

The Problem of Evil

FILM THREE

The Irenaean Theodicy

Length: 18 minutes

TEACHERS

To assist your lesson plans here are twenty questions,
with time-codes

- {1}. Write down the Biblical quote from Genesis 1:26. {00:00 – 00:10}
- {2}. According to John Hick what is 'the primary and overriding purpose' of human existence? {00:15 – 00:41}
- {3}. How does St Irenaeus' theodicy differ from St Augustine's? {01:08 – 01:28}
- {4}. According to St Irenaeus how can genuine human perfection be attained? {02:11 – 02:40}
- {5}. How did Irenaeus view 'The Fall'? {03:10 – 03:42}
- {6}. Which modern scholar has developed Irenaeus' theodicy? {04:42 – 04:52}
- {7}. What do you think John Hick means by a world of 'soul-making'? {04:53 – 05:24}
- {8}. What is the 'Greater Good Argument'? {05:26 – 06:10}
- {9}. According to Hick why did God create us with genuine *free-will*? {06:39 – 07:14}
- {10}. What does John Hick mean by the '*Epistemic Distance*'? {07:14 – 08:09}
- {11}. What, according to Hick, would be the moral problems of living in a world in which we could never do wrong? {08:12 – 09:12}

{12}. In your own words write down THREE criticisms of the Irenaean Theodicy? {10:02 – 11:53}

{13}. What do you think Dostoevsky is saying about 'good and evil' in his book *The Brothers Karamazov*? {11:54 – 14:06}

{14}. Why does John Hick disagree with Dostoevsky that too high a price is paid to know 'good from evil'? {14:09 – 14:30}

{15}. What is '*Universalism*'? {14:34 – 14:40}

{16}. What are the ethical problems with *universalism*? {14:41 - 14:52}

{17}. What do you think the film script means when it says: "*At times, the world can seem more like a vale of **soul - breaking** rather than a vale of soul -making*" {14:56 – 15:14}

{18}. According to Alvin Plantinga what are the problems with the Irenaean Theodicy? {15:16 – 16:12}

{19}. According to John Hick what has the world been designed for? {16:54 – 17:28}

{20}. Explain in your own words the meaning of the on-screen quote by Nicholas Wolterstorff. {17:31 – 17:40}

AFTER SCREENING

**When *The Problem of Evil* FILM THREE finishes, ask
Your pupils/students to engage with:**

TASK 1

WRITE or SKETCH the most memorable image or statement that sticks in their mind. SHOW a friend their image or statement and explain the reason why they chose it. DISCUSS what they consider to be the most important message of the film. EXCHANGE their findings with the rest of the class.

TASK 2

RECALL what they've just watched. If they were able to interview any ONE of the people mentioned or representatives of any of the groups mentioned in the film WHO would they most like to cross-examine? WRITE DOWN a question they would want to ask that person?

The people mentioned in the *Problem of Evil* film PART THREE were:

Irenaeus: {130 – 202 CE}, Early Church Father.

John Hick: {1922-1912} British Philosopher and author of *Evil and the God of Love*.

William Rowe: Modern American Professor of Philosophy.

Dewi Zephaniah Phillips: British Philosopher, {1934-2006}, author of *The Problem of Evil & The Problem of God*, and, *The Concept of Prayer*.

Fyodor Dostoyevsky: {1821- 1881}, Russian author of *The Brothers Karamazov*, first published in 1880.

‘Eight year old boy’, in *The Brothers Karamazov* {1880}.

‘The General’, in *The Brothers Karamazov* {1880}.

Alvin Plantinga: American Professor of Philosophy {born 1932}.

Nicholas Wolterstorff: American Professor of Philosophy {born 1932}.

TASK 3

Split up into groups of three/four. Nominate a scribe from your group to take notes. You have 30 minutes for each group to discuss the following quotations, before exchanging your group's thoughts and feelings to the rest of the class:

DISCUSSION ONE

“Humans beings are not to be thought of on the analogy of animal pets whose life is to be made as agreeable as possible, but rather on the analogy of human children who are to grow to adulthood in an environment whose primary and overriding purpose is not immediate pleasure but the realizing of the most valuable potentialities of human personality”

John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*

DISCUSSION TWO

“We have received the knowledge of good and evil and, by receiving experience of both, with judgment, may make choice of the better things. Thus we have a twofold experience: for if we had no knowledge of evil could

we have instruction in that which is good? For just as our tongues experience sweet and bitter, our minds receive knowledge through good and evil”.

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*: 4: 39

DISCUSSION THREE

“A person who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a rich and more valuable sense than would be one created perfect in a state of either innocence or virtue, thus justifying the long struggle of the soul-making process”

John Hick, *The Problem of Evil*

DISCUSSION FOUR

“The reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in a coercive or forceful way. The world must be to man to some extent at least, as if there were no God. God must be a hidden deity, veiled by his creation. He must be knowable but only by a mode of knowledge that involves a free personal choice on man’s part. Man exists at a distance from God’s goal for him, not because he has fallen from that goal, but because he has yet to arrive at it”

John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*

DISCUSSION FIVE

“What are we to say of the child dying from cancer? If this has been “done” to anyone this is bad enough, but to be done for a purpose planned from eternity – that is the deepest evil! If God is this kind of agent, He cannot justify His actions and His evil nature is revealed”

Dewi Zephaniah Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*

DISCUSSION SIX

“Does evil provide us with an opportunity for spiritual growth, so that this world can be seen as a vale of soul-making? Perhaps some evils can be seen this way, but, much leads not to growth but to apparent spiritual disaster. Is it suggested that the existence of evil provides the opportunity for mercy, sympathy and self-sacrifice in the service of others? Again, no doubt some evil can be seen this way. But, much evil seems to elicit cruelty rather than

sacrificial love. Neither of these suggestions takes with sufficient seriousness the sheer hideousness of some of the evils we see”.

Alvin Plantinga, *Self Profile*

DISCUSSION SEVEN

“The world is like a school instituted for the purpose of teaching children to read. The human heart is like a book used in that school...and the child able to read is the soul made from that school and its book. Do you not see how necessary a world of struggle is to school intelligence, to make it a soul....a place where the heart must feel and suffer in a thousand diverse ways?.... And thus does God make individual beings, souls.....for the world is 'The Vale of Soul-making'”.

John Keats, Poet, {1795-1821}, *Letter to Brother George*

HANDOUTS FOR PUPILS

Presentations

- **Presentation is a key skill in today’s world and this activity aims to enhance the way you present powerful ideas to an audience in SEVEN MINUTES, and, in the process improve IT, research and expressive skills, and most importantly work with others**
- **You will work in small groups in which *everyone* from your allocated group will be expected to address the rest of the class during your presentation, *without notes*, and *all members* of the group will be active in producing one of the following: a visual/dramatic/ musical presentation/short film/ power-point/ debate/drama/dance/‘epic’ poem/piece of artwork/ textile/ montage/ ‘graffiti wall’/ poem/play/comedy routine/historical reconstruction/opera/choir/song/ musical/ or rap; relating any presentation back to the Problem of Evil and, producing something that will enhance audience understanding**
- **Each group will be marked for knowledge, understanding and evaluation in the same way as an individual is marked for an essay. So take it seriously, but above all be creative and express yourselves and enjoy the search for the “X” factor**
- **Your Presentation will take place in.....**
- **The most highly marked groups of presenters will be encouraged to perfect their presentations with a view to recording them as a resource for future use in the classroom.**

Planning Suggestions

Each group has three lessons to create a dramatic and dynamic seven minute presentation on their allocated task to the rest of the class.

Each group will have over three lessons to prepare and its suggested that you spend the 1st lesson ensuring that *everyone* in your group knows and understands their allocated subject; the 2nd lesson planning a strategy for a dynamic and informative presentation, and the 3rd lesson in creatively putting your ideas into practice, ensuring that you have a dress rehearsal before the big day.

GROUP ONE: A Presentation: “*The Irenaean Theodicy*”

The Irenaean theodicy views the human-race as being in a process of creation with the possibility of developing from incomplete creatures made in ‘*God’s image*’ to completed creatures reflecting ‘*God’s likeness*’. Genuine human perfection can’t be ready-made but, according to Irenaeus, must evolve through free choice amidst the challenges and struggles of life. As we’ve been created incomplete, our destiny is to experience both good and evil, and only by working through this friction can we become refined and completed beings. This world isn’t meant to be a paradise but rather a setting in which our most valuable potentialities are drawn out and developed by the challenges, sometimes terrible challenges, this world contains.

GROUP TWO: A Presentation: “*The Differences between The Irenaean and Augustinian Theodicies*”

While Augustine saw the Fall of Adam and Eve as a catastrophic adult crime full of malice and deceit Irenaeus saw it as an understandable lapse enacted by immature and incomplete creatures. As such, according to Irenaeus, suffering isn’t a divine punishment for Adam’s sin but an intrinsic part of a divinely appointed environment specifically designed for the ultimate fulfilment of God’s plan.

GROUP THREE: A Presentation: “*A world of soul making*”

John Hick argues that a loving God didn’t create a hedonistic paradise but a world in which suffering serves the end of human moral and spiritual development: *a world of soul making*. He argues that evils are never tolerable except for the sake of greater goods which may come out of them, and, the world we have, with all its faults is a far more effective world for us to evolve in than any hedonistic paradise where every evil act would have to be immediately punished and every good act rewarded. In such a world a truly moral act, done not for reward but for its own sake, would be difficult, if not

impossible. Therefore Hick seeks to justify the existence of evil in terms of its utility for soul-making.

GROUP FOUR: A Presentation: “*The Epistemic Distance*”

God created us with genuine free-will because He wishes us to come into relationship with Him, without force and its only through freedom and an initial remoteness from God can the sort of person God is looking for, emerge. If God is always immediately and overbearingly present we'd have no choice *but* to obey and worship him, and we'd be like puppets automatically acting without question. For genuine love to exist, free-will is necessary, and, an intellectual distance exists between humanity and God, a distance the British philosopher John Hick calls the '*epistemic distance*':

GROUP FIVE: A Presentation: “*The Irenaean Theodicy & animal suffering*”

If, according to Irenaeus and Hick, only humans are able to attain God's likeness then the suffering in the non-human world appears unnecessary and cruel because a pain-filled evolutionary process, red in tooth and claw, over four billion years has, occurred just to set the stage for the only thing considered intrinsically valuable, that is the moral and spiritual development of human beings.

GROUP SIX: “*Dostoyevsky & The Problem of Evil*”

One of the most famous novels exploring The Problem of Evil was written by the Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky {1821- 1881}. In his book, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky recounts true stories about atrocities committed against innocent children: for example like the one seen in the film about a boy of eight who is brutally killed for accidentally hitting the paw of a general's favourite hunting hound. In the book, two brothers, one a priest, the other a brother who can't reconcile the suffering of the innocent with the existence of an all-loving and all-powerful God, discuss the problem of evil. Dostoyevsky writes: "*Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature . . . and to found that edifice on its un-avenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell the truth.*"

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR FURTHER WORK

The Script

THE IRENAEAN THEODICY

‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’

Genesis: 1:26

“Humans beings are not to be thought of on the analogy of animal pets whose life is to be made as agreeable as possible, but rather on the analogy of human children who are to grow to adulthood in an environment whose primary and overriding purpose is not immediate pleasure but the realizing of the most valuable potentialities of human personality”

John Hick, Philosopher {1922-2012}, *Evil and the God of Love*

200 years before Augustine, Irenaeus another early Church Father, formulated a theodicy that remains popular today. Unlike Augustine, Irenaeus believed we weren't created perfect but are rather in a process of creation with the possibility of developing from incomplete creatures made in 'God's image' to completed creatures reflecting 'God's likeness':

“Man is spiritual and perfect because of the outpourings of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be wanting, he is of an animal nature, imperfect, possessing indeed God's image, but not God's likeness”

Irenaeus, {130 – 202 CE}, *Against Heresies*: 5:6

For Irenaeus, human beings created in God's image provide the raw material for a further stage of God's creative work: the leading of free willed humans towards that quality of existence that is the likeness of God. Genuine human perfection can't be ready-made but, according to Irenaeus, must evolve through free choice amidst the challenges and struggles of life. As we've been created incomplete, our destiny is to experience both good *and* evil, and only by working through this friction can we become refined and completed beings:

“We have received the knowledge of good and evil and, by receiving experience of both, with judgment, may make choice of the better things. Thus we have a twofold experience: for if we had no knowledge of evil could we have instruction in that which is good? For just as our tongues experience sweet and bitter, our minds receive knowledge through good and evil”

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*: 4: 39

For Irenaeus, the Fall of Adam and Eve wasn't a catastrophic adult crime full of malice and deceit but an understandable lapse enacted by immature and incomplete creatures, and suffering isn't a divine punishment for Adam's sin but an intrinsic part of a divinely appointed environment specifically designed for the ultimate fulfilment of God's plan.

The Irenaen theodicy then, places ultimate responsibility for the world's sufferings on God, while at the same time maintaining that God created such a world so His creatures can become completed and mature moral and spiritual beings. Eventually, according to Irenaeus, evil and suffering will be overcome and the human race will develop into God's perfect likeness, living in a heaven described in the Bible as a state where all suffering will end, forever:

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"
The Book of Revelation: 21:4

Soul-making & The Greater Good Argument

Modern scholars such as the English philosopher John Hick have developed Irenaeus' theodicy. Hick maintains that a loving God didn't create a hedonistic paradise but a world in which suffering serves the end of human moral and spiritual development – a world of soul making. For Hick human beings have gradually *evolved* from primitive life forms into more psychologically complex creatures, and our moral and spiritual development should be viewed in the same evolutionary light. He argues that evils are never tolerable except for the sake of greater goods which may come out of them, and, the world we have, with all its faults is a far more effective world for us to evolve in than any hedonistic paradise where every evil act would have to be immediately punished and every good act rewarded. In such a world a truly moral act, done not for reward but for its own sake, would be difficult, if not impossible. Therefore Hick seeks to justify the existence of evil in terms of its utility for soul-making:

"A person who has attained to goodness by meeting and eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a rich and more valuable sense than would be one created perfect in a state of either innocence or virtue, thus justifying the long struggle of the soul-making process"

John Hick, *The Problem of Evil*

Epistemic distance

According to Hick, God created us with genuine free-will because He wishes us to come into relationship with Him, without force and its only through freedom and an initial remoteness from God can the sort of person God is looking for, emerge. If God is always immediately and overbearingly present we'd have no choice *but* to obey and worship him, and we'd be like puppets automatically acting without question. For genuine love to exist, free-will is necessary, and, an intellectual distance exists between humanity and God - a distance Hick calls the 'epistemic distance':

"The reality and presence of God must not be borne in upon men in a coercive or forceful way. The world must be to man to some extent at least, as

if there were no God. God must be a hidden deity, veiled by his creation. He must be knowable but only by a mode of knowledge that involves a free personal choice on man's part. Man exists at a distance from God's goal for him, not because he has fallen from that goal, but because he has yet to arrive at it"

John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*

Hick also maintains that a perfect a world where we could never do wrong would be a world in which we'd never in any meaningful sense do right, for the great virtues we prize so highly, like courage, charity and compassion, are borne out of pain and suffering.

"Might not God exterminate all evil, and produce all Good? Such a world can be conceived of in which if one man tried to murder another, his bullet would melt innocuously into thin air. In such a world there would be nothing wrong with murder and no such crime as murder, because no one could ever be killed. If to act wrongly meant to harm someone, there'd no longer be any such thing as morally wrong action. And for the same reason there'd no longer be any such thing as morally right action."

John Hick, *The Problem of Evil*

CRITICISMS

"Above a forest lightning strikes, igniting a fearsome fire.....A young fawn is trapped, horribly burned, barely alive in excruciating pain for several days...until death relieves her suffering.....So far as we can see, the fawn's suffering is pointless. Could an all loving and an all powerful God have prevented its apparently pointless suffering? The answer is obvious.... God could have easily prevented her from being horribly burned, or, given the burning, could have spared her intense suffering by quickly ending her life rather than allowing her to die in terrible agony for days".

William Rowe, Modern American Philosopher

Although the Irenaean type of theodicy allows room for the concept of evolution and avoids some of the criticisms associated with Augustine's theodicy it still faces difficulties. If only humans are able to attain God's likeness then the suffering in the non human world appears unnecessary and cruel because a pain-filled evolutionary process, red in tooth and claw, over four billion years has, according to Hick, occurred just to set the stage for the only thing considered intrinsically valuable, that is the moral and spiritual development of human beings. Furthermore, while soul-making couldn't take place in a paradise, does our world need to contain such horrendous and immense suffering such as the Holocaust or Hiroshima and given that six million children under five year are currently dying every year from hunger, can the world really be seen as a training ground for soul-making as these innocent children have little time to evolve into God's likeness. Finally according to

some philosophers the suffering of the innocent can never be an expression of Divine love:

“What are we to say of the child dying from cancer? If this has been “done” to anyone this is bad enough, but to be done for a purpose planned from eternity – that is the deepest evil! If God is this kind of agent, He cannot justify His actions and His evil nature is revealed”

Dewi Zephaniah Phillips, *The Concept of Prayer*

Russia, 1878

“A boy of eight accidentally hits the paw of a general's favourite hunting hound with a stone while he's playing. The boy is taken from his mother and locked up in a filthy outhouse, all night. Next morning he's stripped naked, and shivering and numb with terror, he's ordered to run. The general sets the pack of hounds on himand the hounds tear the boy to pieces...before his mother's eyes!Do you understand why this evil is permitted? Without it, I'm told, we couldn't exist on earth for we wouldn't have known good and evil. But why should we know that diabolical 'good' and 'evil' when it costs so much? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that small child's suffering {PAUSE}...nor one of his tears”

Fyodor Dostoyevsky {1821- 1881}, *The Brothers Karamazov*

Universalism

John Hick however disagrees that too high a price is paid to know good from evil, because he envisages a period of perfecting when the general, one day in heaven, will remember how he treated the boy and feel terrible remorse of conscience and ask God for forgiveness.

Hick's theodicy works if everybody is ultimately perfected and goes to heaven, but, if everyone is to be saved does this mean that people like the general who perpetrated hideously cruel and barbaric actions on earth are never punished?

Another challenge to the theodicy is the fact that suffering doesn't necessarily lead to the development of positive human qualities, and, at times, the world can seem more like a vale of *soul breaking* rather than a vale of *soul-making*:

“Does evil provide us with an opportunity for spiritual growth, so that this world can be seen as a vale of soul-making? Perhaps some evils can be seen this way, but, much leads not to growth but to apparent spiritual disaster. Is it suggested that the existence of evil provides the opportunity for mercy, sympathy and self-sacrifice in the service of others? Again, no doubt some evil can be seen this way. But, much evil seems to elicit cruelty rather than sacrificial love. Neither of these suggestions takes with sufficient seriousness the sheer hideousness of some of the evils we see”.

Alvin Plantinga, *Self Profile*

The Irenaean theodicy then sees the world as a difficult environment, a vale of soul making in which the human spirit has the possibility to mature and become refined and complete, in God's likeness. This world isn't meant to be a paradise but rather a setting in which our most valuable potentialities are drawn out and developed by the challenges - sometimes terrible challenges - this world contains.

"The world isn't designed for the maximization of pleasure and the minimization of pain, but is rather well adapted to the quite different purpose of soul making. The most loving parents enjoy providing their children pleasures, but at the same time realize there are times when a child must be denied immediate pleasure to gain greater values, such as unselfishness, compassion, courage, humour, reverence for the truth, and perhaps above all, the capacity for love".

John Hick, *The Problem of Evil*

***"We all suffer, for we all prize and love.
In our present existence, prizing and loving yield suffering.
Suffering is for the loving"***

Nicholas Wolterstorff, modern philosopher

WATCH-WORDS!

The following words and phrases have been used in the film and in the resources - sometimes more than once - and are useful words and phrases for pupils and students to know, and understand:

Analogy, atrocities, compassion, free-will, 'God's image', 'God's likeness', 'Greater Good Argument', hedonistic, hidden deity, intrinsic, potentialities, refined, 'soul-making', temptation, 'the epistemic distance', universalism, virtues.

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