

John hicks theodicy research paper

[People](#), [Adolf Hitler](#)



IN RELATION TO

THE SLAVE TRADE AND THE HOLOCAUST

John Hick's views on theodicy are similar to the original 'Irenaean theodicy' (Irenaean). Hick is in agreement with Irenaeus that God created mankind with the capacity for spiritual growth. Nonetheless, Hick then views the course of 'soul making' as a reaction to the evil contained in the world (Irenaean). This means, therefore, that if there were no cancer, or any evil actions, then human beings would not have a way of developing spiritually. Ultimately, Hick claims that the suffering is necessary in order for humanity to reach ultimate perfection that God had planned for us. Hick argues that “our theodicy must find the meaning of evil in the part it is made to play in the eventual outworking of that purpose” (Stewart, 2009, p 197). However, regarding situations in which great suffering has taken place, namely the Holocaust and the Slave Trade, it is impossible to justify Hick's position. The Holocaust was the systematic persecution and murder of around six million Jews, by the Nazis and their collaborators. The word "Holocaust" originates from the Greek word meaning "sacrifice by fire." The Nazis rose to power in Germany in January 1933. They considered themselves and Germans to be "racially superior," and the Jews, who they believed to be "inferior," posed a threat to the so-called German community (holocaust). Over the period of the Holocaust, millions of men, women and children were killed, many in horrible and drawn out ways. There is no doubt that a huge degree of suffering was incurred throughout the Holocaust.

The slave trade between West Africa and America reached its pinnacle in the mid eighteenth century. It is estimated that each year, over 80, 000 Africans

crossed the Atlantic to live out the rest of their lives as slaves. Most slaves were kidnapped from their home countries. As with the Holocaust, the slave trade is well known to have caused much suffering of men, women and children. Hick's view on circumstances like these is that what happened was necessary in order for humanity to grow and reach its ultimate destiny of perfection.

When evaluating Hick's, and other views on theodicy, it is important to remember that the problem of evil is only a problem to individuals who believe in an omniscient and 'good' God. To non-believers, or atheists, evil is not a problem, but simply an unpleasant part of life. Nonetheless, whether a theist, an atheist, or somewhere in between, suffering is an issue which causes distress to the majority of people. Furthermore, to a survivor of the Holocaust or of slavery, the problem of evil can present major faith dichotomies.

The problem of evil is the question of how to explain evil if there is an all-powerful and all-good higher force. Many philosophers have asserted that the existence a God such as this and of evil are incompatible and therefore improbable. Efforts to settle this question has been, and still is, one of the main concerns of theodicy.

Some answers contain the opinions that free will cannot truly exist without the capacity of evil, that mankind does not understand God, that suffering is required for spiritual growth or that evil is the result of a destroyed world. In this instance, Hick's views are supporting the third argument.

Christianity. Islam and Judaism all teach that God is all-powerful, all-knowing and all-good. Clearly, these assertions contradict the fact that such evil

exists in the world. Theodicy has been born as theists need to justify their God's actions when it comes to terrible wrong-doings, such as slavery and the holocaust. Christians use theodicy as an attempt to defend the goodness of God, despite the clear existence of evil in the world (Stewart, 2009, p 163).

Many would find it unreasonable to justify the holocaust with Hick's theory on theodicy. The notion that an all-powerful, all-good God would allow suffering on a scale such as this in order lead humanity to ultimate perfection is too harsh for most people. Holocaust theology explores this specific problem of evil in depth.

Holocaust theology discusses a mass of philosophical and theological debate, mainly within Judaism, that tries to explain numerous conflicting opinions concerning the role of God in the world, in light of the Holocaust.

Among the monotheistic faiths, many theodicies have been put forward, Hicks' being just one of them. However, in light of the grand scale of evil displayed in the Holocaust, many people have rethought their original views on the topic.

Hick insists that suffering and, indeed, evil, are necessary for spiritual growth. He also combines this with the free will argument, claiming that such spiritual growth needs decisions made out of free will. An obvious problem with this justification is that many wrong-doings do not seem to allow this, such as children being killed in the Holocaust, or black men, women and children being forced to work as slaves. In both of these cases, free will does not seem to be available for these people. A further problem is that the 'spiritual growth' in question is supposed to lead humanity to perfection and,

in effect, to end all evil in the world. Clearly, needing evil in order to end evil is a contradictory concept. On the other hand, however, if there were no evil in the world then the aim would no longer exist.

Another consequence of Hick's theory is that some individuals never have the chance to develop spiritually. Children who were killed in the Holocaust are good examples of such people. In response to such criticisms, Hick maintains that the possibility of an afterlife must be considered, and especially in cases such as infant death (Irenaean). Additionally, it could be argued that as there is such a vast quantity of evil in the world, and as not all suffering appears fair or even understandable, we must have to admit that we do not understand God's plan.

Hick maintains that all good and evil in the world are, in fact, simply providing opportunities for an individual's soul to grow. His stance is that if only good things happened to good people and bad things only to bad people, this would lead people to be selfish and not have the desire to grow spiritually. He views the concepts of good and of a perfect humanity, as a future reward, presumably in the context of an afterlife. If following this theory, then the afterlife justifies the terrible suffering that occurs in the world.

Hick's theory appears to be, like most theodicies, a situation that will provide an acceptable explanation for evils in the world that no one can be able to change. Furthermore, his theodicy is just that: "a vindication of God's goodness and justice in the face of the existence of evil" (thefreedictionary). Therefore, it does not attempt to prove the presence of an omnipotent being, which provides the entire focus of the problem of evil.

Nevertheless, Hick's theodicy does at least attempt to transfer into modern concepts, such as an explanation of slavery and justification of the Holocaust.

In light of everything that is known about both the Holocaust and the slave trade, it is virtually impossible to justify Hick's theodicy as a possible explanation. The theory is well thought out and well stated; Hick has attempted to cover all angles. However, on closer examination, there are contradictions within it that cannot be overlooked. The fact that young children have suffered so deeply and atrociously in both examples cannot be trivialised. Hick does back up his 'spiritual growth' argument with the mention of a better afterlife where people who have suffered can be at peace. Nonetheless, his position does not attempt to prove the existence of a God, and therefore the concept of an afterlife seems more of a postscript to his key points.

Suffering exists in many forms and to many different degrees. However, if an all-powerful, all-good God exists, He cannot be thought to condone evil.

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