The Problem of Evil and John Hick's "Soul-Making" Theodicy

For many Christians, the reality of evil is one of the most difficult facts to account for in the world; it does not seem compatible with God's infinite goodness and power. Whether or not antitheistic arguments from evil actually succeed in providing rational support for atheism, the vast amount of apologetic literature generated in response to such arguments suggests that for many theistic philosophers, they at least *seem* to; and the project of theodicy, or the reconciliation of the existence of God with the reality of evil, seems as needed today as ever.

One of the most important recent contributions to this project is John Hick's "Irenaean," or "soul-making" theodicy, most fully expounded in his now-classic work, *Evil and the God of Love*.[1] Hick's theodicy has been highly influential, but it has also been highly controversial, and many objections have been brought against it. Most of these objections, I think, can be countered, but there are some aspects of Hick's account that remain less than satisfactory. Nevertheless, I do not believe that these shortcomings are enough to undermine Hick's entire project, and I will argue that in the end, those of us who believe in an infinitely powerful and good God would do well to accept the basic insights of the soul-making theodicy.

Hick demarcates two main traditions of Christian theodicy. The first he traces back to Augustine, and identifies as the historically dominant tradition. Augustinian theodicies claim that God has given humans (and possibly angels) freedom, they have misused that freedom and thus brought evil on themselves and on creation, and God will justly punish some but save others through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.[2] Hick disputes many of the themes commonly emphasized by theodicists in the Augustinian tradition, including evil existing as a punishment for original sin, a historical fall, and eternal hell as punishment for sin, and concludes that a different approach is needed.[3]

Hick finds “hints” of this different approach in the writings of Irenaeus, although it would be left to later thinkers to explicate it more fully.[4] Irenaeus viewed the fall not as a calamitous loss of an original state of perfection, but rather as “an understandable lapse due to [the] weakness and immaturity” of the original human beings.[5] Humans were created as “infants,” in the “image” but not yet the “likeness” of God. The purpose of this life is the moral and spiritual growth of humans into perfected beings “capable of personal relationship with [their] Maker.”[6] It is for this development that evil and suffering exists; they are not God’s punishment for sin but rather God’s means of reconciling us with himself.

Adopting Irenaeus’ theology to the present day, Hick asks us to conceive of the world as a “vale of Soul-making.”[7] Its purpose is the creation of finite persons who can—and will—freely choose to share in the life of their personal Creator. God did not create us with ready-made moral character, because character to be valuable must be developed through experience. So God has created us as morally and spiritually immature creatures, evolved from the lower animals. And with the human race beginning in this way, it is no wonder that we should go wrong, for we existed from the first in a “fallen” state and a suffering-filled world. And such a world as we find ourselves in is, Hick insists, absolutely necessary for the perfection of our souls. A pain-free paradise with no difficulties, perils, and hardships would never allow us to learn and to develop, for moral and spiritual growth comes through the facing and overcoming of challenges.[8]

Few theodicists today accept the Augustinian idea of natural evil existing as a punishment for original sin,[9] and most acknowledge that pain and suffering can have some instrumental value (whether in character development, the exercising of moral freedom, or something else).[10] A number of more traditional Christian theodicists, however, object to the notion that the *only* or *primary* reason for the existence of evil in our world is its instrumental purposes. They take issue with Hick's bold claim that it is impossible for the theist to deny God's ultimate responsibility for evil without renouncing his sovereignty;[11] for them, making God responsible for evil—moral evil, at any rate—is the gravest of heresies.[12] Accordingly, they desire to place responsibility for evil back where they believe it belongs: with human beings.

One way of doing this is by asserting some version of the fall doctrine. Hick claims that belief in a historical fall today is both scientifically and philosophically impossible, the former because of the theory of evolution, and the latter because it is inconceivable that perfect persons in a perfect environment would sin.[13] A number of authors have accused Hick of misunderstanding the nature of "perfection" before the fall. Douglas Geivett says that human beings were not "perfectly morally good" before the fall; rather, they were (as yet) uncorrupted, but "morally neutral."[14] But this response is inadequate. Whether one characterizes pre-fall creatures as "morally perfect" or "morally neutral," Hick’s basic point is that such creatures need a *reason* or *motive* to sin, and this requires either a temptation external to them or a moral flaw internal to them.[15] Geivett’s response does nothing to provide such a motivating factor, and any response that does will have to trace that factor back to God, for where else could it originate?

One might object that the nature of sin is to be *unreasonable*, that to assume a pre-fall creature needs a reason to sin is to discount the inexplicability of sin.[16] But any human choice supposes *some* reason for the choice, even if it is not on the whole the *most* rational one. A person may recognize that an action is irrational in the sense that it is not for her ultimate good, but if she nevertheless does it, she clearly must have had some motivation to do so. She may know it is irrational for her to take revenge on a friend (knowing that it will not end well for either of them) but may choose to do so anyway in order to satisfy her desire to give her friend “what’s coming to her.” Such a choice is irrational, but hardly inexplicable. And if the Augustinian theodicist insists, despite all this, that the original sin was an utterly incomprehensible act, we may ask why God would make creatures who choose so unreasonably and inexplicably;[17] and so even here a reason needs to be given for God’s allowing evil to come into existence.

Thus I conclude with Hick that blaming evil on the fall is not only scientifically untenable[18] but also philosophically unsatisfying. Indeed, Hick’s discussion reveals not only the impossibility of a theodicy based on the fall, but of any based solely on human free will. For not only must God be responsible for making us in such a way that we can (choose to) sin, he must also be responsible for making our *environment* such that we *will* sin.[19] The classic atheistic argument against the free will defence is that if it is (logically) possible for humans never to sin, then it is (logically) possible for God to make them so that they never sin.[20] It has been objected that for human freedom to be truly "free," God cannot make our natures such that we always choose to do right.[21] Even if this is true, however, what Hick's challenge to the doctrine of the fall recognizes is that God *could* have made our *situation* such that we would never sin; we would have no reason to. "[O]ur freedom can only operate within the basic situation of our being the kind of creatures that we are in the kind of world in which we are."[22] To be a creature is to be subject to factors beyond our control, which, if not wholly determine, at least severely circumscribe our freedom. So God could give us formal freedom in the sense that we are not so constituted to inevitably do good (but neither are we biased towards doing bad) but nevertheless put us in an environment that we would never go wrong, because we would have no motive for doing so. In creating us in an environment that gives us reason to sin, God bears at least partial responsibility for our doing so, and so the blame for evil cannot be laid solely on human beings.[23]

An environment that gives us no temptations, however, would not be one in which people could properly be said to be good; rather we would simply happen never to do evil because of our situation. A world in which humans could never go wrong would also be a world in which humans would never, in any meaningful sense, go right; for the great moral virtues we prize so highly—courage, charity, compassion and the like—all require the existence of challenges and difficulties to be overcome. “The development of human personality … does not occur in a static situation demanding no exertion and no choices.”[24] And this is why, on the Irenaean view, we need natural evil, pain and suffering, as well as the possibility of moral evil—for if God were, for example, to keep morally evil acts from ever bringing harm to anyone, they would cease to be evil and we would never develop the kind of moral personality that is dedicated to overcoming this kind of evil.[25]

Human freedom, in the practical and not just formal sense, also requires that we live in a religiously ambiguous universe, Hick tells us. Were God to create us in his immediate presence, we could not but be aware of him; then we would have no choice but to know him and worship him, and to obey his commands, and our choice to do so would not be free. So God has created us at an “epistemic distance” from him, so that “the world is *etsi dues non daretur*, as if there were no God … it is systematically ambiguous, capable of being interpreted either theistically or naturalistically”[26]; for only in such a world as this is true freedom possible.

One might ask, however, what exactly “true freedom” means in this case. William Rowe contends that while it makes sense to say that epistemic distance is necessary for the free act of faith, it does not make sense to say that it is necessary for either freely “developing morally in relation to other human beings” or for freely loving God.[27] Hick’s response is that it is true that our being moral persons is not contingent upon epistemic distance from God, but that our having genuine, practical, freedom requires it: “whereas being compelled to be aware of a fellow human being leaves us free to adopt any attitude we like to him/her, being compelled to be conscious of God would not leave us similarly free to adopt any attitude to God … [it] would be a situation in which we could only respond by worship and an answering love."[28]

But why is this a bad thing? Humans are (Hick readily admits) morally ignorant; and would not a fuller awareness of the Divine make us morally wise, perhaps to the point where we would almost certainly not sin?[29] Hick's response would probably be that it is better for us to develop morally than to be "forced" to do right. But it is not quite right to say that we are "forced" to do right in this case; rather the wisdom of the right would be so evident to us that we would almost certainly *choose* to do it. Hick here seems to be equating ignorance with freedom. This is a mistake, however. Coercion is generally wrong because it forces people to act contrary to their wills; here that is not an issue, because it is people's wills themselves that are being changed.[30] Indeed, is this not part of what character development *is*? Could not then an utter awareness of God be a means to moral development, so that our characters could be made perfect? After all, a morally reprehensible individual might have a religious experience and become a much better person for it. He might later describe his new lifestyle as something he felt "compelled" to undertake because of his experience, but we would not accuse God of "forcing" him into it. In our relationships with other human beings, too, not all of our character development comes through hardships. We also learn by experiencing others' love, and being taught what is good. And what better lover and teacher than God? Indeed, Hick at times suggests that as Christians our model for a perfect human is Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate.[31] If this is true, it seems God ought to have made this more evident to the human race, so that we cannot avoid this fact. For how can we be expected to do the good when we do not know what it is? Far from epistemic distance being necessary for true freedom, it seems in fact to restrict from us the possibility of being truly good![32]

So Hick's explanation for the apparent ambiguity of the universe seems, in the end, unsatisfying. This is not fatal to his theodicy, however, for while some answer to this problem is necessary for a complete theodicy, there are probably other possible answers that are compatible with Hick's central premise. So the question is: Is Hick's central premise, that evil exists for the sake of soul-making, reasonable? One of the most difficult tasks for any theodicy is the sheer amount of evil in our world and the seeming meaningless and pointlessness of so much of it. How could the Holocaust ever contribute to any greater good, soul-making or anything else? Surely (the challenge goes) there is far more evil in our world than is necessary for character development; indeed, there is so much as to hinder it in many cases.

In response to this challenge, Hick argues that, paradoxically, evil *must* be so bad and pervasive as to seem inexplicable and dysteleological if we are to grow morally. A world in which suffering only occurred to the extent required for the soul-making of the person afflicted is not one that would evoke compassion and charity, for we would recognize that any suffering that was happening would lead to the good of the sufferer. Only in a world in which this is *not* so, in which suffering afflicts humans with haphazardness and inequity, sometimes even (temporarily) working against the soul-making of the person afflicted, can soul-making truly occur.[33]

A number of different scholars have balked at the notion that the amount of destructive and horrific evil in our world is necessary for soul-making.[34] This is hardly surprising—for if Hick's paradox is correct, it *should* seem to us that God could have made the world better than it was for the purposes of soul-making; and so the argument should (initially, at least) seem objectionable! But lest we let Hick off the hook too easily, Rowe observes that

> it not only seems obvious to us that evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for soul-making; it also seems obvious to us that *evil occurs far in excess of what an omnipotent being would have to permit for us to be rational in believing that excess evil occurs*.[35]

Rowe accuses Hick of employing an "all-or-nothing argument," in which God cannot take away any evil without his purposes being thwarted; but (Rowe insists) in actuality there must be some threshold above which more evil is (all things considered) unnecessary, and is it not obvious that our world is above that threshold?[36]

Linda Zagzebski responds that Rowe has not proved anything at all; for evil seeming to him to be in excess of what is needed for us to rationally believe that evil occurs in excess of what is needed for soul-making is exactly what one would expect under the soul-making hypothesis.[37] Hick echoes this, saying that of course it should seem that the evil in the world is greater than is needed for soul-making, "for it will look that way to us if it is in fact soul-making!"[38]

Contra Hick, however, it is not clear that for the purposes of soul-making, evil really should seem like it is above Rowe's threshold. Rowe seems right that there *is* a threshold above which more excess suffering is unnecessary, and there is not an obvious reason why we would not be able to differentiate between this and the lower threshold in which *no* excess suffering occurs. But perhaps we are simply too ignorant of the big picture to know whether or not the evil in the world is, in fact, above Rowe's threshold; so we cannot go from "seems" to "is." If this is the case, we are left with the curious situation in which *no amount of evil in the world counts against the existence of God*. Under Hick's hypothesis, any amount of evil is compatible with the existence of God—as far as we know, at least.[39] But if we are so ignorant as to not be able to judge whether there is excess evil in the world, what makes Hick confident that we are wise enough to be able to see the purpose of evil in the first place? The very project of theodicy assumes that we have some capacity to make sense of the evil in our world. If this is the case, then why suggest that we do not have the capacity to judge whether evil is truly above Rowe's threshold? If it is not the case (and this is, admittedly, a real possibility), then we are probably better off simply adopting "sceptical theism," the position that God does have good reasons for allowing evil, but that we are unable to discern what they are.[40] Hick's position on our capacity to make judgments about evil seems, at the least, unstable.

That being said, one reason that the evil in this world seems so gratuitous is the lack of significant soul-making that in fact happens in this world. If the purpose of this world is the making of souls, it seems to have failed in its purpose, for most human beings do not leave this world morally perfect, or anywhere near it. Hick, however, offers a resolution to this problem by postulating an afterlife in which all human beings will, in the end, freely come to God. Soul-making is rarely completed in this life, but Hick believes that we may have faith that it will in the life, or lives, to come. If hell, then, has a place in the soul-making theodicy, it is not as a place of eternal torment or separation from God, but as a further place of soul-making, until one day all souls have been made perfect and we are all able to enter a heaven in which we perfectly love each other and our Creator.[41]

Hick seems right that eschatology is an unavoidable part of the soul-making theodicy, and probably of any theodicy. His commitment to universalism, however, has unsurprisingly met much opposition from many Christians. Geivett, for example, admits that universalism seems necessary if God's ultimate purpose is soul-making, but denies that soul-making is God's ultimate purpose, and suggests moreover that such a purpose is incompatible with human freedom. He claims that God's purpose is to create free beings who can choose either to accept him or reject him—a choice which he will honour by sending them to either heaven or hell.[42] Geivett's contention is common,[43] but highly dubious. It is not at all clear what is so good about the kind of freedom Geivett idealizes; if the result of freedom is that the majority of the human race will suffer separation from God eternally, it seems that it would have been better for God not to give humanity freedom.[44] It is also far from clear just what "freely choos[ing] [or rejecting] God in this earthly life"[45] *means*. Were God actually to appear to every single human being and ask them whether they would rather be saved or damned, I can hardly imagine many of them saying the latter. The moral and spiritual ambiguity of the universe make it eminently unreasonable to ask that humans in this life determine the fate of their eternal souls by a “choice” when it is not at all obvious just how one goes about “choosing salvation” (or “being a good person,” for that matter).

But even if we were to grant that it is God’s purpose for all to be saved, we must face the objection that universal salvation conflicts with human freedom.[46] Now, at first glance it seems that so long as making the choices necessary to go through the soul-making process remains a possibility for a person, he will (given an infinite amount of time) eventually make them (just as a monkey hitting keys on a typewriter will eventually produce Shakespeare). But John Rist reminds us that character formation goes both ways: having committed a particular sin we may find it “harder to act morally in this area because a start has been made in forming a habit.”[47] This means that a person’s continued sin in the afterlife could (through the corruption of his character) lead to it becoming increasingly unlikely that he will choose to do good. Even if the probability of his doing good never reached 0, its growing progressively smaller would mean that even over an infinite period of time, the probability of his eventual soul-making would still be smaller than 1, and so his salvation would not be guaranteed.[48]

This scenario, however, only leaves room for two factors: free will and one’s own moral inertia. But why suppose that these are the only relevant factors? After all, these same forces are at work in this life, and yet we still seek to save the lost (or should, at least). We may try to help a person entangled in sin by changing her situation, showing her love and compassion, or removing or making less appealing the temptation to sin. If we can do these things to help people in this life escape sin, why can God not do similarly for people in the next? All God has to do is provide countervailing forces that make it so that the probability of people's continued sin does not consistently grow progressively larger. He could do this, perhaps, by periodically changing their situations so as to give them positive moral influences, or by revealing himself to them to a degree that counteracts their moral dispositions. Whatever his methods, he could presumably see to it that the probability of a person choosing good remained sufficiently constant for that person to eventually do so.[49] So although God could not guarantee that person's (freely chosen) salvation at any *particular* time, he could guarantee his *eventual* salvation.

Now, were someone's character to become so corrupt that moral goodness became a psychological impossibility for him, the above scenario could not obtain for that person. But we have no good reason to think that human beings can become so utterly and irrevocably evil that it is *impossible* for them to choose the good, no matter what situation they are in. Certainly it seems unlikely that, had he a choice, a God who wished for all to be saved would have created human beings in such a way.[50]

This discussion, however, raises another possible difficulty with the soul-making theodicy. If it is not possible for anyone to become irrevocably evil, is it possible for someone to become irrevocably good? Is the concept of a morally perfect person, one whose character is so constituted that no matter what situation she finds herself in, she will not sin, a sensible one? It is not obvious to me that it is; it seems that even the best person, were you to put her in a damnable enough situation, would eventually sin. Geivett contends that it is not possible for us to become morally perfect through our own efforts, that the only way that this is possible is through “divine fiat.”[51] Geivett’s reasons for why God grants this moral perfection (and subsequent salvation) to some and not others are unpersuasive; and, we may also wonder, if God intends to perfect us by divine fiat, why did not he not do so to begin with, at the beginning of this life?[52] Nevertheless, it must be admitted that we have no empirical reason to believe that moral perfection is possible for human beings without divine fiat. This, to my mind, is the greatest difficulty with the eschatological dimension of the soul-making theodicy. Still, if we believe that God truly is all-powerful and all-loving, perhaps he has created us in such a way that this is possible for us, though it may not seem so from our present situation. Certainly this does not seem a less reasonable idea than the alternatives (such as perfection by divine fiat) proposed.

Hick’s arguments make clear that for the purposes of theodicy, God must—if he is to be sovereign—be ultimately responsible for evil, and so must ultimately succeed in his purpose of drawing all persons to himself. Augustinians may balk at viewing evil as “instrumental” in God’s purposes, but there does not seem to be any viable alternative short of denying God’s omnipotence, an option I have not considered here. Difficulties remain, most notably the moral and religious ambiguity of the world, and whether we are willing to accept Hick's paradox. Many other questions could be raised. No one theodicy is likely to satisfactorily explain everything. Nevertheless, if we are committed to maintaining that an all-powerful and all-good God exists, then the acceptance of Hick's fundamental premise—that God uses a world in which evil is inevitable to reconcile his creatures to himself—brings us much closer to understanding the mystery of evil. Some Christians may be unwilling to accept some of the elements of the soul-making theodicy—such as universal salvation or God's omni-responsibility for sin—on grounds of orthodoxy.[53] But the traditional beliefs of a fall and an eternal hell make the problem of evil more baffling, not less. How much orthodoxy can be abandoned for the sake of theodicy, I cannot judge here. But Hick has given us good reason to wonder.

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[1] John Hick, Evil and the God of Love (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007).

[2] Ibid., 38-198.

[3] These are not nearly all of the themes that Hick criticizes in the Augustinian tradition, but others—such as evil as non-being, the principle of plenitude, God’s goodness as aesthetic rather than relational—are neither essential to Augustinian theodicy nor particularly fundamental to many Christians today, and so I have passed over them.

[4] Ibid., 201-19.

[5] Ibid., 215.

[6] Ibid., 212.

[7] Ibid., 295. The phrase is borrowed from a poem by John Keats.

[8] Ibid., 243-327.

[9] Hick’s basic argument against this doctrine is that it is both philosophically difficult to make sense of and inconsistent with the teachings of Christ (God of Love, 207-08). I believe he is right on both counts.

[10] See, for example, Douglas R. Geivett, Evil and the Evidence for God: The Challenge of John Hick’s Theodicy (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 185-87. Geivett defends a traditional Augustinian theodicy, but speaks of natural evil as having instrumental value, rather than being a result of fallen angels or a punishment for original sin.

[11] Ibid., 240.

[12] “The alternative is to locate this mystery of iniquity not in ourselves but in the purposes of God. That I regard as fatal to theism” (Illtyd Trethowan, “Dr Hick and the problem of evil,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 18 no 2 [October 1967], 414).

[13] “It is impossible to conceive of wholly good beings in a wholly good world becoming sinful” (Hick, God of Love, 250).

[14] Geivett, p. 202. Trethowan says that “perfection” before the fall simply means “an intelligent nature capable of being raised to the beatific vision, still in a state of tension therefore, but unflawed” (p. 408). Thomas E. Clarke says that being “finitely perfect” is not the same as being “impeccable” (“The problem of evil: a new study,” in *Theological Studies*, 28 no 1 [March 1967], 121).

[15] Hick, “Coherence and the God of love again,” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 24 no 2 (October 1973), 526.

[16] Trethowan, 408.

[17] Hick, God of Love, 279.

[18] Notably few of Hick’s Augustinian critics properly address the issue of the findings of contemporary science about humanity’s origins. Geivett, for instance, at times expresses scepticism towards evolution (e.g., 221) but never offers his own alternative account of origins. Those who acknowledge the impossibility of believing in a historical earthly fall choose instead to locate the fall in the angelic realm (e.g., Trethowan, 407-08), but this seems dubious (why accept this fall myth if we are denying the other one, which is

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actually present in Scripture?) and suffers from the above problems besides.

[19] This is not to say that, under Hick's view, each sin is an inevitable result of the circumstances preceding it. Rather, though individual sins may be contingent, sin *in general* is a practically inevitable result of our being created with free will with characters that tempt us to sin and environments that give us reason to.

[20] Hick, God of Love, 265-71.

[21] Geivett, 198-200.

[22] Hick, "Freedom and the Irenaean theodicy again," in *Journal of Theological Studies,* ns 21 no 2 (October 1970), 420. Hick's conception of freedom, as I understand it, is libertarian in that free actions are not causally determined beforehand. However, the actions actually available to one are severely circumscribed both by one's character and situation. See God of Love, 275-77; also "Freedom and the Irenaean theodicy again," 419-22. Hick's definition of human freedom could certainly be made more precise, and it might be asked (as I do not in this essay) how freedom, as he understands it, relates to divine foreknowledge (whether, for example, God has middle knowledge of what we would freely do in any possible situation, or whether our free actions are such that by their nature they cannot be foreseen by God), and what implications the answer to this might have on his theodicy (for example, whether a God who could foresee particular freely chosen evils is more responsible for them than a God who could not).

[23] Some libertarians might object that if our environment is such that we never go wrong, then, according to the principle of alternative possibilities, we are not free in respect to evil, because there is no possible world in which we choose it. (We could still have free will in respect to other matters, in that it is possible for us to choose among various non-evil options in any given situation.) Now, this seems to me an odd way of speaking about freedom—if God has created us in such a way that evil is neither psychologically nor physically impossible for us, but we simply have no reason to do evil, how are we not free to do evil? (I would hold, for example, that I am free to have my morning cereal with soda instead of milk—I am capable of it and no one is restraining me from doing it—even though I will never do it, because I have no reason to.) But suppose that we did accept this account of freedom. The free will theodicist might then go on to contend that the exercising of free will (in respect to morality) is good in and of itself (rather than as a means to something else, such as character development), and so that God is justified in creating our situations such that we choose freely (meaning, partly, indeterminately) to do right or do wrong. This seems dubious (would I do good—regardless of the result—by giving a person pornography not available to him before, so that there is now a free choice before him as to whether or not to look at it?), but even if it were true, in making it possible for us to exercise our free will in this way God would still bear ultimate responsibility for the existence of sin in general (if not in particular), just as I would be responsible for a recovering alcoholic's eventual lapsing were I to continually make liquor available to him (Hick, God of Love, 290-91). This would not, then, absolve God of responsibility for moral evil, but simply give a different explanation for his bringing it about.

[24] Hick, "An Irenaean Theodicy," in Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Edinburgh: John Knox Press, 1981), 46.

[25] Ibid.

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[26] Hick, God of Love, 373.

[27] William L. Rowe, “Paradox and Promise: Hick’s Solution to the Problem of Evil,” in Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick, ed. Harold Hewitt (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 116.

[28] Hick, “Reply [to ‘Paradox and Promise’],” in Problems in the Philosophy of Religion, 135.

[29] Although Hick never blatantly specifies this, it would seem that if we “have no choice” but to love and worship God, this love and worship would manifest itself in morally good actions towards other human beings. I think that Hick would agree that a person who absolutely knew and loved God would be a morally perfect person.

[30] There may be cases where we would say that you “coerce” someone if you cause her to desire to do something, for example if you were to deceive someone so as to make her want to do what you want. But if you educate someone of the *truth* and she changes her will, and so lifestyle, as a result, we would generally not describe that as coercion.

[31] “But who is portrayed by such a picture of man dwelling in a right relationship with God? Only, according to the claim of Christian faith, one man: Jesus, who was the Christ” (Hick, God of Love, 263; see also 243, 319, and 339).

[32] “‘Epistemic distance’ is simply another term for lack of knowledge, or more bluntly, ignorance. … it is impossible for anyone rationally and responsibly to do what is required of him when he does not know what it is” (G. Stanley Kane, “Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy,” in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, 6 no 1 [Spring 1975], 7).

[33] Hick, God of Love, 333-36.

[34] “Surely an all-wise, omnipotent being could have found some happier middle ground between our present, all-too-destructive world, and the ‘hedonistic paradise’ Hick fears would make us morally and spiritually flabby” (David R. Griffin, “Critique [of ‘An Irenaean Theodicy’],” in Encountering Evil, 53-54). Or again: “Our world has the pain and stress needed for spiritual growth, but enough is enough, and it would appear God turned the pressure up so as to destroy some while educating only a few” (Frederick Sontag, “Critique [of ‘An Irenaean Theodicy’],” in Encountering Evil, 57).

[35] Rowe, 120, emphasis mine.

[36] Ibid., 120-22.

[37] Linda Zagzebski, “Critical Response [to ‘Paradox and Promise’],” in Problems in the Philosophy of Religion, 126-27.

[38] Hick, “Reply,” 135.

[39] This point is made by Kane, 20; and Stephen T. Davis, “Critique [of ‘An Irenaean Theodicy’],” in Encountering Evil, 58.

[40] Stephen Wykstra, “The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of ‘Appearance,’” in The Problem of Evil, ed. Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[41] Hick, God of Love, 337-63.

[42] Geivett, 215-18.

[43] See, for example, Trethowan, 413; or John M. Rist, “Coherence and the God of love,” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 23 no 1 (April 1972), 96.

[44] Hick, “The problem of evil in the first and last things,” in *Journal of Theological Studies*, no 2 (October 1968), 594.

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[45] Geivett, 215.

[46] According to Keith Ward, for example, Hick's universalism "does not allow for real human freedom, a freedom to hate and reject God's sovereignty" ("Freedom and the Irenaean theodicy," in *Journal of Theological Studies*, ns 20 no 1 [April 1969], 254).

[47] Rist, 98.

[48] If the probability of an event E occurring in a given period of time remains constant, the probability of E occurring at least once over X periods of time can be calculated by multiplying the probability of E *not* occurring by itself X times (i.e., raising the probability of not-E to the power of X). As X approaches infinity, then the probability of not-E approaches 0, and the probability of E 1. Hence, given an infinite amount of time, E would occur; a monkey at a typewriter would eventually type *Hamlet*, even though his doing so on any particular spurt of typing would be incredibly unlikely. However, in this case, the probability of our hypothetical person's soul-making is growing progressively smaller, and so we would not be multiplying (for example) a 0.8 probability of continued sin in a given time period by itself an infinite number of times (which would equal 0); rather, we would be multiplying 0.8 by (say) 0.9 by (say) 0.95, and so on and so forth. This would yield a result much higher than 0, meaning that eventual soul-making could not be assured.

[49] Of course, in the soul-making conception of salvation, this choice would have to be made multiple times. But this does not change the essential nature of the situation.

[50] Even if it *were* possible for human beings to become irrevocably evil, God could presumably interfere before the appropriate choice was made that would bring this about (he could do so, for example, by temporarily removing the temptation to sin). And if, despite all this, some people became so corrupted as to be beyond redemption, it would probably be better for God to destroy them than let them continue to exist (cf. Hick, God of Love, 342).

[51] Geivett, 220.

[52] Hick makes this point in response to the alleged possibility of divine fiat in "An Irenaean Theodicy," 66.

[53] Although whether the Bible actually teaches the "traditional" Augustinian doctrines is of course debatable. See Hick, God of Love, 277-87 (on the fall) and 345-48 (on hell).