

# Theodicy, Tragedy, and Theology Reflexivity

## Agenda

- I. Any brief questions from last week? (10-15)
- II. Prayer (15-20)
- III. Theodicy, Reflexivity, Tragedy, and Tragedy (140-240)
- IV. Read (240-340)
- V. Theological Reflexivity, Tragedy, and Tragedy
- VI. Questions and Answers (340-345)
- VII. Reflection Groups (345-400)

**Read (240-340)**  
Theodicy, Reflexivity, Tragedy, and Tragedy (140-240)

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# Theodicy, Tragedy, and Theology Reflexivity

**What is Theodicy?**  
Simply put, theodicy refers to the study of whether God is just and good in view of the existence of evil. Theodicy is the study of how God can be just and good in view of the existence of evil. Theodicy is the study of how God can be just and good in view of the existence of evil.

**Theodicy and Tragedy**  
Theodicy and tragedy are two concepts that are often used interchangeably. Theodicy is the study of how God can be just and good in view of the existence of evil. Tragedy is the study of how God can be just and good in view of the existence of evil.

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- I. Any brief questions from last week? (1:00-1:15)
- II. Compassion groups (1:15-1:35)
- III. Break (1:35- 1:45)
- IV. Theological Reflexivity, Theodicy, and Tragedy (1:45-2:45)
- V. Break (2:45-3:00)
- VI. Theological Reflexivity, Theodicy, and Tragedy Discussion and Questions (3:00-3:45)
- VII. Verbatim Groups (3:45-4:30)

**What is Evil?**  
Evil is a concept that is often used interchangeably with theodicy. Evil is the study of how God can be just and good in view of the existence of evil. Evil is the study of how God can be just and good in view of the existence of evil.

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# Theological Reflexivity

- Embedded theology consists of beliefs and values instilled throughout childhood. Some embedded beliefs, values, and practices from childhood are left behind; others exert an unconscious influence and surface under stress. Embedded theologies are those pre-critical and often unexamined beliefs and practices that have become a habitual part of one's worldview and practices. People may not even be aware of their embedded theology until they experience an existential crisis or de-centering experience that disrupts their world, pushing deep layers of sometimes unconscious beliefs, values, and practices to the surface.
- Deliberative theology is "the understanding of faith that emerges from a process of carefully reflecting upon embedded theological convictions" (Stone & Duke, 2006, p. 16)
- Self-reflexivity involves both second- and third-order languages in order to become more responsible for the larger social context of systems of thought one turns to for explanations.
- In order to become more accountable for the ways social context shapes our meaning systems, we often need conversation partners and communities that help us understand our social identities and privileges (Neuger, 2004; James N. Poling, 1995; Ramsay, 2013). Unlike self-reflection, which is often experienced as a solitary introspective process, self-reflexivity requires conversations that help us tease out the complex inter-relationships between knowledge and power.
- The process of theological reflexivity often begins at a personal level in conversations that hold us responsible for identifying embedded theologies formed in childhood that still exert an influence which may be life-giving and life-limiting for us and/or others.
- Theological reflexivity: The process of reflecting upon and integrating how one is putting into practice meanings, values, religious beliefs and symbols that connect one with a sense of the sacred. Such reflexivity monitors how one's theologies formed in childhood and young adulthood interface with ongoing religious practices and theological meaning-making, and how social systems influence meaning-making.

## What is Theodicy?

- Simply put, theodicy has to do with the mental gymnastics we perform in order to put forth an explanation of how God can be omni-benevolent (all good) and omnipotent (all powerful), and yet evil and suffering exist.

## The Epicurian Paradox

- Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then God is not omnipotent. Is God able but not willing? Then God is malevolent. Is God both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is God neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

## What is Evil?

- Some philosophers and psychologists described evil as “othering” or objectifying another (C. Schrag, 2008; M. Horne, 2008).
- Social psychology attempts to define evil as they look at theories of cognitive dissonance, authority, and conformity to describe social evils perpetrated by individuals and groups (Crump, 2008; P. Zimbardo, 2008).
- Different theologians saw evil in terms of categories (S. Davis, 2001), activities (B. Larson, 2012), and aesthetics (L. Graham, n.d.) and there were those who eschewed the term altogether (W. Farley, 1990, 1999).
- as being found in performed actions or intrinsic attitudes that negate the possibility of forming life-giving relationships at multiple levels; in these embedded thoughts and embodied actions people are objectified and stripped of their humanity; our search for truth exchanges possibility for certainty, complexity for simplicity; and, our sense of awe about the beauty of the world is diminished.

## Nelson's 5 Paradigms

### The Moral View

Nelson calls this the most widely held view of the problem of evil. Here, evil is a consequence of and rooted in human sin and alienation from God. As we resist the design of creation, evil things happen, and in this view reveal God providence for the care of creation. Thus, an argument following this line of thought ultimately reveals that God might use times of evil or suffering to test someone or instruct, to remind folks of their hope in God, or bring about repentance.

### Radical Suffering

This is a person-centered approach less concerned with explaining evil and more thoughtful about how resistance to evil is paramount. This paradigm recognizes that some evil makes no sense. The assumption is the suffering is to be vindicated, and that the wounded party seeks remedy rather than rationale.

### Ambiguous Creation

This paradigm posits that some suffering and conflict are inherent in an unpredictable world. This, coupled with the freedom of human beings to create and destroy creation, leads to inevitable suffering and conflict. Here, something similar to what theologian Kathleen Sands proposes as “competing goods” is the source and result of evil. I think this model provides for a God who is accountable for a finite and imperfect creation, but not for the ways in which human beings destroy it.

### Eschatological Imagination

This model follows some lines of the Radical suffering model, yet there is the insistence that suffering cannot be justified, and that it must be resisted and the sufferers vindicated. Here, God’s desire for the world is found places of resistance. God is with those who suffer evil and God’s solidarity with sufferers is God’s judgment upon the world and evil, demanding that it stop. The sufferer’s will receive their reward in the end as God abolishes evil.

### Redemptive Suffering

Redemptive suffering says that some suffering can be used for redemptive purposes. It does not seek to justify such suffering, but understands that God can use suffering to “redeem sinners, to end cycles of suffering and sin, and to bring reconciliation and hope to a suffering world.” God in the midst of redemptive suffering pulls the sufferer and sinner into the redemptive divine embrace. This model says that God has the last word in suffering and evil.

### Nelson's final words on the Paradigms

“I have come to believe that each [paradigm] is necessary to comprehend the vulnerability of the human condition, the human capacity to inflict horrible sufferings upon one another, the resiliency of the human heart to suffer and resist enormous evil, the reality of redemption for both those who hurt and those who harm, and the complexity of God’s relationship with creation” (2003, 413).

Nelson, S. (2003). Facing evil: Evil's many faces: Five paradigms for understanding evil. Interpretation, 399-413

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## Lenses Utilized in Approaching the Problem of Evil and Suffering

### Collective lens

#### Major Tasks

- Personally defining evil and the problem of evil;
- Listening for keys words or terms from a care-seeker as to their particular theodicy

#### Resources

- Basic beliefs, traditions, theologies, and doctrines concerning the Omnibenevolence and Omnipotence of God as well as God's relationship to evil.
- Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience

#### Outcomes

- Tentative conclusions and guidance pertaining to statements of faith and belief that orient our worldviews and responses to evil and suffering.
- Beginning development of cohesive and authentic practices of care in response to evil and suffering, as well as conceptualizing hope, forgiveness, love, and compassion.

### Communal lens

#### Major Tasks

- Listening for cultural, social, and familial narratives that explore how a particular community is interpreting and responding to the evil and/or suffering they are experiencing;

#### Resources

- Internalized and spoken narratives of a particular suffering community;
- Localized myths or legends, particular doctrines of faith that inform how groups and individuals are interpreting an event.
- In addition, our own reflections on theodicy and suffering can provide additional interpretive lenses.

#### Outcomes

- Mapping the influence of particular ideas and responses as they live and weave themselves through a person or community's life together.
- Developing counternarratives of hope and resistance that can be examined and claimed as part of the caring response to evil.
- Excluding oppressive narratives by those who might claim exclusive rights to interpretation and response.
- Care-giver's might reflect on how these novel stories impact their own theodicies and the types of care they offer to another.

### Personal lens

#### Major Tasks

- Practicing empathy, care, empowerment, and compassion as they come into contact with particular individual narratives.
- The task of the therapist/care-giver is to create a space where people can reconnect to the ordinary goodness of life.

#### Resources

- The relationship between care-giver and care-seeker;
- In this space one can be empowered to develop novel stories about their experiences as they hear their problematized narratives and explore their own resistance and resilience.

#### Outcomes

- Understanding how stories are shaping identity, where people name problems, but also how they are already resisting particular interpretations.
- Empathic connection to another's suffering, providing support with an eye towards empowering people to develop new narratives out of the universal, communal, and individual stories of faith that they find life-giving.
- A care-giver might utilize stories of suffering to modify or adapt their understanding of a community or universal set of beliefs about evil and suffering.

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## Communal

### Major Tasks

- Listening for cultural, social narratives that explore how community is interpreting the evil and/or suffering and experiencing;

### Resources

- Internalized and spoken particular suffering community
- Localized myths or legends, doctrines of faith that inform and individuals are interpreted
- In addition, our own reflections and suffering can provide interpretive lenses.

### Outcomes

- Mapping the influence of responses as they live and through a person or community together.
- Developing counternarratives of resistance that can be experienced as part of the caring response
- Excluding oppressive narratives might claim exclusive rights and response.
- Care-giver's might reflect how stories impact their own types of care they offer to



## Reflective lens

Defining evil and the  
evil;

Key words or terms  
seeker as to their  
theodicy

Traditions, theologies,  
concerning the  
omnipotence and Omnipotence  
as God's relationship

Tradition, Reason,

Conclusions and guidance  
statements of faith and  
present our worldviews and  
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Development of cohesive  
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## Communal lens

### Major Tasks

- Listening for cultural, social, and familial narratives that explore how a particular community is interpreting and responding to the evil and/or suffering they are experiencing;

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### Outcomes

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- Care-giver's might reflect on how these novel stories impact their own theodicies and the types of care they offer to another.

## Personal lens

### Major Tasks

- Practicing empathy, care, and compassion as they come into particular individual narratives.
- The task of the therapist/caregiver is to create a space where people can recognize the ordinary goodness of life.

### Resources

- The relationship between caregiver and seeker;
- In this space one can be empowered to tell novel stories about their experience, hear their problematized narratives, and explore their own resistance.

### Outcomes

- Understanding how stories affect identity, where people name their experiences and how they are already resisting interpretations.
- Empathic connection to another person, providing support with an eye toward empowering people to develop out of the universal, communal stories of faith that they find.
- A care-giver might utilize stories to modify or adapt their understanding of community or universal set of values and suffering.



## Communal lens

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### Resources

- The relationship between care-giver and care-seeker;
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### Outcomes

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