

## Philosophy of Religion (Christianity)

### 4. Good and evil

#### God and the Devil (Satan)

- Christians believe that when God created, he created everything good:  
  
"God saw all that he had made, and it was very good."  
Genesis 1:31
- This leaves us with the question 'where does evil come from?'
- Some Christians would say that there is a power behind this evil which is often referred to as the Devil.

#### The Devil (Satan)

- The story of how the Devil (sometimes referred to as Satan or Lucifer) came to be is not found in the Bible.
- There is a tradition that states that Lucifer (a name which means 'light') was created good.
- It says he became proud and refused to bow down to Adam.
- He was cast out of heaven.
- Jesus himself says:  
  
"I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."  
Luke 10:18
- The story of the fall of Lucifer inspired the English poet John Milton to write 'Paradise Lost'
- There are very few references to Satan (or the Devil) in the Bible:
  - God allows Satan to afflict his servant Job
  - Jesus is tempted by the Devil in the wilderness
  - Jesus performed exorcisms and cast out demons
  - The Book of Revelation describes a war in heaven
- Christians believe that only God is omnipotent and the Devil only has limited power.
- Some Christians take a liberal view and do not believe the Devil is real. They think that the Devil is simply the personification of evil.

#### The Fall

- The story of the Fall of humanity (i.e. Adam and Eve) is found in the Book of Genesis.
- It tries to explain how sin and death entered the world through disobedience.
- In the story Adam and Eve are given Free Will.
- God tells Adam and Eve not to eat from the tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.  
  
"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."  
Genesis 2:16 - 17
- Eve is tempted by the serpent and she then gave some of the fruit to Adam to eat.
- The consequences: they realise they are naked, embarrassed to be in God's presence, work becomes a curse, Eve will experience labour pains, banished from Eden, death enters the world.
- The serpent is usually identified with Satan.

#### Own point of view and different points of views

- In order to get full marks on the last 12 mark question it is necessary to give another point of view, your own point of view as well as references to Christianity in your answer.
- Atheists do not believe in God and so therefore might not see a problem with natural evil. Tsunamis and earthquakes are just the result of natural processes.
- Some people might argue that God is punishing people for their sinfulness. Atheists and humanists might agree with some of the principles of the Ten Commandments but do not see any need to ascribe them to a deity.
- The 'Golden Rule' (Do unto others as you would have them do unto you) is found in many religions and cultures

## Moral and Natural Evil

- There is no doubt that there is evil (or suffering) in the world.
- Christians say there are two kinds of evil in the world:
- Moral evil where it is obvious there is some human activity responsible for it e.g. murder, rape, theft, abuse, lying
- Natural evil where people suffer through natural disasters e.g. earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, hurricanes ... etc.

#### The Problem of Evil

- The fact that there is evil in the world presents a problem for Christians.
- If God is not able to prevent evil and suffering, then he is not omnipotent.
- If God does not want to prevent evil and suffering, then he is not omnibenevolent.
- The attempt to reconcile the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God in the face of evil is known as a theodicy.
- The theologian Irenaeus (130 – 202) believed that God allowed people to suffer and experience evil so that they became better people and learnt from their experiences.
- Augustine of Hippo however believed that evil was a lack of goodness. Evil happens when people do not choose doing good. Augustine explained this by pointing to the story of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis.
- This is known as 'original sin'.

#### Coping with suffering

- People deal with suffering in different ways.
- Some deal with it by saying that it is part of God's will and no one knows the mind of God:  
  
"God works in a mysterious way  
His wonders to perform."  
William Cowper
- Christians believe that Jesus is able to empathise with their suffering because he was truly human and he too suffered and ultimately died.
- Many Christians pray to God to help them when they experience suffering.
- St Paul wrote in one of his letters that he prayed three times for his 'thorn in the flesh' to be removed. He concluded that God had given him this affliction to keep him humble and trust completely in God:  
  
Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.  
2 Corinthians 12: 7 - 9
- At the time of Jesus people believed that illness and suffering were punishments for past sins:  
  
"Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."  
John 9:3

## Sources for moral behaviour – The Bible

- Christian look to the Bible as a guide for how to live their lives.

#### Old Testament

- Jews and Christians believe that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.
- The first four commandments are concerned with God, the remainder are concerned with human relations:
  - Do not worship any other gods
  - Do not make any idols
  - Do not misuse the name of God
  - Keep the Sabbath holy
  - Honour your father and mother
  - Do not murder
  - Do not commit adultery
  - Do not steal
  - Do not lie
  - Do not covet

#### New Testament

- Jesus' moral teaching is found in the Sermon on the Mount.
- Jesus taught that his disciples were expected to go beyond the mere letter of the law and keep the spirit of the law e.g. do not murder included being angry, do not commit adultery included having lustful thoughts.
- Jesus summarised the whole of the law in two commandments:
  - Love God (quoting the Shema)
  - Love Neighbour (Leviticus 19:18)
- Jesus also taught his disciples the 'Golden Rule':  
  
"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and Prophets"

Matthew 7:12

## Sources for moral behaviour- Jesus

- Christians look to Jesus' life as an example of how to live their lives.
- Christianity teaches that Jesus' obedience to God won eternal salvation for the whole of humanity.
- St Paul taught a principle of 're-capitulation' – where Adam failed, Jesus succeeded.
- St Paul describes Jesus as the second Adam:

So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth; the second man is of heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the heavenly man, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man.

1 Corinthians 15: 45 - 49

## Conscience

- Conscience can be described as an inner feeling or voice acting as a guide to the rightness or wrongness of one's behaviour.
- Some Christians would say that it is the voice of God speaking to their conscience telling them what to do.
- Some people argue that they cannot do something because their conscience won't allow it.
- However, you don't have to be a Christian to believe in one's conscience.
- Many non-Christians would say that they too are guided by their conscience but would not necessarily that it comes from God.
- Humanists believe that it is possible to live a good life without religion.