An Alternative to Traditional Theodicies
—A Soteriological Approach

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I Preface

Since the World War II, when people saw Auschwitz and Hiroshima, Christian theologians have seriously been aware of difficulty in, and yet need of, presenting a valid theodicy, that is, a vindication of God’s goodness and justice in the face of such horrendous evil.

The problem of evil is universal and probably common to almost all the religions of the world. Yet, in terms of logic, the existence of evil is not necessarily such a serious problem as it is to Christianity. In the polytheistic or dualistic religions, existence of evil is taken for granted. The world is the battlefield of the good and evil, and thus pain and suffering are understood to be something inflicted by the evil power. Some religions, such as Buddhism, see this world as a natural place of suffering, from whose bondage we human beings are to be delivered. For them, existence of suffering is an assumed condition, rather than a problem, for pursuing their religious traditions. However, for such a monotheistic religion as Christianity, which believes in the only one God that is the absolutely good and almighty creator of the world, it has been a great problem. That problem is expressed in its simplest form by David Hume in his question:

Is he[i.e. God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil? ¹

Hume himself did not answer this question. Neither did he come to deny God’s goodness or existence. Yet, he, with this question, opened a way to modern skepticism which, on account of existence of evil, doubts either God’s existence, goodness, or almightiness. Kenneth Surin remarks that “the fact that the contradictions of a benevolent divine omnipotence and the existence of evil were not seen by the Christian thinkers of the Middle Ages as an obstacle to belief.[…] this pre-modern state of affairs is very different from the situation which came to prevail after the seventeenth century (when ‘the problem of evil’ metamorphosed into the
problem of the coherence and intelligibility of Christian belief *per se.*)” The word “theodicy” (in French “théodicée,” and in German “Theodizee,” from Greek “teos”(god) and “dike”(justice)) did not exist until 18th century. This was a coinage of Leibniz in his *Essais de Théodicee*, published in 1710 in Amsterdam. As Koichi Namiki points out, it is since Leibniz and Kant that human beings have been rationally trying to justify God, and that in that modern philosophical development, human reason is given authority to indict, defend, and even pass a judgment for or against God. Until modern times, human reason subordinately served God, but in the modern theodicy, it has come to judge God. And now, after the two world wars and other catastrophes in the 20th century, particularly after Auschwitz and Hiroshima, a number of philosophers and theologians find it difficult to establish any theodicy. As Surin says, “ours is an epoch in which historical conditions are such that it is no longer possible to view evil as ‘problem’ that can be ‘answered’ by an essentially intellectual or theoretical undertaking like theodicy.”

In this thesis, we are to search a way to answer such seemingly insolvable problem of evil from the viewpoint of Christianity. In order for that, we shall first survey main lines of theodicy in this and previous century, and having discussed the merits and limitations of those views, attempt to find possibility of Christian theodicy in its context of soteriology.

## II Main Types of Theodicy

To the question of existence of evil, several types of theodicy are found, which can be classified as follows.

1) God is almighty and good, and this is not inconsistent with the existence of evil. (Traditional Christian view)

2) God is almighty but not completely good. (G. Jung’s view)

3) God is good but not almighty. (Process theodicy)

4) God is neither good nor almighty. (This is not usually treated as theodicy)

5) God, in fact, does not exist. (Stendhal’s view)

The type 1) “God is almighty and good, and this is not inconsistent with the existence of evil” can be farther divided into

a) Suffering is God’s punishment.

b) All pains and sufferings are God’s mystery and should be accepted as such.

c) God gave man free will. Man misused that free will to commit the original sin, and therefore there is evil in the world now. (St. Augustin’s position, which is held by Roman Catholic Church).

d) Existence of evil is necessary to human growth. Man is to be perfect by learning good and evil through experience. (St. Irenaeus’s view)

e) This is the best possible world. (Leibniz’s view)
f) mixture of c) and d).
g) Pain makes man reflect oneself, so as to lead him to God. (C. S. Lewis's view)

Among these, the Augustinian and the Irenaean views are the most important.

**Augustinian theodicy**

Augustinian theodicy, which is generally called "Free Will Theodicy," consists of several strands, which can briefly be summarized as follows.

1) **All the creation is good. Evil is no more than distortion or corruption of good.** Augustine defined evil as "corruption" or "privation" of Good. Besides, because it is when one pursues something good (such as happiness, beauty, or health) in an wrong way or excessively that he or she does evil things, evil is something parasitic to the good. There could be no evil without any good to be corrupted or destroyed, although there can be good without any evil at all.

2) **Not only good but also evil is necessary for the total harmony, beauty and order of the creation.** For Augustine, the fact that natural things all have their limitations is itself not evil. Rather, he appreciates such a natural hierarchical order as the 20th century philosopher Arthur O. Lovejoy called "the Great Chain of Being," and thinks it is better for evil as well as good to exist for the abundance and beauty of the whole. He even says, somehow contradictorily with his statement that evil is corruption of good, that things corrupted is still good, though it is made less good, "No nature, therefore, as far as it is nature, is evil; but to each nature there is no evil except to be diminished in respect of good."

3) **Man was created finitely perfect but fell through misuse of free will given by God. This is man's original sin, which brought about evil.** For Augustine, the original condition of human beings, when they were created by God was "such that if they continued in perfect obedience they would be granted the immortality of the angels and an eternity of bliss, without the interposition of death, whereas if disobedient they would be justly condemned to the punishment of death." God gave them free will so that they could freely obey him, but they misused that free will and turned away from God. Augustine says,

When we ask the cause of the evil angels' misery, we find that it is the just result of their turning away from him who supremely is, and their turning towards themselves, who do not exist in that supreme degree. What other name is there for this fault than pride? ‘The beginning of all sin is pride.’ (Ecclus.,10,13) […] In preferring themselves to him [i.e., God] they chose a lower degree of existence.

For the reason why evil entered into the original paradisiac state, Augustine did not say it was by the Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve. Rather, he says, it is because man had already some inclination to evil that he fell.
We can see then that the Devil would not have entrapped man by the obvious and open sin of doing what God had forbidden, had not man already started to please himself. That is why he was delighted also with the statement, ‘You will be like gods.’ (Gen. 3,5)\(^\text{15}\)

For Augustine, our own free will (or libero voluntatis arbitrio) is the cause of evil.\(^\text{16}\)

4) *Evil was caused by the fact that the creatures were made “ex nihilo”.* For the explanation why the man, originally created good, could have chosen evil, Augustine brought out the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. All things that exist are good, but since creatures were made from “nothing,” they have inevitably been affected from that nothingness, or deficiency—which is the cause of evil will\(^\text{17}\). Here, as John Hick points out, Augustine is influenced by the Platonic idea that existence is good, and the supreme existence is the supreme good\(^\text{18}\).

5) *Denial of the existence of genuine evil.* While admitting there is some evil, Augustine believes that in the long run all minor evils would have served for the greater good.

Nor should we doubt that God doth well, even when he alloweth whatever happens ill to happen. For he alloweth it only through a just judgment – and surely all that is just is good. Therefore, although evil, in so far as it is evil, is not good, still it is a good thing that not only good things exist but evil as well. For if it were not good that evil things exist, they would certainly not be allowed to exist by the Omnipotent Good, for whom it is undoubtedly as easy not to allow to exist what he does not will, as it is for him to do what he does will.\(^\text{19}\)

6) *Salvation through Grace.* Human beings are saved by faith, but it is God that calls them first into faith.\(^\text{20}\)

Among these, 1) and 4) are inconsistent. For Augustine, God’s goodness and almightiness are both axiomatic, and he does not seem to feel genuine need for the systematic, thoroughly consistent theodicy so keenly as our contemporary theologians.

Today, Alvin Plantinga presents his “Free Will Defence,” which is an attempt to show that the proposition “God is omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good,” is consistent with “God creates a world containing evil and has a good reason for doing so.”\(^\text{21}\) His is only “Defence,” in that he admits it is impossible to prove both propositions are true, and that what can be done is only to show it is possible that both are true.

The objection to the Free Will Theodicy are mainly as follows:

1) The almighty God could have created creatures which do only good by their free will.\(^\text{22}\)
2) The notion that a perfectly good creature chose to do evil is self-contradictory.\(^\text{23}\)
3) Human beings are in fact not so free.\(^\text{24}\)
4) The biblical story of Adam and Eve is myth rather than history: biologically, humanity evolved out of lower forms of life, rather than created finitely perfect and fell.\(^\text{25}\)
5) Even if the first man in fact fell, the amount and degree of evil that is found on earth now is beyond their responsibility.\textsuperscript{26}

Irenaean type of theodicy

Irenaean type of theodicy is today advocated most strongly by John Hick. According to this view, \textit{man was originally made immature and imperfect, and intended to grow to be perfect through experiences of both good and evil.}\textsuperscript{27}

Since God, therefore, gave [to man] such mental power (\textit{magnanimitatem}) man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things; […] But how, if he had no knowledge of the contrary, could he have had instruction in that which is good? […]For just as the tongue receives experience of sweet and bitter by means of tasting, and the eye discriminates between black and white by means of vision,[…] so also does the mind, receiving through the experience of both the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God.\textsuperscript{28}

Evil is also necessary for human moral growth, for, in the world without any evil, moral quality (honesty, mercifulness, etc) would not have any meaning.

Main objections to this argument are:

1) Some sufferings never contribute to man’s growth.\textsuperscript{29}
2) God could have made man perfect from the outset.\textsuperscript{30}
3) During the long course of time in which God has been leading man to perfection, there were, and still are, many unnecessary sufferings in the world.\textsuperscript{31}
4) Even if evil is necessary for human growth, the quality and quantity of evil are too much.\textsuperscript{32}
5) If evil is necessary for man’s moral virtue, why should we try to overcome evil?\textsuperscript{33}
6) Some evils are addictive and better not to experience.\textsuperscript{34}

Process Theodicy

The view that “God is good but not almighty,” was not so much as seen an alternative to Augustinian and Irenaean theodicies till the latter half of the twentieth century. However, it is now held by process theodicy, derived from A. N. Whitehead’s process philosophy, and is now most clearly and systematically advocated by David R. Griffin. Griffin defines “genuine evil” as “anything, all things considered, without which the universe would have been better”\textsuperscript{35} and builds his theodicy upon several process hypotheses:

1) \textit{God’s omnipotence does not involve coercive power.} Coercive power could be exercised only through body, and God, having no body, cannot coerce.\textsuperscript{36} Those who believe in the traditional almighty God believe in a God who is strong enough to have prevented Auschwitz
but did not\textsuperscript{37}. God’s omnipotence is, for process theodicy, not coercive but perfect power.\textsuperscript{38}

2) \textit{Creation was not “ex nihilo” but from chaos.} This is the correct reading of the original Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1-2.\textsuperscript{39} Because of the intrinsic power of original materials, things have freedom and power even to resist God.\textsuperscript{40}

3) As God has no coercive power, \textit{the only way God moves others is by persuasion.}\textsuperscript{41}

4) \textit{The capacity for intrinsic goodness and the capacity for intrinsic evil are in positive metaphysical correlation,} and therefore even God could not have created a world with good and without evil.\textsuperscript{42}

5) \textit{God’s perfect goodness is not unchangeable.} God responds to the changing situations of the world, loving and with sympathy.\textsuperscript{43}

6) \textit{What has ultimately the strongest power is love.} Our life will turn out to have been meaningful when God by his Responsive Love preserves all that we have been in his consequent nature.\textsuperscript{44}

7) \textit{God sympathetically suffers with all those who suffer.} “God is not only the primordial and constant lure to creative advance, but also the universal sharer of all that result. This is implied by saying that God is Responsive Love as well as Creative Love. God delights in the enjoyments of creatures, but also shares all the pains, being literally sympathetic, compassionate.[...] Process theology therefore takes seriously the Christian intuition that the crucified Christ symbolizes the suffering love at the heart of the universe, a notion that much traditional theism, with its doctrine of divine impassibility, could not affirm.[...] God never lures the creation to take risks that God does not share.”\textsuperscript{45}

8) \textit{Evil is “disharmony” and “discord.”} \textsuperscript{46}

9) Process Christology sees Jesus as a special revelation of God’s mode of agency in the world. Jesus is solely a man without divinity, not the second Person of God.\textsuperscript{47}

10) \textit{Life after death gives human beings hope for the gradual victory of good over evil,} of which the present life is only a part of the process. For, “the longer a soul exists, the more likely it will be to overcome subjugation to the demonic through allegiance to the divine power and its values.”\textsuperscript{48}

Main objections to Griffin’s process theodicy are:

1) Griffin’s God is the God of the elite and the fortunate, because he created the world despite knowing there would be as much evil as good.\textsuperscript{49}

2) God’s omnipotence is the intrinsic and undeniable doctrine of Christianity.\textsuperscript{50}

3) Bible’s correct reading suggests creation \textit{ex nihilo} rather than creation out of chaos.\textsuperscript{51}

4) Griffin’s hypothesis of positive correlation is contrary to our experience.\textsuperscript{52}

5) The God who did his best but could not prevent Auschwitz is “too small.”\textsuperscript{53}

From the survey above, we find that the differences in opinions between the traditional Christian theodicies and the process theodicy mainly come from their fundamental belief which they axiomatically hold—such as, omnipotence of God, creation \textit{ex nihilo} or out of chaos, Griffin’s
correlation hypothesis—so that it is impossible to prove or disprove either position. Hence, in the logical terms, no theodicy could be affirmed absolutely right, though none is to be rejected as absolutely wrong.

III Can there an answer to the problem of evil?

Admitting that there is no logically satisfactory theodicy, the only way that the theodicy today can take may be to admit the existence of evil and turn to see what God did, does and will do to the existing evil and suffering in the world. Among the contemporary theologians committed to theodicy, Marilyn McCord Adams is one who takes this approach. She had an experience of working at a Hollywood parish, where there were so many AIDS patients that she was forced to search for some answer to the problem of suffering for them. She is critical of those who try to justify God’s moral goodness in allowing evil in this world. “Such reasons usually take the form of identifying some Divine purpose (e.g., in creating the best of all possible worlds, or a world with as favorable a balance of moral good over moral evil as God can get, or a state of affairs in which all souls are—through a process involving their free participation—“made” fit for and come into eventual union with God) for which evils are constitutive means or side effects of policies instrumental to or constitutive of Divine purpose. Theodicies contend that the good end of realized Divine purpose is the reason-why that justifies the (constituent or instrumental) means and side effects involved.” Yet, however these theodicies says, she says, “Whether one believes in Adam's fall or credits evolution, God is the One Who set us up in an environment in which we are radically vulnerable to participation in horrors. Primary responsibility for their occurrence must rest with God!”

She rejects the idea that sufferings are given for some legitimate purpose or for some good.

Moreover, I agree [...] that it is indecent to think of God as choosing (what I conceive of as) horrors in advance as instrumental or constitutive means to some greater good. Moreover, I take it to be an epistemic measure of how bad horrors are that we can think of no plausible candidate sufficient reason why God would permit them.

It is from this denial of any goodness in the suffering per se, that she begins to look for the answer to theodicy not in the cause of suffering but in God’s dealing with it.

In my experience, the why-question is spiritually fruitful when pressed with God—after all, it won Job a face-to-face encounter with the Maker of all things—but theoretically intractable. For that reason, I find it preferable to frame the search for a solution to incomposibility problems a different way: in terms of whether there is any way for God to make good on horrors, not just within the context of the world as a whole, but within the parameters of the individual horror participant's life.
She then draws on Roderick Chisholm’s notion of “defeat,” which is contrasted to that of “balancing off.”

My contention is that God can be shown to be good to created persons if and only if God guarantees to each a life that is a great good to him/her on the whole and one in which any participation in horrors (whether as victim or perpetrator) is not merely balanced off but defeated within the context of the individual horror participant’s life. Once again, to say that horrors are defeated is not to say they were not genuinely horrendous; nor is it to claim [...] that they will pale into insignificance (presumably by being over-balanced by the goods of Kingdom come. [...]) Rather, horror-defeat means that their negative value has been overcome by weaving them into a larger meaning-making framework of positive significance for the individual in question. 56

Then, how can this “defeat” of suffering be achieved? Adams thinks it is by God’s suffering on the cross, which puts the suffers in a preciously intimate relationship with God.

God in Christ crucified cancels the curse of human vulnerability to horrors. For the very horrors, participation in which threatened to undo the positive value of created personality, now become secure points of identification with the crucified God. [...] I do not say that participation in horrors thereby loses its horrendous aspect: on the contrary, they remain by definition prima facie ruinous to the participant’s life. Nevertheless, I do claim that because our eventual postmortem beatific intimacy with God is an incommensurate good for human persons, Divine identification with human participation in horrors confers a positive aspect on such experiences by integrating them into the participant’s relationship with God [...] Retrospectively, I believe, from the vantage point of heavenly beatitude, human victims of horrors will recognize those experiences as points of identification with the crucified God, and not wish them away from their life histories. 57

What is important here is that Adams admits suffering to be evil in itself, yet in spite of that, thinks it possible that such suffering can ultimately be transformed into blessing. Even if suffering can bring the suffer nearer to God, it should not be justified for that. The suffering itself is always evil. To see otherwise is to fall into (to use D. Z. Phillips’s word,) some “instrumentalism.” 58

It must be noted that Adams’s suggestion is not free from criticism, —for example, John K. Roth criticizes her for scarcely mentioning those individuals who were killed in the Holocaust when she says she is focusing on “the positive meaning of individual lives” rather than carrying reflection at “too high a level of abstraction.” 59 Roth argues against her that though she says “horrendous evils can be defeated by the Goodness of God within the framework of the individual participant’s life,” the numbers and facts of the sufferers in the Holocaust “stand in jarring conflict with Adams’s optimistic claim.” He asks, “How are those evils to be ‘defeated’?” 60 —However, it seems to me that Adams’s approach is perhaps the only way, or at least one of the
few, that we could take in the context of Christian theodicy.

IV Christian salvation

To answer Roth’s question, or to consider how all one’s past sufferings can be defeated and transformed into blessing, we have first of all to consider what is the happiest state that Christianity thinks individuals can hope to attain.

In the Hebrew Bible, or the Old Testament as Christians call it, the God reveals his name to Moses as "יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה". This is translated into English generally as “I AM THAT I AM” (e.g. King James Version, Darby Bible) “I AM WHO I AM” (e.g. New International Version, New King James Version), “I AM THAT WHICH I AM” (Young’s Literal Translation) or “I am he who is” (New Jerusalem Bible), stressing God’s existence, implying to many readers today that existence is the most conspicuous ontological attribute—or if existence should not be called an “attribute” at all, the essential character—of God. However the ויהי which is translated as “I am” is in the imperfect tense, and grammatically speaking, it can also be translated as “I will be” (cf. a French translation: «JE SUIS QUI JE SERAI»—(I am who I will be)(TOB)). The translation in the present tense therefore involves a theological interpretation, or doctrinal affirmation that the God יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה is eternal and unchangeable. (As eternal truth is generally expressed in the present tense, future tense tends to give impression that God changes.) It may strongly have affected by the Greek LXX translation, “εἰμί ἐγώ” (Brenton LXX translates this Greek into “I am THE BEING”). Grammatically, God’s name יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה can be any of these:

1) “I am who I am.”
2) “I am who I will be.”
3) “I will be who I am.”
4) “I will be who I will be.”

And it is worth noting that the Jewish Publish Society chose not to translate it into any of these modern English phrases. It says, just phonetically transcribing the name in question, “And God said to Moses, ‘Ehyeh-Asher-Ehyeh.” (JPS Tanakh) This is probably from the correct intuition that יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה is untranslatable.

If יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה יִהְיֶה is “I will be who I will be,” God may change. And if God can change, or affected by earthly things, God can suffer and respond to the human situations so committedly as to change himself. A Jewish rabbi Anson Laynter remarks,

The Name (as traditional Jews call God) means “I am who/what I am” or “I will be who/what I will be.” Thus “God” represents the infusion of constant creativity—pure positive potentiality—into the world, which in turn gives us the power and autonomy to live and grow, both individually and collectively. Supremely pragmatic for a religion, Judaism basically says: “We can’t really say anything concrete about God, but we know how we are supposed to act.” [...]
Process theology's point of departure is very similar to this Jewish way of perceiving "God." On the one hand, "I am" represents the primordial God, the God prior to the world (that is, prior to any particular moment of the world's existence), God the whole. On the other hand, "I will be" represents the consequent nature of God, the God who is affected by our deeds and who chooses how to be in the future in response to our deeds. Because "God" is seen as ultimately unknowable and ineffable, all our theologies are flawed.61

Christianity does not think the supreme happiness lies in either wealth, status, or even health on earth. To be with God, in close and right relationship with him, and blessed by him will be the happiness they seek. As we have seen Adams mention Job being able to see God, seeing God face to face has often been regarded by Christians as defeat of all the previous sufferings and answer to all the questions about the meaning of those pains and prima facie meaninglessness of life. If this is true, encounter with God or experience of God's presence in the moment of suffering can be an answer to the Christian problem of evil. It is no coincidence or of little meaning that the Gospel of Matthew ends with the risen Jesus' proclamation, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (28:20).

Moreover, when we see Jesus in the gospels, we see him doing a lot more than sharing human sufferings on the cross.

Jesus' answer to the problem of evil most importantly lies in his evangelic message, "πεπλήρωσα ο Κυριός και η βασιλεία του θεοῦ" (Mark 1:15. "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand.") He believed that the Kingdom of God, or God's reign is just about realized on earth. His work of healing, miracles and teachings all show how with him and through him God's reign is beginning here on earth. By healing the diseases and disability of people, Jesus not only relieved their physical pain but also their social, psychological pain, as the diseases and disability were regarded as God's punishment or religious uncleanness, alienating the sufferers from the society. His miracles are signs that God's power is working here and now. And his teaching, especially his parables of the Kingdom of God, show what the Kingdom of God is like, ensuring people of its coming, and make them feel how deep and strong God's care and love for human individuals. Some of his parables vividly show immanence of the Kingdom, so as to move people to "repent" (that is, to go back to God) and prepare for the Kingdom. His parables are thus performative, not only telling about the Kingdom of God but, by telling, realizing it. This way, Jesus offers hope for the salvation to those who suffer here on earth, while working actively for its realization. From this, we see that Christian theodicy should look to soteriology, rather than only to justification of the existence of evil. Because, it is soteriology that is God's or Jesus's own concern in face of evil in this world.

V Conclusion

In the world today, when Christian theologians find it hard to establish a logically valid theodicy, it may be high time they came back to the New Testament and follow Jesus' active way
of confronting evil. Jesus did not ask nor answer the question why there is evil in the world but he fought the evil actively. After all, problem of evil concerns how we live, rather than how we think.

Notes
3 並木浩一『神義論とヨブ記』「『ヨブ記』論集」（東京：教文館，2003）, p. 118.
4 Surin, pp. 39.
13 St. Augustine, *On the Nature of Good*, Ch. 16.
15 *Augustine, City of God, XIV*, 13, p. 573.
17 アウグスティヌス「基本書と呼ばれるマニの書簡への駆逐」，25章，pp. 141-142.


34 This is my impression. An example may be drug, which it had better not experience even just once.


43 Griffin, *Evil Revisited*, pp.31-32.


60 Roth, "A Theodicy of Protest," p. 3.