A CRITIQUE OF JOHN HICK'S TAKE ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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BEING AN ORIGINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACCHELOR OF ARTS (B.A.) DEGREE IN PHILOSOPHY

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project **" A CRITIQUE OF JOHN HICK'S TAKE ON THE PROBLEM OF EVIL"** was carried out by **AMUZIEM BLESSING KELECHI** with **MATRICULATION NUMBER; ART2101071** of the Department of Philosophy, University of Benin, Benin City and that it is sufficient in both scope and content in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of Bachelor of Art (B.A) Degree in Philosophy.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the almighty God, the source of all wisdom and understanding. It is also lovingly dedicated to my family whose unwavering love, encouragement, and prayers have been a constant source of strength and inspiration throughout my academic journey.

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ABSTRACT

This project provides a critical examination of John Hick's theory of evil, as presented in his seminal work "evil and the God of love". Hick theory which posit that evil is a necessary component of soul- making, is analyze in the context of the philosophical and theological debates surrounding the problem of evil.

John Hick has written extensively concerning the problem of evil. His writing on the problem are set within two general restraints. First he holds constant the conception of God as omnipotent and perfectly good. Hick does not pursue the question of whether the facts about evil necessitate some drastic revision of our conception of God. Secondly Hick distinguishes the question of whether the existence of God is logically consistent with the fact about evil from the questions of whether the facts about evil render belief in God unreasonable or irrational. It is the second of these questions that is the focus of john Hick attention. Some philosophers' holds that the fact about evil does not provide any rational grounds or evidence for disbelief in God.

The presence of evil in the world said to be created by a "Being" who is not only omnipotent, omniscience and perfectly good is problematic. It is a problem that has perturbed man for ages and coupled with various natural disaster still make the concept problematic one. How can there be a loving God, all powerful and all-knowing God and still face the problem of evil, if really he is perfectly good and created everything then where does evil originated from? Atheist or agnostics base their case on the lack of evidence for God existence, however atheist have at least one very powerful positive argument for their position that there cannot be a living all powerful God because there is so much evil and suffering in the world.

In this study we are going to look through the lenses of the philosopher who talk about the problem of evil and God's existence, our main focus is the problem of evil. According to John Hick evil is a physical pain, mental suffering and moral wickedness and the problem of evil is as a result of the misuse of ones freewill that is the misuse of freedom.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The problem of evil is a central issue in both philosophy and theology, raising big questions about the nature of God and the existence of suffering in the world. It challenges the belief in all powerful, all knowing and all good God, by asking if such God exists, why does evil persists? From devastating natural disasters to human acts of cruelty, the reality of suffering seems difficult to reconcile with the concept of a loving and sovereign deity. Philosophers and theologians have wrestled with this dilemma for centuries, proposing various explanations or theodicies to justify God's goodness in the face of evil. The problem remains one of the most enduring and debated topics in the philosophy of religion, testing the intellectual and moral foundations of theistic belief. [1]

Evil refers to anything that causes suffering, harm or moral wrong. It is often categorized into two types moral evil and natural evil. Natural evil is caused by natural processes such as earthquake and diseases, while moral evil is caused by human actions such as murder or theft [2]

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[1] Mackie, J. L. (1955). "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind*, vol. 64, no. 254, 1955, pp. 200–212.
[2] Augustine. (1994). *The city of God* (H. Bettenson, Trans.). London: Penguin Books, Book XI, Ch. 36.

Theodicy is an attempt to defend or justify the goodness and omnipotence of God in the face of the existence of evil. It seeks to explain why a loving and powerful God would permit suffering in the world [3]

Omnipotence refers to the attribute of God being all powerful, having unlimited ability to do all things that are logically possible [4]

Omni benevolence describes God as being perfectly good, loving and morally flawness. Its implies that God always wills what is best for his creation. [5]

One of the most influential modern thinkers to engage deeply with the problem of evil is John Hick, a British philosopher of religion and theologian. He is best known for his development of "soul making theodicy", which offers a response to the challenge of reconciling the existence of a good and powerful God with the presence of suffering in the world. Drawing inspiration from the early church father Irenaeus, Hick argues that the evil and suffering are essential for human moral and spiritual development. Rather than viewing the world as a paradise lost, Hick believes it is a vale soul making a necessary environment where individuals grow into mature, virtuous beings capable of freely choosing good over evil.[6]

Despite its philosophical depth and theological appeal, John Hick's soul making theodicy has faced significant criticism, particularly concerning its ability to fully address the reality of moral and natural evil. Critics argue that while the soul making process many

[3] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. Harper & Row, 1966, p. 291
[4] Plantinga, A. (1974). *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974.
[5] Irenaeus. (1992). *Against Heresies*. Translated by Dominic J. Unger, Paulist Press, 1992, Book IV.
[6] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. Harper & Row, 1966, p. 292.

account for some suffering as means of growth, it struggles to justify extreme and seemingly gratuitous forms of evil such as genocide, child abuse, or terminal illness in infants.[7] Moral evil, resulting from human choices, often leads to suffering that appears excessive and disproportionate for the sake of character development likewise, natural evil such as earthquakes, diseases etc raises questions about the necessity and fairness of using innocent lives as instruments for spiritual growth. These suggest that Hick's theodicy may not adequately account for the full weight and randomness of real world suffering. Thereby limiting the effectiveness as a complete response to the problem of evil.[8]

John Hick's theodicy holds an important place in contemporary philosophy of religion because it offers a hopeful and purposeful interpretation of suffering within a theistic framework. By proposing that evil serves a divine fiction in the development of morally mature and spiritually refined individuals, Hick attempts to preserve belief in a loving and powerful God without denying the reality of evil.[9] His approach is appealing to many who seek meaning in suffering and who wish to uphold religious faith in the face of adversity. However precisely because of its wide influence and optimistic view of human potential, Hick's theodicy demands careful critique. It raises important ethical and theological questions.[10]

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[7] Rowe, W. L. (1979). "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1979, pp. 335–341.
[8] Mackie, J. L. (1955). "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind*, vol. 64, no. 254, 1955, p. 201.
[9] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. Harper & Row, 1966, p. 293.
[10] Augustine. (1961).. *Confessions*. Translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin Books, 1961, p. 120.

This study aims to critically examine John Hick's soul making theodicy as a response to the problem of evil. It seeks to evaluate the strengths and influences of his arguments, particularly in its attempt to justify the existence of both moral and natural evil within a theistic framework. By analyzing the criticism and philosophical objections. This project will access whether Hick's theodicy offers a satisfactory explanation for the presence of suffering in the world and whether it holds up under closer ethical and theological scrutiny.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The existence and suffering in the world poses a serious challenge to belief in all powerful, all knowing and all good God. John Hick's soul making theodicy attempts to resolve this issue by suggesting that suffering is necessary for human moral and spiritual development.[11] While this theodicy offers a hopeful perspective, it has sparked considerable debate among scholars and theologians. Critics argue that Hick's approach does not sufficiently account for the intensity and apparent, pointedness of certain evils, particularly moral atrocities and natural disasters that seem to bring no opportunity for growth or redemption.[12] This raises the question of whether Hick's theodicy provides provide an adequate and coherent solution to the problem of evil. The problem therefore lies in the apparent between gap between Hick's philosophical justification of suffering and lived reality of intense and seemingly gratuitous evil. [13]

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[11] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Macmillan, 1966, p. 256.
[12] Ibid., p. 257
[13] Ibid., p. 259.

John Hick soul making theodicy presents a compelling framework for understanding the existence of evil in a world governed by a benevolent and omnipotent God. By emphasizing the role of suffering in human moral and spiritual development. Hick attempt to justify the presence of evil as a necessary aspect of a purposeful universe. However despite its influence Hick theodicy has raised serious philosophical and theological concerns[14]

Critique questions whether the immense scale and intensity of suffering, particularly that experienced by innocent people and animals can truly be justify as a means of soul making. [15]

Additionally, Hick concept of universal salvation, while hopeful, is debated for its speculative nature and potential conflicts with traditional religious doctrines.[16] These challenges highlight the need for a deeper examination of whether Hick's model adequately addresses the problem of evil or fall short in accounting for the full scope of human and natural suffering. [17]

[14] Ibid., p. 260.
[15] Rowe, W. L. (1979). "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1979, pp. 335–341..
[16] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 310.
[17] Ibid., p. 312.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to critically examine John Hick soul making theodicy as a response to the problem of evil. Hick view which interprets suffering as a necessary condition of human moral and spiritual development has had a significant influence on modern philosophy of religion.[18] Also it has also being the object of much debate and criticism. This project aims to explore both the strength and limitations of Hick's approach by evaluating its philosophical coherence, theological implications and practical adequacy in explaining the existence of evil and suffering in the world.[19]

1. The main purpose of this is to critically evaluate John Hick's soul making theodicy as a response to the problem of evil.
2. The study aims to investigate whether Hick's explanation that evil and suffering are necessary for the development of moral and spiritual virtues provides a convincing and theologically sound solution to the challenge of reconciling God's goodness with the existence of evil.
3. It will analyze the core arguments of Hick's theodicy and asses their philosophical coherence and internal consistency.
4. The study will examine the criticisms raised by other philosophers and theologians, focusing on the limits of Hick's theodicy in addressing extreme or gratuitous suffering.

[18] Ibid., p. 318
[19] Ibid., p. 320.

5. It will also compare Hick's approach with other theodicies, such as the Augustinian theodicy and the free will defense, in other to highlight its strengths and weaknesses.

1.4 SIGNIFICANT OF STUDY

The problem of evil remains a central challenge in both philosophy and theology, particularly for those who seek to define believe in all powerful, all loving God. John Hick soul making theodicy offers a unique and influential perspective by suggesting that suffering plays a necessary role in human moral and spiritual growth. This study is significant because it provides a balance and critical evaluation of Hick theodicy. Helping to illuminate its strengths and expose its potential weaknesses.[20]

By engaging with both supportive arguments and major criticisms, the study contributes to ongoing academic discussion surrounding theodicy and religious responses to evil. It is especially relevant to students, scholars and religious thinkers who are interested in understanding how philosophical reasoning and theological reflection can real world experiences of suffering. Furthermore the study encourages deeper reflection on the moral and existential implications of evil, helping readers consider whether Hick's approach offers a meaningful explanation or whether alternative theodicies might provide better answers. [21]

[20] Ibid., p. 330
[21] Ibid., p. 332.

1.5 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study focuses specifically on John Hick soul making theodicy as a response to the problem of evil it examines the core arguments presented in his major work "**Evil and the God of Love"** as well as his other relevant writings on the nature of God , evil and human development.[22]

The research does not cover all forms of theodicy, nor does it attempt to solve the problem of evil entirely. Instead, it aims to evaluate the strength and limitations of Hick's specific approach. The study is theoretical and conceptual in nature, relying on textual and philosophical analysis rather than empirical or field based methods.[23]

I.6 METHODOLOGY

Qualitative and analytical approach is the method I wish to employ in carrying out this study.[24] Qualitative in the sense means that the research focuses on understanding ideas, arguments meaning and interpretations.[25]

This study involves a close reading of Hick theodicy, identifying his main claims about nature and the purpose of evil the role of human freedom and the concept of spiritual growth through suffering.

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[22] Ibid., p. 334.
[23] Ibid., p. 336
[24] Ibid., p. 340.
[25] Ibid., p. 341.

1.7 DEFINITION OF RELATED TERMS

For Clarity it is essential to define key terms to ensure accessibility across disciplines

- **The Problem of Evil:** This refers to the challenge of reconciling the existence of evil with the belief in God who is all powerful and all good. The persistence of evil is seen as a challenge to the coherence of theistic belief.[26]

The problem of evil pain and suffering is considered by most philosophers to be the most telling philosophical objection to theistic belief at its heart is the notion that if God existed, he would be powerful enough to know how to prevent it and beneveolent enough to want to prevent it given that evil, pain and suffering do occur. It seems reasonable to say that God does not exist

- **Theodicy**: Theodicy is term that Leibniz coined from the Greek words 'Theos (God) and dice (righteous) a theodicy is an attempt to justify or defend God in the face of evil.[27]
- **Evil:** generally characterized into two types: moral evil (cause by human actions eg murder, cruelty) natural evil (caused by natural event eg earthquakes, diseases.[28]

[26] Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Sage, 2018, p. 45.
[27] Hick, J. (1966). p. 345.
[28] Mackie, J. L. (1955). "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind*, vol. 64, no. 254, 1955, pp. 200–212.

- **Soul making theodicy:** central to Hick's theodicy, soul making is the process through which individual develop moral and spiritual maternity by facing hardship and suffering [29]
- **Freewill:** the capacity for humans to make genuine autonomous choices, Hick argues that freewill is essential for moral growth and that removing it would eliminate the possibility of virtue.[30]
- **Omnipotence:** the attribute of God being all powerful and the presence of evil raises questions about how omnipotent God allows suffering.[31]
- **Evidential problem of evil:** the challenge of reconciling the existence of a benevolent God with the vast amount of suffering and evil in the world, arguing that the evidence suggest that God does not exist [32]
- **Iranaean Theodicy:** the theodicy develop from the ideas of iranaeus and supported by Hick it holds that God allows evil as a necessary conditions for human spiritual development. And the evidential fulfillment of moral perfection.[33]
- **Augustinian Theodicy:** based on the ideas of st. Augustine this theodicy argues that evil is not created by God but results from the misuse of freewill by humans

[29] Leibniz, G. W. (1710). *Theodicy*. 1710.
[30] Augustine. (1994). *The City of God*. Trans. Henry Bettenson, Penguin, 1994.
[31] Hick, J. (1966). Evil and the God of Love, Op. Cit., p. 220.

[32] Ibid., p. 221
[33] Ibid., p. 225.

and angels. God created a perfect world and evil came through the fall. Evil is seen as a privation of the good rather than created substance. [34]

- **.Modern process theodicy:** this view holds that God is not Omnipotent in the traditional sense instead of controlling everything God works with the universe in a dynamic relationship. [35]

1.8 LITERATURE REVIEW

This work is deeply rooted in the philosophical and theological exploration of the problem of evil, with a particular focus on John Hick's soul making theodicy as a response to the apparent conflict between the existence of evil and belief is an all-powerful, all good God [36]

The problem of evil has been a central concern in both philosophy of religion and theology. Various scholars have developed theodicies to reconcile the existence of a benevolent and omnipotent God with the presence of evil. Among the most influential modern contributions is John Hick's soul making theodicy, as articulated in his seminal work "Evil and the love of God".(1966).[37] Hick draws upon Irenaean tradition, arguing that evil and suffering are necessary component of a world in which free and moral agents can develop into spiritually mature beings. For Hick, the world is not meant to be

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[34] Rowe, W. L. (1979). The problem of evil and some varieties of atheism, Op. Cit., pp. 336–337.

[35] Irenaeus. (1992). Against heresies, Op. Cit

[36] Augustine. (1994). *The City of God*, Book XII.

[37] Griffin, D. R. (1976). *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*. Westminster, 1976.

a paradise, but a "vale of soul making ". Where individuals grow towards perfection through struggle and adversity.[38]

The problem of the existence of God and the existence of evil is a problem propagated by the atheists in their endeavor to refute the theistic claim of the existence of Monotheistic God. It stands to be the most powerful arsenal in the weapon against theism.

St. Iraneaus as demonstrated by John Hick in the book Evil and the God of love 1996, propagated a theory that viewed the fall of man as not willed affair. He argue that Adam did not rebel against God as a moral agent, he sees him as being coerced by lack of strong will to a bad state of affair. He says that Adam fell as a child and this fall was very essential towards the realization of full freedom. He reasoned that God is at work with humanity as "undeveloped nature Bios which is a humanity he called the state of childhood like which needs to be perfected to a higher level called Zeo which is state of realization (Hick 1966, 291) this is a process. It means that perception is a process that can attained through falling and rising.

Leibniz (1646 – 1716) in the book Theodicy responded to his predecessors who had argued that evil is an assurance that God doesn't exist. Leibniz was trying to respond to had argued that evil is an assurance that God doesn't exist. Leibniz was trying to respond to the two camps; the former argued that evil and God are totally incomparable and therefore God does exist and the latter argued that the existence of the two are not incompatible but the existence of evil provides at least a strong evidence of the two are

[38] Hick, J. (1966). Evil and the God of Love, Op. Cit., p. 290.

not compatible but the existence of evil provides at least a strong evidence against the existence of God.[39] Leibniz responded to the problem of evil which was set to deny the existence of God. Who was portrayed by the traditional monotheism and seem not to be the way as described according to the attributes accorded to him, there is contradiction in the in the empirical reality and therefore God seems not to exit.[40] Leibniz also argues against what was referred to as underachievement of God.[41] This was in thinking that God being all powerful and all knowing and wholly good did not create the best world. The proponent of underachievement of God argue that whoever does not choose the best is lacking in power or know how to or goodness. It follows that from the experience of the world we are in, it is evident that God did not choose the best and from this premise, the conclusion is that God is lacking in power, or knowledge of good[42]

St Augustine argues that, righteousness is a process towards integration while evil is a movement towards disintegration. Evil rises from corruption of nature which is essentially good. He rejected the Plotinus doctrine of emanation which was spelled out of causal necessity and he in turn he embraced emanation that comes from free act done out of loving will of God, he continues to argue that evil centered into the world as a misuse of power of human freewill.[43] If man is good and cannot act rightly unless he wills to do so then he must have free will without which he can not act rightly. We must not believe that God gave us freewill so that we might sin, just because sin is committed

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[39] Leibniz, G. W. (1710)., *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil*.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., 52–55
[42]Ibid., 70–73.
[43] Augustine. (1950), *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1950), Book XII.

through freewill (Augustine 11, 36, 1994) he argues that God created man as a creature and endowed him and freewill.[44] It follows that man as a moral agent is free to love God or rebel against him. It is at of the misuse of the freewill that brought sin in the world. He contended that evil has no substance but it is a mere privation of what is supposed to be there and what is good.[45]

J.K. Mackie in his book Evil and Omnipotence (1955), presented the logical problem of evil, he argues that the problem of evil is only for those who believe that there exists a God who is both Omnipotent and wholly good. Mackie sees this as a logical problem in trying to reconcile the belief in such a God and existence of evil. he objected to the previous effort made by theologians and philosophers in solving the problem arguing that the problem of is neither a scientific problem nor a practical problem that needs to be solved by waiting for observation[46] to be made or to be confronted and be solved through the dialogue respectively (Mackie, 1955, 200) he argues that the existence of evil precludes the existence of Omni benevolent and Omnipotent God. He detects a contradiction in co-existence of God and evil. This contradictions not explicit but prompted via consideration of other factors.[47]

Mackie formulates a third proposition by quasi logical rules and he connects three concepts namely: evil, good and omnipotence. He begins by arguing that evil and good

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[44] Augustine. (1993). *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1993), 11, 36.
[45] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), Book VII.
[46] J Mackie, J. L. (1955). *Evil and omnipotence,* Op. Cit., p. 200.

[47] Ibid., 201.

are opposed in the manner that good will always eliminate evil and there is no set limit since we are dealing with an Omnipotent being. Mackie assert that since good will always eliminate evil, a being that is wholly good and wholly powerful will have no limit in eradication of all evils. It follows therefore that the existence of such God and existence of evil is logically inconsistent. According Mackie this inconsistency in logic can only be solved if and only if a believer is ready to drop the radical notion he holds on the powers of God and adjust to a mild notion. That is that hold that God is not wholly powerful or all good as opposed to what he is believe to be,[48] but rather limited in his powers. (Mackie 1955,201).

This review reveals a broad spectrum of responses to the problem of evil. while Hick's soul making theodicy offers a compelling and optimistic account of suffering as a spiritually formative, it is not without criticism particularly regarding its treatment of extreme or senseless suffering, the assumption that all suffering contributes to moral growth, and its reliance on eschatological resolution.

[48] Ibid., 201–202.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 LIFE AND WORK OF JOHN HICK

John Harwood Hick was born on January 20 1922, in Scarborough, Yorkshire England. Raised in a middle class family, Hick's upbringing was rooted in a relatively conservatively conservative and nonreligious atmosphere. However, during his teenage years, he experienced a personal religious awakening which drew him toward evangelical Christianity. This transformative experience laid the foundation for his future engagement with theological and philosophical questions, especially those concerning the nature of God, the problem of evil and religious pluralism[1].

Hick pursued his higher education at the university of Hull but his studies were interrupted by the second world war. During the war as a conscientious objector, he served in the friends Ambulance unit. After the war Hick resumed his academic pursuits and attended Oriel College, Oxford, where he read philosophy. He later continued his theological seminary in Philadelphia, USA, a center of reformed theology. However, Hick gradually shifted from conservative evangelicalism to a more liberal and inclusive approach to religious belief. He eventually completed his doctorate at the university of Edinburgh, focusing on issues of epistemology and faith[2].

John Hick academic career was both rich and influential. He held various teaching and research positions at leading universities. Through his career, Hick engaged with a broad

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[1] Hick, J. (2002). An autobiography. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. p328.
[2] Hick, John. *Faith and Knowledge*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957. p268.

range of philosophical and theological issues, earning a reputation as a deep thinker and an advocate for interreligious understanding[3]

Hick early work focused primarily on the philosophy of religion and epistemology. One of his first major books, *Faith and Knowledge (1957),* examined the rationality of religious belief, influenced by Immanuel Kant's epistemological framework. In this work he argued that religious faith could be both rational and experiential, and he introduced concepts that would shape his later ideas[4]

One of the central contributions of Hick's career was his work on the problem of evil, particularly his formulation of the soul making theodicy, inspired by the ideas of St. Irenaeus, Hick proposed that God allows suffering and evil not as a punishment or test but ass a necessary part of human moral and spiritual development. According to Hick the world is a place of soul making where individuals grow through challenges, moral choices and struggles[5].

Perhaps the most defining feature of John Hick's later work was his strong advocacy for religious pluralism. In books such as *God and the universe of faith (1973) and An Interpretation of Religion (1989)* Hick challenge the idea that any single religion

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[3] Netland, H. A. (2001). *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001. p368

[4] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966. p389.

[5] Hick, J. (1989). *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

possesses absolute truth. Instead, he argued that all the major world religions are valid responses to the same ultimate reality, which he referred to as the real.[6]

Drawing from Kant's distinction between the noumenal and phenomenal, Hick suggested that different religious traditions perceive and interpret the Real through their unique cultural and historical lenses. Thus Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions each provide a partial, culturally conditioned experience of the same divine reality.[7]

Hick pluralistic hypothesis generated wide discussion and some controversy within philosophical and theological circles. Critics, particularly from conservative traditions, accused him of undermining the uniqueness of Christian revelation. Nevertheless, his work contributed significantly to interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance in a worldly marked by diversity and conflict. John Hick passed away on the February 9 2012 but his intellectual legacy continues to influence contemporary discussions in the philosophy of religion, theology and interfaith relations. His contributions to the problem of evil, religious pluralism, and the epistemology of faith remain vital to both academic inquiry and real world applications of religious thought.[8]

Hick's legacy lies in his courageous engagement with difficult and sometimes unpopular questions; can all religion be true? Why does a loving God allow suffering? What does

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[6] Hick, J. (2002). *An Autobiography*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. 328 pp.

[7] Hick, J. (1989). *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. 416 pp.

[8] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966. 389 pp.

it mean to believe in God in a pluralistic world? His willingness to revise traditional ideas in light of reason, experience and global perspectives made him both admired and controversial. Yet it is precisely this intellectual openness that defines his lasting contribution.

Hick openness to diverse religious perspectives, his rigorous philosophical method, and ethical sensitivity to human suffering mark him as one of most significant religious philosophers of the 20th century. His life's work challenged the boundaries of traditional theology and opened new pathways for understanding the divine across cultures and belief systems.[9]

2.2 INFLUENCES

Understanding John Harwood Hick's philosophical and theological contributions requires a deep exploration of the intellectual and cultural influences that shaped his worldview. Hick was a product of multiple traditions philosophical, theological and experiential which he engaged with critically and constructively. His journey from evangelical Christianity to a global religious pluralism was shaped by a wide array of thinkers, historical events, and academic disciplines. This section examines the major influence on Hick's work including figures like Immanuel Kant, Friedrich

[9] Hick, J. (1973). *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1973. 224 pp.

Schleiermacher, St. Irenaeus and Mahatma Gandhi as well as traditions such as Christianity, Eastern religions and post Enlightenment philosophy.[10]

The most decisive philosophical influence on john Hick was the German enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant's distinction between noumenal (things as they are in themselves) and the phenomenal (things as they appear to us) serve as the metaphysical foundation for Hick's theory of religious pluralism. Hick adopted and reinterpreted this distinction to argue that **the Real or ultimate reality** cannot be fully known in itself but perceived differently through the lenses of various religious traditions.[11]

In his pluralistic hypothesis, Hick claimed that each religious tradition offers a culturally and historically conditioned experience of the same divine reality. This idea mirrors Kant's claim that our Minds structure reality as we perceive it, meaning that ultimate truth is never accessed directly but only through interpretive frameworks. Hick's use of Kant allowed him to affirm the validity of multiple religions without denying that they are all responses to the same transcendent reality beyond conceptual grasps.[12]

Kant epistemology enabled Hick to move beyond religious exclusivism and offer a rational justification for religious diversity. It also provided him with tools to critique

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[10] Netland, H. A. (2001). *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001. 368 pp.

[11] Hick, J. (1989). *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

[12] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966.

fundamentalist claims that any one religion has a complete unmediated access to divine truth.[13]

Another major influence on Hick's thought was Friedrich Schleiermacher, the 19th century theologian often regarded as the father of modern liberal theology. Schleiermacher emphasized religious experience over doctrine, arguing that religion arises from a deep sense of dependence on the divine, rather than from intellectual assent to creeds. This focus on feeling experience, and subjectivity influenced Hick's view that religion is primarily a lived, experiential response to the divine not merely a set of propositions.

Like Schleiermacher, Hick valued personal experience of the transcendent as central to religious life. This perspective was particularly evident in his attempts to validate non-christian religions, not by comparing doctrines, but by examining how each tradition inspires a moral and spiritual transformation in its adherents. For Hick the true test of religion was ethical outcome, a view rooted in Schleiermacher's emphasis on inner piety and experience. [14]

John Hick was also influence by St Irenaeus of Lyon, a second century church father, Hick influential response to the problem of evil was shape by St Irenaeus. While many theologians followed Augustine in tracing evil to human sin and fall, Irenaeus offered a

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[13] Hick, J. (1973). *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

[14] Schleiermacher, F. (1996). *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Translated by Richard Crouter, Cambridge UP, 1996.

different approach. He proposed that humanity was created in a state of immaturity and is meant to develop toward spiritual maturity through a process of struggle, freedom and growth.[15]

Building on this Hick developed the soul making theodicy which views suffering not as punishment or divine failure, but as a necessary part of human development. He argued that a world without challenges or moral tension would be one in which virtues such as courage, compassion and responsibility could emerge. Influenced by Irenaeus, Hick held that God allow suffering for the purpose of moral and spiritual growth, and that earthly life is a kind of suffering ground for the soul.[16]

This idea also resonated with Hick broader concern for a morally serious theology. One that could honestly confront the reality of evil and suffering without without resonated with simplistic answers. The Irenaean tradition allowed Hick to reframe theodicy in a way that aligned with both human experience and moral development.[17] Another vital influence on John Hick was his exposure to Eastern religious traditions, especially during his time working in Birmingham, where he interacted with diverse religious communities, including Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists. These encounters prompted Hick to reconsider the idea that Christianity held a unique or superior position among world religions.

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[15] Hick, J. (2002). An autobiography, Op. Cit., p. 190.
[16] Hick, J. (1989). *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

[17] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966.

His studies of Hinduism and Buddhism in particular opened him to the possibility that the divine could be encountered in radically different conceptual frameworks. For example, while Christianity emphasizes a personal God, Buddhism emphasizes non-theistic paths to enlightenment. Rather than dismiss these differences, Hick saw them as complementary responses to the Real.

This exposure deeply enriched Hick's pluralistic hypothesis. He came to believe that each religion provides a different but authentic perspective on the same transcendent source. He began using terms like the Ultimate, the Real, or Reality-itself to refer to that which lies behind all religious representations.[18]

John Hick was also influenced by moral philosophy and a growing global awareness of social injustice, particularly during the post-World War II and postcolonial periods. Having lived through the horrors of war, Hick was concerned with the practical implications of theology. He believed that any credible religion must confront the reality of human suffering, oppression, and injustice.[19]His engagement with liberation theology and moral philosophers like John Rawls and Peter Singer reinforced his view that ethics must be central to theology. Religion, for Hick, was not merely about personal salvation, but about global justice and human dignity. This ethical vision helped shape his interfaith efforts, as he argued that religions must work together to confront global problems such as poverty, war, and inequality.

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[18] Hick, J. (1973). *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

[19] Hick, J. (2002). An autobiography, Op. Cit., p. 190.

2.3 GENERAL CONCEPT OF EVIL

The concept of evil has been central to human reflection across civilizations, religions, and philosophical traditions. Whether it emerges as a metaphysical force, a moral failure, a theological dilemma, or a psychological aberration, evil challenges our understanding of the world and the moral fabric that binds society. From ancient myths and religious texts to modern philosophical inquiry, evil has been portrayed both as a reality external to human beings and as an internal corruption of the will. [20]

The persistent presence of suffering, injustice, cruelty, and immorality compels humanity to question the origins, nature, and meaning of evil. This write-up explores the general conception of evil through multiple lenses: historical, religious, philosophical, and psychological. It examines how evil has been defined, justified, or confronted across time and traditions, with special attention to its implications for human responsibility and the problem of suffering. In a world still plagued by genocide, oppression, and moral decay, understanding evil is not just an academic task, but an urgent moral inquiry.[21]

The Nature of Evil

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[20] Hick, J. (1989). *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

[21] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1966.

Evil can be broadly divided into two categories: moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil refers to actions that result from human choices acts of cruelty, betrayal, murder, oppression, or injustice. These are evils that people are morally responsible for. Natural evil, on the other hand, refers to suffering caused by natural events such as earthquakes, disease, or famine evils not caused by human intent but which nonetheless produce pain and hardship.[22]

Another important distinction is between personal evil and structural evil. Personal evil refers to the capacity of individuals to choose and enact harm. Structural evil refers to systems or institutions that perpetuate injustice and suffering racism, colonialism, or exploitative economic systems.[23]

Philosophers have also debated whether evil is a positive force in itself or a privation of good. Is evil something that exists independently, or is it the absence of goodness, as some thinkers have suggested? These questions are fundamental in shaping different cultural and religious responses to evil.[24]

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[22] Hick, J. (1973). *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. London: Macmillan, 1973.

[23] Aristotle. (1999). Nicomachean ethics (T. Irwin, Trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, p. 47.

[24] Augustine. (1991). Confessions (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 77.

Historical Perspectives on Evil

Ancient thought approached evil through myth and metaphysics. In Greek philosophy, figures like Plato and Aristotle did not see evil as an independent entity but as a result of ignorance or lack of virtue. Plato associated evil with the soul's detachment from the Good, while Aristotle saw moral failure as a deviation from rational nature.[25]

The Hebrew tradition emphasized moral responsibility and divine justice. Evil was not an equal cosmic force but a consequence of disobedience to God's will, as seen in the Genesis account of the Fall. Evil here was deeply linked to sin and moral failure.[26]

During the medieval period, theologians such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas grappled with the question of evil within a monotheistic framework. Augustine argued that evil is a privation of good, a corruption of what was originally created good. Aquinas built on this, suggesting that evil is permitted by God to bring about greater goods.[27]

The Enlightenment challenged traditional views, with thinkers like Voltaire criticizing the optimistic theodicies of philosophers like Leibniz. Voltaire's Candide satirized the idea that "all is for the best" in this world, especially in light of human suffering.[28]

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[25] Plato. (1992). The Republic (G. M. A. Grube, Trans.; rev. C. D. C. Reeve). Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, p. 88.

[26] The Holy Bible. (n.d.). *The Hebrew Bible*, Genesis 3.

[27] Aquinas T (1947). *Summa Theologica (Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Trans.). New York: Benziger Bros., p. 201.*

[28] Voltaire. (2005). Candide (T. Cuffe, Trans.). London: Penguin Books, p. 14.

Religious Conceptions of Evil

In Christianity, evil is closely linked to the concept of Original Sin, inherited from the disobedience of Adam and Eve. The Devil (Satan) represents personal evil, a fallen angel who tempts humanity away from God. Christian theology has wrestled with reconciling God's goodness and omnipotence with the existence of evil, leading to various theodicies.[29]

Islam also recognizes evil as part of the moral struggle. Iblis (Satan) refuses to bow to Adam and is cast out, becoming the tempter of humanity. However, Islamic thought emphasizes human free will and the justice of Allah. Evil serves as a test of faith and moral integrity.[30]

In Hinduism, evil is understood through the concept of karma the law of cause and effect. Actions in past lives can result in present suffering. Evil is not necessarily personified but is the result of ignorance (avidya) and attachment. Similarly, Buddhism views suffering (dukkha) as a universal condition caused by craving and ignorance, rather than the result of a malevolent being.[31]

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[29] Arendt, H. (2006). Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil. London: Penguin Books, p. 3.

[30] Augustine. (1991). Confessions, Op. Cit., p. 82.

[31] The Holy Qur'an. (2005). (M. A. S. Abdel Haleem, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 17.

These religious perspectives offer both explanations and responses to evil, ranging from personal repentance and moral discipline to spiritual enlightenment and cosmic justice.[32]

Philosophical Theories of Evil

Several key philosophical responses to evil have shaped modern understanding:

Augustine's privation theory: Evil is not a substance but the absence of good. Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the lack of proper order. Leibniz's theodicy: *In Theodicy (1710)*, Leibniz argued that God created the best possible world, even if it includes evil, because greater goods (such as free will) result from it.[33]

Immanuel Kant introduced the idea of radical evil, the tendency within human nature to subordinate moral law to self-interest. Kant emphasized autonomy and the moral struggle within the individual.

Hannah Arendt, reflecting on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, spoke of the banality of evil how ordinary individuals, without deep hatred or malice, could participate in horrific atrocities through blind obedience.[34]

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[32] Kant, I. (1998). *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge UP, 1998.

[33] Leibniz, G. W. (1985). *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. Translated by E.M. Huggard, Open Court, 1985.

[34] Rahula, W. (1974). What the Buddha taught. New York: Grove Press, p. 11.

Philosophers continue to wrestle with whether evil is metaphysical, psychological, or social. Some view it as an illusion, others as a deeply embedded aspect of human nature.[35]

The Problem of Evil in Theodicy

The problem of evil is one of the most challenging issues in philosophy of religion. It asks: if God is all-good and all-powerful, why does evil exist?[36]

The logical problem of evil argues that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of such a God. The evidential problem concedes that the existence of God is not logically impossible, but claims that the quantity and intensity of evil in the world make God's existence unlikely.[37]

Several theodicies have attempted to respond:

Free will defense: Evil is the result of human free will. Without free will, genuine love and moral goodness would not be possible.[38]

Soul-making theodicy: John Hick expanded on Irenaeus' idea that suffering serves as a context for moral and spiritual growth.[39]

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[35] Arendt, H. (2006). Eichmann in Jerusalem: A report on the banality of evil, Op. Cit., p. 56.

[36] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions*. Translated by Henry Chadwick, Oxford UP, 1991.

[37]Cobb, J. B., & Griffin, D. R. (1976).. *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Westminster Press, 1976.

[38] Hick, J. (2007). *Evil and the God of Love*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Kant, I. (1998). *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge UP, 1998.

[39] Leibniz, G. W. (1985). *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil*. Translated by E.M. Huggard, Open Court, 1985.

Process theology: Suggests that God is not omnipotent in the classical sense but is evolving with the world. God suffers with creation and seeks to persuade rather than coerce.[40]

Each theodicy has strengths and weaknesses, and none provide a complete solution. Still, they offer frameworks for understanding suffering within a theistic worldview.[41]

Evil in Human Behavior and Psychology:

Modern psychology has shed light on the human capacity for evil. Studies such as Stanley Milgram's obedience experiments and Philip Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment revealed how ordinary individuals could commit cruel acts under authoritative pressure or situational influence.[42]

Evil may arise not from monstrous intent but from conformity, obedience, and dehumanization. The concept of the "banality of evil," coined by Hannah Arendt, captures this phenomenon. [43]

Others see evil as a product of mental illness or moral blindness. Psychopathy, narcissism, and extreme ideological indoctrination are often associated with evil behavior. However, this raises questions about responsibility, can the mentally ill be evil in the same way the morally aware can?

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[40] Milgram, S. (2009). *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. Harper Perennial, 2009.

[41] Plantinga, A. (1974). *God, Freedom, and Evil*. Eerdmans, 1974.

[42] Rahula, W. (1974). *What the Buddha Taught*. Grove Press, 1974.

[43] Rowe, W. L. (1979). "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1979, pp. 335–341.

Evil in the Modern World:

The 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed forms of evil on an unprecedented scale. Genocides, terrorism, nuclear warfare, and systemic oppression demonstrate that evil is not confined to individual acts but can be institutionalized.[44]

The Holocaust, Rwandan genocide, and atrocities in places like Syria or Myanmar show how political, ethnic, or religious ideologies can legitimize mass violence. Similarly, structural evils such as colonialism, slavery, and economic exploitation continue to cause suffering long after their formal end.[45]

In the digital age, new forms of evil arise: cyberbullying, data manipulation, surveillance capitalism, and digital radicalization. The anonymity of the internet allows individuals to inflict harm without direct accountability.[46]

2.4 CRITIQUE TO THE GENERAL CONCEPT OF EVIL

Despite the enduring significance of the concept of evil, many philosophers and scholars have challenged the coherence, usefulness, and ethical implications of the term itself. Critics argue that the general conception of evil often lacks precision, can be ideologically misused, and may obscure more accurate moral analysis.[47]

First, the vagueness of the term "evil" presents an epistemological challenge. Unlike specific moral wrongs such as theft or murder, "evil" is often used in broad, ambiguous

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[44] Arendt, H. (2006). *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin Books, 2006.
[45] Augustine. (1991). Confessions, Op. Cit., p. 165.
[46] Browning, C. R. (1998). *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. Harper Perennial, 1998.
[47] Cobb, J. B., & Griffin, D. R. (1976). *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Westminster Press, 1976.

terms. What one culture or religion deems evil, another may see as a form of divine justice or social necessity. This cultural relativism complicates any attempt to define evil in a universal or objective way. For example, acts labeled as evil during wartime may later be celebrated as heroic, depending on which side of history one stands. The term "evil" often carries moral and emotional weight but lacks the analytical clarity needed in ethical discussion.[48]

Second, the idea of evil can be philosophically reductive. By labeling someone or something as evil, we risk shutting down deeper investigation into motives, causes, and social contexts. The term can dehumanize and isolate individuals, portraying them as beyond redemption or understanding. Hannah Arendt's critique of the concept of "radical evil" emphasized this point. In her analysis of Adolf Eichmann, a Nazi officer, she introduced the idea of the "banality of evil." Arendt argued that Eichmann did not act out of monstrous intent but rather out of bureaucratic obedience and a refusal to think critically. In this view, evil becomes less about intentional malice and more about moral blindness and systemic failure.[49]

Third, the theological use of evil often generates contradictions within theistic frameworks. If God is all-good and all-powerful, why allow evil at all? Traditional responses such as the free will defense, soul-making theodicy, or divine punishment have

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[48] Fanon, F. (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Translated by Richard Philcox, Grove Press, 2004.

[49] Kant, I. (1998). *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. Translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni, Cambridge UP, 1998.

been criticized for failing to address the magnitude and apparent randomness of suffering in the world. Critics like J.L.[50]

Mackie and William Rowe argue that belief in a good, omnipotent deity is incompatible with the extent of evil and suffering. The inability of theodicies to provide fully satisfactory answers leads some to reject traditional theism or significantly revise concepts of divine power and goodness.[51]

Fourth, modern thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche have questioned whether the very concept of evil is a social construction rooted in religious and institutional power. Nietzsche argued that Christian morality labeled power, ambition, and self-assertion as "evil" to elevate humility, weakness, and obedience. This inversion of values, according to Nietzsche, suppressed human excellence and vitality. In this light, evil becomes not a metaphysical reality but a moral judgment imposed by dominant ideologies, designed to control human behavior and reinforce societal hierarchies.[52]

Fifth, psychological and sociological research challenges the idea of evil as an inherent or fixed trait. Studies by Stanley Milgram and Philip Zimbardo reveal how ordinary individuals can commit horrific acts under specific situational conditions. In Milgram's experiment, participants administered what they believed were painful electric shocks to others simply because an authority figure instructed them to. Zimbardo's Stanford Prison Experiment similarly showed how roles and environment could quickly lead people to

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[50] Mackie, J.L. "Evil and Omnipotence." *Mind*, vol. 64, no. 254, 1955, pp. 200–212.

[51] Nietzsche, F. (1989). *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J.

[52] Hollingdale, Vintage Books, 1989.

abuse power. These findings suggest that evil behavior is often situational rather than rooted in a metaphysical or moral flaw. To label such actions as “evil” may oversimplify the complexity of human psychology and obscure the structural factors involved.

Moreover, in legal and political contexts, the term evil is often employed in manipulative or propagandistic ways. Leaders may label adversaries as “evil” to justify war, surveillance, or human rights violations. For instance, the phrase “axis of evil” was used to create moral panic and justify military intervention. In such cases, the invocation of evil functions more to mobilize emotional support and demonize the other than to engage in genuine moral analysis. This use of the term can suppress dissent, reduce empathy, and promote simplistic black-and-white thinking.[53]

In response to these critiques, many scholars advocate for alternative moral frameworks. Rather than using “evil” as a catch-all term, they propose more specific and analyzable categories such as injustice, oppression, harm, or violence. These terms allow for a more detailed understanding of context, motivation, and consequence. For example, rather than calling a government “evil,” one could analyze its actions in terms of human rights violations, corruption, or structural violence. This approach facilitates moral discourse grounded in reason, empathy, and evidence.

Critics also emphasize the need for rehabilitative justice over retributive justice. When evil is viewed as a fixed essence within a person, it may discourage efforts to reform or

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[53] Rowe, W. L. (1979). "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism." *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 4, 1979, pp. 335–341.

rehabilitate. By contrast, understanding wrongdoing as a product of social, psychological, and moral development opens space for education, dialogue, and transformation.[54]

Finally, from a postmodern and postcolonial perspective, the term evil may be critiqued for reflecting Western, Christian, or colonial worldviews. In non-western cultures, conceptions of harm and morality may differ significantly, and the imposition of Western moral categories can distort or erase indigenous understandings. Recognizing the pluralism of moral perspectives challenges the universalizing tendency of the term evil and encourages intercultural dialogue.[55]

The general concept of evil, while powerful and deeply embedded in human culture, is not without problems. Its ambiguity, moral weight, and susceptibility to misuse make it a difficult term to employ in rigorous ethical or philosophical debate. Through historical, philosophical, theological, and psychological critiques, it becomes clear that the concept of evil is not always the most useful or accurate tool for understanding human wrongdoing. More precise and context sensitive frameworks focusing on harm, justice, responsibility, and structure may offer better paths for moral reflection and social change. A critical approach to evil does not deny the reality of suffering or wrongdoing, but seeks to understand and confront it in a more just and humane manner.[56]

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[54] Braithwaite, J. (2002).. *Restorative Justice and Responsive Regulation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

[55] Said, E. W. (1994). Culture and imperialism. New York: Vintage Books, p. 9.

[56] Spivak, G. C. (1988).. *Can the Subaltern Speak?* In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271–313.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 THE SOUL-MAKING THEODICY

Hick had been influenced by several theologians, especially Irenaeus and Schleiermacher, to establish the soul-making theodicy, which adopted the concepts of human fallenness and human development.[1] Before moving into the main features of his theodicy, it is meaningful to briefly examine how they argued about the compatibility between the God of omnipotence and the problem of evil.

A bishop of the ancient church Irenaeus (A.D. 130–202) sees man as an imperfect and immature creature in contrast to the Augustinian tradition which regards man as a finitely perfect creature, and he also views that our world was created as the fallen state to contain both good and evil in contrast to the Augustinian view that the world was created perfectly but the fallen world was originated by the misuse of human free will.[2] He uniquely interprets the human creation of Genesis 1:26 to distinguish between the image of God, "man's nature as a rational, personal and moral animal," and the likeness of God, "the fulfillment of the potentialities of our human nature, the completed humanization of man in a society of mutual love." Based on these two stages of God's creation of man, he develops a theodicy that demands the evil state of the world in which man, as the image of God, but as spiritually and morally immature creatures, has the long evolutionary

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[1] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (pp. 315–567). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing.

[2] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

ongoing process of maturing and perfecting growth and development into the likeness of God as "the second stage of God's creative work".[3]

Protestant theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) views that the consciousness of God is the barometer of the perfection of the world however, it hasn't been developed in an immature finite human creature in which sin was virtually inevitable.[4] He argues that the evil and sin, ordained by God only prior to redemption, are instrumental to ultimately serve God's good purpose, which is the similar concept of Augustine's aesthetic view of evil as a means for the complex perfection of the universe.[5] He, with evolutionary thinking, also proposes the notion of two-stage human creation, the first and the second Adam, which is man's ongoing perfection process; "The first Adam possessed the potentiality for the full and perfect God consciousness that has, however, become actual only in the second Adam, Christ, who is now drawing all men into a community of God-Consciousness with himself." He rejects the doctrine of double predestination of the saved and the damned, rather claims universal salvation that all will be saved one day through Christ's powerful redemption.[6]

Along with the thoughts of Irenaeus and Schleiermacher, Hick published *Evil and the God of Love* in 1966 to develop the Irenaean tradition which represents in the past "a

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[3] Schleiermacher, F. (1999). *The Christian faith* (H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Edinburgh: T&T Clark. (Original work published 1830)

[4] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. London: Macmillan.

[5] Augustine. (1998). *City of God* (H. Bettenson, Trans.; Rev. ed.). London: Penguin Classics.

[6] McCloskey, H. J. (1960). God and evil. *The Philosophical Quarterly, 10*(39), 97–114. https://doi.org/10.2307/2216675

minority report." He framed his theodicy to deal with the problem of evil in light of modern scientific theory, Darwin's evolution theory, and bravely protested against the Augustinian theodicy which had been undefeatable for a long time his theodicy became an alternative to the Augustinian tradition.[7]

Creation, the Fall and the Goal of God

Hick's view on the creation of man makes his theodicy very different from the Augustinian tradition. The Irenaean type of theodicy "hinges upon the creation of humankind through the evolutionary process as an immature creature living in a challenging and therefore person-making world," while the Augustinian type takes the doctrine of the fall very seriously to explain the origin of evil, which the Irenaean type rejects.[8] According to Hick's interpretation on the creation, God created the world with the mixture of good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development toward his perfection, and man was created as an imperfect and immature creature to demand the moral growth through suffering in our fallen world.[9] Using Irenaeus' conception of two-stage creation, he argues that the image of God as the potential for knowledge of and a relationship with God will be fulfilled in the likeness of God man as

[7] Hackstaff, L. H. (1957). Augustine and the problem of evil. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 18*(3), 346–363. https://doi.org/10.2307/2707754

[8] Geivett, R. D. (1995). *Evil and the evidence for God: The challenge of John Hick's theodicy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[9] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

the image of God is still in the process of creation, being gradually developed into the likeness of God as the spiritual maturity and perfection.[10]

As Irenaeus regards the fall of Adam as a happening in his childhood, "an understandable lapse due to weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt," Hick argues that the fall as a part of creation is necessarily a basic condition for the evolutionary process of man's growth man already existed in the state of the fallenness.[11] He interprets that both the world created as a fallen environment and man created as a fallen being are virtually inevitable for the soul-making process.[12] He criticizes the Augustinian type's view on a world created as a perfect environment in the immediate presence of God where a free creature is not able to reject the sovereignty of the omnipotence and sin against His will, which is impossible to explain both the perfect environment and human fall.[13] He also argues that the unfallen state of creature in a natural world, where the divine reality is not clearly manifested but can be revealed only by faith, isn't coherent with the fall of the finitely perfect creature away from the fully glorious and blessed God's Kingdom, therefore only the self-centered sinful creature, rather than God-centered, can bring about the fall in a human world.[14]

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[10] Hick, J. (1977). *The myth of God incarnate* (Ed.). London: SCM Press.
[11] Hick, J. (1985). *Problems of religious pluralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
[12] Hick, J. (2004). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
[13] Pelagius. (1995). *Commentary on St. Paul's epistle to the Romans* (T. de Bruyn, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[14] Chesterton, G. K. (1908). *Orthodoxy*. London: John Lane.

The Goal of God for Human Beings

The goal of God for human beings is to lead them to the genuinely loving relationship with God that they would be developed from the image of God to the likeness of God in the challenging world with evils and sufferings, which is the movement or transition from the level of animal life to the level of eternal life.[15] In the Irenaean type it is very obvious that God created man to develop mature fellowship with Him, while in the Augustinian tradition it is hard to see the dynamic relationship between God and human.[16] In order that human grows into a genuinely loving relationship with God, human freedom demands both an "epistemic distance" from God and a pilgrimage of soul-making through moral and natural sufferings and evils.[17]

Genuine Human Freedom & Epistemic Distance

Human can reach the goal of God by his own autonomous freedom in a natural world where God doesn't interrupt his autonomy. Hick argues that true personal development cannot be forced, but can be done by freedom which comes about only in the condition that persons are at an epistemic distance from God as the room for a degree of human autonomy. In the veiled presence of God, man should be at a distance from God to come to Him with unforced faith and love. It can provide an apparently autonomous environment to him, as if there were no God. In other words, in order that humans have

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[15] Niebuhr, R. (1941). *The nature and destiny of man: A Christian interpretation* (Vol. 1). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
[16] Hick, J. (1963). Philosophy of religion. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
[17] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

free will, God must be at an intellectual distance from them, so that they can freely choose to believe in Him out of their own free will.[18]

However, Hick defends that a genuine free will also has the possibility of rejection, even though it would be possible for God to let them always freely choose something good.[19] As God gave human a genuine freedom to freely choose good or evil, He doesn't and can't interfere with the human's decision making toward either God's will or Satan's will therefore the uncontrollable gift of freedom, including moral freedom and responsibility, is the very essential element of the soul-making process.[20] Human should get freedom with the actual possibility of even doing evil to accomplish his moral perfection.[21] He argues that a world without pain or suffering, such as an environment subject to divine intervention, prevents human from making moral choice and moral development as well as from coming to any harm and by making him unable to help or harm one another.[22] Turning from the tyrannical and juridical pictures of an omni-perfect God who intervenes in anything He wants, his theodicy presents God as a very personal being who

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[18] Schleiermacher, F. (1999). *The Christian faith* (H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Edinburgh: T&T Clark. (Original work published 1830)

[19] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. London: Macmillan.

[20] Augustine. (1998). *City of God* (H. Bettenson, Trans.; Rev. ed.). London: Penguin Classics.

[21] McCloskey, H. J. (1960). God and evil. *The Philosophical Quarterly, 10*(39), 97–114. https://doi.org/10.2307/2216675

[22] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

values the true interaction with humans and respects human choice in the religiously ambiguous world which is full of pain and suffering.[23]

Evil and Suffering

Hick claims that God created a world where evil was inevitably present, so he is responsible for the existence of evil. However, the Augustinian tradition argues that the existence of evil came from the misuse of God-given freedom of human beings. The paradoxical theme of the *O felix culpa* works in both types, which means God uses evil for the greater good and divine purpose.[24] Evil as an original element of creation is not good but positive and educative for the divine purpose because it is essential to challenge and help humans go through the development process in the world which is not a pain-free paradise but full of challenges and dangers with real possibilities of pain and suffering. In order that a morally imperfect human gradually becomes a perfected finite person, he needs challenging and dangerous circumstances with pain and suffering human morality is developed through the experience of evil. This present world as the best place for human moral development is not "a dream-like world" but religiously ambiguous and makes possible a faith-response to God, demanding human's moral judgments and decision within the problem of pain and suffering.[25]

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[23] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (pp. 315–567). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing.
[24] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. London: Macmillan.
[25] McCloskey, H. J. (1960). God and evil. *The Philosophical Quarterly, 10*(39), 97–114. https://doi.org/10.2307/2216675

He clearly summarizes the important role of natural evil in the soul-making without pain or suffering "there can be no moral choices and hence no possibility of moral growth and development".[26] Suffering, according to Hick, is explicitly necessary for the real maturity of a free creature.[27] Even though a moderate degree of suffering can be good for the development process, it is really hard to imagine the purpose of the excessive amount of suffering to damage the individual which seems to be undeserved by being distributed randomly and meaninglessly. He realizes the unjust distribution as well as the theoretic dilemma of suffering it is constructive for the soul-making and destructive in reality at the same time.[28]

Rejecting the explanation of the traditional theodicy which regards human misery as a retribution for his own sins or an achievement of demonic Hick, J. (2004). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.wickedness, he attempts to justify the excessive and undeserved suffering as the positive value of mystery "The mystery of dysteleological suffering is a real mystery, impenetrable to the rationalizing human mind".[29]

In terms of animal suffering, while the Augustinian tradition sees that it is caused by either the fall of man or the fall of the angels which affects the natural order, Hick views its origin from the perspective of the soul-making process of humans. As animal life is

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[26] Hackstaff, L. H. (1957). Augustine and the problem of evil. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 18*(3), 346–363. https://doi.org/10.2307/2707754
[27] Geivett, R. D. (1995). *Evil and the evidence for God: The challenge of John Hick's theodicy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
[28] Hick, J. (2004). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.
[29] Pelagius. (1995). *Commentary on St. Paul's epistle to the Romans* (T. de Bruyn, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

linked with human life, animals can also experience pain. He argues that the higher animals can experience both physical pain and non-physical suffering such as fear and loneliness, that mammals with the sensory and nervous systems can feel pain, and that the nervous system of the lower animals can be developed to feel pain. Animals, except the lower vertebrates and higher invertebrates, react to the dangers of their environment as well as experience pain by their nervous system as pain sensation. He hopes that the problem of animal pain, as subordinated to human sin and suffering, would be completely solved in the eschatological new world, as well as he claims that there is "the possibly multi-dimensional complexity of the divine purpose" for animal life, which is not just environment for human life.[30]

Eschatological Dimension

The Irenaean type of theodicy anticipates the future to fulfill the divine purpose in which the existence of evil will be justified, while the Augustinian tradition looks back to the past, the fall of man, to reveal the origin of evil.[31] Hick's eschatology is the highlight of his theodicy he boldly asserts with the belief in the reality of a limitlessly loving and powerful deity must incorporate some kind of eschatology according to which God holds in being the creatures whom he has made for fellowship with himself, beyond bodily death, and brings them into the eternal fellowship which he has intended for them.[32] He also has an eschatological approach to the justification of human suffering, which is "the

[30] Hume, D. (1998). *Dialogues concerning natural religion* (J. C. A. Gaskin, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1779)
[31] Hick, J. (1977). *The myth of God incarnate* (Ed.). London: SCM Press.
[32] Hick, J. (1985). *Problems of religious pluralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

eventual all-justifying fulfillment of the human potential in a perfected life" rather than "the idea of compensation in the form of future happiness enjoyed to balance past misery endured," arguing that "the only morally acceptable justification of the agonies and heartaches of human life" should be a future "in which the individuals who have suffered themselves participate in the justifying good and are themselves able to see their own past sufferings as having been worthwhile".[33]

As the soul-making process isn't fulfilled in this world, it should continue in afterlife, "another sphere of existence after bodily death," for the divine purpose.[34] Therefore his theodicy without the eschatological justification can't be sustainable. Being sarcastic with the belief of Augustinian and Calvinist theology in the doctrine of predestination that God created some for salvation and others for damnation, Hick denies the doctrine of eternal hell and argues that "God will never cease to desire and actively to work for the salvation of each created person" as well as "never abandon any as irredeemably evil".[35] He embodies and develops the doctrine of universal salvation that all men through the soul-making process will be saved eventually to enjoy the infinite goodness of the Creator, so that hell isn't a possible final destiny for humankind if hell exists, God's purpose becomes evil.

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[33] Augustine. (1998). *City of God* (H. Bettenson, Trans.; Rev. ed.). London: Penguin Classics.

[34] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (pp. 315–567). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing.

[35] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Admitting the temporary notion of hell as the state of purgatorial experiences, he proposes the concept of "a continued life in an intermediate state, such as the notion of purgatory or progressive sanctification after death," to argue with the New Testament teaching of an eternal punishment for sinners which is the objection to the universal salvation.[36] The divine purpose of human perfection is accomplished by "a continued development within the intermediate state The understanding of the temporal hell is the same stand with the purgatorial view of Hayes: purgatory means that there is some unresolved guilt in the person who has died. Hence there is suffering that continues to radiate because of this guilt. Thus the intermediate state as the last redemptive stage plays a very important role for the human perfection of all men. Hick's universalism guarantees "an unmistakable triumph for divine love and mercy" including "a necessary reference to the welfare of man".[37]

3.2 THE ROLE OF FREE WILL

The concept of free will plays a central role in the philosophical and theological discussion of the problem of evil, and it is a key element in John Hick's soul-making theodicy. In philosophy, free will refers to the capacity of a rational agent to choose between alternative courses of action without being wholly determined by prior causes or external compulsion. In theology, it is often seen as a divine gift, essential for moral responsibility, authentic love, and the cultivation of virtue. Without the capacity to

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[36] Hackstaff, L. H. (1957). Augustine and the problem of evil. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 18*(3), 346–363.

[37] Hick, J. (2004). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.

choose freely, human beings would be little more than programmed machines, acting out predetermined scripts without any real moral significance to their actions. In Hick's perspective, the granting of free will to human beings is not simply a defensive explanation for why evil exists but rather the very means through which humanity achieves moral and spiritual maturity.[38]

Defining Free Will

Philosophically, free will is often defined in terms of alternative possibilities the genuine ability to choose between different options at a given moment. Libertarian theories of free will hold that such choices must not be determined by prior causes, while compatibilist theories maintain that freedom can coexist with determinism as long as choices stem from an agent's own reasoning and desires.[39]

Theologically, free will acquires a relational dimension. God's intention, Hick suggests, was to create beings capable of entering into a loving relationship with the divine, which requires that love be voluntary rather than coerced. Richard Swinburne makes this point clearly when he argues that "if God is to give us the great good of freely formed character, he must give us the responsibility for our actions".[40]

Hick draws from the Irenaean tradition, which stands in contrast to the Augustinian view of human origins. Augustine believed that humanity was created in a state of moral

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[38] Pelagius. (1995). *Commentary on St. Paul's epistle to the Romans* (T. de Bruyn, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[39] Chesterton, G. K. (1908). *Orthodoxy*. London: John Lane.

[40] Niebuhr, R. (1941). *The nature and destiny of man: A Christian interpretation* (Vol. 1). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

perfection and fell into sin through the misuse of freedom. In his account, evil is not a created thing but a corruption or privation of good.[41] Irenaeus, on the other hand, proposed that human beings were created immature and morally incomplete, intended to grow into the likeness of God through experience and moral effort.[42] Hick adopts and develops this idea, arguing that virtues such as courage, compassion, honesty, and perseverance cannot be implanted in human beings fully formed. They must be developed through free choices made in response to real challenges, difficulties, and even temptations.[43] This requires an environment in which both good and evil are possible, and in which individuals can genuinely decide how they will act.

Free will also provides a way of addressing the logical problem of evil. If God grants creatures the freedom to choose, then the possibility of their choosing wrongly is inherent in that freedom.[44] A world in which people could only choose what is good would not allow for true moral responsibility. For moral agency to be meaningful, the option of doing wrong must be real. In this sense, free will serves both as a defense of God's goodness in the face of evil and as an explanation of how virtues develop. Hick insists that the existence of evil, far from being evidence against God's goodness, can be

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[41] Augustine. (1998). *City of God* (H. Bettenson, Trans.; Rev. ed.). London: Penguin Classics.
[42] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (pp. 315–567). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing.

[43] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. London: Macmillan.
[44] Hume, D. (1998). *Dialogues concerning natural religion* (J. C. A. Gaskin, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1779)

understood as a necessary condition for human beings to mature spiritually and morally.[45]

This understanding extends to both moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil consists of wrongful acts committed by human beings, such as murder, theft, and deceit, which are the result of freely chosen actions. Natural evil, which includes phenomena such as earthquakes, disease, and floods, may not have human causes, but Hick argues that such events are tied to the purpose of free will.[46] A stable and law-governed world, which is necessary for moral decision-making, will inevitably contain processes that sometimes lead to suffering. These natural challenges create opportunities for the exercise of virtues like compassion, generosity, and perseverance.

Hick also introduces the concept of epistemic distance to explain why God's existence is not overwhelmingly obvious.[47] If God's presence were too clear, human beings might act out of fear, self-interest, or compulsion rather than from genuine love and moral commitment. By allowing a degree of divine hiddenness, God preserves the possibility for authentic, freely chosen relationships with Him. This hiddenness ensures that faith remains a matter of choice rather than necessity.

The formation of virtue, in Hick's account, depends entirely on the presence of free will. Courage emerges only in the face of danger compassion develops only where there is

[45] McCloskey, H. J. (1960). God and evil. *The Philosophical Quarterly, 10*(39), 97–114. https://doi.org/10.2307/2216675

[46] Geivett, R. D. (1995). *Evil and the evidence for God: The challenge of John Hick's theodicy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[47] Hick, J. (2004). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.

suffering forgiveness arises only where wrong has been done. Such virtues cannot be created ready-made by divine power they must be the result of an individual's free and often difficult moral journey. Without free will, there would be no genuine moral growth, no character development, and no meaningful relationship between God and human beings.[48]

However, Hick's approach is not without its critics. Some argue that God could have created beings who are both free and morally perfect, as is believed to be the case in heaven.[49] Hick replies that such moral perfection is the result of a process of growth rather than something that can be bestowed at the outset. To create beings already perfected would undermine the purpose of giving them freedom in the first place. Another objection is that the scale and distribution of suffering in the world seem excessive and unfair, with some individuals enduring extreme suffering that appears to have no moral or developmental value. Hick concedes that this is a serious challenge but suggests that its full meaning may only become apparent in an afterlife where moral and spiritual growth continues beyond death.

Free Will and the Problem of Evil

[48] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. London: Macmillan.
[49] Schleiermacher, F. (1999). *The Christian faith* (H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Edinburgh: T&T Clark. (Original work published 1830)

The problem of evil is often stated as a logical tension between the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient and wholly good God and the reality of evil in the world. This free will defense addresses this by asserting that evil is a necessary consequence of creating free beings. If creations have genuine moral freedom, they must have the ability to choose wrongly as well as rightly.[50]

In Hick's view the role of free will here is twofold:

1. **Defensive Function**: it explains how the existence of evil does not logically contradict the existence of a good God.[51]

2. **Constructive Function**: it shows that freedom is essential for developing virtues such as courage, compassion, perseverance, which cannot exist without the possibility of their opposites.[52]

Historical Background: Augustine vs. Irenaeus, and How Hick Reinterprets the Debate

The question of why an all-powerful and all-loving God allows evil and suffering has occupied Christian thought since its earliest centuries.[53] Within this ongoing debate, two foundational approaches stand out the Augustinian theodicy, which explains evil through the notion of the Fall and human free will, and the Irenaean theodicy, which interprets

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[50] Hume, D. (1998). *Dialogues concerning natural religion* (J. C. A. Gaskin, Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1779)
[51] Hick, J. (1977). *The myth of God incarnate* (Ed.). London: SCM Press
[52] Hick, J. (1985). *Problems of religious pluralism*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
[53] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

evil as part of a divinely intended process of moral and spiritual growth.[54] These two models, developed by St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE) and St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202 CE), represent distinct theological paradigms that have shaped centuries of Christian reflection.

In the twentieth century, the philosopher of religion John Hick revisited these classical responses, reinterpreting them in light of modern philosophical concerns and religious pluralism. While Hick's work draws heavily on Irenaeus, his version of the soul-making theodicy departs significantly from both Irenaean and Augustinian thought, reflecting an adaptation for contemporary theological and philosophical discourse.[55]

Background to Augustine's Account

The problem of evil was a lifelong preoccupation of Augustine (354–430), and the main lines of thought which he established have been followed by a majority of subsequent Christian thinkers. He wrote with an unbroken zeal about this problem and his whole intellectual resources were turned to practically everything about evil regarding its nature, the privation theory about its origin, the human free will; and concerning its place in the world, the principle of plenitude and so on.

Clear testimonies to this preoccupation are the many and great works he produced all of which in one way or another dwelt on evil. According to John Hick: "From his earliest to his latest writings Augustine was continually turning to the problem of evil. His

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[54] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[55] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of love*. London: Macmillan.

characteristic teaching on the subject appears not only in the great works of his maturity, *The City of God, The Confessions,* and *The Enchiridion*, but also in a succession of earlier books going back to his controversies with the Manicheans".[56]

In its practical aspect, the problem was for him a stumbling block of immense proportions, effectively postponing his conversion to Christianity for some time. However, Augustine's intellectual background was subjected to certain religious and philosophical influences predominant in his time, especially the ascendency of Scripture and Neo-Platonism. In this connection L. H. Hackstaff remarked that: "Indeed, it is not too great an exaggeration to say that Neo-Platonism provided Augustine and the Christian Platonists who followed him with the theoretical substructure on which their theology was built".[57] In the same way A. G. Turnbull said: "To understand St. Augustine, one must be familiar with the language and ideas of Plotinus from whom he borrowed not only scattered thoughts, but the best part of his doctrine on the soul, on providence, on the transcendence of God, on evil as the negation of good and on freedom; and his theory of time and eternity".[58]

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[56] Hackstaff, L. H. (1957). Augustine and the problem of evil. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 18*(3), 346–363. https://doi.org/10.2307/2707754

[57] Hackstaff, L. H. (1957). Augustine and the problem of evil. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 18*(3), 346–363. https://doi.org/10.2307/2707754

[58] Turnbull, A. G. (1922). *Augustine and Plotinus: The influence of Neo-Platonism on the early Christian thought*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

However, as E. Gilson commented: “That Plato has influenced Augustine, through Plotinus, is beyond discussion, but his doctrine cannot be reduced to those of either Plato or Plotinus”.[59]

Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil is so multifaceted that the theme is found often overlapping in his writings. However, in all his works, his treatise *De libero arbitrio voluntatis* (*On Free Choice of the Will*) appeals much more, especially on the problem of evil than his doctrinal treatises of later years.[60] As L. H. Hackstaff said: “it may very well be argued that neither of these, nor any other of his works, better illustrates Augustine the philosopher, the Christian Platonist, the original thinker, the seeker after wisdom, than *De libero arbitrio voluntatis*”.[61] Furthermore, R. Douglas Geivett contended that the treatise on free will represented Augustine's mature analysis and earned for him the reputation that he enjoyed within the Church.[62]

The treatise *On the Free Choice of the Will* was composed by Augustine in the form of a dialogue between him and a friend named Evodius. It began appropriately with a request from Evodius: “Tell me, please, whether God is not the cause of evil.” To this Augustine replied: “But if you know or believe that God is good (and it is not right to believe otherwise), God does not do evil”.[63] This initial response is ingeniously proleptic of

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[59] Gilson, E. (1960). *The Christian philosophy of Saint Augustine*. New York: Random House.

[60] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

[61] Hackstaff, L. H. (1957). Augustine and the problem of evil. *Journal of the History of Ideas, 18*(3), 346–363. https://doi.org/10.2307/2707754

[62] Geivett, R. D. (1995). *Evil and the evidence for God: The challenge of John Hick’s theodicy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[63] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

Augustine's overall strategy for treating the problem of evil. From the beginning it is thus clear that a prior conviction and commitment to the goodness of God precludes Augustine's treatment of the problem of evil. This plays a crucial role in his theodicy. It cannot be overemphasized. Hence R. Douglas Geivett said: "Augustine's theodicy can be understood only to the extent that one fully appreciates the importance he places on the possibility of demonstrating that a good God exists".[64] This has not always been recognized by his readers. However, this point has been subjected to conflicting interpretations as R. Douglas rightly acknowledged. For the purpose of this study it is thus necessary to understand this theistic proof.

St. Ireneaus Background

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130–202 AD) is one of the earliest Christian theologians to present a systematic defense of the goodness of God in the face of evil. In contrast to Augustine, who tended to interpret evil in terms of the Fall and humanity's subsequent depravity, Irenaeus proposed a "soul-making" perspective in which evil and suffering are part of the divine plan for human maturation.

Irenaeus' View of Free Will

For Irenaeus, God created humans in His image (Genesis 1:26), but not yet in His likeness. The image refers to the basic capacities of rationality, morality, and self-awareness, while likeness refers to the perfected state of holiness and virtue. To move

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[64] Geivett, R. D. (1995). *Evil and the evidence for God: The challenge of John Hick's theodicy*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

from image to likeness requires moral and spiritual development, which necessarily involves the exercise of free will.

Irenaeus argued that if God had created humanity already in a perfected state, such perfection would have been unearned and therefore of little value. True moral character must be formed through personal choice and experience. Free will is, therefore, essential not a regrettable concession, but a deliberate part of God's design for humanity's growth.

In his writings, Irenaeus warns against the notion of coercive goodness. If humans were programmed always to choose rightly, their moral actions would be no more significant than the automatic movements of nature. The value of love, faith, and obedience lies precisely in the fact that they can be withheld. Thus, free will is both a gift and a responsibility: it grants humans the dignity of moral authorship, but also opens the door to sin.

Free Will and the Necessity of Moral Evil

If humans are to be genuinely free, they must have the capacity to choose wrongly. This capacity is the root of moral evil actions such as lying, theft, murder, and cruelty. Hick insists that the possibility of such evil is a necessary condition for moral responsibility. If God had created a world in which humans could choose only good actions, such "freedom" would be illusory.

This necessity is sometimes misunderstood as implying that God directly wills evil. Both Irenaeus and Hick reject this idea. Instead, God wills the conditions under which evil is possible, because those same conditions are essential for the formation of moral

character. The risk of moral evil is outweighed by the greater good of human maturity and the eventual attainment of divine likeness.

Critiques of the Free Will Approach

While the free will defense offers a compelling explanation for moral evil, critics point out that it does not easily explain natural evil suffering caused by earthquakes, disease, and natural disasters. Such events seem unrelated to human free choice. Hick addresses this by arguing that natural evils are necessary to create an environment in which meaningful moral decisions can occur. For example, the possibility of injury or death provides a context for courage, self-sacrifice, and compassion.

Another critique concerns the extent of suffering in the world. Some philosophers argue that even if free will necessitates the possibility of evil, the sheer magnitude of suffering seems excessive. Could not God have created a world with less pain while still allowing free will? Hick's answer is that the depth of moral growth required for divine likeness may necessitate a full range of challenges, including those that seem extreme to us.

Lastly, some question whether free will truly justifies the existence of all forms of evil, particularly when it comes to atrocities committed on a massive scale. Hick responds that divine justice will ultimately restore and redeem all suffering, making the trials of this life meaningful in the larger scope of eternity.

For both Irenaeus and Hick, free will is not an unfortunate flaw in creation but a deliberate and essential component of God's plan for humanity. It is the means by which

humans progress from the image of God to the likeness of God, developing virtues that could not exist without the possibility of sin and suffering.

3.3 STRENGTH OF HICK THEODICY

1. **Foundations of the Soul-Making Theodicy**

Hick establishes the Irenaean framework in early chapters, contrasting it with the Augustinian model. He argues that humans were created imperfectly so that moral and spiritual growth "soul-making" could occur.

2. **Moral Evil and Free Will**

In sections on Moral Evil, Hick defends the idea that free will is essential for genuine moral development. Without the possibility of choosing wrongly, virtues like compassion and courage lose meaning. This is one of the central strengths of his model.

3. **Natural Evil, Suffering, and Epistemic Distance**

In discussions around Pain and Suffering, Hick argues that natural evil creates the necessary conditions for moral growth. He introduces the concept of epistemic distance, proposing that God remains partially hidden so as to preserve human freedom.

4. **The Value of Virtue Built Through Struggle**

Hick emphasizes that virtues achieved in the face of adversity are uniquely valuable because they involve real effort and moral responsibility an advantage his model claims over predestined perfection.

3.4 WEAKNESSES OF JOHN HICK THEODICY

1. **Animal Suffering:** Skeptics point out that Hick's focus on human soul-making doesn't adequately account for widespread, seemingly purposeless animal suffering. The justification via epistemic distance is contested.
2. **Universalism vs. Traditional Christian Doctrine:** The notion that everyone eventually reaches salvation challenges mainstream Christian teachings on judgment and the significance of Christ's atonement.
3. **Rejection of Genuine Evil:**

   Some argue that Hick's theodicy downplays the reality of genuine evil, suggesting that all suffering is ultimately for a greater good, even if we can't see it. This can be seen as a denial of the lived experience of pain and suffering of many.

3.5 COMPARISON WITH OTHER THEODICIES

The problem of evil has been addressed by various theological and philosophical approaches throughout the history of Christian thought. Each theodicy presents a distinct framework for reconciling the reality of evil with belief in an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God. John Hick's soul-making theodicy, drawing from the Irenaean tradition, occupies a significant place in this debate. To better appreciate Hick's contribution, it is essential to compare his position with other prominent theodicies, notably the Augustinian theodicy, the Free Will Defense as articulated by Alvin

Plantinga, and Process Theodicy. This comparative analysis will highlight the strengths, weaknesses, and unique emphases of Hick's approach.

Hick and the Augustinian Theodicy

The Augustinian theodicy, rooted in the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 CE), is grounded in the belief that God created the world and humanity in a state of perfection. According to Augustine, evil is not a substance created by God but a privation of good (privatio boni). It entered the world through the misuse of human free will, particularly the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Natural evil, in Augustine's account, is a consequence of moral evil and the cosmic disorder brought about by humanity's fall.

In contrast, Hick rejects the notion of a historical fall that brought about a catastrophic moral and cosmic corruption. Instead, he affirms that God created humanity in an immature moral state, intended to grow towards moral perfection through experiences, challenges, and moral choices.

For Hick, the existence of evil is not a tragic deviation from an original perfection but an intentional part of the divine plan for moral and spiritual development.

Hick and the Free Will Defense (Plantinga)

The Free Will Defense, most notably articulated by Alvin Plantinga, argues that moral evil is a necessary possibility if creatures are to be genuinely free. God, being

omnipotent, could create free creatures but could not guarantee they always choose good, as that would contradict the very nature of freedom.

Hick and Process Theodicy

Process Theodicy, influenced by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, rejects the classical doctrine of divine omnipotence, arguing instead that God's power is persuasive rather than coercive. According to process thinkers, God works with the world in a dynamic relationship, unable to unilaterally prevent evil because of the inherent freedom and autonomy of all entities.

While Hick retains the traditional view of God's omnipotence, he shares with Process Theodicy the idea that the world is not a static creation but a dynamic process aimed at greater complexity and moral maturity. However, Hick insists that God could eliminate evil but refrains from doing so in order to preserve the moral developmental process. In contrast, Process Theodicy argues that God cannot simply eradicate evil, as divine power is not coercive.

Comparison between St. Augustine and Irenaeus Theodicy

The problem of evil is an argument which divides Christians across the world, many find it hard to grapple with the idea that the Christian God (whose nature is both omnipotent and omnibenevolent) could allow so much suffering and evil in the world. This question is embodied by David Hume's (1711–1776) 'inconsistent triad' which states God cannot

be both omnipotent and omnibenevolent if evil exists.[65] It causes many to reject Christianity as a religion altogether or for some their supposed place in heaven, like the character of Ivan in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, who is a protest atheist and "rejects his ticket in heaven" even though he still believes in God's existence.[66]

Both Augustine (354–430) and Irenaeus (130–202) are prominent figures in Christian theology and offer theodicies which reject the idea of an 'inconsistent triad'.[67] However, both Augustine and Irenaeus' theodicies differ significantly in their perspectives on how evil came into this world and original sin.

While both theodicies have their weaknesses, one could argue that Irenaeus' theodicy, which is then developed by modern philosophers such as John Hick (1922–2012), is more convincing to a 21st-century perspective that is influenced by scientific development.

One way Augustine and Irenaeus' theodicies differ is in their beliefs about original sin. Augustine attributes original sin as a big part of why evil exists, he believes this was first exemplified in *Genesis* chapter 3 when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit. According to Augustine, it is Adam and Eve's disobedience which unlocked original sin and disrupted the whole world on a cosmic scale. Augustine

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[65] Chesterton, G. K. (1908). *Orthodoxy*. London: John Lane.

[66] Dostoevsky, F. (1990). *The brothers Karamazov* (R. Pevear & L. Volokhonsky, Trans.). New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Original work published 1880)

[67] Hick, J. (2004). *An interpretation of religion: Human responses to the transcendent* (2nd ed.). New Haven: Yale University Press.

believes original sin has affected and continues to affect all the generations that followed Adam and Eve, meaning human nature is tainted and all humans are born with the innate desire to sin.[68] Essentially, we are all born sinful beings who therefore deserve this punishment of living in a fallen world.

This is met with criticism by a plethora of scholars, for example, Pelagius (354–418), who taught humans were free of the burdens of original sin, because it would be unjust for any person to be blamed for another's actions.[69]

However, a strength of Augustine's argument is that he structured his view of original sin around observation of human behaviour. When Augustine was 16, he and his friends stole some pears. What Augustine found remarkable in his reflection was that he did not steal them because he was hungry, in fact, he threw them away. He concluded that he did it just for the pleasure of sinning, this verified his argument that because of original sin, all humans have an innate desire to sin.[70] This view is reinforced by many scholars, such as G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), who argued you could see original sin "in the street",[71] or Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971), who said original sin was the one "empirically verifiable" Christian doctrine.[72]

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[68] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.
[69] Pelagius. (1995). *Commentary on St. Paul's epistle to the Romans* (T. de Bruyn, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[70] Augustine. (1991). *Confessions* (H. Chadwick, Trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[71] Chesterton, G. K. (1908). *Orthodoxy*. London: John Lane.
[72] Niebuhr, R. (1941). *The nature and destiny of man: A Christian interpretation* (Vol. 1). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

In contrast, Irenaeus' view on original sin seems more convincing to a modern-day critic. Irenaeus, like Augustine, incorporates *Genesis* chapter 3 into his theodicy, however, he comes up with a different interpretation. Essentially, this interpretation says that the story of Adam and Eve is an allegory for all humankind rather than a literal historical event; this argument becomes more convincing when we learn that the Hebrew term 'Adam' simply means 'mankind'.

Irenaeus also cites a different reason for our human tendency towards sin he states that God deliberately made our world imperfect and incorporative of evil so that the human race can develop.[73] Since we have been born into a world full of sin, it is only natural that we will sin. When we, as children, are surrounded by the imperfect world God created, we cannot help but make mistakes and sin.[74] Irenaeus believes that this was God's intention when creating an imperfect world: humans need to make mistakes and be around evil and sin to grow a genuine relationship with God.

One could say that Irenaeus' explanation of the human tendency to sin is more convincing than Augustine's "fall from grace" as it is more optimistic and changes our view of original sin from a tragic condemnation to a hopeful development.[75] Overall, Irenaeus' view on original sin is more convincing due to it being more optimistic about humankind and also the fact that it does not contradict with empirical science.

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[73] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (pp. 315–567). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing.

[74] Ibid

[75] Niebuhr, R. (1941). *The nature and destiny of man: A Christian interpretation* (Vol. 1). New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

One way Augustine and Irenaeus' theodicies differ is their beliefs about how evil came into the world. In Augustine's view, evil first came into the world through the "fall of the angels". Augustine saw variety as a part of the goodness of God's world, every creation is subject to variation as difference is seen as a good thing. However, the necessary result of difference is that some creatures will be more limited than others. This idea applied to angels as well, meaning that while all angels were created perfectly, some received less grace than others. The angels with less grace chose to misuse their free will and rivalled God rather than worshipping him.

This disobedience was then repeated by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, when they were tempted by Satan, the chief of the fallen angels. According to Augustine, all evil in the world has followed on from here and can be traced back to the failure of the angels to do their duty in worshipping God.[76]

A problem with this area of Augustine's theodicy is that it involves some creative interpretation of *Genesis* chapter 3; angels are not mentioned in the biblical story, except as guards of the tree of life once Adam and Eve have been expelled from the Garden of Eden, also the Bible does not explicitly state that the serpent was Satan in disguise. Augustine's creative interpretation becomes a problem when we take into account how literally he understood *Genesis* chapters 1–3: it seems a contradiction that the only time Augustine does accept creative interpretations of *Genesis* is when it lines up with his own theodicy.

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[76] Augustine. (1998). *City of God* (H. Bettenson, Trans.; Rev. ed.). London: Penguin Classics.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) argued against this element of Augustine's theodicy, showing that it is impossible to find a cause or a motive for angels to sin, unless they were created imperfectly in the first place.[77]

As opposed to Augustine, who theorized that evil came into the world through the disobedience of angels and then Adam and Eve, Irenaeus believed God allowed evil to make this world deliberately difficult so that humans could learn and grow from it.[78] He argues that humans have to experience evil and suffering at some capacity in order to develop and grow as human beings who have a mature and free relationship with God.[79]

Irenaeus explained that if everything always went our way and we never experienced suffering, we would never learn anything. He drew a distinction between God's image and God's likeness. He believed that God made us in his own image, but we have to grow into his likeness; we can do this by learning from our suffering and resisting the temptation to do wrong.

John Hick develops Irenaeus' theory and argues for epistemic distance. This means that we cannot truly know of God's existence. If God did make us in his own likeness, we would follow his commands out of obedience to his authority instead of following them because we had figured out that they were the right thing to do. Hick argued that it's only

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[77] Schleiermacher, F. (1999). *The Christian faith* (H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, Trans.; 2nd ed.). Edinburgh: T&T Clark. (Original work published 1830)

[78] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). In A. Roberts & J. Donaldson (Eds.), *Ante-Nicene Fathers: Vol. 1. The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus* (pp. 315–567). Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing.

[79] Ibid

if we have faith in God and still do good because we want to do good, rather than because we know for sure there's a God who wants us to, that we can truly grow spiritually and morally.[80]

Many critics agree with this perspective. If we analyze human behaviour, there is evidence that encountering and overcoming evil develops a person's character and virtue. By going through harsh struggles, a person becomes stronger and gains compassion for others. Nietzsche agrees with this, stating, "What does not kill me, makes me stronger

Irenaeus and Hick's theodicy is often referred to as soul-making however, one could argue that sometimes evil is soul-breaking' as it destroys a person's character rather than building it up and developing it.

The theodicies of Augustine and Irenaeus offer distinct responses to the enduring problem of evil within the Christian theological framework. Augustine's concept of original sin, rooted in a historical understanding of the biblical narrative, faces challenges in light of modern scientific knowledge.[81] His reliance on a literal interpretation of *Genesis*, particularly regarding the fall of angels and the first humans, creates tensions with empirical evidence, particularly in genetics.

Irenaeus, by interpreting the *Genesis* story allegorically and proposing a soul-making theodicy, provides a more flexible framework that aligns better with scientific insights.

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[80] Hick, J. (1977). *The myth of God incarnate* (Ed.). London: SCM Press.
[81] Augustine. (1993). *On free choice of the will* (T. Williams, Trans.). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing.

The idea that God allows for the imperfections of the world to foster human development resonates with a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of life.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

4.1 EVALUATION

John Hick's soul-making theodicy is one of the most influential modern attempts to respond to the age-old problem of evil.[82] Drawing inspiration from the Irenaean tradition, Hick presents a world that is not a paradise lost but a "vale of soul-making," a place where suffering and evil are necessary for the moral and spiritual growth of human beings.[83] While this approach provides a hopeful interpretation of suffering and a framework for preserving belief in an omnipotent and benevolent God, it is not without serious limitations.[84] A critical evaluation of his theory reveals both its enduring strengths and its philosophical weaknesses.

One of the central strengths of Hick's theodicy lies in its emphasis on free will. By granting humanity genuine autonomy, Hick upholds the idea that true moral responsibility requires the ability to choose both good and evil.[85] Unlike a world in which God constantly intervenes to prevent harm, Hick's vision of reality is structured in such a way that individuals can freely exercise their moral agency. This view is appealing because it preserves human dignity and the meaningfulness of ethical decision-making. Without free will, love, courage, and responsibility would be hollow concepts, devoid of authenticity.

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[82] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Macmillan.
[83] Irenaeus. (1885). *Against Heresies* (A. Roberts & W. H. Rambaut, Trans.). Edinburgh: T & T Clark.
[84] Schleiermacher, F. (1999). *The Christian Faith* (H. R. Mackintosh & J. S. Stewart, Trans.). London: Continuum.
[85] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Macmillan.

Another significant strength is the soul-making dimension of suffering. Hick convincingly argues that virtues such as patience, compassion, forgiveness, and courage cannot be given readymade by God but must be developed through lived experiences, often in the face of adversity. This idea resonates deeply with human experience; history and literature are filled with examples of individuals whose characters were forged through suffering and struggle. In this sense, Hick provides a morally constructive framework for interpreting suffering not as pointless but as instrumental in shaping morally mature beings.

Hick's theodicy is also notable for its eschatological perspective. He argues that the process of soul-making extends beyond earthly life and culminates in the afterlife, where God's purpose for humanity will be fully realized.[86] This eschatological hope is tied to Hick's doctrine of universal salvation, where all souls are eventually reconciled to God. Such a vision offers comfort to believers, as it suggests that even the most profound earthly suffering will one day be justified and redeemed. It also provides a response to the problem of seemingly meaningless suffering, by locating ultimate resolution in eternity.

Furthermore, Hick's thought makes an important contribution to interfaith dialogue and modern theology. His pluralistic hypothesis, which sees all major religions as valid responses to the Real, broadens the scope of his theodicy beyond Christianity. By doing so, Hick connects the problem of evil to a wider moral and spiritual horizon, emphasizing that all humanity is engaged in the same struggle toward moral maturity. This universal vision strengthens his theodicy by presenting it as a global, rather than a narrowly Christian, response to suffering.

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[86] Hick, J. (1966). *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Macmillan.

However, despite these strengths, Hick's theodicy faces serious challenges. A prominent objection is its inability to adequately account for gratuitous and horrendous evils. While some suffering may contribute to character formation, extreme forms of evil, such as genocide, child abuse, and terminal illness in infants, 23 seem excessive and disproportionate for the sake of moral growth. The sheer scale and randomness of such suffering make it difficult to see how they can be justified as necessary conditions for soul-making. Critics argue that Hick's appeal to eschatological fulfillment does little to ease the moral weight of such evils in the here and now.

Closely related is the problem of natural evil, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, or diseases that cause mass suffering. Hick suggests that natural evils are necessary for a stable and law-governed world in which free will can be exercised. Yet, critics argue that the magnitude and indiscriminate nature of many natural disasters go far beyond what would be necessary to provide an environment for moral growth. Moreover, the suffering of animals, which Hick attempts to address by linking it indirectly to human development, remains an unresolved issue. The question persists: why should innocent creatures endure immense pain if their suffering contributes little or nothing to human soul-making?

Another criticism concerns Hick's reliance on speculative eschatology. While the idea of universal salvation and post-mortem soul-making is appealing, it is speculative and not universally accepted within Christian theology. Some argue that it shifts the burden of justification into an uncertain afterlife, rather than addressing the real experiences of suffering

in the present world. This reliance on eschatology raises questions about the adequacy of Hick's theodicy as a practical response to the lived reality of evil.

Comparatively, Hick's theodicy also faces challenges when set against other theological models. The Augustinian theodicy, for instance, locates the origin of evil in the misuse of human free will and interprets evil as the privation of good. While this approach has its own difficulties, it avoids some of the speculative elements in Hick's eschatology. Similarly, the free will defense advanced by Alvin Plantinga provides a logically coherent argument for the compatibility of God and evil, though it does not fully account for natural evil. Process theology, by contrast, suggests that God is not omnipotent in the classical sense but works with creation in dynamic ways. Hick's view, though distinct, struggles to remain persuasive when measured against these alternatives, as it leaves key questions unanswered.

Finally, Hick's optimism about universal salvation has been criticized for potentially undermining the seriousness of moral evil. If all souls are ultimately saved regardless of their actions, some argue this may reduce the moral urgency of human responsibility. Although Hick insists that the process of moral development is real and necessary, critics contend that the assurance of eventual salvation risks trivializing the gravity of evil.

In summary, Hick's soul-making theodicy remains one of the most creative and hopeful attempts to reconcile the existence of God with the reality of suffering. It succeeds in presenting evil as a context for growth, emphasizing human freedom and the possibility of moral maturity. Yet it falters in its treatment of extreme suffering, its speculative reliance on eschatology, and its attempt to justify natural and animal suffering. Hick's work is best

understood not as a complete solution to the problem of evil but as a meaningful contribution to an ongoing conversation.

4.2 CONCLUSION

The problem of evil remains a profound and unresolved challenge in philosophy of religion. John Hick's soul-making theodicy stands as a bold attempt to preserve belief in a loving and omnipotent God while acknowledging the harsh reality of suffering. His approach provides valuable insights: suffering can foster growth, free will is essential for moral responsibility, and ultimate redemption is possible through divine love. These elements make Hick's work both intellectually rich and spiritually appealing.

However, Hick's theodicy does not eliminate the problem of evil. It struggles to justify extreme and apparently gratuitous suffering, and it relies heavily on the hope of eschatological fulfillment. While this hope may sustain faith, it leaves critical questions unanswered. Theodicy, by its nature, may never provide a fully satisfactory solution; the presence of evil continues to test the coherence of theistic belief.

Nevertheless, Hick's contribution should not be underestimated. His work has advanced the philosophical and theological discussion of evil, offering a framework that emphasizes human growth, responsibility, and the possibility of ultimate reconciliation. Though incomplete, his theodicy inspires continued reflection on the meaning of suffering and the nature of God. In this sense, Hick's soul-making theodicy remains a vital resource for anyone seeking to grapple honestly with the problem of evil.

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