
Explain and Evaluate the Problem of Horrendous Evil

Within this essay, I'll be exploring the problem of horrendous evil, which, as explained by H.J. McCloskey, 'is a problem, for the theist, in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand and belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other' I will frequently touch on the views of Marilyn McCord Adams who attempts to defend the validity of God's characteristics from horrendous evil. Adams defines these evils as 'evils the participation in which gives one reason prima facie to doubt whether one's life could be a great good to one as a whole'. Adams, variously attempts to show the compatibility of evil and God's existence, contributing to "reconciling the imperfect world with the goodness of god. Though Adam's argument are somewhat persuasive, I'll argue it's not adequate enough to combat the perceptible argument presented by horrendous evils. Adam's argument needs to be strenuous due to the empirical evidence of horrendous evils' capability of 'engulfing' all goodness and positivity from people's lives, to such an extent, that it makes lives not worth living. This is seen with extreme cases, such as raping a woman, then cutting off her arms and dropping a nuclear bomb over populated areas. These examples contribute to Adam's explanation of "balancing off" but shows evil to outbalance goodness, in turn, causing people's happiness to be overridden by evil, making lives feel worthless. Hence, this leads to psychological damage to the state where they don't want to live. Adams summarises this, outlining horrendous evils causes "psychophysical torture whose ultimate goal is the disintegration of personality". However, it's vital to distinct horrendous evils from general, everyday evils, such as a paper cut to a relationship break up, as everyday examples have the capability to be overcome, whilst, horrendous evils don't due to the sheer pain and torture they bring people. This strengthens the cause against an omni-God as it's inevitable he's either incapable or unwilling to prevent these evils. Plantinga echoes this, commenting "Faced with great personal suffering or misfortune, he may be tempted to rebel against God, to shake his fist in God's face, or even to give up belief in God altogether". Nevertheless, Adams and Plantinga share the belief that there

is a coexistence and a compatible relationship between horrendous evils and God. They hold this view on the basis that we are too immature to understand God's purpose for letting Horrendous Evil roam within the world. They use an analogy to legitimise their perspective and make clear for us to understand. They explain just as a baby is too immature to understand why the mother lets him go through painful heart surgery, people are too immature to understand why God lets us go through horrendous evil. Leibniz goes further by saying that it's better that horrendous evil is in the world than no evil at all, hence, evaluating that with horrendous evils, we live in "the best of all possible worlds". However, it hard to see this analogy as sound considering the intensity and sheer anguish some horrendous evils cause. This is transparent in such cases as a man deciding over what family member should die or live. It seems it is unlikely that a man would accept he is too immature to understand why he experiences this horrendous evil. This is strongly agreed with by William Rowe, who remarks "Suffering often occurs in a degree far beyond what is required for character development". Hence, this puts Adam's defence against horrendous evil in a laborious position. Nonetheless, Adam admits that horrendous evils would cause problems if taken generally and globally, however, if taken individually, the argument of horrendous evil world fail, due the general approach believing all evils from equal. This influenced Adams to withdraw from the "generic and global" approach, and look at individual instances where goodness has engulfed the most

horrendous of evils, to maintain goodness in life. Chisholm goes further, holding that good has the capacity to balance off evil experienced by people, hence, leaving an overall state of good, thus defeating evil. Chisolm explains evils are negligible and inconsequential as goodness engulfs it, therefore, having a greater impact on lives, relative to actions of evil. This view is echoed by John Hick, who claims "God allows some evil because it builds positive character in the victims or in others which outweigh the negative value of evil itself". However, as already explained, it is empirically observable that some people never recover from horrendous evils and evil permanently engulfing all goodness, invariably making the victims lives worthless. Nevertheless, Adams braces Chisholm's perspective, explaining that there are 3 ways evil are engulfed, all coming through the power of God. Adam further pronounces that in order for them to be defeated, "The worst evils demand to be defeated by the

best goods. Horrendous evils can be overcome only by the goodness of God". Firstly, horrendous evils can be engulfed through one-on-one, interpersonal experiences with God. The interaction with God can solely overcome all the horrendous pain someone has experienced. This is advocated by Ivan Karamazov who states horrendous evil to be "incommensurate with any package of merely non-transcendent goods and so unable to be balanced off, much less defeated thereby". Rudolph Otto agrees that experiences of God can defeat horrendous evils through the numinous, bringing up his concept of "mysterium, tremendum et fascinans", which describes people's intense admiration, and attraction to God's glory. This is acknowledged by the story of Job where all suffering and evil in his life is defeated through divine interaction. However, the problem still lies that experiences generally are of comfort for people, it doesn't remove the fact that they underwent these horrendous evils. Hence, it's argued that only the most devoted would be of awe for Jesus if any interaction occurred, whilst others would be confrontational, questioning his intentions to put them through these pains. It's inevitable that the Holocaust survivor would feel a sense of anger towards the initiator, instead of awe for his power over pain and suffering. Secondly, Adams believes horrendous evils can also be engulfed through our shared pain and suffering with Jesus, hence "identifying" ourselves with Jesus, giving purpose for our suffering. This is either achieved via mystical identification, where someone is purposely meant to experience the pain Jesus experienced, or sympathetic identification, where the resemblance to Jesus' pain gives us a sense of what Jesus went through. This sense of identification is echoed by Mother Teresa who believed the people who suffered the most, most resembled Christ. However, it can be argued that this explanation is of contradiction, as whilst she believes pain allows us to identify with God, is it really the case that a baby, who experienced immense pain and passed away for example, can really identify with Jesus' suffering? Thirdly, Adams promotes Julian of Norwich's explanation of divine gratitude as an alternative reason for how evil is off balanced by goodness. She explains that after the point of death, God states "Thank you for all your suffering of your youth". She believes this discussion with God will bring overwhelming jubilation to the person, hence, overcoming and balancing off all the horrendous evils faced. However, this argument's argued to be intolerable as it seems in cases of suicide, the victims won't have the opportunity to interact with God, therefore not being able to balance off the horrendous evils that brought anguish to their lives. This case is further ignited by the fact that the bible sees suicide as a transgression, highlighted by Job 1:21 which states God's authority and command over life and death.

Hence, if Catholicism's perspective of purgatory is false, it appears the horrendous evils faced by suicide victims won't be defeated and balanced off as they won't receive awe and happiness that's experienced through God's at their death. In conclusion, Adam's defence of God against the problem of horrendous evil isn't successful. Though she shows how God allows evil to

occur, due to answered flaws in her argument such as confrontational feelings towards God, babies who lacked identification with Jesus, and cases of suicide, I don't rationalise her reasons why God licenses the effects of horrendous evils. Thus, I'm not convinced that horrendous evil are balanced off by the good and satisfaction brought by God, hence, heavily threatening the rationality of the existence of an omni-God. This stance is underscored in Rowan Williams' writing, 'Of Course this Makes us Doubt God's Existence' through his questioning of why God allows this intensity of suffering to occur, as well as how horrendous evils make us feel anymore happier, confident and safer in God.

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