

Danijel Tolvajčić,
*Teodicejski problem u
 suvremenoj filozofiji
 religije.*

Zagreb, Grafički zavod Hrvatske

d.o.o., 2023, 151 pp.

If God exists, whence comes evil? The presence of evil in the world is considered one of the loudest objections to theism and thus, the question of theodicy becomes unavoidable. From a Christian perspective, the question is: how is it possible that an omnipotent, good God allows suffering? If He is perfectly good, wouldn't He eliminate suffering? Otherwise, He is not good. Or perhaps He is not omnipotent, but in that case, can one speak of God's existence? From these existential questions arose the need to *justify* God, and despite a rich history in which both ancient and medieval thought played significant roles, it only gained clear outlines during the Enlightenment period.

Contemporary discussions distinguish between *defense* as discourse about God's reasons for allowing evil and *theodicy* which attempts to explain why God permits evil. It is precisely this contemporary thought that Danijel Tolvajčić addresses in his new book, *Teodicejski problem u suvremenoj filozofiji religije* (*The Problem of Theodicy in Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*). It was published by the Catholic Faculty of Theology in Zagreb and Kršćanska sadašnjost d.o.o. in January 2023. It provides an overview of the most significant (in the author's opinion) contemporary theodicean frameworks and their critiques, whilst

the author simultaneously considers the sustainability of theodicy itself; do theodicies truly offer answers to the introductory questions, or do they deepen a problem for which the human mind has no solution?

The book consists of seven chapters. The preface is followed by the introductory chapter, which provides a historical framework of theodicean position development. In Chapters I–V the theodicean problem is expounded and examined through the perspective of the most prominent contemporary authors (Hick, Swinburne, Griffin, Phillips and Surin, Davies) from the position of philosophy of religion, with an emphasis on the analytical tradition. After the concluding chapter, the author adds a critical review (VI), in which he considers the sustainability of theodicy itself.

In the introductory chapter, the author outlines the fundamental coordinates of thematizing the relationship between God and evil in classical and contemporary perspectives by acquainting the reader with methodology and prominent starting questions that have occupied theological and philosophical thought throughout history. He begins with a systematic reflection on early patristics up to contemporary theistic responses. With the paradigm shift in the Enlightenment, the atheological problem of evil was articulated, which is also a characteristic of contemporary philosophy, with the emphasis on the so-called *evidential* problem of evil, which is the conceptual framework of the contemporary author's activity. Tolvajčić concludes the introductory chapter with significant contemporary theistic responses, which are divided into *defenses* and *theodicies*.

The first chapter presents John Hick's soul-making theodicy as an attempt to respond to the probabilistic aspect of the problem of evil. As Tolvajčić notes, Hick considers Irenaeus of Lyon's exegesis (particularly the work *Against Heresies*) more plausible (than Augustinian) for present times, believing that soul-making theodicy must go a step further in terms of introducing the eschatological aspect of human progression towards the complete realization of human nature's potential. At the end of this chapter, Tolvajčić critically reviews Hick's presented soul-making theodicy, highlighting the discord between basic premises and Christian tradition in two fundamental points—understanding of the biblical account of the fall and the universalistic conception of eschatological reality.

The second chapter reports on Richard Swinburne's *greater good* theodicy. According to Tolvajčić, Swinburne's theodicy is determined by a dual aim—to offer a probabilistic justification of theistic belief in general and then provide justification for specifically Christian beliefs. In this context, Swinburne's *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (1998) is considered one of the most notable theodicean frameworks of the twentieth century. Along with a more detailed presentation of these premises, Tolvajčić also expounds on Swinburne's conception of free will, freed from determinism and the necessity of moral and natural evil to manifest human free will as a greater good. Characterizing it as insensitive to concrete suffering, in the critical review of the presented theodicy, Tolvajčić emphasizes the questions that arise, including the didactic value of such theodicy.

David Ray Griffin and his process theodicy are the subject of the third chapter. Process thought is a direction within contemporary American thought that places concepts of change, becoming, and events at the core of ontology (rather than substance or being). The central problem is God's nature and His relationship with the world. Traditional theism should be rejected, and the idea of God should be aligned with factual experiences and contemporary exact sciences. After introducing the position of process thought, Tolvajčić continues by clarifying that Griffin rejects classical dualism, and classical monism but also pluralism, distinguishing God and the original power of the universe, which he calls *creativity*, as a universal property of reality. Accordingly, for process philosophy and theology, God's creative power is not absolute but evocative, meaning that God cannot stop evil in the world even if He wanted to—He can just encourage us to do good and avoid evil. Clearly, process thought significantly distances itself from key elements of theistic position, and in the critical review, Tolvajčić focuses on two key points, although he emphasizes that the number of problematic elements in the process idea of God is significant. Primarily, it is the claim that God is not the Creator in terms of the first principle of the existence of everything. The second point is the premise that God's power is not absolute which is indeed a desecration of God.

In the fourth chapter, the author deals with the concept of moral anti-theodicy and the contribution of two authors, D. Z. Phillips and Kenneth Surin. In this context, contemporary theodicean efforts are problematic

under metaphysical–religious and ethical–moral aspects. The theodicean anthropomorphization of God and the excessive confidence in the capabilities of the human mind results in the emergence of philosophical theism that distorts the biblical anthropological paradigm. Also, it leads to the ethical instrumentalization of evil and God’s immorality. Hence, Phillips and Surin believe that every theodicy ultimately trivializes and instrumentalizes the pain and suffering of those who endure evil. Therefore, the practice of writing theodicies should be abandoned. For Tolvajčić, the presented thesis is valid, but he believes that the solutions proposed by the two authors are not entirely satisfactory. They either abandon the traditional theistic understanding of God or depend on the metaphysically dubious idea of a changeable and suffering God of contemporary Protestant theology. Here, Tolvajčić believes, adequate metaphysics is missing.

Finally, in the penultimate fifth chapter, Brian Davies’s thought and the Thomistic abolition of theodicy are presented. Davies believes that the entire contemporary project of theodicy is a *categorical mistake* and should therefore be rejected. Davies’s starting point is the claim that the contemporary thematization of the problem of evil is problematic from the perspective of the wrong conception of God. Therefore, he suggests that only when questions about God’s existence and nature are adequately answered can one properly think about the relationship between God and evil. Tolvajčić expounds Davies’s position through several essential determinants—thematizing the evil between theistic personalism and classical theism, God as

an answer to the question of *why something is rather than nothing*, how to properly understand God’s goodness and God’s love, and about the problem of evil’s source. Davies uses negative theology in his argumentation and emphasizes the finitude of human expression about the inexpressible. The endeavor to give a final answer about the existence of evil is not possible. Any attempt to question God’s existence through the existence of evil, or to present God’s reasons for allowing evil in the form of theodicy, falls flat. Thus, theodicy is characterized as a categorical mistake. In the critical review, Tolvajčić presents the exchange of arguments between Davies and Brian Shanley (Davies’s critic), rounding off this chapter with his critical opinion that Davies, despite certain deficiencies, still provides the best contemporary (re)solution to the relationship between evil and God.

The final, sixth chapter is the author’s conclusion, in which he attempts to concisely answer the question: why are theodicies unsuccessful? He once again reviews the problems of presented concepts which ultimately leads him to the conclusion that it is possible to say “that the problem of evil in all its variants (...), as well as attempts to answer and give reasons why a morally perfect God permits evil (which is indeed the primary intention of all theodicies), simply miss the point.” (p. 139) as the problem of evil, as well as theodicy misunderstanding, arose from the abandonment of the classical metaphysical conception of God as pure reality.

It can be said that the work is written in Tolvajčić’s already recognizable style—the essence of certain positions is presented comprehensibly,

and a concise critical review is given, clearly, from a traditional Christian perspective, which the author himself emphasizes in the preface. The challenge here was to provide the relevant theses and the proponents of certain concepts in the evolution of contemporary theodicy thought in the context of movements within the philosophy of religion, in which Tolvajčić succeeded. Concise writing and a systematic critical presentation make this book accessible to a broader readership, as well as the scientific community, making it a valuable contribution to Croatian literature in the fields of philosophy and theology.

The presented work of Danijel Tolvajčić is an essential reading for an-

yone who wants to deal with contemporary understanding of theodicean problems and its rich bibliography invites readers to continue independent research, opening space for making their own judgement about what is presented. Undoubtedly, it is a scholarly book that is the fruit of research into the contributions of already established authors, presented in a new way, with very valuable critical judgement from the author himself. It will certainly find its place on the shelves of libraries of scientists, experts, and enthusiasts in philosophy and theology.

Julija Prpić
