

Evil and Suffering

Christianity &
Catholic Christianity

Evil comes in different forms, and can have an impact on a person's relationship with their faith.

Free Will Led to Evil Entering the World

- 1) Christianity teaches that evil entered the world as a result of Adam and Eve giving in to temptation in the Garden of Eden — they disobeyed God by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge. This switch from a perfect world to one containing evil is known as 'The Fall'.
- 2) After the Fall, every human being was born with a flawed nature, capable of causing suffering — this is the idea of original sin.
- 3) Christians believe God created humans with free will — it's up to them to choose whether they perform evil deeds or not, just as it was up to Adam and Eve whether to give in to temptation or not. Good is the opposite of evil, and since God is good, Christians try to follow his example.

"When the woman saw... the fruit of the tree... she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband... and he ate it." Genesis 3:6 NIV

Suffering can be Human-Made or Natural

Suffering can be divided into two types:

Moral (human-made) Suffering

- 1) This is when suffering is brought about by the cruel actions of people.
- 2) This includes things like murder, war, rape and torture.
- 3) The person causing the suffering is able to make a choice about what is morally right or wrong.

Natural Suffering

- 1) This kind of suffering is caused by the world in which we live, and is no one's 'fault'.
- 2) This includes things like disease, floods, earthquakes and hurricanes.
- 3) However, many recent natural disasters may have been caused by human interference in the natural world, raising the question of whether that makes those events human-made.



Evil can Lead People to Question their Faith

- 1) Evil and suffering may lead some people to question their belief in God — or even to reject their faith.
- 2) Some might say that since suffering exists, God can't be both benevolent and omnipotent — a loving and all-powerful God wouldn't allow it to happen. They might argue that he doesn't exist, or that he can't have the characteristics that believers say he has.
- 3) But others would say that although God has these characteristics, he gave people free will and so doesn't interfere. Or some may say that he wants to help, but isn't powerful enough.
- 4) Christians react to evil and suffering in various ways. Suffering is often seen as a test of faith — God has his reasons (even if we don't know what they are). Many believe that God is with people in their suffering, and that it can bring people closer to him.
- 5) Others say life on Earth isn't meant to be perfect — the focus should be on reaching heaven.
- 6) Some believe in the 'vale of soul-making' — responding to suffering in both themselves and others develops the human soul, improving people's character so they live as God wants them to.
- 7) The Book of Job tells of the suffering Job endures and how he questions God. He concludes that God is all-powerful and knows what he's doing, and that suffering must be accepted because people can't really understand the world or God's plan: "Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him..." (Job 13:15 NIV).
- 8) Christians try to help people who are suffering — practically (charity) and by praying. Jesus said: "whatever you did for one of... these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40 NIV).

"the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love... he does not treat us as our sins deserve..." Psalms 103:8-10 NIV

"I know, Lord, that your laws are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. May your unfailing love be my comfort..." Psalms 119:75-76 NIV

Not the cheeriest of topics...

Christians explain and respond to evil and suffering in a variety of different ways. Cover this page, see how many you can think of and write them all down.



Revision Summary

And that wraps up another section — time to see how you got on. The questions below are similar in style to the questions you'll be answering in the actual exam.

If there's anything you can't answer, go back through the section and have another go when you've re-read it.

For some courses, you need to learn about the views of different religions on these topics. But for other courses, you need to know about them in the context of just one religion — if that's the case for your course, answer each of these questions in the context of the religion you've studied.

Jumping right in with some 1 mark multiple choice questions.

- 1) Which of the following is the idea that punishment should try to change the criminal for the better?
a) Protection b) Reformation c) Retribution d) Deterrence
- 2) Which of the following is where an offender might meet their victim?
a) Corporal punishment b) Prison c) Community service d) Restorative justice

For these 2 mark questions, keep it short and snappy with two brief points.

- 3) Give two arguments against capital punishment.
- 4) Give two examples of causes of crime.

Time for some 3 mark questions — don't spend too much time on them, just three short points will do.

- 5) Outline three aims of punishment.
- 6) Outline three ways that forgiveness can be shown.
- 7) Outline three conditions that make a trial fair.

These 4 mark questions require you to develop your points for full marks.

- 8) Explain two religious beliefs about evil and suffering.
- 9) Explain two religious beliefs about preventing crime.
- 10) Explain two religious attitudes to the aims of punishment.

Make sure your longer answers are well organised and clearly written so the examiner can easily see your points.

And the questions continue — this time for 5 marks. Refer to sacred texts for full marks.

- 11) Explain two reasons why justice is important to many religious believers.
- 12) Explain two religious beliefs about the treatment of people accused of crimes.
- 13) Explain two religious beliefs about why people should live good lives.

Saving the best for last — the 12 mark question, with extra marks for SPaG. The question will often have bullet points that you need to include, so you can use these to make a plan. Jot down arguments for and against the statement so you don't forget any when you actually start writing your answer.

- 14) 'The death penalty is never a suitable punishment.'

Evaluate this statement.

Your answer should include the following:

- religious arguments that support the statement
- religious arguments that disagree with the statement
- a conclusion.

You can also include non-religious points of view in your answer.

Head over to the 'Do Well in Your Exam' section for help with writing essays.