Why is there a world like this rather than only the highest of heavens?If this world is an expression of Divine creativity in all its fullness, and is perfect and the best of all possible worlds only limited by what God can logically do, then we have no recourse left but to despair for we can imagine a significantly better world than this".

{John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*}

DISCUSSION FIVE

"Following St. Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination towards evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the 'death of the soul'How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole human race is in Adam 'as one body of one man.' By this 'unity of the human race' all men are implicated in Adam's sin, as all are implicated in Christ's justiceBy yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a personal sin, but this sin affected the human nature that they would then transmit in a fallen state. It is a sin which will be transmitted by propagation to all mankind, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice. And that is why original sin is called 'sin' only in an analogical sense: it is a sin 'contracted' and not 'committed' - a state and not an act."

{The Catechism of The Catholic Church, 1994, 403-404}

DISCUSSION SIX

"It is clear that the fundamental doctrines of Christianity demand a great deal of ethical perversion before they can be accepted. The world, we are told, was created by a God who is both good and omnipotent. Before He created the world He foresaw all the pain and misery that it would contain; He is therefore responsible for all of it. It is useless to argue that the pain in the world is due to sin. In the first place, this is not true; it is not sin that causes rivers to overflow their banks or volcanoes to erupt. But even if it were true, it would make no difference. If I were going to beget a child knowing that the child was going to be a homicidal maniac, I should be responsible for his crimes. If God knew in advance the sins of which man would be guilty, He was clearly

responsible for all the consequences of those sins when He decided to create man. The usual Christian argument is that the suffering in the world is a purification for sin and is therefore a good thing. This argument is, of course, only a rationalization of sadism; but in any case it is a very poor argument. I would invite any Christian to accompany me to the children's ward of a hospital, to watch the suffering that is there being endured, and then to persist in the assertion that those children are so morally abandoned as to deserve what they are suffering. In order to bring himself to say this, a man must destroy in himself all feelings of mercy and compassion. He must, in short, make himself as cruel as the God in whom he believes. No man who believes that all is for the best in this suffering world can keep his ethical values unimpaired, since he always has to find excuses for pain and misery."

{Bertrand Russell, *Why I am not a Christian*}

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 hours 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: “*Privatio Boni*”

As everything was created perfect, evil is not a thing or a substance existing in reality, but a mere absence of the substance of good, a privation or lack of good, just as poverty is the privation of wealth, sickness the privation of health, darkness the privation of light.

GROUP TWO: A Presentation: “*The Principle of Plenitude*”

The Principle of Plenitude is essentially maintaining that the whole range of Eternal Ideas became incarnated in the world, and, the world with its astonishing contrasts contains every possible variety and diversity of existence and experience. Without such contrasts God’s creativity couldn’t be fully expressed: butterflies, bacteria, humming birds, parasitic worms, orchids, tumors, roses, thorns, hot, cold, joy, sorrow – a plentiful world overflowing with a multitude of extraordinary differences in the quality and character of things.

GROUP THREE: A Presentation: “*The Aesthetic Theme*”

The mingled good and evil we experience and witness in this plentiful world are the results of finely tuned laws, and, according to St Augustine, all events and experiences occur within a harmonious order where all degrees of reality contribute to the perfection of the whole – a perfected and harmonious order that in our mortal imperfect state, we fail to recognize.

GROUP FOUR: A Presentation: “*The Fall*”

As Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin entered the world, and, according to St Augustine as all of humanity was ‘seminally present’ in the loins of Adam during this ‘original sin’, the guilt of Adam’s sin has been passed onto the entire human race, and, ever since suffering is the punishment for sin. Because of this disobedience, called ‘original sin’, we no longer live in

paradise but instead are destined to live in a 'fallen world', where the balance, order and harmony of the human and natural worlds have been shattered and destroyed.

GROUP FIVE: A Presentation: "A Soul – Deciding Theodicy"

St Augustine's theodicy is sometimes called a "Soul Deciding Theodicy" because God's gift of free-will enables humans to choose between right and wrong and either obey God's laws and enter Heaven or disobey God and enter Hell.

GROUP SIX : A Presentation: "Atonement"

St Augustine taught that because God is Merciful and Just humanity has been given a chance to atone for Adam and Eve's original sin and be reconciled with the Divine, but, because the balance of the world has been so disordered by the Fall, God Himself had to be incarnated on earth as Jesus Christ, to suffer the ultimate sacrifice on the cross in order for humanity to be reunited with God.

GROUP SEVEN: A Presentation: "Criticisms of Augustine's Theodicy"

Although St Augustine's Theodicy has been hugely influential within Christian thought, it has been criticized for containing {a} logical errors, {b} scientific errors, and, {c} moral errors.

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR FURTHER WORK

The Script

AUGUSTINE'S THEODICY

***"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good".***

Book of Genesis 1

One of the most influential attempts to justify God's existence in light of the evil in the world was put forward by the 4th century theologian St Augustine. St Augustine's theodicy is based on the Biblical idea that when God created the world He created a 'very good' world, a flawless, perfect world, and a world free from defects:

"To Thee there is no such thing as evil, even in Thy whole creation; because there is nothing from beyond it that can burst in and destroy the order which Thou hast appointed for it"

St Augustine, {354-430 CE}, *Confessions*

Privatio Boni: 'privation of good'

According to Augustine, as everything was created perfect, evil is not a thing or a substance existing in reality, but a *mere absence of the substance of good*, a privation or lack of good:

"What after all is anything we call evil, except the privation of good? Sickness is nothing but the privation of health, darkness the absence of light. When a cure or a light is administered, the 'evils' which were present {that is the sickness or the darkness} don't retreat and go elsewhere, rather, they simply don't exist any more, for such 'evil' isn't a substance but a defect of the substance of good"

St Augustine, *Enchiridion*

Augustine taught that the world with its great diversity and astonishing contrasts contains every possible variety and diversity of existence and experience, and, without such contrasts God's creativity couldn't be fully expressed: butterflies, bacteria, humming birds, parasitic worms, orchids, tumors, roses, thorns, hot, cold, joy, sorrow – a plentiful world overflowing with a multitude of extraordinary differences in the quality and character of things.

Aesthetic Theme

The mingled good and evil we perceive in this plentiful world are the results of finely tuned laws, and, according to Augustine, all events and experiences occur within a harmonious order where all degrees of reality contribute to the perfection of the whole – a perfected and harmonious order that in our mortal state we fail to recognize:

"Of this order the beauty does not strike us because by our mortal frailty we are so involved in a part of it that we cannot perceive the whole in which these fragments that offend us are harmonised with the most accurate fitness and beauty"

St Augustine, *The City of God*

The Doctrine of Original Sin & The Fall

If everything was perfect however how did evil and corruption enter the world? According to Augustine's interpretation of the Bible, evil and corruption entered the world when first Angels and then human beings - creatures endowed with the gift of free-will and the capacity to choose between good and evil - turned away from God and chose evil:

"And the woman said unto the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden, God hath

said, Ye shall not eat of it lest ye die". And the serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil". And when the woman saw that the tree was a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat".

Genesis 3: 1-6

As Adam and Eve disobeyed God, sin entered the world, and, according to Augustine as all of humanity was 'seminally present' in the loins of Adam during this 'original sin', the guilt of Adam's sin has been passed onto the entire human race, and, ever since suffering is the punishment for sin. Because of this disobedience, called 'original sin', we no longer live in paradise but instead are destined to live in a 'fallen world', where the balance, order and harmony of the human and natural worlds have been shattered and destroyed.

Atonement

Augustine however, also taught that because God is Merciful and Just humanity has been given a chance to atone for Adam and Eve's original sin and be reconciled with the Divine, but, because the balance of the world has been so disordered by the Fall, God Himself had to be incarnated on earth as Jesus Christ, to suffer the ultimate sacrifice on the cross in order for humanity to be reunited with God.

Soul - Deciding Theodicy

As atonement is now possible, a Judgement will occur at the end-time when people will be judged according to how they've lived their lives, and, ultimately original harmony will be restored. Good people will be rewarded with eternal heavenly bliss while evil doers will be eternally punished in Hell - a theodicy sometimes called a "Soul Deciding Theodicy" because God's gift of free-will enables humans to choose between right and wrong and either obey God's laws and enter Heaven or disobey God and enter Hell.

Augustine attempts to clear the creator of any blame for the existence of evil, arguing instead that it stems from the misuse of free will in a tragic act of cosmic significance that took place in the prehistory of the human race but was prefigured in the heavenly realms by the incomprehensible fall of some of the angels, the chief of whom is now Satan, God's Enemy.

Logical error

The theodicy however was disputed in Augustine's own time by Pelagius, a British theologian, who maintained that evil is *done by us, not born with us*. Since then thinkers like the 19th century philosopher, Friedrich Schleiermacher have argued that it's a contradiction to claim, as Augustine does, that in a perfect environment creatures lacking for nothing deliberately choose to catastrophically disrupt their perfect existence, and furthermore if there was

already knowledge of good and evil those who chose imperfection weren't therefore created perfect.

Furthermore, if God is all-powerful shouldn't fallen angels and humans have been under his control, and if He pre-ordained suffering to be a part of the natural order isn't *He* ultimately responsible for its presence in the animal and human worlds?

Augustine's view too that evil isn't a substance but an absence of good is also questionable because to the sufferer evil feels like a menacingly cruel and heart rendering reality with its own appallingly distinctive and horrifying power, and certainly isn't experienced merely as the 'absence of good'.

Scientific error

The theodicy has more recently been challenged by Darwin's theory of evolution which maintains that humans evolved into complex beings over millions of years, rather than *starting* perfect only to fall and become imperfect as Augustine claims; while natural evil, cited by Augustine as a punishment for the original sin, occurred long before homo-sapiens appeared on earth, the mass extinction of dinosaurs for instance occurring some 65 million years ago.

Moral error

While Augustine's view that we're all seminally present in the loins of Adam raises the question why should innocent people suffer for the misdemeanors of past generations, the most serious criticism of his theodicy concerns his inclusion of Hell. If Hell is part of creation then God is responsible for its existence and must have foreseen the need for punishment, and, as this punishment apparently never ends it builds the suffering of the eternally damned into the permanent structure of the cosmos:

"In what's become one of the key sentences in the literature of theodicy St Augustine says 'God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist', but, Hell, as understood by Augustine is endless suffering that's never turned to good and so remains forever a blot upon God's creation"

John Hick
Evil and the God of Love

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:

Aesthetic theme, atonement, contradiction, corruption, defect, disordered, Eternal Ideas, fallen state, free-will, incarnated, judgement, literal, mortal frailty, original sin, Principle of Plenitude, *privatio boni*, privation, saviour, seminally present, sin, Soul-Deciding Theodicy, the Fall, theodicy, theologian, transmitted.

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