**Critically asses the philosophical problems raised by believing in an omnibenevolent God**

Omnibenevolence is the idea that God is all-loving/all-good. Christians understand this to mean “God is love”. In the Old Testament this is expressed through judgement and forgiveness, whereas in the New Testament it is shown through agape, unconditional love through an action.

Anselm argued for the ontological argument. If we have an idea of a God wjo id perfect in every way, when nothing greater could be possibly greater, then he must exist in reality. A God who exists in our heads as something we imagined to be great but didn’t actually exist, would be inferior to a real God. So God must exist, in order to meet the idea of ‘that noting greater could be conceived’. If God wasn’t morally perfect then the nature of his existence is limited as well as his benevolence. Richard Dawkins came up with the idea The God Delusion; this is the idea the God of the Old Testament potentially has favourites and uses people as a means to an end. This is shown through his encouragement of killing and anger. For example, in Genesis 22, he ordered Abraham to kill his own son, Isaac, as a sacrifice which he was going to go through with. God then stopped him before he could and promised him good things for his dedication. However, someone who tries to kill someone in society now, is actually punished. Therefore, Gods punishments seem less than just especially when a person dies and they are sent to hell for eternal punishment without being able to try and change. As well as this, a person who has followed the word of God their entire lives could be punished for no reason whether this is through illness or a natural disaster. The idea of a perfect God may exist in our heads as someone who is all loving and good like Anselm suggests, but an ideal God can’t exist in the real world. An all-loving God wouldn’t create evil where innocent people were hurt, surely he would be good enough to know that people could commit bad actions that could affect others around them. People want to believe that an omnibenevolent being exits and will protect them when it comes to evil but then punishes them in order to test their faith or blames it on our free will. Therefore, a more loving and good God can be thought of.

Some philosophers, including Boethius, believed God can see things in a different way from the way in which we see them, because humans exist within time, whereas God doesn’t any time constraints. He also argued that sin allows for us to experience different learning experiences which will allow us to achieve perfection. So, if the world was without sin would be really know what ‘goodness’ is? Augustine believed the world was perfect as it was created by God who wouldn’t have created something imperfect deliberately. In the Bible Gods creation is explained as “good” and Augustine took this as he starting point for his theodicy ‘God saw all that he had made and behold it was very good’ (Genesis 1:31). Augustine believed evil is not a real quality but a privation of good. In his view, evil didn’t have its own existence but came from the fall of good. Humans were created In Gods favour meaning there was no knowledge of good and evil. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, he gave them free will so they could choose good or bad causing the world to become fragmented. Augustine believed this was caused from the fall of God’s grace. Sin had then entered the world breaking the relationship between God and humans. Therefore, evil becomes part of the world and each human that’s born carries the sin from Adam and Eve causing people to suffer from God’s s punishment. God is therefore powerful enough to know when something is going to happen so it then has to happen, the future is necessary. However, Calvin came up with the idea of predestination. God created a timeline for each person that they have to follow. He knew straight away who would go to heaven and hell. No one is given the chance to make a mends and change the way they act, therefore you could do good your whole life and still be destined for hell or you could be bad and go to heaven. An omnibenevolent God would surely give people a chance to change? If they are given a certain timeline by an all loving God he could make sure we do good by still allowing us to have free will. If God was as omnibenevolent as he’s made out to be then surely he’d know beforehand that the path we took would be evil. The free will he gave us that makes him all-loving doesn’t actually make much difference to what will happen in our future. If we are destined for hell then if we choose good its ultimately pointless. Some believers also believe that we have to suffer in order for our faith in God to be stronger. However, the idea that God is all-loving is a meaningless statement as it “dies a death of thousand qualifications” as there is no empirical evidence to falsify it when innocent people are suffering every day by an ‘omnivbenevolent’ God.

Aquinas believes that when we speak of the love of God, we use an analogy as we can’t say anything positive about God that is literally true. His love is like ours but his is infinitely greater as we can only understand a small proportion of divine love. This was argued in Aquinas’ book Summa Theologica. Furthermore, God also commands things because they are good but also because he knows what to command with perfect knowledge as his nature is entirely good. God would therefore never create something like murder to be seen as a good action. Goodness is part of God’s character and like Irenaeus argued, we are made in ‘in his own image, not his likeness’ (Genesis 1:26) as he gave us free will to make our own decisions. However, John Stuart Mill argues there is cruelty in nature. God’s creation has a major flaw because some animals have an advantage over others. They haven’t been created equally as some have claws, teeth and speed which will help them to survive. It would be like a lion going after a lamb. If God is as omnibenevolent as people says he is why are his designs acting in a malevolent way? Either God can do nothing to stop evil, he doesn’t care or he doesn’t exist. Mills argument is based on observation that the world is imperfect. Evil is unreasonable if God is omnibenevolent and as it inflicts suffering on innocent people “either there is no God or a there exits an incompetent or moral God”. Therefore, if there is a God he must be cruel if he inflicts suffering so easily on innocent people who have stood by him. An example of this is found in Matthew 5:11-12 where Jesus promises followers that they will be rewarded appropriately if they suffer on account of his name. If we are made in Gods image then love we have is a limited characteristic even though we have free will in order to make our own decisions including how we love and if we do good or bad actions, instead of relying on a God that causes people to suffer.

The Christian understanding of God holds that God’s nature is love. This is seen in both the Old and New Testament as the New Testament’s word for love is agape, unconditional love through an action rather than feelings or emotion. God is the source of love by coming incarnate in Jesus, giving people the opportunity to see God through his love for the world. His love was sometimes compared to that of a parents, while humans are his children. Therefore, the source of all love is seen as God. However, the Hebrew word for love is hesed or chesed. This is based on the idea that it speaks mainly of God’s love for Israel rather than particular individuals. Showing love for each other’s welfare is the proper response to the love God’s shown them as he expressed his love through judgement and forgiveness which is why he punishes and judges those he loves the most. This is shown in the story form the book of the prophet Amos. However, Did God choose to love it/Israel because it had loveable qualities, or does Israel have loveable qualities because God loves it? This implies that there is a standard of goodness that’s independent of God and a standard of values outside his control and creativity. If whatever God thinks or does is simply by definition “good”, regardless of what it is then does it make sense to praise God for his goodness?

Overall, there are many problems raised by believing in an omnibenevolent God. There are so many people that suffer whether its due nature or other humans and God doesn’t once stop it. It does occasionally help those that follow his guidance as shown in the Bible but those who don’t aren’t helped. Evil is portrayed in many ways and although we have freewill to make our own decisions on how we act, an omnibenevolent and omnipotent God would know that evil would be created and he could of stopped it if he cared about his creation as much as people say he does.