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Viktor Ilievski, *Plato's Theodicy: The Forgotten Fount,* Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2023, ISBN:978-90-04-67929-0.

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The reality of evil and the existence of God has long been a subject of philosophical and theological debate, presenting a logical inconsistency that challenges our understanding of the nature of deity. The problem of evil, in particular, has given rise to the *argument from evil*, one of the strongest arguments against God's existence or perfection. The book under review explores the types of answers to this rationale from Plato's philosophical perspective. According to Viktor Ilievski, Plato formulated a comprehensive response, comprising more than a few theodicean strategies. Plato's answers aimed to reconcile the coexistence of evil and God's omnibenevolence as being consistent in the same world.

With the exception of Plotinus,[1] the ancient philosophers did not write specific treatises addressing the nature of evil or providing justification for the goodness of God in the face of evil. However, according to Lactantius, a formulation of the problem of evil might have been developed by Epicurus. While there are serious arguments that cast doubt on whether Epicurus was truly committed to such an endeavour, the problem of evil was nonetheless tackled by Plato on several occasions as part of a more coherent theological program. As a theistic philosopher, Plato grappled with this problem in a relatively clear and articulate manner, in one of the earliest systematic efforts to vindicate the existence of an all-good and all-powerful deity. Thus theodicy was not a peripheral concern for Plato, but a dominant one. Plato's primary theodicy revolves around the idea that God, while benevolent, is not fully omnipotent. However, when examined more closely, Plato's solution reveals additional nuances and facets beyond this core formulation.

To prove his case, Ilievski displays in five chapters the key places where Plato debates in detail the inquiry into evil. In the first chapter, Ilievski points at *Republic* II, where Plato struggles with the theology of his time (the Homeric-Hesiodic one, where Gods dispense both good and evil, and consequently the divine engages in morally reprehensible actions). This represents the earliest documented idea in Western culture

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[1] See in the previous issue, *Religion and the Problem of Evil (I)*, the article of Anne Sheppard and John Dillon, "Plotinus on Evil," *RES* 16 (1/2024): 114–20, DOI: 10.2478/ress-2024-0008.

that Gods are good and cause only good, and cannot be the source of evil. Especially 379b–c contains the first recorded justification of God's goodness marking thus a kind of theological reform and the inauguration of theodicy, even if in a rudimentary form, as a philosophical discipline (p. 12, 36). This pushes back the origins of the theodicy tradition, considerably earlier than is typically acknowledged, which tends to trace it to the Stoics. Here Ilievski argues against those (such as Carlos Steel or John Hick) who explicitly affirm that Plato's dialogues do not contain any theodicy. Although here the treatment of evil is merely anthropocentric (and political), I think Ilievski has a point since Plato openly absolves God of responsibility for any form of evil, pushing the charge towards human accountability.

In the second chapter, Ilievski undertakes a comprehensive analysis of *Republic* X, with particular attention to the Myth of Er. Ilievski's purpose here is to demonstrate how Plato's theodicy becomes more explicitly formulated, arguing that the Myth of Er represents Plato's "Solution from Personal Responsibility". While it is anachronistic to attribute the modern concept of free will to Plato (p.46), the myth operates with a similar idea. The stress is thus on the individual moral implications and accountability associated with one's decision-making (αἵρεσις). Although the Gods provide the context and the choices, and seem to lack divine compassion and involvement in human affairs, it is up to each soul to select its path, and thus to be responsible for evil.

The third chapter, which is one of the most challenging, is dedicated to the Digression from *Theaetetus*, specifically concentrating on 176a5–8, in an attempt to emphasize the implications of a *metaphysics of evil*. Ilievski posits the presence of an "implicit theology." Although the concept of the Good has its opposite, Plato exercises caution in affirming a metaphysical dualism, shown by his use of the atypical term ὑπεναντίον. Even though ὑπεναντίον is considered responsible for all evils, it is conceived at a lower and secondary level. Additionally, it is suggested that both ὑπεναντίον and ἀνάγκη are terms used by Plato to designate the same entity. Ilievski notes that the theodicy in *Theaetetus* is distinct compared to other theologies he analyses. This is because it does not exculpate God by identifying separate causes or reasons for evil. Instead, it focuses on the individual *sufferers* and the latent benefits of suffering (p. 111), a perspective known as the Irenaean type of theodicy.

The subsequent chapter naturally focuses on the *Timaeus*, as it is the primary text for initiating and potentially concluding an argument regarding the presence of evil in the world. Ilievski identifies three theodicean

tactics. The first, "the Principle of Plenitude", attributes the existence of undesirable elements in the sensible world to the Paradigm rather than to God. The second theodicy, "the Solution from Personal Responsibility", places the fault on the moral agent. The third, and most widely recognized theodicy concerning the origin of evil in the world, attributes the blame to the pre-existing material. The final chapter examines a relatively rarely discussed text, that of *Laws* X. Here, Ilievski considers the so-called aesthetic thesis, which posits that imperfections contribute to the overall beauty and perfection of the world.

Several of Plato's theodicies presented in this book are logically pertinent, and there is more to be explored by scholars, philosophers, and theologians who struggle with the problem of evil. The reconciliation with God from these Platonic perspectives could reinforce theism from viewpoints that are prior to Christianity. As Ilievski put it, Plato's arguments and claims constitute the *fount* for later theologies, which is not necessarily a surprise given that much of the history of philosophy and theology is a development and exploration of Plato's initial surveys.

Overall, the chief merit of Ilievski's meticulous research in this impressive book is to rehabilitate Plato as a theologian, filling a significant gap in Platonic scholarship. This demanding book must be an essential reference for any scholar of Plato and theodicy. It offers a fresh insight into Platonic theology, a subject that, surprisingly, is largely underexplored by Platonic scholarship. Additionally, the book includes an excellent list of references, a very useful *Index Locorum*, and an *Index Nominum*.