

The problem of evil
by john hick |
analysis



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In this final paper I review the contemporary issue “ The Problem of Evil” by John Hick on pages 143 to 147 of the Burr & Goldfinger text. Hick has four main points in his article. First, that within the Christian doctrine there is no dilemma concern the existence of Evil because Second, the concept of Evil is necessary for the measuring of actions so that Third, human souls can choose to move nearer or farther from God, meaning that Fourth, our existence and world is a type of ‘ soul factory’ measuring and creating souls that are worthy to the presence of God.

Some quick internet searches on John Hick reveals that he is a very well respected and prolific writer on the topic of God, Philosophy, Theology, and the relationship of Religion and Science (<http://www.johnhick.org.uk/jsite/>). Further he has several advanced degrees from some very prestigious universities to include a doctorate of philosophy from Oxford University and a doctorate in literature (or Letters it is not clear) from the University of Edinburgh. Hick’s clear writing style and excellent arguments have clearly earned him a place of prominence within high academic circles.

This article is in the section concerning God & Religion. What is especially interesting, and suggests the overall quality of the thinking, is that Hick is able to ‘ turn the tables’ on an argument that at one time seemed to put a nail in the coffin of theology. Until reading this article, I did struggle with the dilemma of Evil against the existence of God. At first blush and even with some deeper inquiry they do seem to be at odds. These are reasonable questions: If God is all powerful and all good, why does Evil exist? Why do bad things happen to good people? And so on. Through a well thought out argument Hick addresses this, and further suggests, cleverly being able to

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stay within the theology and thinking of Christian doctrine, that a creator God given the goals and temperament of the Christian God, would see Evil as a necessary requirement for a world designed to create souls worthy of His presence.

Summary of Article

Hick has written an extensive essay outlining a philosophical argument suggesting that it is not a contradiction to believe in a Christian version of God while still acknowledging the existence of Evil in its many forms. The dilemma he is arguing against is the idea that a perfectly loving creator God would not allow, or would abolish Evil from his created world. Since we can see that Evil clearly exists, it is reasonable to assume that either there is no creator God, God is not Omni-powerful, or God must not be perfectly loving (Goldinger and Burr 143).

Hick goes on to summarize Augustine, who defined Evil as a distortion of something valuable; a movement away from God by humans (Goldinger and Burr 144). This is an important distinction because it suggests that Christian doctrine does not dismiss Evil, but identifies it as having meaning and purpose within the realm created by God. It identifies direction of the soul against actions, where good actions move a soul closer to God and evil actions move a soul farther away from God. Further, Hick summarizes the Christian viewpoint of the creation of the earth not of an absolute paradise created by God for his human creations to dwell in, but as a soul factory creating believers and preparing souls to enter the presence of God (Goldinger and Burr 146).

To this end, Hick suggests that a perfect world would neither serve as a vehicle to produce souls worthy of Heaven, nor be a consistent and logical place for free-willed humans to dwell. Too much inconsistency would be necessary, for example should someone fall from a height that would break their back, gravity would have to change characteristics such that the fall would not hurt them, less they suffer the pain of the injury, and so on, several of these types of analogy's are offered. He further offers that without Evil there would be no measuring stick to understand good and Just actions. To that end Hick summarizes his argument by saying that the existence of Evil fits perfectly into a theological model that accepts both free will, and the ability to measure a person's soul against the actions and choices they make, where worthy souls choose good actions that move them closer to God and unworthy souls choose actions that are Evil and move then away from God.

Philosophical Critique

As pure philosophy goes this article is actually one of the best explanations I have ever read concerning the problem of evil within a Christian theological framework. Its underlying premise is that our world as created by God is a type of ' soul factory', and when viewed as such can only make logical sense is real choices can be made by us, many with the consequence of evil and harm to others. Further, within these context natural disasters that bring evil upon people is necessary, for without itself sacrifice, heroism, and true goodwill could not be attempted or offered by people, thus denying any true measurement or preparedness of the human soul to be in the presence of God.

Without evil human souls would not be able to learn from their actions, observe the actions of others, and make choices that allow them to either move nearer or farther from God. If the world we created such that any choice we made could never bring evil on another, and never provide a consequence to the choice we make, our souls would never develop beyond that of spoiled children. Tough choices and tough consequences are necessary in a world designed as a proving ground for the soul. Further, without the necessary context of evil we would not be able to contemplate the true divinity of God nor of our own existence. There would be no reason to attempt any endeavor or any type beyond pure self-gratification.

Since evil is necessary for the measuring of our actions within the constructs of the world as a soul factory, the reality of Evil is necessary for a creator God looking to produce real creations, and not simple automatons that are capable of evolving into something more. All of this does not justify evil actions, or provide any type of moral platform for anyone to justify an evil action, it simply provides necessary context for us to understand the reasons for our choices and why it is important to make choices that move us closer to God.

What is especially interesting about this argument is that it turns the dilemma concern the existence of Evil and the existence of God on its ear, and takes an argument that at one time was believed and held onto by anti-Christians as an absolute proof against the existence of God, and makes it a pretty good argument FOR the existence of God. Not only does it dispel the dilemma, it builds on it in a very interesting way and argues that no real

creator God would even consider designing a world without evil, given the other theological elements of Christianity.

Conclusion

Upon reviewing the arguments presented in “ The Problem of Evil” by John Hick on pages 143 to 147 of the Burr & Goldfinger text and Hick’s has four main points, you discover a very well thought out and logical philosophical argument that seems to hold in both logical construct and keep its underlying assumption valid within the necessary area of Christian doctrine. The idea that God created the world as a “ soul factory” is supported by the concept of freewill and choice, and the measurement of choice within a reality with real choices and real consequences. Upon close examination this is not a dilemma concerning the existence and nature of God, but a reassurance that Christianity is in fact based upon a rational view of the world and that it can be defended using logic and sound reason.

This article interested me very much and I will be going out and purchasing some other books by Hick to see if he is able to put together complete toms that are as well thought out and as interesting as this article was. Given that he has published over 20 books and given his academic appointments, I suspect I am in for a fun bit of reading.