

# When Successful Theodicies Fail: The Holocaust and the Problem of Gratuitous Suffering

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YCT Yom Iyun on Bible and Jewish Thought, June 25 2018

## The Problems of Evil

- 1) God exists and is omnipotent, omniscient and perfectly good
- 2) Evils exist

P1 A perfectly good being would always eliminate evil so far as it could

P2 An omniscient being would know all about evil

P3 There are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do

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P4 God could not have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evils

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Man alone can strive and struggle for the good; God is good. Man alone can create value; God is value. But if man alone is the creator of values, one who strives for the realization of ideals, then he must have freedom of choice and freedom of decision. And his freedom must be respected by God Himself. God cannot as a rule intervene whenever man's use of freedom displeases Him. It is true, if He did so, the perpetration of evil would be impossible, but so would the possibility for good also disappear. Man can be frightened; but he can be bludgeoned into goodness. If God did not respect man's freedom to choose his course in personal responsibility, not only would the moral good and evil be abolished from the earth, but man himself would go with them. For freedom and responsibility are of the very essence of man. Without them, man is not human. If there is to be man, he must be allowed to make his choices in freedom. If he has such freedom, he will use it. Using it, he will often use it wrongly; he will decide for the wrong alternative. As he does so, there will be suffering for the innocent.

Eliezer Berkovits, *Faith After the Holocaust* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 105.

- 1) There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (Gratuitous Suffering Premise)
- 2) An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse (Consequence Premise)
- 3) Therefore, there does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.