

Background and Commentary

Background

Kirsten wrote this work following targeted support for ten pupils, five in Y7 and five in Y8 that the school identified as showing exceptional ability in RE. They were offered a chance to attend for one morning an RE gifted and talented workshop. The workshop was an enquiry into a religious question of the pupils own choosing. Some pupils were interested in science and religion, while others wished to explore, 'What was the purpose of life?' But the overall favourite question was, 'Why is there evil in the world?' Following the workshop Kirsten wrote her response to the question, 'If there is a God – why is there evil in the world?' She discussed the work with the workshop tutor, made a few changes and produced a final draft.

Commentary

Kirsten with an excellent command of language makes her position clear. She does not attempt to deny that there is evil in the world but openly accepts that it exists. Nevertheless, she claims that there are sound reasons for believing in an all-powerful and all-loving God. Her main argument is that God has created humans with free will. Kirsten does not try to square human free will with God being all-knowing. She understands that this might lead her into a difficult contradiction. She accepts that humans have free and that this sets, 'a limit on what can be known, and thus on God's own knowledge'. As God has made a world in which in which it is possible for humans to choose to do good then it must also be possible that they may choose evil. Kirsten shows an impressive glimmering insight into this abstract and difficult idea in her words, 'As humans have been given free will it allows us to cause evil and suffering in the world.' What is again impressive about Kirsten's work is that she does not abandon this idea and move onto a second reason as if simply by weight of numbers two reasons must be better than one. Instead, she senses that her abstract idea needs to be expressed in a way that would make it clearer and to do this she comes up with a helpful analogy. Humans without free will she claims would be like machines, predictable and without feelings or emotions. She then goes on to make what many would agree is a valid point that without feelings and emotions human life would be diminished and that all we value about life would be lost – 'It wouldn't be worth living'. The next three paragraphs hint at two other arguments. The first is that evil provides something to be resisted and so helps us to improve. The second is that perhaps God allowed evil into the world as some sort of test. She makes a reference to natural evil but she doesn't explore this idea any further. In her final paragraph she repeats her main argument that without free will we wouldn't have emotions and feelings – we would be like machines. Finally, she ends with another machine related analogy – 'We would be robots'.

How might the work be improved?

Kirsten might improve the work by discussing arguments to the contrary. For example, free will may help us to understand why there is moral evil but does it help explain why there is so much natural evil in the world? Can natural evil be blamed on humans misusing their free will? Kirsten might also be encouraged to consider the argument that God if he wished could surely limit some of the extreme violence that humans commit. Couldn't God intervene and prevent at least some examples of senseless torture? Humans would still have free will but the worst examples of humans being evil, not all the time, but at least some of the time God could surely do something about evil in the world without turning humans into zombie like robots whose every action is controlled by God.