

ZOHEIR BAGHERI NOAPARAST\*

ORCID: 0000-0001-5632-2699

## WITTGENSTEIN AND THE PSEUDO-PROBLEM OF EVIL

Keywords: Wittgenstein, problem of evil, omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence

Słowa kluczowe: Wittgenstein, problem zła, wszechmoc, wszechwiedza, doskonała dobroć

### Introduction

In contemporary debates among analytic philosophers, the problem of evil is divided into two categories: the logical and the evidential problem of evil.<sup>1</sup> The logical problem of evil attempts to show that the co-existence of evil and God leads to an inconsistency. The logical argument attempts to refute God's existence by a deductive argument. J.L Mackie (1955) introduced the logical problem of evil in the analytic philosophy. The debates following his article led to the abandonment of the logical

---

\* Zoheir Bagheri Noaparast—PhD candidate in Philosophy at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (KU). He is currently working on his thesis, entitled “Wittgenstein on Religious and Scientific Language Games”.

Address for correspondence: Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt, Ostenstrasse 26, 85072 Eichstätt, Germany. E-mail: m.z.bagheri.noaparast@gmail.com.

<sup>1</sup> For an overview of the logical and evidential problem of evil, see McBrayer, Howard-Snyder (2013).

problem of evil and instead philosophers engaged with the evidential problem of evil. William Rowe (1979) pioneered discussions on the evidential problem of evil among the analytic philosophers. While the logical argument of evil aims at showing the impossibility of the existence of God in a world containing evil, the evidential argument aims at showing the improbability of God's existence.

Evils have been categorized into two groups: moral and natural. By moral evil, we mean evils that are inflicted on sentient beings by human beings. Robbery, backstabbing, torturing, killing and the like are among the moral evils. Natural evils refer to the pain that sentient beings suffer as a result of natural events such as tornados, earthquakes, tsunamis and diseases.

Theists usually tend to offer different justifications for moral and natural evils. One of the most debated justifications is justifying moral evils by referring to "free will". In a non-compatibilist conception of free will, human beings act freely and therefore they are themselves responsible for the pain and suffering which they inflict on others. Some atheists have either questioned the intelligibility or the coherence of a libertarian conception of free will. David Lewis (1993), for instance, has argued against the possibility of a libertarian conception of free will. The libertarian conception of free will can also be used against the theist position. Schellenberg (2004) not only questions the existence of free will as a necessary prerequisite for a meaningful relationship with God, but also argues that the existence of free will itself is reason to doubt God's existence. This is because, as a result of free will, many atrocities occur which a loving God would want to prevent and the alleged benefits of free will can also be achieved under a different scenario where free will does not exist.

Facing the challenges brought about by the problem of evil, some have argued that the problem of evil impels us to revise the divine features. Some have argued that we should abandon attributing omnipotence to the Almighty, while others have argued that we should limit the kind or extent of the knowledge attributed to God, yet others have argued that we should question the concept of "goodness" when it comes to God. A radical version of the revision arguments proposes the existence of an evil genius or evil God who is omnipotent and omniscient and has created this world. Cahn (1977), Stein (1990), and Law (2019), among others, have argued that the existence of an evil God is as likely as the existence of a good

God. Cahn introduced the “problem of good”, a challenge for reconciling the good in the world with the existence of an evil God. There is of course another possibility which has not been taken seriously in the recent debates on the problem of evil among analytic philosophers, namely Manicheanism. In the past, Manicheans defended the existence of both evil and good deities and as a result they had an answer for the existence of good and evil; two separate sources.

A strong commitment to morality is presupposed in discussing the problem of evil. Therefore, both theists and atheists need to have the possibility to condemn evil and there are instances of evil which need outright condemnation. Nevertheless, some theists insist that there are justifications for the existence of such evils. They do so by insisting that God knows things that we do not and given that we do not have that knowledge, we are not aware of those justifications. However, given the human perspective and understanding that we have, we have no other choice but to condemn those evils as unjustifiable. Wachterhauser (1985) argues along the lines that given that our understanding of morality is dependent on our human perspective, if we accept that certain evils are somehow justified, then we have no choice but to become skeptical about morality. However, skepticism about morality is as big a blow to theism as the problem of evil itself.

In all the debates on the problem of evil, despite the differences, philosophers deal with the co-existence of God on the one hand and evils on the other. In contemporary debates on the problem of evil, the God in question is generally taken to be the God of the “Abrahamic religions”. One of the implications of this is thought to be that God is a person who has a mind, willpower, intentions, and moral features. Three divine features are singled out in dealing with the problem of evil: Omnipotence, Omniscience, and Omnibenevolence.

In what follows, I will offer a Wittgensteinian diagnosis of the discussions related to the problem of evil. In order to do so, I will draw on themes present in the writings of the later Wittgenstein. Two major arguments will be developed. First, Wittgenstein argued that the use of words in each language game determines their meaning. As a result, when we intend to define divine attributes, we ought to engage with the religious traditions and the actual religious language games. However, philosophers in the analytic tradition propose their own abstract concepts and almost neglect the religious traditions entirely. This means the philosophical discussions

on the problem of evil barely have any relevance for the religious believer. Second, Wittgenstein thought of concepts like “disembodied mind” as confused, and argued against the intelligibility of attributing personhood to non-humans. Drawing on these points, I will argue that the philosophical discussion on the problem of evil needs therapy and not a clever solution.

### God and divine attributes in the religious traditions

In the Wittgensteinian view, for a word to have meaning it should be used in a specific language game with its own rules. In our discussion, in order to see how divine attributes are used and what they mean, we ought to consult existing religious language games. However, in the debates on the problem of evil, many of the divine attributes are employed without paying any attention to religious tradition. Figuring out the proper use of the words in the religious language game is not an easy task and a superficial consultation of the religious texts can lead us astray.

In the religious texts of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God manifests a variety of emotions such as anger and vengeance. One might think that it would have been easier to resolve the problem of evil had the philosophical conception of God more in common with the holy books of the Abrahamic religions in particular and religious traditions in general. Take the following example, a passage from the Old Testament which was a severe punishment for what King David as a person had done: “The Lord sent a pestilence on Israel from that morning until the appointed time; and seventy thousand of the people died.” (2 Samuel 24:15.)

If we were to accept God as an extremely powerful person who took revenge on an entire nation simply because one of them had committed a sin, then we have a very clear answer to why evil and God coexist. In that case, God is the source of evil and there is no problem in reconciling such a God with the existence of evil. If God is the source of evil, then there is no “problem of evil”. The problem would be instead how to deal with such a God.

However, dealing with religious traditions is not as simple as picking out a few instances from the holy books and determining what of conception of God is at play. On reading the holy books, one will find many passages that could imply that God is immoral, while other passages may suggest that he is pure love. In order to see how God and divine attributes are used in each tradition and how they hang together, that tradition ought

to be studied in its entirety. It is only after such a thorough study of God in a tradition that we can begin to engage with the problem of evil. The specific attributes that we may all agree on, need to be specified with the aid of tradition. Let us assume that we all agree that if there were a God, he ought to be all loving. We need to specify what “love” means in “all loving” and in order to do so we need to deal with specific religious traditions to determine what is meant by “love” in each of them. Without such specifications, we are not dealing with the God of certain traditions but with speculations about what God would be. Some philosophers have speculated about God and have argued for or against such speculative conceptions. Arguing for or against such a God is arguing for or against a philosopher’s God, not the God of a certain tradition.

### God in the Abrahamic Religions?

In addition to the fact that analytic philosophers do not consult the religious traditions to clarify the meaning of divine attributes, they seem to have a craving for a general definition of God in the Abrahamic religions. Another Wittgensteinian criticism can be leveled against this craving for generality.

Wittgenstein (1958) is famous for arguing against reduction and craving for generality in philosophy. He thought that such cravings were the result of the preoccupation of philosophers with the methods of sciences. If we were to apply this criticism to the discussions on the problem of evil, we should resist the general and reductive conception of “God in the Abrahamic traditions”. By the Abrahamic religions we mean Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, the Gods present in each of these religions are so different that one wonders how one could argue for or against them at the same time. Barely any philosophical paper in the analytic tradition on the problem of evil or Theism refers to the holy books of these three religions. What is meant by divine “knowledge”, “power”, and “morality” is dependent on minute details in each of these books. Taking one example, Richard Swinburne begins the first chapter of his book “Is there a God?” as follows, “My topic is the claim that there is a God, understood in the way that Western religion (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) has generally understood that claim” (1996, p. 3.). Contrary to the general use of the term “God in the Abrahamic traditions” or “God in the monotheistic religions”, the God presented in The Quran and the Gods presented in The Old and The New

Testament are not the same, despite similarities. Consulting each of these religions would make it clear that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have crucial differences; pivotal differences in discussing the problem of evil. This is not to mention how our conception of God would be different if we were to take the various interpretations of each sect in these three religions into consideration. Unless we carry out such an examination and base our philosophical arguments on such an examination, we are not dealing with God in any religious tradition but an imagined God. Taking Wittgenstein's advice seriously, we should speak of three different versions of the problem of evil, one specific to Islam, one specific to Judaism, and one specific to Christianity.

### The philosophical and the religious conception

In his book "Problem of Evil and Problem of God" (2004), D.Z. Phillips has leveled some criticisms against the idealized conception of God used in the philosophical discussions related to the problem of evil. Phillips develops the Wittgensteinian point mentioned above and discusses one of the divine attributes, namely Omnipotence, in order to examine how in the analytic tradition this divine attribute is used and how irrelevant it is to the religious traditions. Richard Swinburne defines God's omnipotence as,

[a]n omnipotent being is one who can do anything logically possible, anything that is, the description of which does not involve a contradiction: such a being could not make me exist and not exist at the same instant, but he could eliminate the stars or cover the earth with water just like that.

(Swinburne, 1998, p. 3)

Such a definition is not to be found anywhere in the Abrahamic traditions. Rather it is a definition that Swinburne has come up with. However, defining God regardless of the tradition is not only limited to theists. Atheists such as J.L. Mackie also define divine attributes without consulting religious tradition.

Phillips (2004) questions Swinburne's definition by offering the following examples as things that God cannot do: "riding a bicycle, licking and savouring a Haagen-Dazs ice-cream, bumping one's head, having sexual

intercourse, learning a language and so on and so on” (p. 12). If God rides a bicycle or licks an ice-cream, it does not constitute a logical contradiction. Yet we know that God cannot ride a bicycle nor lick an ice-cream. But where do we know this from? It is widely accepted that the concept of God developed in the monotheistic traditions does not include such anthropomorphic capacities because God is thought to be without a body. Therefore, in order to find out what sort of conceptual limitations there are for defining God and his attributes, we ought to consult each monotheistic tradition. With his ironic examples, Phillips reminds us of the importance of the religious tradition in developing concepts related to God. If we allow our imagination to wander off, we may come up with interesting stories but that will be our story, not the story of the religions. Of course, we cannot prevent philosophers from speculation. All we can do is to remind them that their speculations do not determine the conception of God in the religions. In *On Certainty*, Wittgenstein (1969) examines the consequences of neglecting the different discourses and their respective rules. In § 467 he discusses how two people discussing philosophy would be labeled as mad if others were not notified that they were engaged in philosophy. Philosophy is a harmless activity insofar as we are aware of engaging in it and not confusing it with another language game.

As far as Swinburne’s definition of omnipotence is concerned, it is doubtful that Phillips’s critique of this definition is acceptable. As William Hasker (2007, p. 153) has pointed out, Phillips is not successful in showing that the concept of omnipotence is incoherent. This is because attributing the actions Phillips listed to God is, in fact, contradictory given that God is immaterial by definition. Hasker adds that while Phillips quotes Swinburne’s statement that “God cannot do what is logically impossible *for him* to do, whatever the reason for that logical impossibility” [italics in the original] he does not give enough attention to this statement in dealing with the incoherence of the concept of omnipotence.

Phillips reminds us that our definitions and conceptions need to be limited by the tradition. However, there are two limitations to his valuable reminder. First, it is not always clear if his own conceptions are also in accord with the tradition he has in mind. Let us take the example of morality. Phillips argues that humans and God do not share a moral community. In other words, he holds that one cannot sensibly say that God acts “according to” some moral rules as is the case with human beings because such a statement

would indicate that God obeys something outside of him. Thus, Phillips concludes that God has no moral action, and even mere action, at all. However, he does not offer any exegetical source for his view nor does he engage religious passages in which God has been described as a loving and caring person or where God exhibits wrath and envy to clarify his point. The problem of God's obeying something outside him is recognized and met in the religious traditions. In Islamic tradition, for instance, there are at least two views of the al-Ash'ari and the Mu'tazilites (Frank, 2007). The proponents of the former hold that God's actions could be described as good but in themselves. In other words, God does not act according to some criteria; rather, His actions are the criteria themselves. This indicates that morality supervenes on the actions of God and, thus, it is conceivable that, in a possible world, God orders to kill the innocents and this could be considered as moral. In contrast, the Mu'tazilites hold that God acts according to some criteria but these criteria are not external to Him. This indicates that there cannot be a possible world in which God orders to kill the innocents; rather, God always acts according to justice while justice is required by His existence. What is common to the two views is that God is not subordinate to some external criteria. As Hasker (2007, p. 157) has mentioned, in Christianity also some orthodox Christians believe in "the doctrine of divine simplicity" according to which God, God's attributes, and God's actions are identical without there being a need to talk about God's obedience to some external rules. The upshot can be stated in this way: as far as a moral community is concerned, God is the pivotal point of such a community and humans are subordinate to it rather than vice versa. That is to say, in the religious traditions the problem of the moral community is solved or dissolved by making the relation between humans and God upside down so that God originates the moral community and humans participate in it.

Second, Phillips also follows the mainstream analytic philosophers of religion in speaking of "the Abrahamic religions", whereas he limits his focus on Christianity and neglects two other religions, namely Islam and Judaism. Imposing the philosopher's conception of God on any religion is the problem that Phillips recognizes and the problem with his own work is that he imposes a Christian conception of God—which does not seem to be a Christian God upon close examination of the religious texts—on monotheistic religions. In order to remain more faithful to Wittgenstein's philosophy,



it would be best not to “think” what religions have to say about divine attributes and rather “look” at each religion and determine it for each case.

### Conception of God in the problem of Evil

So far, we have dealt with the Wittgensteinian remark that meaning of words are determined in how each language game is played. This point has been widely neglected by analytic philosophers. Let us now turn to some philosophical considerations with regard to the concept of God in the problem of evil.

If the problem of evil is to make any sense at all, God needs to be a person—or person-like—who has created the world and sustains it and can intervene in it. In this picture, God has a mind, he wills and intends things and he has some moral features. Such a God is said to be beyond the physical realm. Therefore, if the problem of evil is to make any sense, we need a divine supernatural person who has certain attributes to begin with. In addition to such a broad conception of God we need a definition for “evil”. Here, I have chosen the now dominant view which equates “evil” in the problem of evil with pain and suffering that sentient beings go through.<sup>2</sup> In other words, in order to have the problem of evil in place, we need to experience pain and suffering and witness other sentient beings experiencing it while a certain conception of God is in place. In the following section, I will examine the problematic conception of God that is now commonplace in the analytic tradition; a conception that Wittgenstein found problematic.

### Wittgenstein on God

Wittgenstein had a complicated relation with religion and God. From his youth when he was occupied with his sins and logic during his conversations with Russell<sup>1</sup> to his mystical notes during the First World War, the mystical elements in the *Tractatus*, (see McGuinness, 1966) and his interest in religion in his later life, it is evident that he was not a cold-blooded atheist. In fact, he could be described as an atheist friend of religion.

Wittgenstein remained an agnostic as far as the evidence indicates, however there were certain concepts in religions which he appreciated

---

<sup>2</sup> When Russell asked Wittgenstein whether he was thinking about his sins or logic, Wittgenstein replied that he was thinking about both of them (McGuinness, 1989, p. 48).

and admired. Paul Engelmann has described Wittgenstein's agnosticism as follows:

If we call him an agnostic, this must not be understood in the sense of the familiar polemical agnosticism that concentrates, and prides itself, on the argument that man could never know about these matters. The idea of a God in the sense of the Bible, the image of God as the creator of the world, hardly ever engaged Wittgenstein's attention..., but the notion of a last judgement was of profound concern to him. "When we meet again at the last judgement" was a recurrent phrase with him, which he used in many a conversation at a particularly momentous point. He would pronounce the words with an indescribably inward-gazing look in his eyes, his head bowed, the picture of a man stirred to his depths.

(cited in Child, 2011, p. 218)

On the other hand, Wittgenstein could not accept one of the attributes of God, namely that God is the creator of the world:

Wittgenstein [once said] that he thought that he could understand the conception of God, in so far as it is involved in one's awareness of one's own sin and guilt. He added that he could not understand the conception of a Creator. I think that the ideas of Divine judgement, forgiveness, and redemption had some intelligibility for him, as being related in his mind to feelings of disgust with himself, an intense desire for purity, and a sense of the helplessness of human beings to make themselves better. But the notion of a being making the world had no intelligibility for him at all.

(Malcolm, 2018, p. 309)

If we are to conceive of God as a creator, then we have to assume that he is a person with certain attributes who has created the world. The idea of "creator" is in fact at the heart of the problem of evil. Had God not created the world, then given that he is not the source of existence then he would not have been responsible for the existence of evil. However, the question is how to understand "God is the creator of the universe". In his lectures on religious belief, Wittgenstein (1966) makes it clear that when one says, "God's eyes can see everything," it would be a confusion to speak of God's eyebrows. This is because, when we use "eyes" for God we are not describing anything. Rather we are using a metaphor to convey a religious idea.

Therefore, if we do not detect the proper use of the word “eye” in that specific context we would have a confused idea of God. Likewise, when we use the term “creator” we need to clarify how to use it so that it would not lead to confusion. In order to make this point clear, we can draw on the distinction between “analogy” and “metaphor”. When we attribute something to God which is in no way describing him we would say that we are using metaphors, whereas when we use a word which is in some sense a description of God we would say we are using an analogy. If one says that God’s goodness is an analogy, it means that God has some affinity with the word “good” as we use and understand it. However, if we say that God’s goodness is a metaphor, it means that we are using the words to make God meaningful for ourselves without describing him on any level. When we consider the word “creator,” we have some images in mind of carpenters, or sculptors or other professions in which someone creates something. In order to determine whether “God is the creator” is an analogy or a metaphor, we need to make some philosophical considerations. In order to use “God is the creator” as an analogy, we need to presuppose that God could be described as a person in some sense of the word. However, Wittgenstein is critical of describing God as a person. This would mean that for Wittgenstein, “God is the creator of the universe” can only be a metaphor. Let us examine God’s personhood, a concept used by most analytic philosophers and examine what is problematic about it.

### The personhood of God

The concept of “person” as we understand it now implies moral duty and psychological properties such as mind and will. This is a recent development of this concept. Prior to the Enlightenment, the concept of person was not used to refer to human beings, but to deal with the Trinity and how the three persons of the Trinity are related (Wolf, 1964). This original use of the term “person” in the history of Christianity can enable us to determine the proper use of the term “person” when we are dealing with God in a Christian context. How we ought to perceive the relation between God and the concept of “person” in Judaism and Islam requires a separate analysis. However, given that the psychological concept of “person” is a recent development, and did not exist in the original context of Islam and Judaism, it cannot be attributed to God in these religions either. Nevertheless, some analytic

philosophers seem to be at ease in using this specific concept of person for God and neglect the proper use of this term in its religious contexts.

The personhood of God is described by Swinburne as follows:

I take the proposition “God exists” (and the equivalent proposition “There is a God”) to be logically equivalent to “there exists necessarily a person without a body (i.e., a spirit) who necessarily is eternal, perfectly free, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and the creator of all things”. I use “God” as the name of the person picked out by this description.

(Swinburne, 2004, p. 7)

J.L. Mackie who was an atheist did not have any problem in conceiving God as a person. In other words, he thought it is meaningful to call a bodiless entity a person:

Although all the persons we are acquainted with have bodies, there is no great difficulty in conceiving what it would be for there to be a person without a body: for example, one can imagine oneself surviving without a body, and while at present one can act and produce results only by using one’s limbs or one’s speech organs, one can imagine having one’s intentions fulfilled directly, without such physical means.

(Mackie, 1982, pp. 1–2)

On the other hand, some atheists such as Kai Nielsen thought that God cannot be a person because we cannot call a disembodied soul a person. Nielsen argues that God cannot be a person because it would lead to a contradiction. On the one hand, God is said to be infinite but also a person, and said to be a person without a body. Nielsen argues that an “infinite person” and a “bodiless person” are contradictions in terms (Nielsen, 1985, pp. 24–25). Instead of arguing for the logical possibility of such a concept we can also talk about the probability of this concept. For example, we could argue that God’s being a person is highly improbable because we have never witnessed a mind without a brain (Drange, 2010).

In the Wittgensteinian view, the use of words is regulated by conceptual constraints. If we are to use the word “person” for certain entities, we need to consider the grammar of the word “person”. Mackie is right in saying that, we can imagine a disembodied spirit as a person. However, imagination is not

the best guide for word-use in the Wittgensteinian view. When we imagine a disembodied soul as a person who has intentions and moral traits and so on, we are somehow imagining a person—a human being—but merely subtracting the body. We are somehow treating it like a human who just happens to have lost the human body or merely does not have it but everything else is as if she had a body. Our use of the word in such an instance is pretty much determined by the use of the words “embodied person”. When we speak about will power, intentions, and moral traits of the disembodied soul, we are using them just as we would use such words for an embodied person.

This is because we have no place for a disembodied mind in our form of life to know when they intend something or become angry or happy. Given that we have no encounter with disembodied minds and we have not developed the proper use for words related to them in our form of lives, we merely project the use of such words which we use for embodied persons onto a disembodied person. Before such an encounter, if we use such words, we would be using them “as if” we were describing a human person.

Moreover, for Wittgenstein, attributing all the personal traits is restricted to humans and those who behave like humans:

“But doesn’t what you say come to this: that there is no pain, for example, without pain-behaviour?”—It comes to this: only of a living human being and what resembles (behaves like) a living human being can one say: it has sensations; it sees; is blind; hears; is deaf; is conscious or unconscious.

(Wittgenstein, 2009, § 281)

The word “person” is used for human beings and somewhat loosely for some animals. This is because they have some personal traits or we read these traits in them. Wittgenstein famously said “if a lion could talk we could not understand him” (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 223). In fact, if a lion could “talk” and we could recognize that behavior as “talking”, we should be able to understand it. Lions cannot “talk”. This is because their form of life, their structure of brain, tongues, teeth and communal life and... are so different that talking as a recognizable activity for us cannot be carried out by them. If we imagine a lion talking, it is as if we are imagining a human being with a lion costume who is acting; something similar to the lion in *The Wizard of Oz* or Disney cartoon characters. The Lion-ness of a person who talks cannot be real, but only apparent. God does not share our form of life, he does not

have a brain, a tongue, teeth and is not brought up like us. Therefore, one cannot say that God talks. Also, any other activity which is dependent on our form of life cannot be attributed to God. For example, God cannot be said to love or hate us. The words “love” and “hate” are dependent on our form of life. We may say a dog loves his owner but here we are only using “love” anthropomorphically. If there is such a thing as dogs’ loving others, it is not the same as human-love. Similarly, attributing knowledge to God would be meaningless because our conception of knowledge is dependent on our form of life. Given that God does not participate in our form of life, it is meaningless to say he has “knowledge”. If we were God or a member of the divine community, maybe given our life-form in that community—the fact that we have no brains, no bodies, no tongues and are made of some gaseous substance and have a certain type of relationship with one another—we could have a certain type of knowledge. However, what type of knowledge that would be and whether it is recognizable by human beings as “knowledge” is not as simple as Mackie claims it to be, to say the least.

If none of the features that a person possesses could be attributed to God, then he might still be said to be a person who has no traits in common with us. But why and how do we recognize a person as a person? We recognize someone as a person because they participate in a form of life which is shared among persons. If not, calling an entity a person would be merely based on imagining them to have something in common with our shared life. The traits and characteristics that we attribute to and recognize in other people is also dependent on the form of life. Therefore, describing God as a person would constitute an instance of confusion. We have confused God with a human being.

If God cannot meaningfully be described as a person, then the problem of evil also evaporates. This impossibility would imply that the divine attributes that we envisage are not analogies, but only metaphors. If we cannot describe God as a person on any level, then attributing traits belonging to persons to God would also be wrong. We could not attribute moral traits, such as love and benevolence, to him; neither could we attribute knowledge and power to him, unless we do so metaphorically.

The problem of evil requires God to be at least analogically a person. As we have seen, the original use of the term “person” in the Abrahamic religious is irrelevant to the concept of “person” as we use it now. In addition to this point, Wittgenstein’s critical remarks if successful indicate that we

can use the concept of “person” for God only as a metaphor. Similar to what Wittgenstein says about the relation between God’s eye and eyebrows, we could say that when we use God’s personhood as a metaphor, it would be a mistake to talk about his attributes such as “knowledge”, “will” and “mind” as if we are describing them.

If God cannot be a person and God’s personhood is at the core of the problem of evil, then we do not need to solve the problem of evil with some clever solution. We do not need to propose theories, defenses, and theodicies to solve the problem. Instead, we need therapy to get rid of this pseudo-problem.

But what if a personal god did exist? Wittgenstein would have defied him:

It is a dogma of the Roman Church [said Wittgenstein] that the existence of God can be proved by natural reason. Now this dogma would make it impossible for me to be a Roman Catholic. If I thought of God as another being like myself, outside myself, only infinitely more powerful, then I would regard it as my duty to defy him.

(Drury, 1974, p. 107)

## Conclusion

The Wittgensteinian criticism of using religious concepts while neglecting the language game of religion is a serious problem which needs to be addressed by analytic philosophers. Each religion has a distinct conception of God and the rules governing each of these language games determines its correct use. As a result, instead of speaking about the problem of evil in Abrahamic religions or monotheistic religions, we need to speak of problem of evil in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam separately. The examination of Phillips’s view showed that consulting religious traditions could prevent analytic philosophers from imposing their own terminologies upon religious concepts. While Phillips takes the concept of God’s omnipotence as incoherent, the religious traditions avoid the incoherence by taking the immateriality of God more seriously into consideration. Likewise, the problem of moral community that Phillips raises has been dealt with by the religious traditions in a way that prevents the subordination of God to the moral community.

In addition to this point, the Wittgensteinian criticism against the intelligibility of the personhood of God, if successful, undermines the philosophical debates on the problem of evil. In that case, we are engaged with a pseudo-problem and we do not need clever arguments and counter-arguments, rather we need to clarify our misconceptions. These two Wittgensteinian criticisms go hand in hand and cannot be separated. To draw on Wittgenstein's example mentioned in this paper, we do not need to offer arguments to determine whether God's eyebrows are brown or black. We need to recognize that we are dealing with a metaphor. To gain a proper understanding of such metaphors we need to see how they are used in their home. The language game of religion, and not the analytic philosophy of religion, is home to such metaphors.

## Bibliography

- Cahn, S.M. (1977). Cacodaemony. *Analysis*, 37 (2), 69–73.
- Child, W. (2011). *Wittgenstein*. London: Routledge.
- Drange, T.M. (2010). *Nonbelief & evil: Two Arguments For the Nonexistence of God*. Prometheus Books.
- Drury O'Connor, M. (1974). Conversations with Wittgenstein. In: R. Rhees, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Personal Recollections* (pp. 112–189). Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Frank, R.M. (2007). *Early Islamic Theology: The Mu'tazilites and al-Ash'ari. Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalam*. Vol. 2. Ed. D. Gutas. Burlington–Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Hasker, W. (2007). D.Z. Phillips' Problems with Evil and with God. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 61 (3), 151–160.
- Law, S. (2019). Introduction to the Evil God Challenge. *Think*, 18 (51), 5–9.
- Lewis, C.S. (1940). *The Problem of Pain*. Glasgow: Collins.
- Lewis, D. (1993). Evil for Freedom's Sake? *Philosophical Papers*, 22 (3), 149–172.
- Mackie, J.L. (1955). Evil and Omnipotence. *Mind*, 64 (254), 200–212.
- Mackie, J.L. (1982). *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Malcolm, N. (2018). A Memoir. In: F.A. Flowers III, I. Ground (eds.), *Portraits of Wittgenstein*: (pp. 278–331). Abridged Edition. Bloomsbury Academic.



- McBrayer, J.P., Howard-Snyder, D. (eds.) (2013). *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil*. Chichester: Wiley.
- McGuinness, B.F. (1966). The Mysticism of the Tractatus. *The Philosophical Review*, 75 (3), 305–328.
- McGuinness, B.F. (1989). “Der Grundgedanke des Tractatus.” In: J. Schulte (ed.), *Texte zum Tractatus* (pp. 32–48). Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Nielsen, K. (1985). *Atheism and philosophy*. Pyr Books.
- Phillips, D.Z. (2004). *The Problem of Evil and the Problem of God*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Rowe, W.L. (1979). The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 16 (4), 335–341.
- Schellenberg, J.L. (2004). The Atheist’s Free Will Offence. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 56 (1), 1–15.
- Stein, E. (1990). God, the Demon, and the Status of Theodicies. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 27 (2), 163–167.
- Swinburne, R. (1996). *Is there a God?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swinburne, R. (1998). *Providence and the Problem of Evil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swinburne, R. (2004). *The Existence of God*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wachterhauser, B.R. (1985). The Problem of Evil and Moral Skepticism. *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 17 (3), 167–174.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *The Blue and Brown Books*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1966). *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1969). *On Certainty*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wittgenstein, L. (2009). *Philosophical Investigations*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Wolf, H.C. (1964). An Introduction to the Idea of God as Person. *Journal of Bible and Religion*, 32 (1), 26–33.

### Abstract

Theists believe that our world was created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God. Given that God is believed to be the creator, we would expect the way our world is to be compatible with God's attributes. We do not expect a God who is omnipotent and omniscient to create a poorly-designed world. If our world was poorly designed, we would either abandon our belief that our world was created by God, or we would revise the divine attributes, or we would find a way to justify the co-existence of God with such a world. In the history of philosophy, evil as a feature of our world has been subject to a great many debates. Evil is considered to be all the pain and suffering that sentient beings go through. God is said to be omnibenevolent; as a result, he would not want us to go through pain and suffering. He is also omniscient and omnipotent and therefore has the knowledge and power to safeguard us against evil. Yet we face pain and suffering in this world. For theists, reconciling the existing evil in this world with God is a challenge, and atheists have tried to argue away from evil and prove the non-existence of God. The debate between theists and atheists surrounding the problem of evil presupposes a certain conception of God. The presupposition is that God is a person who possesses a mind, will power and has a moral character. While most analytic philosophers dealing with the problem of evil have taken sides in this debate, in the Wittgensteinian view the debate is based on a confusion. This confusion has two reasons. First, the definition of God and the divine attributes are not based on the language game of religion. Second, the conception of personhood attributed to God is a confusion. As a result, for Wittgenstein there can be no "problem of evil" as is discussed among the analytic philosophers, and the debates between the theists and atheists are not engaging with a real problem but a pseudo-problem. The problem of evil does not need a solution and smart arguments and counter-arguments, rather it needs therapy.