

When God Silenced Moshe: The Problem of Evil in Jewish Thought

The Problem of Evil

- P1. An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God exists.
- P2. Evil (or bad things) exist that should be prevented by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God.
- ∴ An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God cannot exist.

ANSWER III: BECAUSE FREE WILL

1. The Third Premise

- P3. God places the value of free will above all other considerations (barring extenuating circumstances).

2. Ralbag [Gersonides], *Milḥamot Hashem*, III:4 (tr. S. Feldman, 1998) 118

The fact that God does not have knowledge of which possible outcome will be realised does not imply any defect in God, may He be blessed. For perfect knowledge of what the thing is in reality ... Hence, God knows these things in the best manner possible, for He knows them insofar as they are ordered in a determinate and certain way.

3. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I:57 (tr. S. Pines, 1963) 132–133

These subtle notions that very clearly elude the minds cannot be considered through the instrumentality of the customary words, which are the greatest among the causes leading unto error. For the bounds of expression in all languages are very narrow indeed, so that we cannot represent this notion to ourselves except through a certain looseness of expression.

4. Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed*, I:72 (tr. S. Pines, 1963) 193

On the one hand, there is a demonstration of His separateness, may He be exalted, from the world and of His being free from it; and on the other hand, there is a demonstration that the influence of His governance and providence in every part of the world...

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL RESPONDS

5. The Problem of Evil

- P1. An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God exists *that would prevent evil unless He could not do so without sacrificing a greater good or allowing a greater evil*.
- P2. Evil (or bad things) exist that *could* be prevented by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God *without sacrificing a greater good or allowing a greater evil [i.e., there is gratuitous suffering]*.
- ∴ An omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God cannot exist.

6. Lord Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership: God, Science, and the Search for Meaning* (2011) 241

There is a difference between a contradiction and a cry.

You can solve a contradiction by sitting quietly in a room, thinking, using conceptual ingenuity, reframing. ... You cannot solve a cry by thinking. Moses, weeping for his people, is not consoled by Leibniz's admittedly brilliant proof that all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Theodicy [i.e., solving the problem of evil], the attempt to vindicate God's justice in a world of evil, is compelling evidence that in the translation of Abrahamic spirituality into the language of Plato and Aristotle, something is lost.

What is lost is the cry.

***To Heal a Fractured World*, (2005) 22–23**

God exists, therefore there is justice. But it is *divine* justice – justice from the perspective of one who knows all, sees all, and considers all ... But we who live in space and time cannot see from this perspective, and if we did, it would not make us better human beings but worse.

...

If we were able to see how evil today leads to good tomorrow – if we were able to see from the point of view of God, creator of all – we would understand justice *but at the cost of ceasing to be human*.

...

There is divine justice, and sometimes, looking back at the past from a distance in time, we can see it. But we do not live by looking back at the past. ... *God creates divine justice, but only we can create human justice*. ... God did not create humankind to demand of it absolute submission to His all-powerful will. In revelation, creation speaks.

What it says is a call to responsibility.