

How the theodicy of irenaeus differs from that of augustine essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The problem of evil and suffering can be the major obstacle between non believers and faith.

For these people it is impossible to contemplate a God who chooses to inflict the pain and misery onto the world that is easily apparent. Philosophers have therefore looked for explanations for why an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God would do such things. This question is summed up in Augustine's creation, the inconsistent triad. Augustine summarised that an omnipotent and good God and evil in the world point to a contradiction, only two of the three points can ever exist harmoniously. Yet Augustine strived to prove this idea wrong.

Augustine theorised that in the beginning (in his opinion Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden) that the world was in fact perfect. There was no evil or suffering and the world was a perfect place to exist in. Augustine claims that it was the choice of Eve to eat from the forbidden tree that lowered human's perfection and created evil and suffering. As we are all descendants of Adam and Eve, we all carry the burden of that crime with us to this day. So for Augustine this would explain the inconsistent triad, originally there was no evil in the triad, but the actions of humans, benefitting from free will, created that evil.

The other key concept of Augustine's theory is that evil is not existent, and is simply the definition of the absence of goodness. Wherever good is lost the remainder is called evil. This again creates a logical explanation to the triad, because if evil isn't existent then how could God have power over it.

Augustine compares the fall of the angels chiefly Satan, to the fall of man in

the Garden of Eden. In summary God didn't create evil, humans did through the misuse of free will, and evil is merely the definition given when goodness is absent. Irenaeus another philosopher of the first half millennia of AD created a separate explanation for evil and suffering.

He didn't attempt to explain away the existence of evil but thought of an explanation that acknowledged its existence and allowed it to fit into the inconsistent triad. In contrast to Augustine's theory, Irenaeus doesn't begin his theory with the Garden of Eden. Augustine believed that the garden of Eden constituted the peak of human perfection whereas Irenaeus would argue that as humans we develop closer to perfection all the time, we become more civilised and loving through each generation. Augustine believed that evil was manmade and denied any direct involvement from God, Irenaeus didn't, he believed that some evil was provided by God to act as a series of challenges for humans to try and overcome. This evil would be categorised as natural evil. Irenaeus believed that although humans were made in God's image we were not made in his likeness and that through our trials in this world we must grow and mature towards this ultimate goal.

Moral evil is again the product of free will, a gift from God. In our attempts to overcome the challenges laid in front of us we sometimes make the wrong choices resulting in evil and suffering. On other occasions we try to deny the existence of God and lose all goodness in an attempt to compete with the idea of God. Both offer explanations for why moral evil exists in the world.

Without the free will that allows these immoral actions to occur we would not be, according to Irenaeus, be in the image of God. Both theories offer

alternative approaches to evil and suffering and both rely on belief in the afterlife to be effective. Yet Augustine places the blame for evil and suffering firmly at the door of mankind whereas Irenaeus places evil and suffering in the natural order of things describing it as a way in which God matures us as individuals and draws us closer to him. Despite the arguments of both Irenaeus and Augustine, atheists and agnostics alike are not convinced.

This is mainly down to the unanswered questions that the theodicies leave in their wake. Many find the clinical almost mathematic approach to the problem to be insensitive and unrealistic when you look at cases of extreme suffering. For instance with the theodicy of Irenaeus it is claimed that suffering is part of the test of life and that through this process we grow closer to God. Yet if this is the case why is suffering not equally spread out through all people? Why is it that whilst I sit here in the life of luxury children are dying every second in Africa from curable diseases? A particularly poignant question when we take into account the fact that many of these dying children are brought up in strong Christian families where god is an active part of their life.

It seems totally unfair that innocent children are given such extreme suffering in comparison to others across the globe. Another sticking point for criticsers or Irenaeian theory is that it is totally dependent in belief of the afterlife, it is claimed that we are challenged by evil and suffering to become closer to God and grow closer to his likeness. This is only possible in the afterlife, yet if there is no afterlife then the whole theory falls apart. In contrast if there is an afterlife and that is the ultimate destination of us all regardless then what is the point of all these challenges? Surely in heaven <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-theodicy-of-irenaeus-differs-from-that-of-augustine-essay/>

we could learn to become closer to the likeness of God without having to suffer all the evil the world throws at us. All these questions weaken the theodicy of Irenaeus bringing many of the ideas behind it into question.

There are similar weaknesses to the theodicy of Augustine. But as the theodicy places blame with mankind there are important differences. The theory relies on the stories of Genesis to base the idea of blame for evil and suffering with humans and yet much archaeological evidence contradicts the story of Adam and Eve, this includes Darwin's theory of evolution. Similarly scientific evidence suggests that throughout history natural disasters have occurred, again contradicting the idea of the fall of man. In Augustine's theodicy we are introduced to the idea that evil is just the absence for good.

Yet serious evil such as murder, rape, child abuse, or terrorism seem to be much more than simply the absence of good, there is for many a difference between lack of good and evil. With reference to the idea that Augustine's idea that forces of good and evil are in a battle, this introduces the idea that there is hell. Yet if God is in fact omnipotent why does he allow such a place to exist? Yet there is definite value in the theodicies, they offer logical and well reasoned explanations for why there is evil and suffering in a world created by an omnipotent, omnipresent, benevolent God. Augustine uses the idea presented within The Bible, (the most popular book ever) that Eve was at fault for the fall of mankind.

This idea sits well with people who do believe in the creation story. Evil as part of Irenaean theory is not a punishment but a tool to for " soul making" (John Hick). This theory allows people to have optimism through suffering

and gives value to the growth that follows suffering. So despite the flaws of the two main theodicies there are strong cores to both ideas that can offer solace for people struggling with the problem of evil and suffering.