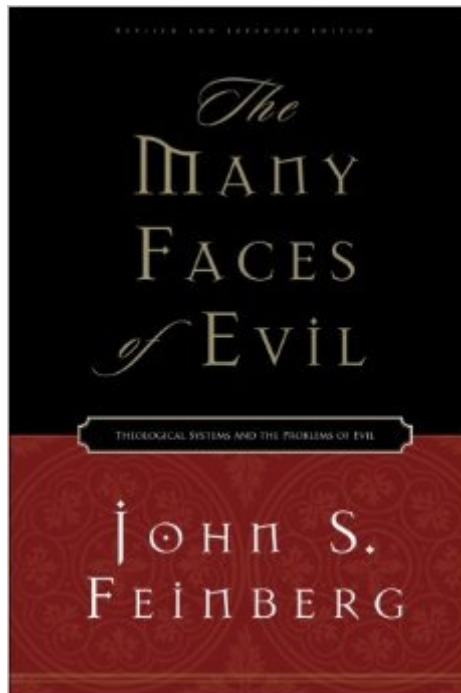


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The Many Faces Of Evil (Revised And Expanded Edition): Theological Systems And The Problems Of Evil



Synopsis

In this examination of the questions posed by the problem of evil, John Feinberg addresses the intellectual and theological framework of theodicy. Beginning with a discussion of the logical problem of evil, he interacts with leading thinkers who have previously written on these themes.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It is clear from this book that the problem of evil has long been a pressing concern of John Feinberg. What started out as a doctoral dissertation many years ago has morphed into an effective and mostly comprehensive exploration of this perennial problem from an evangelical perspective. While I don't agree with everything Feinberg proposes, I do think evangelicals of all theological stripes will be greatly informed by this book. Among the strengths of the book is Feinberg's interaction with the ideas of non-evangelicals where the problem of evil is concerned. He effectively and thoughtfully interacts with a number of non-evangelicals as well as skeptics, and this alone is noteworthy. Feinberg seems to be interested in constructive, yet principled dialogue with those outside his own camp, and as an evangelical, it is hoped by this reader that such dialogue will be reciprocated by theological liberals who claim to be interested in such dialogue. I also thought that Feinberg's view that the problem of evil is actually a series of problems of evil is penetrating and really helps the comprehensive treatment of the subject that we see here. While I might quibble a bit with the degree to which Feinberg attempts to categorize these various problems, and thus arguably diminishes their interrelated nature, I do think this approach does justice to the issue and helps avoid a facile examination that too often plagues evangelical treatments of the subject. In particular, his 'religious

problem of evil', which is really the existential problem of evil, is a valuable and thoughtful addition that evangelical scholarship in the theodicy area has been severely neglectful of. Feinberg deserves a standing ovation for devoting a solid portion of the book to discussing this aspect of the problem of evil, and it is hoped that other evangelicals will wake up and follow Feinberg's lead whenever they address the problem of evil in their writings, classroom lectures, and conversations with those around them. I also strongly agree with the contention that one's theology will (and should) greatly influence how a Christian (or anyone for that matter) addresses the existence of evil. The problem of evil is not an isolated matter that can be addressed in a vacuum. Our theology should and will greatly inform how we address it, and I think Feinberg is mostly successful in examining how various theological commitments impact on how folks from various theological traditions will handle this particular issue. The one minor drawback is that in my view, more Biblical exegesis was in order in this book than what I saw. Feinberg's general opposition to the greater-good defense was just one example of an objection that seemed to be based more on philosophical argumentation than exegetical demonstration. I have increasingly noticed that comprehensive scholarly works from evangelical authors that seem intended to go beyond the evangelical subculture and gain an audience among non-evangelicals too often downplay the centrality of the authority of Scripture that must continue to define what it means to be an evangelical. It seems to me that an evangelical work on any topic should be unapologetic in presenting a Biblical argument, since the Bible is (or ought to be) our final authority, even though it is not our lone authority. It seems to me that too many books like this one seem to put the Bible on the sideline in order to gain some respectability among circles of the academy that don't take the Bible seriously (meaning that they don't consider it to be particularly authoritative) and thus don't take traditional evangelicals seriously. Well, such an approach strikes me as an unnecessary capitulation, and I fear to some degree that this is what happened with this particular book. While I greatly appreciate the depth with which Feinberg engages non-evangelical scholarship, what this book needs is a melding of systematics and exegesis that results in systematics being better informed by Scripture. But this little soapbox quibble aside, the book is, I think, a valuable contribution to the field of 'theodicy' that evangelicals will greatly profit from.

Evil and suffering are perennial problems which baffle theist and atheist alike. But the presence of evil in the world is a real challenge to those who believe in an all-powerful and an all-benevolent God. Thus the problem of evil. Or, as Feinberg makes clear, the problems of evil. For there are many problems. Thus in this volume Feinberg interacts with a number of theological and

philosophical issues surrounding the topic of evil in the world. As such, it is perhaps the most thorough and rigorous evangelical treatment of the problem thus far available. And it is no lightweight. Those wanting an easy-to-read overview of the issues are urged to look elsewhere. But for those willing to think carefully and critically, this 500-page treatment is top quality. Since there are many issues involved, Feinberg treats each one in turn. For example, there is the logical or deductive problem of evil. There is the evidential or inductive problem. And evil itself can be broken down, as in moral evil and natural evil. And there are different ways of approaching these issues. There is the free-will defense of Augustine and Plantinga. There is the soul-making theodicy of Irenaeus and Hick. There is the best possible world approach of Leibniz, and so on. All of these major approaches - and criticisms of them - are tackled by Feinberg. Feinberg therefore interacts with many dozens of earlier as well as recent thinkers on this issue. The result is a very thorough and comprehensive treatment of the issue. Feinberg himself comes from a Reformed perspective, and he argues for a position he calls the Modified Rationalist framework. And even that position can be broken down into various versions. So the debate can be quite complex and detailed, and the reader needs patience to follow the discussion all the way through. But the book is not just one long exercise in intellectual and philosophical rigor. It concludes with two much more down-to-earth chapters. One is a very personal chapter on the religious problem of evil. It deals with a personal tragedy Feinberg had to grapple with, which made him reassess his own approach to evil and suffering. And a concluding chapter offers ten purposes for, or uses of, suffering. These two chapters help round off this book and make it more accessible and practical to the average reader. This volume is actually the third edition of his original 1979 version. Every edition adds new and more up-to-date material, and interacts with newer critics along the way. For example, this newest volume contains a lengthy chapter on the problem of hell. This volume may not be the one to give to someone experiencing a personal tragedy, but it is the volume to give to those who want to be up on the latest philosophical and theological debates on the issue. It is a monumental endeavor and deserves careful reading.

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