



ADDITIONAL RESOURCE PACK

Classroom
VIDEO
Education with Vision

Religion and Suffering – A Religious Perspective

Produced by:
VEA Pty Ltd

© Classroom Video Ltd 2011

Commissioning Editor:
Dee Powell

Executive Producer:
Edwina Baden-Powell

Reproducing these support notes

You may download and print one copy of these support notes from our website for your reference. Further downloads, copying or printing MUST be reported to The Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA) as per the Copyright, Design and Patents Act, 1988.

For Teachers

Brief Summary of Programme

This programme examines what the terms evil and suffering mean. It focuses on the two main types of evil and suffering that are in our world today: natural and moral evil. It attempts to resolve the theological and philosophical dilemma of the inconsistent triad and gives some possible explanations of evil and suffering in the face of an omnipotent, Omni-benevolent and omniscient God. This topic is discussed by a range of specialists and academics that explain and describe how the existence of God and suffering can co exist together, with reference to the theodicy's of St Augustine and Irenaeus. The programme offers some benefits to experiencing suffering and often asks rhetorical questions which can aid discussions on evil and the problem of suffering for religious people. The programme contains some disturbing imagery that you may wish to inform students of before showing.

DVD Timeline

| | |
|---------------|---|
| 00:00 – 07:50 | The cause of evil & suffering: Natural and Moral evil |
| 07:51 – 09:50 | Psychological effects of suffering |
| 09:51 – 14:20 | The problem of evil & suffering for religious believers |
| 14:21 – 17:20 | Benefits of suffering |
| 17:21 – 22:54 | Theodicy |
| 22:55 – 23:00 | Credits |

Other Background Information for Teachers

Evil and suffering is unfortunately a part of our world. We only have to turn on the television or read a newspaper and images of suffering jump out to us. Philosophers and theologians refer to two types of evil and suffering that human's experience. Natural evil refers to suffering that humans cannot control – often geographical malfunctions like hurricanes, volcanoes and tsunamis, etc. Many people have stated that humans can have control over this type of suffering, as it may be a consequence of how humans treat the world. Moral evil refers to the suffering that humans can control – murder, burglary and bullying for example. Humans have free will and we often make other people suffer.

The existence of evil and suffering in the world does not create any problems for atheists as they can accept that such suffering is just a part of life. For theists, evil and suffering creates problems as it can go against their beliefs of an all powerful, all loving and all knowing God. If evil exists in the world, which we cannot really deny, then why does God not intervene? If God has the power to stop evil then why doesn't He? If He loves his creation, would He really let them suffer the most immense pain and agony that the world inflicts upon them? This philosophical problem is often referred to as the inconsistent triad. For atheists, this issue merely backs up the fact that God does not exist. Theists often give explanations for the existence of God in the face of the existence of evil and suffering.

For many religious people, suffering is a part of everyday life, it is something that all humans experience so we can value and cherish the good things that happen to us. For some, evil and suffering is a test that God sets his creation – if faith and belief are still intact after suffering has occurred then the test has been passed. Christians often refer to the stories of Job and Abraham and relate these biblical stories to their own lives. Other religious people have suggested that there is no such thing as evil in the world; it is merely the absence of good in the world. Many religious people state that evil and suffering is not caused by God, but by free will. Humans are free agents who perform evil acts in the world, separate from God. Christians, Muslims and Jews would refer to the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, as God created them free people – they were told not to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge but were free to disobey God. Some have said that the actions of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is the reason why evil and suffering exists today.

Evil and Suffering – A Religious Perspective

Many Philosophers and theologians have stated that a theodicy can explain evil and suffering in the world today. A theodicy attempts to explain how evil and God can exist together. There are two theodicy's which religious believers may refer to when talking about the problem of evil and suffering. Augustine suggested that evil and suffering are the result of Adam and Eve's actions in the Garden of Eden, we are still being punished for the original sin that they started. The theodicy of Irenaeus states that free will is the cause of evil and suffering. Humans are born imperfect and therefore make mistakes. God does not intervene and stop suffering happening as humans are free agents to do as we see wish. Evil and suffering is present in the world to make us stronger people.

Curriculum Links

KS3 – Religious Education

1. Links to the existence of God and Ultimate questions – why do people suffer and whether the existence of suffering proves/disproves the existence of God.

KS4 / 5 – Religious Studies/Philosophy/Philosophy of Religion

1. Links to the problem of evil and the inconsistent triad – the problem of evil and suffering for religious people
2. Links to the existence of God in the face of evil and suffering – does God exist?
3. Links to the views of some philosophers and the theodicy's of Augustine and Irenaeus
4. Links to 'problems of suffering – different types of problems and solutions'
5. Links to God and the world

Related DVDs available from Classroom Video Ltd.

No God But God
Do We Have Free Will?
Does God Exist?

Please contact customer services on 0117 929 1924
or visit www.ClassroomVideo.co.uk to see our full range of Religious Studies and Philosophy titles.

Other Useful Links & resources

<http://www.philosophyofreligion.info>

General philosophy site search engine, type in 'the problem of evil and suffering' – useful background.

www.thatreligiousstudieswebsite.com

General Religious Studies search engine, type in 'the problem of evil and suffering' - Useful information.

'The Puzzle of God' by Peter Vardy

A detailed look at the theological and philosophical issues raised by the existence of a God.

Suggested Activities Before Viewing the Programme

1. In pairs, students produce spider diagrams of the types of evil and suffering in the world today. After a discussion of the words student have recorded, ask them to circle all of the words that humans have control over, and put a square around those that humans do not. Discuss key ideas.
2. Gather newspaper and magazine articles that show people suffering. Discuss with students how the suffering happened and any benefits the person/people gained from the suffering.
3. As a class come up with a list of benefits that suffering can have. Assess which of the ideas is the most beneficial. Watch a clip from a soap showing one or more of the characters suffering. Suggest how the characters may benefit from the suffering.
4. Inform the class that the existence of evil and suffering in the world today has questioned many people's beliefs regarding the existence of God. Individually, in 100 words exactly, students to write down whether they are an atheist, agnostic or theist and why. Share thoughts and feelings with the group if they are comfortable to do so. Ask whether the existence of evil and suffering in the world may be a reason why people do not believe in a God.
5. As a class discuss where evil and suffering come from. You may wish to use the following questions: Where does evil and suffering come from? Why do people suffer? Does evil and suffering come from a God? Is there such a thing as evil and suffering in the world? Do all humans suffer? Is evil and suffering always started by humans?

Student Worksheet

While Viewing the Programme

1. What does the word 'suffering' mean?

2. What does the word 'evil' mean?

3. Define what natural evil is and give an example of natural evil in the world.

4. Define what moral evil is and give an example of moral evil in the world.

5. Which evil do you think causes the most suffering in the world and why?

6. Which do you think is worse – those that perform acts of evil or those that witness it and do nothing? Why?

7. What is psychological scaring?

8. What is the difference between an atheist, agnostic and theist?

9. Why do you think many people are sceptical about the existence of God?

10. Why is suffering a problem for religious believers?

11. God is often described as being omnipotent, Omni-benevolent and omniscient. What do these words mean?

12. What is the inconsistent triad?

Evil and Suffering – A Religious Perspective

13. How may religious believers explain the problem of evil & suffering?

14. What are the benefits of suffering?

15. What does the word 'theodicy' mean?

16. Outline the theodicy of St. Augustine. Give a possible weakness to his theodicy.

17. Outline the theodicy of Irenaeus. Give a possible weakness to his theodicy.

18. Do you think that the natural and moral suffering in the world proves that God does not exist? Explain your views.

Suggested Student Responses

1. What does the word 'suffering' mean?

It is experiencing physical, emotional or psychological pain in a persons life. Usually something bad.

2. What does the word 'evil' mean?

Evil is the absence of good. It does not promote good.

3. Define natural evil and give an example of natural evil in the world.

Natural evil refers to bad events that humans have no control over. E.g. Earthquakes, tsunamis, famine, floods, hurricanes.

4. Define moral evil and give an example of moral evil in the world.

Moral evil refers to bad events that humans can control and stop. It involves a human choice. E.g. Murder, genocide, paedophilia.

5. Which evil do you think causes the most suffering in the world and why?

Personal opinion.

6. Which is worse, those that perform acts of evil or those that witness it and do nothing?

Personal opinion.

7. What is psychological scaring?

This refers to events that happen in a persons life that still effects them years later. E.g. survivors syndrome, shell shock.

8. What is the difference between an atheist, agnostic and theist?

An atheist does not believe that God exists. An agnostic is not sure if God exists. A theist believes that God does exist.

9. Why do you think many people are sceptical about the existence of God?

Maybe a person has not experienced God and feels that there is no evidence to support that God exists. These days, many people need their senses fulfilled (sight, taste, touch, hearing, etc) in order for them to see something as true.

10. Why is suffering a problem for religious believers?

It is a problem as it goes against the classical definition of what or who God is. God is supposed to be omnipotent/omniscient and Omni benevolent. The fact that evil exists in the world would may mean that God is not these characteristics.

11. God is often described as being omnipotent, Omni benevolent and omniscient. What do these words mean?

Omnipotent means that God is all powerful. Omni benevolent means that God is all loving. Omniscient means that God is all knowing.

12. What is the inconsistent triad?

The philosopher J.L.Mackie developed this theory. If evil exists then one of the characteristics of God has to be false. If evil exists, then God might not have the power to stop evil but loves his creation, or if God may love his creation but not have the power to stop it, etc.

13. How do some religious people explain the problem of suffering?

Suffering is a test of faith, it can be the result of a persons sin in their own life, it is God's will

14. What are the benefits of suffering?

It can change a persons life as well as improving others. It can unite a community together and increases a persons empathy towards others. People can learn from suffering and become a better person.

Evil and Suffering – A Religious Perspective

15. What does the word theodicy mean?

The justice of God. Is God being fair by making us suffer?

16. Outline the theodicy of St. Augustine. Give a possible weakness to his theodicy.

God created people perfect. Suffering is caused by people abusing their free will. Adam and Eve were told by God to not eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. They could not resist temptation and ate the fruit. This is called original sin. Since then, humans have been punished because Adam and Eve broke the natural order of the world. A possible weakness is that Augustine takes the creation account as literally true – which not all religious believers would.

17. Outline the theodicy of Irenaeus. Give a possible weakness to his theodicy.

Humans are born imperfect – we all make mistakes. Mistakes are the result of free will. God does not intervene with the world as God cannot change a human's free will. Evil is beneficial to mankind. A possible weakness is that not all of the free will that humans have causes evil – e.g. the life and work of Martin Luther King.

18. Do you think that suffering proves that God does not exist?

Personal opinion.

Suggested Activities for After the Programme

1. Complete some additional research using the internet on the theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus. Come up with a list of strengths and weaknesses to their arguments.
2. Produce a questionnaire about suffering and ask people what they think the benefits of suffering may be. You may wish to include which evil they think is the worst – natural or moral.
3. Research the stories of Abraham and/or Job from the Bible. Rein act these Biblical stories suggesting what could be learnt from these characters – maybe a more modern day version of the story.
4. In groups produce a presentation on how world religions respond to the problem of suffering in the world.
5. Watch a section of the film 'Bruce Almighty' and suggest how the film could be related to the inconsistent triad – why can't Bruce make Grace fall back in love with him? Research the free will defence argument and assess whether this could solve the problem of suffering for religious people.

