

Critically evaluate Hick's theodicy (15)

- Hick's aim and intended readers
(Rejection of Augustinian theodicy)
- Hick's theodicy: The Vale of Soul-making
- Strengths of Hick's theodicy
- Weaknesses
 - animal suffering
 - universalism and free will, virtues in heaven
 - scale and meaninglessness of suffering
 - Is God responsible for evil? Or is evil not ultimately evil...?
- Conclusion

- The Augustinian theodicy (the ‘majority report’) uses FWD, but involves a “fall” from a state of perfection, which causes moral and natural evils. Only through Christ can anyone be saved.
- Hick claims it’s not Biblical and criticises it on scientific, logical and moral grounds.

- Scientific (knowledge about evolution)- there were natural evils before homo sapiens evolved.
- Logical – how can there be a Fall if creation was perfect?
- Moral – why punish people for their ancestors' sins?

Hick's aim

- 'Not to create faith, but only to prevent it being overcome by the dark mystery of evil...The aim of a Christian theodicy must be..defensive..., showing that..evil does not render faith irrational.'
- He is not trying to convince atheists that God exists. He is addressing himself to 'thoughtful believers' who are troubled, as he is, by the problem of evil.

- Hick's theodicy avoids all these problems. This world is vale of soul-making, created at epistemic distance from God.
- No clash between his (liberal) Christian faith and modern science – two stage theory of human evolution
- No logical problem – world and humans created imperfect.
- No moral problem – no inherited guilt. Each of us is free to progress, and ultimately God wishes all to achieve blessedness

- By using the analogy of the loving parent, and contrasting it with a zoo-keeper (or hypnotist), Hick appeals to our instinctive feeling that a life without challenges would not be worth living. 'Man is in process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create.. It is a hazardous adventure in individual freedom.' Thus we understand why a loving God might have created a 'religiously ambiguous' world.

- Eschatology: the ultimate joy will outweigh any suffering en route to it.

- However, the real weaknesses are those which are recognised by Hick himself. One of these is his difficulty in making any sense of animal suffering. Where's the soul-making?
- 'Sentient nature supports and serves its human apex by helping to constitute **an independent natural order to which man is organically related and within which he exists at an epistemic distance from God**'.

- Eschatology: problem of universalism.
- Are humans really ultimately free?

- What is the use of the hard-won virtues and the whole process of soul-making if the ultimate destination is universal bliss? He points out that ‘soul-making is not just about acquiring virtues. It is entering into relationship with God. It is the overcoming of egoity, the transcending of individual self-interest in a common human life in relation to God’ - and it is not unreasonable to suggest that this could be a process continuing beyond this particular life.

- So Hick does seem to have good answers to most of the main criticisms of his theodicy.
- The one that continues to trouble him – as is apparent in Chapter 17, added ten years later – is the sheer scale and injustice of suffering.
- Hick has pointed out earlier that there is much to make life worthwhile, but he still would recognise, like or Ivan Karamazov - that there is excessive or dystelological suffering: the price of soul-making does seem too high, when one witnesses people whose souls seem to be destroyed rather than made by suffering. Hick, reluctantly, seems driven to echo Swinburne's 'defence' of the Holocaust as providing an opportunity for heroism.

- So, in conclusion, it can be said that Hick's theodicy has distinct advantages over the Augustinian theodicy, but it does not solve the problem of evil; Hick's subsequent spiritual journey towards a less personal understanding of God suggests that he was not satisfied by his own attempt at a solution.
- However, I would go back to his 'defensive aim' and argue that, in that limited sense, he does succeed in helping those whose faith is in danger of being 'overcome by the dark mystery of evil'.

- Has Hick found God?
- Does Hick think Jesus died to save us from our sins?
- What proof does he give for his theory of multiple lives?