

How augustine accounts for the existence of evil essay



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Augustine started from the assumption that God is God holy good and that God created a world free from defects. Following the teaching in genesis 1, Augustine emphasised that 'all God has made pleased Him.' Suffering and evil were therefore unknown.

He made the logical point that it is not possible for God to be responsible for evil since evil is not a substance. Instead evil refers to what is lacking in a thing; it is a 'privation of good.' Augustine used the analogy of blindness which is not an entity in itself but an absence of sight. If God can not have created evil, Augustine traced its origin to those areas within the world that have free will, namely, angels and human beings. These abused God's gift of freedom and chose wilfully to turn their attention away from God, the supreme good, and to idolise instead 'lesser goods'. In keeping with the story of the fall in genesis 3, he argued that the desire for power proved too much for Adam and Eve, who were tempted by Satan, to break God's command and eat the forbidden fruit from the tree of knowledge.

Having explained the origin of evil, Augustine went on to show that all suffering is a fully deserved consequence of human sin. Natural evil originated from the loss of order within nature following the first sin. This destroyed the delicate balance of the world. From then on, there was to be enmity between humans and other creatures.

Humans would have to battle constantly to grow enough food. Pain, such as that resulting from child-birth, entered the world, along with death. The first sin also caused the world to be distanced from god. In this new ad damaged environment, remote from god, moral evil flourished and spread.

Both types of evil are interpreted as a punishment; ' all evil is either sin or punishment for sin. ' Augustine made the essential point that all humans, including innocent babies, deserve to suffer as all humans were present ' in the loins of Adam'. This reflects the ancient belief that every generation was seminally present in Adam, and therefore that every generation is guilty because they inherit his guilt for disobeying god. Augustine concluded this theodicy with a reminder of god's grace if god was simply just every one would go to their rightful punishment in hell. Through his grace however, god sent his son to die on the cross so that some might be saved and go to heaven. This shows that god is merciful as well as just.

Augustine's view that evil is the result of human free will rather than god's will can be supported. For example, we can argue that if god gives human beings genuine free will this necessarily entails the possibility of moral evil. Augustine's theodicy successfully accounts for the existence of natural evil as a result of the introduction for moral evil into the world. We can also support Augustine's assumptions that free will is so valuable that it justifies the risk of evil. Because of its compatibility with, and reliance upon, the genesis account of creation, Augustine's theodicy appeals to Christians who accept the authority of the bible as the word of god. Some weaknesses of the theodicy are that it has been argued that his theodicy contains; logical errors, scientific errors, and moral errors.

Augustine's appeal to the free will defence poses a logical difficulty within the specific framework of his theodicy. It is hard to see how, in a perfect world, where there was no knowledge of good and evil, there could possibly be freedom to obey or disobey god, since good and evil would be unknown.

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The fact that god's creatures chose to disobey him seems to suggest there was already a knowledge of evil which only could have come from god. The scientific difficulties stem from Augustine's reliance upon the creation and fall stories in genesis. As a result, much of the argument rests upon ancient and scientifically controversial Judaeo-Christian theology. One problem is Augustine's idea that the world was made perfect by god and then damaged by humans.

This contradicts evolutionary theory which asserts that the universe has continually been developing from an earlier stage of chaos. The second major weakness concerns Augustine's assumption that each human being was seminally present in Adam. This theory must be rejected on biological grounds which mean that we are not in fact guilty for Adam's sin. This means that god is not just in allowing us to suffer for someone else's sin.

One moral difficulty in Augustine's theodicy concerns his concept of hell. Hell appears to be part of the design of the universe. This means god must have already anticipated that the world would go wrong - and have accepted it. Finally, although Augustine argued that god's selection of some people for heaven shows his mercy, others would argue that it displays irrational inconsistency, further questioning god's goodness.

The combined effect of these criticisms leads most people to conclude that Augustine's theodicy does not work.