



The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil

By *Brian Davies*

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An important new book on how we can still believe in a God of love and confront the problem of evil in the world. Probably the most important book on the subject since John Hick's book "Evil and the God of Love".

Evil is a strong word that people now employ fairly rarely. Many people believe these days that God is omnipotent, omniscient and good and that what we deem to be bad or evil in the world is no reason for abandoning belief in God. It is an intellectual or theoretical problem not one where the focus is on how one might bring about some desirable goal (a practical matter).

Professor Davies says we should tackle this problem by attending to the basics, by asking whether there is a God and then What is God? he starts by summarizing the arguments so far (from Seneca to the present day). He then moves to what he describes as the basics (see above) and demonstrates that much of what has been written about on the topic of evil is in fact irrelevant or just plain wrong.

Finally, though many theologians argue that evil is a mystery, Davies argues that this too is wrong and a cop out. We should rather be concerned with the problem (or mystery) of good. The real issue is ` Why is there not more good than there is`. From the discussion Aquinas emerges as a hero (as filtered through analytical philosophy) but many moderns thinkers do not emerge so well. Davies effectively picks holes into the arguments of Peter Geach, Paul Helm, Richard Swinburne and even Mary Baker Eddy.

This is a lively book on a tricky subject, written at all times with humour and much practical example.

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Editorial Review

Review

How can a good God allow the tremendous evils that we see around us every day? Some would argue that the very existence of evil disproves the existence of God. Others would say that evil does not really exist. Davies (philosophy, Fordham Univ.) thinks that both of these approaches are faulty. Drawing on the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas but making it his own in a way that allows him to respond to more contemporary statements of the problem, Davies, a Dominican priest, does not try to explain away evil. Instead, he concentrates on showing that a recognition of the existence of evil does not preclude belief in a good God. This is a well-written consideration of a perennial topic, written by a veteran teacher who knows how to make abstract ideas understandable through the use of relevant examples. (Augustine J. Curley, *Library Journal*, November 1, 2006 *Library Journal*)

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"So this is a welcome book. It debunks a number of unconvincing theodicies which are based on over-anthropomorphic understandings of God".
(Mark Dowd *The Catholic Herald*)

"an excellent volume...The book is remarkable in a number of ways, including its brevity...its clarity, and its depth...Davies has written an excellent book that everyone can benefit from reading. It can be used in undergraduate courses and parish study groups, but scholars will also profit from the author's carefully wrought arguments and nuanced conclusions. *The Reality of God and the Problem of Evil* provides another indication that Thomism continues to thrive as a vital tradition in philosophy and theology."
(Stephen Pope, *Commonweal Commonweal*)

Review in Catholic Herald (*The Catholic Herald*)

"His book is important because he forces us to begin with some searching preliminary questions. Before we can think about God and evil, we need to ask how we understand God, and what we mean by evil. Davies is in the perfect position to undertake this task, combining a thorough knowledge of Christian thinking across the centuries with the linguistic precision of an Anglo-American philosopher"
(*Church Times*)

"(Davies)writes attractively, combining philosophical rigour with homely examples"
(*The American Spectator*)

"Brian Davies...writes attractively, combining philosophical rigour with homely examples."
(Brian Hebblethwaite *The American Spectator*)

"This book provides a readable exposition and assessment of a range of theodicies, and makes a valuable contribution to debate about one of the less common responses to the problem of evil. It would therefore be of interest both to undergraduates and to those with a postgraduate interest in questions about the coherence

of theism.'

Elizabeth Burns, Heythrop College, *Religious Studies*

(Elizabeth Burns, Heythrop College, Religious Studies, Vol 44, 2008)

[Davies'] book has three main strengths. First, it is easy to read. The way the argument is presented helps the reader to pick up on a point and then to work backwards or forwards to see the presuppositions behind an idea...That leads us to the second strength of this book. Davies succinctly summarizes a wide range of arguments about God and evil...Indeed, we have here a compendium of how the fact of evil in the world has shaped what people say about God...This in turn brings us to the third strength of the book, the insistence that how we understand God comes before how we understand evil.'

Owen Huggs, *New Directions*

(*New Directions*)

"Davies generally argues his case with clarity and humour...

what he offers is a rigorous examination of a perennial problem which perhaps more than any other leads many to deny the reality of God. Davies has provided an excellent resource for anyone willing to engage with that problem"

Expository Times, 1 February 2008

(Trevor Williams)

"Brian Davies...[is a] first class philosopher." -Ric Machuga, *Books & Culture*, March/April 2010

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About the Author

Brian Davies is Professor of Philosophy at Fordham University, New York, USA. His publications include *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 3rd edition, 2003) and *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

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