

A RESPONSE TO EVIL AND SUFFERING: THE VALE OF SOUL-MAKING THEODICY

THE VALE OF SOUL-MAKING

John Hick (1922-2012) further developed Irenaean theodicy, leading to his '*vale of soul-making*' theodicy. The term was taken from a letter written by the poet, John Keats (1795-1821), to his brother about his continued ill-health. In the letter, dated April 1819, Keats wrote about his philosophy - '*system of Spirit-creation*' - that he'd formulated in response to his ongoing health problems. He called it the '*vale of soul-making*'.

THEODICY

The defence of God in view of the existence of evil and suffering.

This clearly refers to the process by which Keats came to terms with his increasingly poor health and is reflected in Hick's '*vale of soul-making theodicy*.'

Echoing Irenaeus, in his book, '*Evil and the God of Love*' (1972), Hick proposed that humans were born with an inclination to do wrong, so that we could '*grow and develop into the 'likeness' of God*'. The suffering we experience helps us to become better people; we grow and are shaped by our pain, developing a better sense of morality. This means much more than if God just bestowed this morality upon us.

He argued that as humans we have free will; autonomy and freedom to make our own decisions about how we act. This shows that we are capable of doing morally right or wrong things, and, ultimately, capable of good and evil. God doesn't interfere, as this would undermine our freedom. Rather, he keeps an epistemic distance, allowing us to make our own choices.

He further argues that if God's existence was absolutely known, then we would act morally because we would be worried about punishment. By keeping Himself slightly apart humans make good choices based on their own moral compass, leading to our moral development.

However, some people go the opposite way when they experience suffering; they become less kind, less compassionate. This leads Hick to further postulate - again, agreeing with Irenaeus - that for some, the moral development continues after death, in heaven. This is known as '*universal salvation*', the belief that everyone goes to heaven. Hick comes to this conclusion because it is needed to justify suffering in the world.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE VALE OF SOUL-MAKING THEODICY

There are four key arguments against the '*vale of soul-making*' theodicy:

1. Surely there are other ways to develop moral growth?
2. If you shouldn't do something bad to achieve something good, then how come God created an imperfect world?
3. Not all suffering results in moral growth. Are there other ways?
4. Is '*universal salvation*' fair? Why would someone behave morally when they're going to heaven regardless?



TASKS

1. Research both Irenaeus and Hick. Note down key facts about their lives, including notable books and opinions.
2. Explain the meaning of '*vale of soul-making*' in your own words.
3. What is '*universal salvation*'?
4. Do you agree with Hick, that moral growth is the reason we have evil and suffering in the world? Explain your answer.
5. Re-read the four arguments against the '*vale of soul-making*'. Imagine that you are Hick. Answer each of the questions to the best of your ability in defense of the '*vale of soul-making*.'
6. Which of these makes the most convincing argument against the '*vale of soul-making*'? Explain your answer.