





Philosophy of Religion

Theme 2: Challenges to religious belief - the problem of evil and suffering Booklet 1



Knowledge and understanding of religion and belief

A	The problem of evil and suffering:  The types of evil: moral (caused by free will agents) and natural (caused by nature). The logical problem of evil: classical (Epicurus) - the problem of suffering. J. L. Mackie's modern development - the nature of the problem of evil (inconsistent triad). William Rowe (intense human and animal suffering) and Gregory S. Paul (premature deaths).	
B	Religious responses to the problem of evil (i): Augustinian type theodicy: Evil as a consequence of sin: evil as a privation; the fall of human beings and creation; the Cross overcomes evil, soul-deciding Challenges to Augustinian type theodicies: validity of accounts in Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3; scientific error - biological impossibility of human descent from a single pair (therefore invalidating the 'inheritance of Adam's sin'); moral contradictions of omnibenevolent God and existence of Hell; contradiction of perfect order becoming chaotic - geological and biological evidence suggests the contrary.	
C	Religious responses to the problem of evil (ii): Irenaean type theodicy: Vale of soul-making: human beings created imperfect; epistemic distance; second-order goods; eschatological justification Challenges to Irenaean type theodicies: concept of universal salvation unjust; evil and suffering should not be used as a tool by an omnibenevolent God; immensity of suffering and unequal distribution of evil and suffering.	

Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above, such as:

- The extent to which the classical form of the problem of evil is a problem.
- The degree to which modern problem of evil arguments are effective in proving God's nonexistence.
- Whether Augustinian type theodicies are relevant in the 21st Century.
- The extent to which Augustine's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.
- Whether Irenaean type theodicies are credible in the 21st Century.
- The extent to which Irenaeus's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.

2. A. The types of evil: moral (caused by free will agents) and natural (caused by nature).

Our world is one where good and bad things happen. Some of these things are considered so bad as to be evil. Evils are usually divided into two groups: *natural evil* and *moral evil*.

Natural Evil: In contrast to moral evil, natural evil is evil that results from the operation of natural processes, in which case no human being can be held morally accountable for the resultant evil. Classic examples of natural evil are of three kinds:



- natural disasters like cyclones and earthquakes that result in enormous suffering and loss of life
- illnesses such as leukaemia and Alzheimer's,
- disabilities such as blindness and deafness.

The suffering and harm which comes from the natural world and the way that things are made, not through human action. **Peter Vardy** gives some examples: the pain of childbirth, natural disasters, the poor design of the body,

'Natural evil is the evil that originates independently of human actions, in disease, in bacilli, in earthquakes, storms, droughts, tornadoes, etc.' **Hick**

A religious believer who chooses to maintain that God is omnipotent and all-loving faces two possibilities:

1. Evil is the fault of humanity or the Devil, but not God
2. God had a good reason to create natural evil

Moral Evil: The suffering and harm which results from human actions.

This is evil that results from the **misuse of free will on the part of some moral agent** in such a way that the agent thereby becomes morally blameworthy for the resultant evil. Moral evil therefore includes specific acts of intentional wrongdoing like lying and murdering, as well as defects in character such as dishonesty and greed.



'Moral evil is the evil that we human beings originate: cruel, vicious, unjust and perverse thoughts and deeds'. **Hick**





'The evil constituted by deliberate actions or negligent failure.' **Swinburne**

Theists might be able to explain this more easily than natural evil. They often argue that suffering which results from moral evil is not God's fault, but our own. God lovingly gave us the freedom of choice when he made us to act as we choose. Unfortunately, many people choose to do wrong.

Yet there are still problems with this. Surely God, being all knowing, knew that we would act this way if he gave us the freedom to do as we please (free will)? Why did God give us the option to choose the wrong things? Why didn't he programme us to always be good? Why does God not stop us when we make the wrong choice? If God can see that someone is about to attack a child, why doesn't he step in?

Brian Hebblethwaite argues that even though moral evil can be blamed on mankind's failings, we still need an explanation of why we are made in such a way that we feel pain and grief.

1. List three specific examples in each column and explain why they are natural/physical or moral evil – detailed – your explanation must show how the example chosen causes suffering and is therefore considered evil.

Natural/physical evil	Moral evil
	
	

2. Why is evil a problem for religious believers?

The Logical Problem of evil: classical (Epicurus) – the problem of suffering

The problem of evil challenges faith in a God who created the universe out of nothing and is all-knowing, all-loving and all-powerful and leads some to argue that God does not exist at all.



The logical problem is concerning the inconsistency of God's nature and the existence of evil.

[Video clip about the problem of evil](#)

'Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked. If God can abolish evil, and God really want to do it, why is there evil in the world?' **Epicurus, The Wrath of God**

The logical problem of evil: classical Epicurus

The God of Classical Theism consists of many attributes, all of which are meant to encapsulate **God's perfection**, where to be perfect is to be *the greatest being possible*. These qualities of God include eternity, omnipresence, and others, but what is important to the problem of evil are the following three in particular:



1. **Omnipotence:** that God is **all powerful**, that God has the ability to bring about any state of affairs that is logically possible in itself as well as logically consistent with his other essential attributes.
2. **Omniscience:** that God is **all knowing**, that he knows all truths or knows all that is logically possible to know.
3. **Omnibenevolence:** that God is **all loving** and the source of perfect goodness.

The problem of evil as stated by Epicurus argues that the **existence of evil is incompatible with the existence of the God of classical theism**. As a result, it is **logically inconsistent** to accept that both exist together.

Why is it a problem?

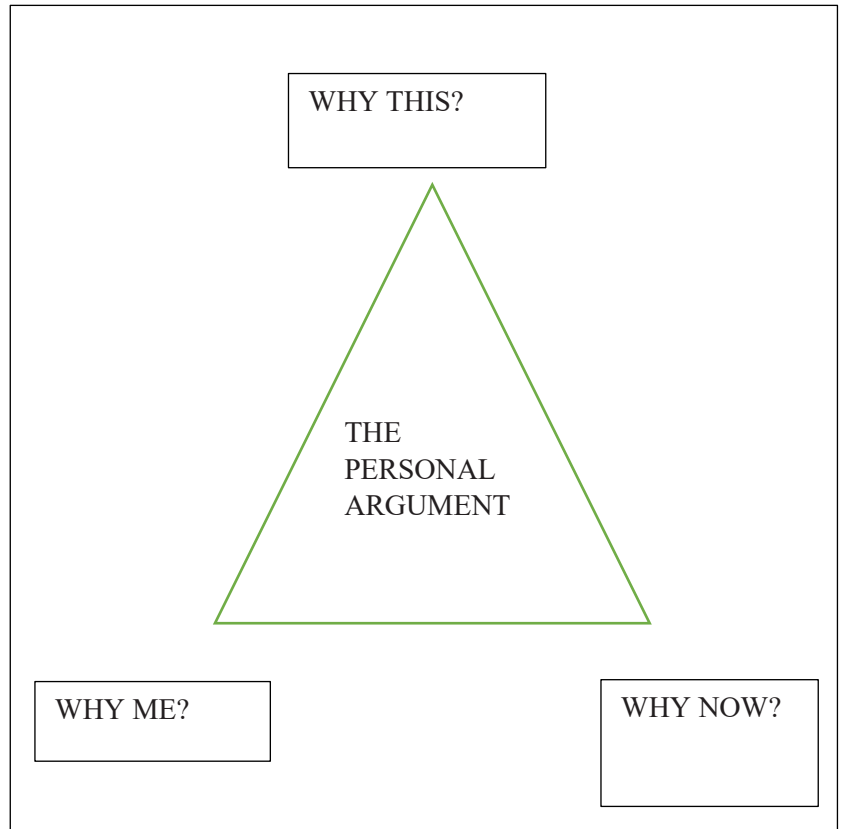
This is not just a philosophical problem, a puzzle to think about and have an opinion on. The problem of evil presents religious people with a genuine and immediate problem.

Some believe that the existence of evil in the world means they can **never** accept that there is a God.

Others may **lose faith** which was once very strong when they are faced with suffering e.g. the death of a loved one, a mother who can't feed her child due to famine, a child who loses her entire family in an earthquake, or a man with a terminal disease to which there is no cure.

The problem of suffering:

These three viewpoints focus on the experience of the evil. It raises different questions because of the experience of suffering. Whereas the logical argument attempts to show that the existence of God is inconsistent with the existence of evil and so leads to atheism, the personal argument involving the experience of suffering focuses on the moral issue. Assuming God exists can such a God be trusted?



3. What is meant by the term the 'God of Classical Theism'?

4. What is meant by the phrase 'the problem of evil'?

5. Think of examples of personal suffering

6. Why might it make people doubt God?

J.L. Mackie's modern development – the nature of the problem of evil (inconsistent triad)

Mackie focussed on the **logical** problem of evil. The logical problem arises because theists maintain that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do. However, Mackie claims that the only solution to the logical problem is to deny this and that all so called 'solutions' or 'theodicies' actually limit God's power but misleadingly keep the term 'omnipotence'. He argues that in the various theodicies:

- God is bound by logical necessities. Hence not omnipotent since he cannot do what is logically impossible
- God is subject to causal laws which he made. Hence not omnipotent because he has to introduce evil as a means to good.
- God makes things that he cannot control. Hence not omnipotent because he has created human wills that he cannot control.

Therefore, Mackie argues that the theodicies do not give a solution to the problem of evil since they have changed the premise (i.e. that God is omnipotent).

"Mackie's triad" are the following three propositions:

Mackie's omnipotence paradox

Theodicies do not solve the problem of evil as they limit God.

'This leads us to what I call the Paradox of Omnipotence: can an omnipotent being make things which he cannot subsequently control? Or, what is practically equivalent to this, can an omnipotent being make rules which then bind himself?'

1. God is omnipotent. Since God alone created the universe out of nothing, He has **total responsibility** for everything in it. If He is **all-powerful** then He can do anything that is logically possible.

Omnipotence incorporates omniscience and involves a clear definition of what he calls 'unqualified omnipotence', that is, omnipotence without any restrictions due to the constraints of the world.

2. God is omnibenevolent. 'A wholly good being eliminates evil as far as it can'. **Any loving being**, as we understand the term, would **wish to stop** the multiple horrors heaped upon the millions of innocent people over the years.

3. Evil exists. We have **sufficient direct experience** to support the existence of evil, that **God's creation suffers** physical and mental pain.

These three are thought to be logically inconsistent.

*This means **one cannot affirm – simultaneously – the truth of all three statements.***

*Thus, for Mackie, **to believe in the existence of God is positively irrational (= illogical).***

Holding such a contradiction would be like believing that:

- a. This object is round.
- b. This object is square.

7. You need to be able to properly summarise the dilemma in sufficient detail:

world, end, exist, omniscient, responsibility, possible,

- Since God alone created the universe out of nothing, He has **total** _____ for everything in it. If He is **omnipotent**, then He can do anything that is logically _____. This means that He could have create a _____ free from actual evil and suffering, and free from the possibility of ever going wrong. It also means that, should He have allowed them to come about, He could end all evil and suffering.
- Since God is _____, He has complete knowledge of everything in the universe, including evil and suffering. He also **knows how to stop it**.
- However, if God is **all-loving**, He would wish to _____ all evil and suffering. In the words of J.L. Mackie, 'A wholly good being eliminates evil as far as it can'. Any *loving* being, as we understand the term, would **wish to stop** the multiple horrors heaped upon the millions of innocent people over the years. No all-loving God would allow his creation to suffer physical and mental torment for no reason and to no avail.
- *And so since God is omnipotent, He could immediately carry out his desire to step in and stop **the suffering** he has complete knowledge of.*
- Yet he doesn't, which suggests **such a perfect God does not actually** _____.

8. Possible solutions to the 'inconsistent triad'

Solution	Explanation	Problems
God is not omnipotent	God loves creation but doesn't have the power to prevent evil. Process Theologians – God is part of the universe, started and encouraged evolution.	What do you think religious believers would say about this?
God is not omnibenevolent	God doesn't care if his creation suffers. Maybe God is malicious.	
Maybe evil has a greater purpose, God could remove it but chooses not to	God has a different perception to humans. Toddler analogy.	Hume – evil is felt too widely for it to be dismissed.

9. Evil doesn't exist

The response based on God's perspective

Evil does not exist. It is our perception that is at fault. If we were able to see the universe from a God's eye view, then we may see that the suffering that creation faces is not the evil that we think it is, but rather has a purpose that we do not understand because we do not have God's perspective.

Toddler example



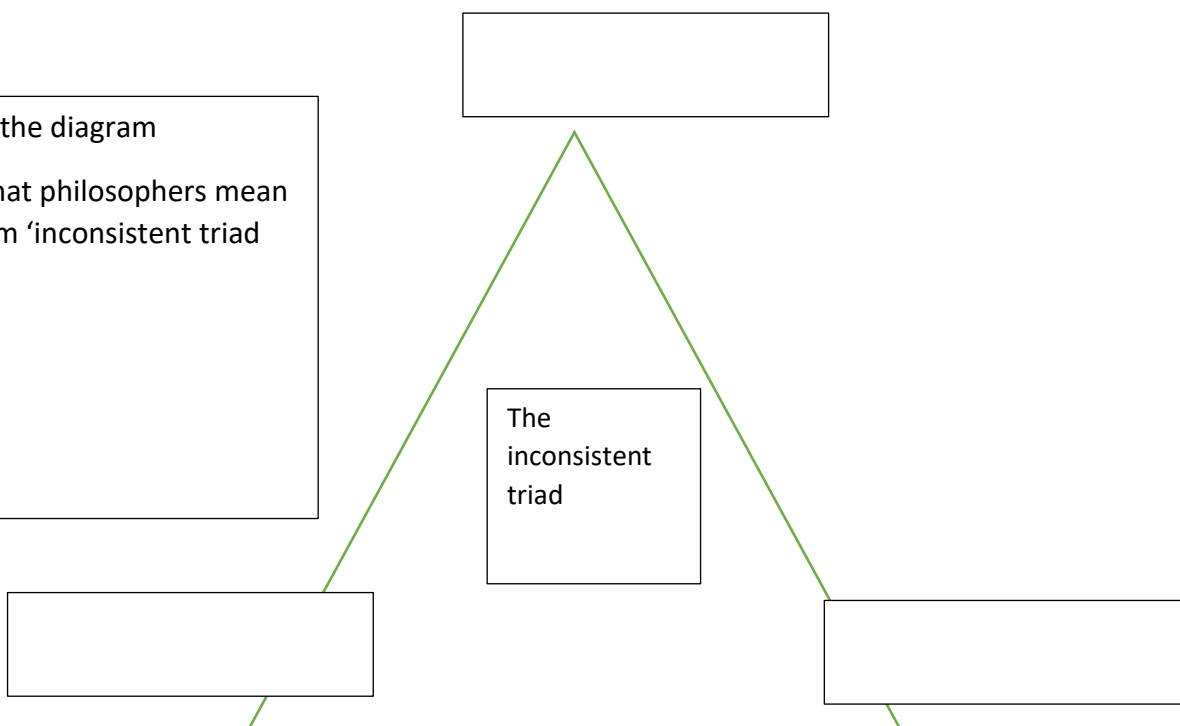
Problems with this explanation of evil

Evil cannot adequately be explained as an issue of perception. It is too widely felt and too vivid to be dismissed.

10.

Complete the diagram

Explain what philosophers mean by the term 'inconsistent triad'



William Rowe (intense human and animal suffering)

William Rowe develops one form of the **evidential problem of evil** and argues his case for atheism in *'The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism'* (1979). Rowe bases his argument around the form of evil that he describes as the 'intense human and animal suffering' that 'occurs on a daily basis' and 'is in great plenitude in our world'.

Rowe accepts that if this evil and suffering resulted in 'some greater good' that could only be achieved by its presence, then such suffering might be justified even though it would still be considered evil even if the final outcome was good.

However, Rowe argues that this type of suffering is *not* all required for a greater good, and that it is therefore evidence against God's existence:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering which an omnipotent, omniscient being **could have prevented** without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
2. An omnipotent omniscient being would know when intense suffering was about to take place.
3. An omniscient, wholly good being **would prevent** the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
4. Therefore **there probably does not exist** an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

Rowe considers it a valid argument that a God who is able to do anything and who is wholly good would not permit **evil that is avoidable, pointless and in no way fulfils His purpose for the world**. The evidence that such evil exists is therefore taken as evidence that God cannot exist.

Rowe uses two examples to show that **the evidence for unnecessary evil points to the non-existence of the God of Classical Theism**. And by picking examples of both moral and natural evil, Rowe is attempting to state the evidential argument in the strongest possible terms. As one commentator has put it, 'if these cases of evil are not evidence against theism, then none are'.

11. Why is Rowe's work called the 'evidential' problem of evil?

12. What specific problem does Rowe highlight?

To support his argument Rowe provides several **examples of pointless human and animal suffering**. These include the following:

An example of human suffering (and moral evil):

The girl's mother was living with her boyfriend, another man who was unemployed, her two children, and her 9-month old infant fathered by the boyfriend. On New Year's Eve all three adults were drinking at a bar near the woman's home. The boyfriend had been taking drugs and drinking heavily. He was asked to leave the bar at 8:00 p.m. After several reappearances he finally stayed away for good at about 9:30 p.m. The woman and the unemployed man remained at the bar until 2:00 a.m. at which time the woman went home and the man to a party at a neighbour's home. Perhaps out of jealousy, the boyfriend attacked the woman when she walked into the house. Her brother was there and broke up the fight by hitting the boyfriend who was passed out and slumped over a table when the brother left. Later the boyfriend attacked the woman again, and this time she knocked him unconscious. After checking the children, she went to bed. Later the woman's 5-year old girl went downstairs to go to the bathroom. The unemployed man returned from the party at 3:45 a.m. and found the 5-year old dead. She had been raped, severely beaten over most of her body and strangled to death by the boyfriend.

- Rowe's contention with this example is that the five-year-old did not need to be raped and severely beaten before she was murdered if her death was necessary to bring about a greater good.
- All that was needed was for her to be killed quickly; and even this is open to doubt for the question is raised as to what greater good was achieved by this evil.

He claimed that animal suffering also seemed pointless.

In some distant forest lightning strikes a dead tree, resulting in a forest fire. In the fire a fawn is trapped, horribly burned, and lies in terrible agony for several days before death relieves its suffering.

- Although this is presented as a hypothetical event, Rowe takes it to be 'a familiar sort of tragedy, played not infrequently on the stage of nature.'
- And as with the human example, the fawn could have died quickly rather than dying in

13. Write a very brief summary of each example.

Gregory S. Paul (premature deaths).

Gregory Paul argues that the death of so many innocent children challenges the existence of God. He estimates that since the time God first talked to man, as recorded in the sacred texts of the Abrahamic religions, that over 50 billion children have died naturally before reaching what Paul calls 'the age of mature consent' and some 300 billion human beings have died naturally but prenatally. Paul calls this 'the Holocaust of the children' and using this statistical information, he argues:

- Millions of innocent children suffer and die every year, from both natural and evil causes.
- These children are too young to be able to make choices about God – they have no freewill.
- No all-loving, all-powerful being would permit such suffering.
- Therefore God does not exist.



The problem of evil stated in this way is sometimes referred to as the statistical problem of evil.

'The modern Christian consensus followed by billions is so firmly overturned by human circumstances that it very probably is not possible to reconcile the Christian concept of a pacific creator with the state of the universe.' Paul

Paul's work, *Theodicy's Problem*, is a critique of those who claim that there is one intelligent creator who is perfect in moral terms, and possesses all the power needed to prevent extensive suffering among His intelligent creations – the God of Christianity. His work is a scientific, data driven challenge to God's existence based on the demographic statistic that detail the full extent and causes of suffering and early death of 'immature humans' through what is commonly labelled 'natural evil' (i.e. not at the hands of other humans/moral evil).

His argument, very simply, is that if a creator exists, then it has chosen to fashion a habitat that has maximised the level of suffering and death among children due to factors beyond the control of humans. This means that if God exists as the creator of the world, He has allowed, or even intended, for us to live in a world of great natural evil. The extent of this evil does not allow for an omnibenevolent, omniscient and omnipotent creator God.

Paul offers the following figures, based on demographic research:

There have been around 100bn humans born to date.	The majority of conceptions do not run to full term. As such, there have been around 300bn natural prenatal deaths.
c. 1900 the juvenile mortality rate in England and the United States was more than 25%.	c. 1900 in the United States around 13% of infants died and 20% of under-5 year olds.
Pre-1800 around 50% of people died before maturity.	There have probably been around 50bn infants and children that have died – around 50% of total born.

Total combined deceased = 350bn

Total lived to maturity = 50bn

Some may counter Paul’s argument by stating that these statistics include infants who died as a result of intentional abortion. Paul, however, accounts for this and states that in the U.S. there are around 4 million births a year. Accounting for conceptions ended naturally, Paul equates that there are around 8 million conceptions a year. There are 1.3 million abortions carried out in the U.S. each year, which leaves around 3 million terminations due to natural evil.

Paul’s argument also refers to the problem of suffering, which he believes increases as children mature. He gives the following three examples of natural evil causing death:

Disease	Victims usually remain conscious and are killed over an extended period of time.
Death by lack of nutrition	High level of mental and physical anguish and suffering.
Death by trauma	Extreme suffering through cause of death, e.g. drowning and suffocation.

There is no historical evidence that the prayer of Christians has reduced suffering by children in areas of Christian majorities, which one might expect in the case of the existence of a Christian God. Paul believes this fact further challenges belief in the existence of God.

Finally, Paul makes reference to Christian ideas of heaven and the afterlife. In order to be prepared for heaven, imperfect humans must undergo experiences that render us ‘perfect’. We need a level of maturity to truly enjoy and exercise our free will in order to reach perfection; children do not have this level of maturity and therefore cannot truly exercise free will. This either means that those who die before maturity are incapable of entering heaven (a), or that they go to heaven without choosing (b).

- a) If those that can’t choose freely to be with God are sent to Hell or held in limbo, this seems unfair. They are in that position because of the world that God created.
- b) If they go to heaven without choosing then they are not being allowed to truly exercise their free will, and the point of earthly experience has been negated.

14. Create a revision aid for Mackie, Rowe and Paul's arguments. In your notes.
15. What is Paul's main challenge to the existence of God. Add statistics to your answer.

16. Explain why Paul makes reference to the inefficacy (usefulness) of prayer.

17. Which do you think is the strongest argument? Remember to give reasons for your views.

Chunk 2 A

1. What is the problem?

2. Epicurus

3. Mackie

4. Rowe

5. Paul

Solutions: Introducing Theodicies

The term '**theodicy**' literally means 'righteous God' and is the name given to an attempt to justify the existence of a loving God in the face of evil. They are 'justifications for God's righteousness'. There are several criteria for a successful theodicy.

- It must be **internally coherent** (i.e. make sense!) within itself and to the reader.
- It must be done **within the context of natural theology** (don't rely on belief)
- It must **cohere with other theology** (so can't limit God's power or goodness, or say suffering is insignificant because Jesus died and suffered for us etc.).
- It must be **personally convincing** and give us reason to believe that God is more likely to believe than not, alongside evil's apparent existence.

We consider two theodicies; the *Augustinian Theodicy* and the *Irenaean Theodicy*, as well as the Free Will defence

2 B Introduction to the Augustinian Theodicy

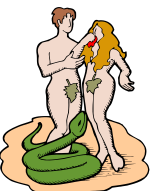



Where did evil come from?


In order to explain why there is evil and suffering in the world, Christians usually turn to the first book of the Bible (Genesis). There we read about how Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command not to eat from the fruit of the tree, which was at the centre of the *Garden of Eden*. The consequences of doing so were believed to have had dramatic consequences for the world, and everyone (and everything) in it. Genesis chapter 1 and 2 tell us that originally humans and the world were created *perfect*. But when the first humans disobeyed God's command not to eat fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their relationship with God, the world and other humans changed forever. Genesis chapter 3 describes these events, which are also known as the *Fall*.

Using Bibles, complete the following table explaining the Biblical origins of evil and suffering in the world ...

18. The relationship between humanity and God

Before the fall	After the fall
<p>God walked in the 'cool of the garden' with man and woman and spent time with them</p> 	<p>Gen 3:8</p> <p>Gen 3:23</p> 

19. The relationship between men and women

Before the fall	After the fall
<p>Gen 2:2</p>	<p>Gen 3:7</p> <p>Gen 3:16</p> 

19. The relationship between humanity and nature

Before the fall	After the fall
<p>Gen 1:31</p> <p>Gen 2:8-9</p>	<p>Gen 3:17-18</p>

As far as the Bible is concerned, it is HUMANS not God who are responsible for evil and suffering in the world. **This forms the basis of the Augustinian Theodicy**



The Augustinian Theodicy

St Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD) proposed a classical theodicy based on the idea of original sin. Augustine believed that God created a perfect world that is good:

Thy creation, itself finite, full of Thee, the Infinite; and I said, Behold God, and behold what God hath created; and God is good, yea, most mightily and incomparably better than all these: but yet He, the Good, created them good.

Augustine, *The Confessions of St Augustine*, 397–401

Augustine asks whether God's creation is good and whether God himself is good: 'Where is evil then, and whence, and how crept it in hither?' Augustine's answer is that the world is still good but it is simply less good, and evil is 'nothing but a privation of good'.

In this universe, even what is called evil, when it is rightly ordered and kept in its place, commends the good more eminently, since good things yield greater pleasure and praise when compared to the bad things. For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil. What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? In animal bodies, for instance, sickness and wounds are nothing but the privation of health. When a cure is effected, the evils which were present (i.e., the sickness and the wounds) do not retreat and go elsewhere. Rather, they simply do not exist anymore. For such evil is not a substance; the wound or the disease is a defect of the bodily substance which, as a substance, is good. Evil, then, is an accident, i.e., a privation of that good which is called health. Thus, whatever defects there are in a soul are privations of a natural good. When a cure takes place, they are not transferred elsewhere but, since they are no longer present in the state of health, they no longer exist at all.

Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, 421–22

20. Augustine describes evil as the 'privation of good' and compares this to a 'privation of health'.

What do you think Augustine believes evil to be in the world?

For Augustine evil is not, therefore, a separate substance; it is simply a loss (privation) of goodness. Augustine compares this to blindness, which he describes as a 'privation of sight'. Without sight there can be no blindness: without goodness there can be no evil. The world is good, but it is not as good as it was designed to be by God. Evil is not a thing or substance in itself, but a falling short of God's intended perfection.

If God is not to blame for the existence of evil in the world then what is the cause? Augustine concludes that the cause is linked to the fallen angels and the original sin of Adam and Eve. It was the disobedience of the angels led by Lucifer and human fallibility to give in to temptation that caused the world to be less good. God had given humans free will, and it is the misuse of free will that causes suffering and evil. The disobedience of the angels and Adam and Eve disturbed the harmony of God's creation and resulted in natural as well as moral evil entering the world.

Adam and Eve committed the original sin of disobeying God and the consequence of this is that all their descendants have inherited original sin and the disharmony of the world. This is because all of humanity was present in 'the seminal loins of Adam'. Augustine supports his argument by quoting St Paul: 'Thus

by one man, sin entered into the world and death through sin; and thus death came upon all men, since all men have sinned.’ (Romans 5:12) and argues:


From this state, after he had sinned, man was banished, and through his sin he subjected his descendants to the punishment of sin and damnation, for he had radically corrupted them, in himself, by his sinning. As a consequence of this, all those descended from him and his wife (who had prompted him to sin and who was condemned along with him at the same time) – all those born through carnal lust, on whom the same penalty is visited as for disobedience – all these entered into the inheritance of original sin. Through this involvement they were led, through divers errors and sufferings (along with the rebel angels, their corruptors and possessors and companions), to that final stage of punishment without end.

Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, 421–22

The theodicy is often called ‘soul-deciding’ because God has given humans free will and each human decides their own eternal fate by either obeying God’s will or ignoring it. If we ignore God then according to Augustine we deserve the punishment of Hell as it is a just reward for sin. However, God continued to love his creation and sent Jesus so that through his suffering and death there is the possibility of salvation to believers. Augustine describes the original sin of Adam and Eve as ‘Oh happy fault’ because it led to the coming of Jesus.

21

<p>a. Evil as a consequence of sin The fall of human beings and creation</p>	<p><i>Explain Gen 1:31...</i> Evil did not come from God, since God’s Creation was perfect: “God saw all that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” Genesis 1.31</p> <p>God called everything into existence ex nihilo and through corruption and decay, they will eventually lapse back to nothingness. Humans and angels are part of the created order and therefore they are susceptible to change and therefore have the capability of turning away from God. It is this turning – which involves an act of _____ - that brings about evil.</p> <div data-bbox="1066 1227 1426 1525" data-label="Image"> </div>
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<p>b. Evil as a privation Privatio boni</p> 	<p>Privation is the absence or loss of something that is normally present e.g.</p>
<p>c. Everybody is guilty because everyone was seminally present in Adam so everyone deserves to be punished</p>	<p><i>Explain what this means ...</i></p>
<p>d. The Cross overcomes evil</p>	<p>Felix culpa – the happy mistake</p>
<p>e. Soul deciding Redemption: the act of saving something or someone. In the Christian context it refers to Jesus saving humanity from evil and sin.</p>	<p><i>How are some saved ...</i></p>

22. What did Augustine say about God's perspective?

A modern development of the Augustinian Theodicy – useful for AO2

The Free-will defence

The Augustinian tradition has led to the modern theodicy in the tradition of St Augustine known as the free-will defence. This is based on the belief that God has made a deliberate decision to give up control of the universe and some of the beings within in it, and that this relinquishing of control is what has resulted in evil in the world.

Richard Swinburne considers that a world in which human beings are free to choose how they behave is in itself good.

A good God would have reason to create a world in which there were men with a choice of destiny and responsibility for each other, despite the evils which would inevitably or almost inevitably be presented in it, for the sake of the good which it contained.

Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 1992

Swinburne considers free will to be 'God's gift to man'. Having once given this freedom then God cannot interfere, as to do so would limit human freedom. However great the evil, God must stand back, otherwise the freedom of humanity is compromised. If God was going to intervene, then at what point should this happen? If God did set a limit beyond which he would not allow evil to go, then those below the limit would feel aggrieved that God did not stop evil from happening to them.

Alvin Plantinga argues for a free-will defence on the grounds that God permits evil for the sake of free will and if God stopped evil occurring then this would be contrary to humanity having free will. Plantinga considers that the existence of the God of classical theism and the existence of evil are logically consistent.

Think about

Six million Jews died in the Holocaust. If God had set the limit at three million before He intervened what do you think would be the feelings of the families of the three million who died? Do you think that there can be total freedom if it is known that God is going to intervene beyond a certain point?

How does it work?

Peter Vardy offers a summary of the free will defence in five simple steps!

1. The highest good for humans is a loving relationship with God
2. Love must be freely chosen
3. So God, who is all powerful and all loving, gave humans freewill in order to achieve point 1
4. Genuine freewill means that sometimes humans will choose good (kindness, humility, compassion) and sometimes they will choose evil (cruelty, viciousness, greed)
5. Therefore evil exists in order that humans may choose to have a loving relationship with God.

As both Hick and Swinburne point out, God does not wish to create a cosy 'puppet world' for his 'pets' to live in. So it is a mistake to look at the world and wonder why it isn't more pleasant for humans. A much greater good than pleasure is the relationship humans can have with God, and this relationship

can only be a genuine one if we have freewill. And, as we have seen, freely chosen evil is a terrible side-effect of free will, but one that is worth it.

The parable of the king and the peasant girl

Soren Kierkegaard used the parable of the king and the peasant girl to support the free-will defence.

A king fell in love with a peasant girl. He decided to draw up a royal decree that would force her to marry him. But the king realised that if he forced her to marry him, he would never be really sure of her love. Then he considered that if he appeared to her in his finest clothes and showed his great wealth and power she would agree to become his wife. But he realised that he would never know if she had married him for his riches and power. Finally the king decided that he would go and live and work with the villages as a peasant and seek to win the girl as his wife. Only then, if she had fallen in love with him as himself, could he be sure that she really loved him.

Who does the king represent?

Who does the peasant girl represent?

23. Write an explanation of the free-will defence.

Support for the Freewill Defence

- It adds to the work of Augustine and Irenaeus, giving further explanation as to why some evil and suffering may be necessary
- **Richard Swinburne** has supported this defence and has helped to counter some of the criticisms put to it. One criticism asks why God needs to allow the scale of suffering witnessed in the Holocaust. He replied:



'The less he allows men to bring about large scale horrors, the less the freedom and responsibility he gives. We are asking that God should make a toy world, a world where we can choose and our choices can make a small difference, but the real choices remain God's. For he simply would not allow us the choice of doing real harm...He would be like an overprotective parent who will not let his child out of sight for a moment.'



In other words, a God who intervened to prevent large scale atrocities would compromise the gift of freedom and remove human responsibility, thus preventing genuine development.

Criticisms of the Freewill Defence

- Divine love cannot be expressed through suffering
- It doesn't explain **why** people chose to turn away from God. This in turn, raises the question as to whether God could have created a race of genuinely free beings who, nevertheless, would never in fact have chosen to commit evil.

J.L Mackie challenged this idea, arguing that God's gift of free will is not an excuse for the existence of evil. God should simply have created free beings who would never have chosen to sin.

Flew criticised the freewill defence on the basis of the meaning of 'freewill.' For Flew, freely chosen actions are ones which are caused by a person themselves, rather than externally. So when you have the chance to marry the person you love, your decision will ultimately stem from the type of person you are – whether you find them funny, whether you fancy them etc.... As long as your choice to marry is internal to you (i.e. powered by your own emotions and character), then it is freely chosen. Flew then goes on to say that God could have created a world in which all humans had a good nature and also were free in Flew's sense of the word. In such a world, humans would always choose to do the right thing, and such a world would surely be better than this one.



Many have challenged Flew's criticism. What's the difference between Flew's naturally good people and puppets who have been created to always act in a good way? For Flew, God should manipulate the key parts of his creation (humans) in order to bring about desired results. But there is a clear problem with this.

E.g. Imagine a hypnotist persuading someone they were in love. Would this love be worth anything? Just as we would question the value of feelings manipulated in someone by a hypnotist, we might also question the value of the love felt for God by the 'naturally good'

Sample answer

Explain how the Augustinian theodicy attempts to solve the problem of evil

A theodicy is an attempt to justify the existence of a loving God even though there is evil in the world. They are seen as justifications for God's righteousness.

St Augustine of Hippo (354-430AD) proposed a classical theodicy based on the idea of original sin. Augustine accepted the Genesis account of creation that God created a perfect world. He argues that evil did not come from God, since God's creation was perfect, 'God saw all that he had made, and it was very good' God created everything pure and perfect.

He claimed that God cannot be blamed for creating evil as it is a privation because for Augustine evil is not, therefore, a separate substance; it is a privation (a loss of goodness). A comparison Augustine makes is to blindness, a 'privation of sight' without sight there can't be blindness and without good there can be no evil. Evil is a falling short of God's intended perfection when designing the world.

Augustine concludes that Evil was introduced to the world by fallen angels and the original sin of Adam and Eve in the fall. Humans abused God's gift of freedom and they chose to turn away from God. He uses the example of the fall to demonstrate how Adam and Eve broke God's command and ate the forbidden fruit. The fallen angels led by Lucifer chose to rebel against God and were cast out of heaven.

The consequences of the fall were that all the descendants of Adam and Eve have inherited original sin and the disharmony of the world. This is because all of humanity was present in 'the seminal loins of Adam' and so Augustine argues that everybody is guilty and deserves to be punished. The fall and the fallen angels disturbed the harmony of God's creation and this has caused natural and moral evil entering the world.

Natural evil is a fitting punishment because after the fall the world became distanced from God. Human action had destroyed the natural order that brought about natural evil and natural evil is now a fitting punishment for humans, therefore God is right not to intervene and stop the suffering.

The variety of creatures within the world leads to inequalities between them in terms of beauty, strength, intelligence, etc. Therefore, each creature is in some way imperfect. Augustine's idea of the principle of plenitude came from the Greek philosopher Plotinus' idea that plenitude means that all possible forms of existence should exist. Augustine argued that God created a hierarchy of beings; the consequence of this is that possible creatures must be imperfect and unequal.

Augustine's aesthetic argument claims that something may look evil to us but be good as God sees it, because God sees the big picture. A scorpion's sting is bad for us but good for the scorpion. A world that includes suffering is better as it gives humans a consequence for their actions.

According to Augustine the idea that God saves some from evil through Jesus shows that that he is merciful as well as just. According to Augustine if God were simply just, everyone would go to their rightful punishment in hell. However God was merciful and sent his only son to die on the cross so that some people might be saved and go to heaven.

- Read this example answer
- There are some **add** points.

24. Identify where they are and what can be added – use the text book and booklet for more information

Challenges to Augustinian type theodicies: validity of accounts in Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3; scientific error - biological impossibility of human descent from a single pair (therefore invalidating the 'inheritance of Adam's sin'); moral contradictions of omnibenevolent God and existence of Hell; contradiction of perfect order becoming chaotic - geological and biological evidence suggests the contrary.

1. Validity of accounts in Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3;

25. Read Genesis chapters 2 and 3 – what differences do you notice?

26. Why does this make some scholars question the validity of the accounts?

27. Explain how a non-literal interpretation of Genesis is problematic for the Augustinian theodicy.

2. Scientific errors: biological impossibility of human descent from a single pair (therefore invalidating the 'inheritance of Adam's sin')

Biology...



Augustine's argument rests on the assumption that each human being was seminally present in Adam. This should be rejected on biological grounds – it is not the case that all humans are ancestors of Adam. If the Genesis account is not scientifically valid then Augustine's theory is not consistent or relevant to our experience of evil.

So we are not guilty for Adam's sins as Augustine argues. This means that God is not just in allowing us to suffer for someone else's sin.

28. How does this damage the Augustinian theodicy? Is it a serious problem for the theodicy?

3 Moral contradictions of omnibenevolent God and existence of Hell;

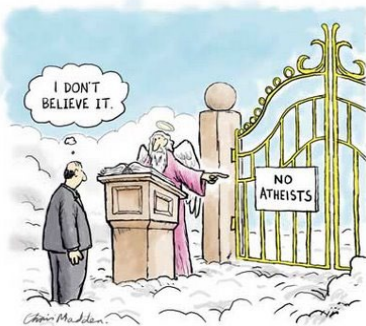
Hell as reflecting God's anticipation of evil... In Augustine's theodicy, *hell appears to be part of the design of the universe*. Augustine acknowledges that God must have already anticipated that the world would go wrong – and have accepted it. Surely a wholly good God would have intervened and saved humans from suffering that extends all the way to genocide.



29. What quality of God does this question?

Hick argues that this must make *God* ultimately responsible for evil. Given that we would hold a manufacturer responsible for knowingly making a faulty product, God must be held to account for the sinfulness of humans. It can be argued that God is far more responsible, for His omnipotence suggests that He could have found a way to avoid the fault. Augustine's theodicy therefore fails in its claim that evil is the punishment we deserve, for **the punishment is unwarranted**.

30. How does the existence of hell make God responsible?



Limited Atonement... Augustine argues that since God had this knowledge that humans would use their free will to sin, he decided to send his Son to allow humans to redeem themselves. The word *atonement* is used to describe what was achieved by the death of Jesus. Jesus died for his followers' sins, so they could be re-connected with God. His death cleansed them of their sins so they could start a fresh new life through his teachings.

However, Augustine believes in **limited atonement** – God's selection for only *some* people to go to heaven, if you turn towards Jesus – seems irrational. It would show that **His mercy is inconsistent**, further questioning God's omnibenevolence, or infinite goodness.

The moral problem of Predestination...The act of **deliberately creating people so that they will spend eternity in Hell** is an act of torture that is totally at odds with love, and still less the will of an all-loving God. The very existence of Hell demonstrates that evil and punishment are written into the design of the universe.

31. Contradiction of perfect order becoming chaotic: Logical errors: From F. D. E. Schleiermacher:

It's a logical contradiction to say that a perfect world had gone wrong – this would mean evil created itself out of nothing (which is logically impossible).

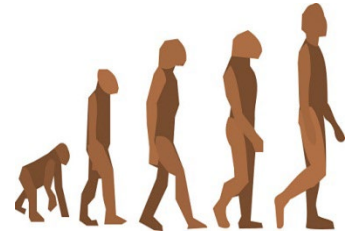
Even if evil is a deprivation it is still a real, tangible, feature of the world, as is the suffering it produces – and so this must somehow be attributed to God if he is responsible for the world...



Either the world was not perfect to begin with or God enabled it to go wrong.

The evolving universe...

The Fall says God created a perfect world and it was damaged by humans. But science has shown that we live within an **evolving** universe: the world was chaotic and has been developing into an order since. The development of human beings is the result of a process of natural selection, mutation and evolution from earlier life forms is well evidenced. This reduces the plausibility of the creation account as an historical fact.



Even under Day Age Creationism (where each day of creation is actually an era, or age i.e. billions of years), the story of The Fall cannot be taken literally in the way Augustine reads it.

In terms of Augustine's appeal to a freewill defence:

It is hard to see how, in a perfect world where there was no knowledge of good and evil, there could possibly be freedom to obey or disobey God, since good and evil would be unknown. The fact that God's creatures chose to disobey Him seems to suggest there was already knowledge of evil, which could only have come from God. And if there wasn't the ability to know what they were doing was wrong, surely a wholly good God would be immoral for punishing them for their ignorance.

How can a creature created good turn away from God?

Augustine argues that God only created good, and both angels and humans are such creations that *'[i]n themselves, too, they are good'*. However, while Augustine claims evil is a privation of good, an absence of it, both beings managed to rebel against God. First, the angels, and then, through the fallen angel Satan, humans were tempted into betraying God.



But *how can a creature created good turn away from God?* Augustine's doctrine of creation claims that an angel or human really is good, yet at the same time, in order for his theodicy to work there must be a flaw in both being's nature in order for them to turn away from God. How could they have a flaw if created by God and all created things are good? Evil must have

been a flawed feature of angels and humans. As John Hick says:



'The basic and inevitable criticism [of Augustine's theodicy] is that the idea of an unqualifiedly good creature committing a sin is self-contradictory and unintelligible. If the angels are finitely perfect, then even though they are in some important sense free to sin they will never in fact do so. If they do sin we can only infer that they were not flawless – in which case their Maker must share the responsibility for their fall and the intended theodicy fails.'

AO2 Strengths of the Augustinian tradition

32. Summarise each strength - CARED

1. **Brian Davies:** agrees that evil cannot properly be called a **substance**: it is rather ‘a **gap between what there is and what there ought to be**’. For example, blindness is a privation of sight, and so this helps to explain the concept of evil being a privation of good. Evil is an **absence of good**.

2. **Plantinga:** agrees that **free will is responsible for moral evil** rather than God. Humans sometimes choose good, but if God had designed us so that we always chose good, we would not truly be free. Humans are responsible for evil, not God.

3. **Free will is so valuable that it justifies the risk of evil:** Augustine’s theodicy accounts for the existence of *natural evil*, by way of the introduction of *moral evil* in the world (the Fall). It can be further argued that for genuine free will there is always needed to be the possibility of some natural evil. Without this possibility people would have less freedom to demonstrate virtues such as courage and self-sacrifice in the face of real danger.



The extent to which we can agree with Augustine’s feature of free will in his theodicy depends upon how important the gift of free will is considered to be, and whether this gift necessarily entails the possibility of suffering. Some would argue that without free will, humans would be as puppets or robots, and their humanity would be destroyed, while religious believers argue that we require free will to have a genuine relationship with God.

4. **The theme of predestination serves several functions:** Developed by Augustine, and fully developed by Calvin, the theme of predestination is controversial, but...

- It is compatible with several Biblical passages; e.g. *Psalm 139: 16*: ‘All the days ordained for me were written in your [God’s] book before one of them came to be.’
- It is supported by *God’s omniscience* – and avoids the suggestion that evil either took God by surprise or frustrated His plans.
- It leaves intact the belief that God is completely in *control* of everything (he does not merely permit the existence of evil).
- Finally, for those who consider it is compatible with free will, it does not prevent God’s punishment of humans from being fully deserved.

5. **Aquinas’ different world idea** – God could have made a better world but it would not be ours. Any criticism of God’s creation would need to be based along the lines that God should somehow have created more than He has – which seems confused; it is unclear how much more He should have created. What is the ultimate ideal?

Chunk the Augustinian Theodicy

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Chunk the challenges to the Augustinian Theodicy

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Strengths of Augustinian Theodicy

Compatible

Absence of good

Robots

Evil explained

Different world

The Irenaean Theodicy

In his work, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus (130-202 CE) argued that the world was the way it was because God had a plan. God's plan was to create the world so it would provide humanity with the chance to develop the qualities necessary to become perfect. He referred to humanity as 'children of God.'



For Irenaeus, there were two stages in the creation of the human race:

1. Humans (Adam and Eve) were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). I.e. God brought into existence intelligent, immature, **imperfect beings** with the capacity for moral and spiritual perfection.
2. Humans would grow into the likeness of God (Genesis 1:26) by developing, over a long period of time, into perfect moral and spiritual beings.

He maintained that God could not have created humans in complete perfection, because attaining the likeness of God needed the willing cooperation of humans. This meant God had to give them free will. Therefore, God did not make a perfect world because evil has a valuable part to play in God's plan for humanity. Freedom requires the possibility of choosing good over evil and therefore God has to allow evil and suffering for this to occur.

'How, if we have no knowledge of the contrary, could we have instruction in that which is good?'

Humanity is given evil in order for them to develop the characteristics needed for perfection, such as courage, generosity, love and kindness.



There is biblical support for this view, as Paul says, *'We also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope.'* (Romans 5:3) Paul also said that this is valuable for humans because, *'our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.'* (Romans 8: 18-19)

So God created the natural order to include the possibility of good as well as evil and suffering. He then stood back to allow humans to use their free will for good or evil. He cannot intervene or that freedom is lost. Humans must make responsible choices in real situations. Irenaeus concluded his theodicy by suggesting that one day, evil and suffering will be overcome and humanity will evolve into God's perfect likeness and live in Heaven, where all suffering will end and God's plan will be complete.



According to the Irenaean Theodicy both natural and moral evil are essential to '**soul-making**' so they have a good purpose. Evil has a valuable part to play within His plans for humans. Hick develops this theme into a fuller explanation of the importance and implications of evil for both God and humans.

A Modern Take on the Irenaean Theodicy – John Hick

Hick argues that instead of creating humans as morally perfect beings from the outset, God deliberately left them imperfect or 'unfinished' to enable them to complete the process of creation themselves. Following Irenaeus, he argued that humans are created as children of God in the **image of God** with the potential to achieve perfection in the future, when they will be in the **likeness of God**.

'Likeness' means a certain valuable quality of personal life which reflects finitely the divine life. It represents the perfecting of man, the fulfilment of God's purpose for humanity, the *'bringing of many sons to glory'*, the creating of *'children of God'* who are *'fellow heirs with Christ'* of his glory (Hick, *Evil and Soul-Making*)

Evil as the means through which humans become 'children of God'

Hick admits that this makes God partly responsible for the evil in the world as it is the means through which humans will become 'children of God'. God had a sufficiently good reason for allowing evil that its existence does not threaten His perfectly loving nature. God *needed* to allow humans to develop themselves rather than creating them perfectly, because virtues that have been formed as a result of a person overcoming temptations and challenges are *'intrinsically more valuable than virtues created within him ready made without effort on his own part'* (Hick, quoted in S T Davis (ed.), *Encountering Evil: Live Options in Theodicy*, 2001). By allowing evil (which is contrary to His nature) to exist in His creation, God is in fact demonstrating the true extent of His love for humans.

God is at an epistemic distance

God has chosen to place humanity at sufficient distance to have awareness but not certainty of God.

In order to be a person, exercising some measure of genuine freedom, the creature must be brought into existence, not in the immediate divine presence, but at a distance from God.

John Hick, Encountering Evil, Live Options in Theodicy, 1982

An epistemic distance means that there is a knowledge gap between God and humans. Humans are not born with the innate knowledge of God's existence and have to seek God through faith.

Humanity is created at an epistemic distance from God in order to come freely to know and love their Maker; and that they are at the same time created as morally immature and imperfect beings in order to attain through freedom the most valuable quality of goodness. John Hick, Encountering Evil, Live Options in Theodicy, 1982

Were God's presence to be imminent, humans would be overwhelmed by knowledge of God's expectations. In practice they would obey God not because they had chosen to upon their own volition, but because He was overlooking their every move.

Why is the world not a paradise? Vale of Soul Making

Natural evil has a part to play in the process of **soul-making**. For if the world were a paradise, where there were no possible chance of ever causing any kind of harm, humans would not in fact be free, because every possible human action would result in happiness. Without such evil, everyone would follow God's laws because there would never be any difficulty in doing so. Qualities such as courage, humour and love would all be impossible.

The **counterfactual hypothesis** established that God's purpose would not be possible in a world completely free from suffering and evil.

Counterfactual hypothesis: this is the method of enquiry that examines what would happen if a situation had been brought about in a different way to that in which it was.

Hick therefore argues that the world has to be one containing:

Unpredictable contingencies and dangers – in which unexpected and undeserved calamities may occur to anyone – because only in such a world can mutual caring and love be elicited.

John Hick, Encountering Evil, Live Options in Theodicy, 1982

Hick concludes that while our world is not:

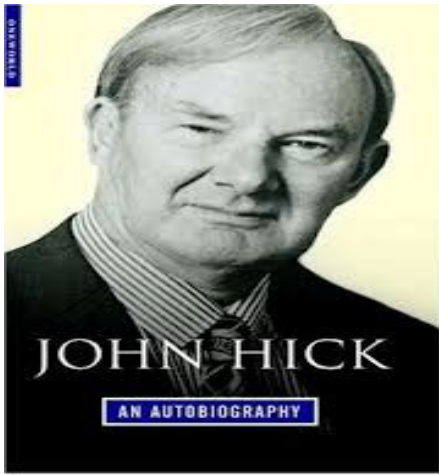
Designed for the maximisation of human pleasure and the minimisation of human pain, it may nevertheless be rather well adapted to the quite different purpose of 'soul making'.

John Hick, Philosophy of Religion, 1990

The need for an afterlife – eschatological justification

1. The process towards the likeness of God is rarely completed in the life of the individual except for a small minority that are recognised as saints.
2. Only a supremely good future in Heaven can justify the magnitude of the suffering endured.
3. Many apparently 'evil' people are nothing more than 'victims of the system'; people who perhaps have been brought up badly and who cannot be held totally responsible for their actions.

All people will eventually become the 'children of God' and 'inherit eternal life', as they will develop second order goods which are human virtues and good actions, e.g. sympathy with others, benevolence, courage...



Irenaeus (130-202AD) traced evil back to freewill, like Augustine.

He differs in that he admits that God did not make a perfect world and that evil has a valuable role to play in God's plan for humans.

This Theodicy is '*soul making*' in that evil is a means to an end: if it did not exist there would be no means of spiritual development. We would not be able to develop into Gods perfect likeness



33. What did Irenaeus understand '**being in Gods image**' and '**being in God's likeness**' to mean?



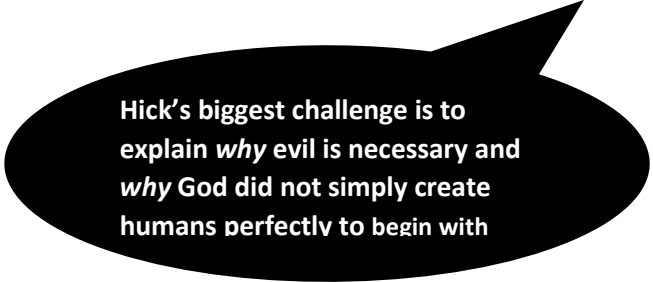
34. Why did God not create humans in complete perfection? Include second order goods.

35. Some people might argue that God should never allow evil to happen: that he should intervene to prevent it. **How did Irenaeus respond to this? Add the craftsman analogy**

36. Explain what Hick means by **Epistemic Distance** and why he thinks it is essential for human development? What did Hick mean by 'soul making' theodicy?

37. How did Hick explain the imperfections in the world?
Include; human development, **natural evil**, the **counterfactual hypothesis**

38. Why does Hick claim that there must be an afterlife (eschatological justification)?



Hick's biggest challenge is to explain *why* evil is necessary and *why* God did not simply create humans perfectly to begin with

39. Fill in the blanks in this summary of the Irenaean Theodicy...

- ▶ _____ is part of God's plan
- ▶ God made human's in his _____,
- ▶ Genuine human perfection, cannot be ready-made, but must be achieved through _____
- ▶ Since God gives us _____, God had to give us the potential to _____ him.
- ▶ If there were no possibility of _____, then humans could not disobey God.
- ▶ Therefore the _____ order had to be designed with the possibility of causing good or harm.
- ▶ God cannot compromise our freedom by _____ and stopping suffering.
- ▶ Eventually evil and suffering will be _____ and everyone will develop God's _____, living in glory in _____. This justifies the temporary evil.

Challenges to the Irenaean Theodicy

1. The concept of universal salvation (everyone goes to heaven) seems unjust...

Also, there is no evidence for life after death

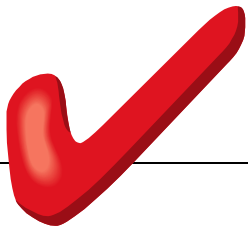
2. Evil and suffering should not be used as a tool by an omnibenevolent God. Suffering can never be an expression of God's love... D.Z. Phillips

3. The immensity of suffering

4. The unequal distribution of evil and suffering

The Irenaean Theodicy envisages a long process with the death of billions of creatures before we develop into God's likeness & live in Heaven! Why is it necessary to have such a long process when God, if he is all powerful, could have created free, intelligent being in the 'twinkling of an eye'?

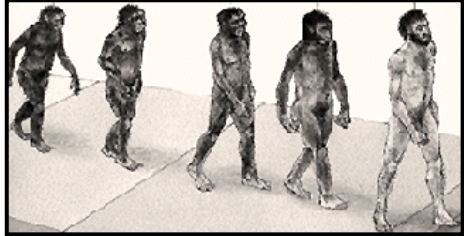
5. As a Christian theodicy, the death of Jesus and forgiveness seem irrelevant



The Strengths of the Irenaean Theodicy

1. Allows room for the concept of evolution...

Humanity has evolved and developed into more complex moral & spiritual being from more primitive states. This theodicy, therefore, is able to keep to the concept of evolution, whereas the Augustinian theodicy has a problem with this.



This is a _____ strength because

2. The major success of the theodicy is predominantly the relation of the theodicy to today's society. We are all on a learning curve, learning as we go on and this seems to be a valid point that will actually stay valid until there is no learning left to do in the eyes of the Irenaean theodicy this will be the state of perfection. Craftsman analogy . . .

This is a _____ strength because

3. This is an optimistic theodicy as it suggests that everyone will reach heaven and achieve perfection and develop into God's likeness, no matter how long it takes for each individual. It gives something for everyone to aspire to in the sense that suffering and pain will be removed forever and all will be able to take part in spiritual perfection eternally in heaven with God.. The soul making nature of this theodicy is very positive!

This is a _____ strength because

Comparing the Augustinian and Irenaean Theodicies

Key concepts	Augustinian	Irenaean
creation		
Humanity		

Theme 2: Challenges to religious belief – the problem of evil and suffering

AO2



Issues for analysis and evaluation will be drawn from any aspect of the content above (see booklet 1), such as:

1. The extent to which the classical form of the problem of evil is a problem.
2. The degree to which modern problem of evil arguments are effective in proving God's nonexistence.
3. Whether Augustinian type theodicies are relevant in the 21st Century.
4. The extent to which Augustine's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.
5. Whether Irenaean type theodicies are credible in the 21st Century.
6. The extent to which Irenaeus's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.



The extent to which the classical form of the problem of evil is a problem.

Read the article by Jeff Astley at the back of this book

The classical form of the problem of evil poses massive problems for believers

1. The classical form of the problem of evil poses a particular challenge to believers who accept the God of Classical Theism. The logical problem of evils argues that evil makes the existence of God impossible due to the inconsistent triad – Epicurus.
2. Even Aquinas identified evil as a problem for believers in his *Summa Theologica*, he claimed infinite goodness is an essential part of God's nature, any proof against God's goodness being infinite will constitute proof that God does not exist. The existence of even the tiniest quantity of evil precludes the possibility of infinite goodness. As witnesses to evil in our world, we are thus witnesses to proof against the existence of God. David Hume used this idea to argue that only two of the three parts of the inconsistent triad can exist alongside each other. Therefore, either God is not omnipotent, or God is not all-loving or evil doesn't exist.
3. The classical form of the problem poses a massive problem to believers because it has not been adequately addressed by the theodicies
 - Weaknesses of the Augustinian Theodicy and the Free Will Defence – natural evil
 - Weaknesses of the Irenaean Theodicy and Hick's development
4. If God created the world *ex nihilo* then he is totally responsible for all evil in the world

The classical form of the problem of evil doesn't create massive problems for believers

1. It does not pose the same problem for believers who accept the existence of a variety of gods of assorted character and authority as the existence of evil can be attributed to the tensions between the different gods.
2. Aquinas differed from Hume in that whereas Hume, as an atheist, accepted the conclusion that God does not exist, Aquinas went on to reject it. Despite drawing attention to the apparently insurmountable contradiction between God and evil, Aquinas remained one of the most famous Christian thinkers of all time. This is possible because Aquinas's logical argument only works if we accept its two premises:
 - The concept of infinite goodness is part of the definition of God
 - In talking about God's goodness, we are referring to the same thing as human goodness, and assuming that what we call evil is incompatible with the goodness of God.
3. The classical form of the problem poses a massive problem to believers because it has not been adequately addressed by the theodicies
 - Strengths of the Augustinian Theodicy and the Free Will Defence – Kierkegaard and Swinburne
 - Strengths of the Irenaean Theodicy and Hick's development
4. In the 18th Century, Leibniz developed Augustine's aesthetic argument into the main focus of his theodicy. He argued that our world is the best possible world, in that it permits the greatest quantity and variety of beings, resulting in the 'most reality, most perfection, most significance' possible. Faced with all of the possible universes that He could have created, God, being God, could not as Leibniz argued 'fail to act in the most perfect way, and consequently to choose the best' (*Monadology*, 1714).

This section covers AO2 content and skills

Specification content

The extent to which the classical form of the problem of evil is a problem.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Evil is the result of God's creation.
2. The logical problem of evil cannot be overcome.
3. Only classical theists have an issue with the problem of evil.
4. The logical problem of evil is less important than the emotional and physical problem of evil.
5. Rejecting any one of God's key attributes helps to solve the classical logical problem of evil.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Issues for analysis and evaluation

The extent to which the classical form of the problem of evil is a problem

In the 3rd century BCE, Epicurus is credited with posing the logical problem of evil – in which is stated the formulation: 'Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked. If God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?'

Epicurus bases his assumption of an existent God who is attributed with divine power and benevolence, favourably disposed towards the human race. However, his formulation, sometime referred to as the 'Epicurean paradox', denies that it is possible for such a God to exist alongside the existence of evil. This then, is the classical logical problem of evil. The extent to which it can be considered a problem rests, ultimately, on the predisposition of the individual.

For instance – any individual who discounts the existence of God is automatically 'rewarded' by the problem of evil not being a problem at all. For evil may well exist but God does not. Alternatively, the believer may decide to attribute different characteristics to God – causing him to be a god of malevolence or limited power – or even a God who has no particular interest in the welfare of human beings – a god apathetic to innocent human suffering. This, however, is sidestepping the problem!

For the individual who concedes to a belief in God then it becomes quickly apparent that the attributes of the said God are essential when considering to what extent the classical problem of evil is a problem. Thus, if a belief in God is held where God is considered to be an almighty power but to have no particular fondness for humanity (or anything else in creation) then there is no contradiction with the existence of evil – it may also be possible to dispute Epicurus' assertion that such a God would be 'wicked' in that the fact of the matter may be that God simply does not care about the existence of evil – therefore, he is not so much wicked as apathetic where evil is concerned.

Equally, any believer that holds faith in a God who is loving towards his creation but has no other particular attributes, must be willing to concede that, despite a willingness to want to remove evil, He is unable to do so. This is the position held by Process theologians, considering God as the 'fellow sufferer who understands'. In such a case, whilst the fact that evil still exists is an emotional and physical problem, it is no longer a logical one!

However, for the classical theist, holding to God's attributes of omnipotence and omnibenevolence then there is no escaping the logical problem of evil as presented to us by Epicurus – such a God – able to do anything and wanting to prevent our suffering would surely not want us, as His creation, to suffer – would He?

**1. 'The classical form of the problem of evil is an insurmountable problem for believers?
Evaluate this view.**

It is an insurmountable problem - believers can't solve it	It is not an insurmountable problem – believers can solve it	Evaluation
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		
Conclusion		

The degree to which modern problem of evil arguments are effective in proving God's non-existence

Ask almost any non-theist why they do not accept the existence of God as a believable proposition and, almost invariably, they will respond with reference to the amount of evil and suffering in the world. It seems entirely inconsistent that a God who is all-loving and all-powerful and has created the universe, could have put together His creation in such a way to allow the existence of evil and suffering – often to quite appalling extremes – thus undermining any counter claim regarding his supposed goodness and power.

Mackie's inconsistent triad – which shows the incompatibility of God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence with the existence of evil – is an effective 'argument' for undermining the existence of God – or so it seems. However, it must be noted that the inconsistency of the three statements is based on the assumption that God does indeed possess the stated characteristics and this may not actually be the case.

If God does indeed have both omnipotence and omnibenevolence then it seems virtually impossible to concede that evil exists, from a logical point of view. However, the overwhelming evidence of suffering within and among the entirety of creation – not just humanity – seems to make such a conclusion entirely nonsensical. Accepting this position would seem to therefore lead one to the inescapable alternative conclusion – i.e. that a God with the characteristics of omnipotence and omnibenevolence cannot exist.

However, if it is accepted, in line with Mackie's reasoning, that God is able to exist without one of those key attributes, then the modern problem of evil, much like the classical problem, no longer seems to be relevant. In other words – a God who is all-powerful but willing to let evil exist because he either doesn't care or consciously wants his creation to suffer – would still exist but would be significantly different from the God worshipped by the vast majority of theistic religions of the world today.

Perhaps, however, it is a God who is omnibenevolent and actively wants to stop the suffering experienced by creation but is unable to do so. The laws of the universe may bind this being, perhaps, and due to limitations to His power he is incapable of stopping the existence of evil. He may well still exist but would such a being be worthy of worship?

Evidential arguments, such as those proposed by William Rowe in which a whole range of suffering is brought as evidence against the existence of God, also mount a serious challenge to God's existence – how can an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God allow such horrors to occur and yet stand idly by whilst they continue to do so? Equally, the statistical problem of evil as presented by Gregory Paul, also shows a God who seems not to care about the destruction of literally billions of children since the time of the existence of the Abrahamic religions – the only sensible conclusion that can be drawn from this is that God simply does not exist.

Thus it would seem that modern problem of evil arguments – such as those outlined by Mackie, Rowe and Paul – do pose a significant challenge to believers in the God of Classical Theism and effectively seem to suggest his non-existence.

Specification content

The degree to which modern problem of evil arguments are effective in proving God's non-existence.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Modern problem of evil arguments are more effective than classical arguments in proving God's non-existence.
2. Omnibenevolence is a less significant attribute than omnipotence when considering whether God is worthy of worship.
3. There are solutions to the modern problem of evil.
4. It is not God's non-existence that modern problem of evil arguments prove, rather it is God's traditional attributes that are challenged.
5. Modern problem of evil arguments are entirely ineffective in proving God's non-existence.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

2. The degree to which modern problem of evil arguments are effective in proving God's nonexistence.

Essay preparation activity

1. What are the modern problems of evil arguments?

Mackie

Rowe

Paul

2. Does it highlight a different problem to the classic problem of evil are or there some similarities?

Differences - Evidential

Similarities – Mackie and the triad

3. In what ways does it effectively prove God's nonexistence?

- Challenges God's existence

- Challenges God's characteristics and nature

- Animal suffering (Rowe) has no theological or philosophical basis in classical theism

- Innocent suffering challenges the idea of a 'just' God.

- Paul – the amount of suffering . . .

4. In what ways does it not provide effective proof of God's nonexistence?

- The modern problem of Rowe and Paul questions God's characteristics not his existence

- Animal and innocent suffering can be explained by the Augustinian theodicy . . .

- The Irenaean theodicy claims that suffering is necessary . . .

- The Free Will Defence

- Proof of God's existence is rooted in faith as well as natural theology – evil and suffering are often interpreted as tests of faith.

5. What do you think are the most convincing arguments?

Evaluating the Augustinian Theodicy

2. Whether Augustinian type theodicies are relevant in the 21st Century.

3. The extent to which Augustine's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.

Both of these questions are asking you to identify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Augustinian theodicy – you can create one essay plan and adapt it to the specific issues of each question.

The weaknesses of the Augustinian theodicy can be found in detail in Booklet 1 on Challenges to Religious belief.

You can summarise them as follows: -

Biblical - validity of accounts in Genesis, Chapters 2 and 3

Logical - Logical contradiction of perfect order becoming chaotic - geological and biological evidence suggests the contrary.

Scientific - biological impossibility of human descent from a single pair (therefore invalidating the 'inheritance of Adam's sin');

Moral - moral contradictions of omnibenevolent God and existence of Hell;

The strengths can be found on page 23, add detailed notes to the ideas that follow:-

- consistent with the God of Classical Theism and Bible e.g. predestination
- Brian Davis – evil is absence of good
- Plantinga – No free will = robots
- Natural evil necessary for genuine free will and moral evil is humanity's responsibility
- God make the perfect world for us, the idea of God creating a different world is confusing

Specification content

Whether Augustinian type theodicies are relevant in the 21st century.

Whether Augustinian type theodicies are relevant in the 21st century

The Augustinian type theodicies find their origin in the works of Augustine – the 4th/5th-century Christian Bishop of Hippo. Based largely on the account of The Fall in the Book of Genesis and the Christian understanding of the Atonement through the resurrection of Jesus, the theodicy demonstrates how evil was not part of God's plan for creation but rather was the unintended consequence of allowing free-will agents to exercise their moral choice. The question can then be asked – how historically accurate are these accounts? Did they actually occur? If not, then why should we believe anything that is based on them? In a 21st-century world of scientific enquiry and healthy scepticism, such ideas seem easy to dismiss and are therefore barely relevant.

The ability to have free will meant that a genuine choice between good or evil needed to be available – this meant that moral evil could theoretically thrive, if these free-will agents deliberately chose to turn away from good. Equally, the disobedience shown to God demanded a just punishment – which is where natural evil came from – a disruption of the perfect world created by God due to the evil choices of the free-will agents. Such a viewpoint also demands an assumption to believe that a divine being existed who 'programmed' His creation to act in a particular way. This idea seems difficult to comprehend in an age where evolutionary theory holds sway, where a consideration of how human beings were formed and developed is concerned.

The Augustinian account also presumes an acceptance of the belief in the existence of angels – indeed it is the fallen angel in the form of the serpent that is the catalyst for the events of the Fall – yet this is a strange notion for the 21st century where there is no empirical evidence for such creatures and certainly not in a way in which they are capable of taking the form of an animal and speaking directly with human beings – the whole account seems too fanciful to be taken seriously by the 21st-century mind – further depreciating the relevance of Augustinian type theodicies in the 21st century.

The view of evil as a privation depends on the acceptance of the concept of a perfect world where all things existed a state of goodness and perfection and that, only by a disruption of this, were absences of this goodness found and therefore 'evil' existed. However, in the 21st century, how believable is this? Evil is a very real presence in the world – as are its effects. As such, suggesting that evil is a 'lack of a thing' seems to belong purely to the realm of metaphysical speculation rather than cold harsh reality.

The salvation of human beings by acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus is a comfort to those of the Christian faith, where a reconciled existence with God after death, offers hope of a future where pain and suffering will be nothing more than a distant memory. However, for those outside of this faith tradition no such comfort is offered and, as less than half of the planet's population are promised this salvation then what relevance does it have to the majority of people in the 21st century?

In conclusion, despite the appeal that they may have to believers from the Christian faith traditions, Augustinian type theodicies lack the scientific and historical credibility to be truly relevant in the 21st century.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Science undermines the relevance of Augustinian type theodicies.
2. Augustinian type theodicies are only relevant for Christian believers.
3. Augustinian type theodicies are entirely irrelevant in the 21st century.
4. If the Book of Genesis is not reliable then neither are Augustinian type theodicies.
5. A belief in free will is essential for Augustinian type theodicies to be considered relevant.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

The extent to which Augustine's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism

The problem of evil is a long-standing challenge to believers in the God of Classical Theism. Throughout history there have been attempts to support this belief and to attack the problem of evil. One such example can be found in the theodicies (attempts to justify God in the face of the existence of evil) associated with the works of Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine's starting point is that God is not responsible for the creation of evil. Augustine refers to evil as a lack of goodness or a 'privation of good'. One way of trying to understand what is meant here is by considering the example of blindness. Blindness is the lack or privation of sight, and so this helps to explain the concept of evil being a lack or privation of good. Creating a 'lack of something' contradicts God's act of creation. If this point is taken as valid, then Augustine's theodicy is already a partially successful defence of the God of Classical Theism.

In further defence of the God of Classical Theism, Augustine points out that it is the free will of humans and angels that caused suffering. It was the deliberate turning away from divine commands, as explained in the Biblical account of the Fall, which resulted in the consequential destruction of the perfect order. It was not God's will for this to happen but rather the deliberate action of free-will agents. It should be recognised that evil is a direct result of the consequences of the Fall.

The Genesis account demonstrates the need for evil and suffering to exist as a consequence of the actions from free-will agents. It is necessary for a just God to punish wrongdoing. The introduction of natural evil (caused by the actions of fallen angels, who wreak havoc and human rebellion, which affected all of creation and subsequently distorting it) is therefore a deserved punishment. Again, if this view is accepted then Augustine's theodicy provides a successful defence of the God of Classical Theism, at least in part.

However, not all of Augustine's viewpoints are as easy to accept. The assertion that all humans are 'seminally present' in Adam and therefore, according to the inheritance of guilt doctrines, all descendants of Adam (i.e. all human beings) are deserving of punishment as they have inherited his sin, is a particularly difficult viewpoint to accept. This is because genetic and biological records show that it is biologically impossible (as well as genetically undesirable) for all humans to have descended from a single male. In this case Augustine's theodicy is not a successful defence of the God of Classical Theism.

Equally, the proposition that God demonstrates mercy through making provision for a way of redemption through Christ, leading to the Fall being referred to as the 'felix culpa' (happy mistake), is only of relevance to Christian believers. What about theists from other faith traditions? This part of the Augustine's theodicy simply does not work.

The moral and logical issues with the various contradictions within the Augustinian theodicy further undermine its validity as a defence of the God of Classical Theism in the face of the existence of evil.

Therefore, in conclusion, following the points made above, Augustine's theodicy fails as a successful defence of the God of Classical Theism.

Specification content

The extent to which Augustine's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Augustine's theodicy is successful if the Book of Genesis is accepted as fact.
2. The contradictions within the Augustinian theodicy are what weaken it most.
3. It is impossible to defend the God of Classical Theism by using the Augustinian theodicy.
4. The Augustinian theodicy represents a partially successful defence of the God of Classical Theism.
5. Only Christians can make sense of the defence offered by the Augustinian theodicy.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Evaluating the Augustinian theodicy essay plan

Challenges to the Augustinian theodicy	Arguments in defence of the Augustinian theodicy	Evaluation and link to the question

Evaluating the Irenaean Theodicy

4. Whether Irenaean type theodicies are credible in the 21st Century.
5. The extent to which Irenaeus's theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism. Both of these questions are asking you to identify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Irenaean theodicy – you can create one essay plan and adapt it to the specific issues of each question.

Strengths

- It is compatible with the scientific view of evolution
- The Irenaean theodicy avoids the issue of a perfect creation turning away from God whilst also allowing for free-will and God's characteristics
- Irenaeus' theodicy allows for the humanity to recognise the value of a relationship with God. If God's love was freely given, it would be of less value. (as Hick argues, otherwise man becomes like a "robot")
- Irenaeus provides a recognisable and achievable goal for humanity and a purpose for suffering that stresses the relevance and value of life on earth perhaps more than Augustine's theodicy does.
- Because God creates the universe and humanity out of imperfect matter, Irenaeus' theodicy avoids the issue that God creates 'ex nihilo', and that he is therefore wholly responsible for the introduction of evil into the world.
- Irenaeus'/Hick's concept of the universe as the vale of soul-making is the "best possible universe": a world without free will would lack value / a world without error would not be one in which man possesses free will
- If we accept that human perfection has to be developed, then:
 - We had to be created imperfect
 - Have to be free to be able to go against God
 - We had to be distanced from God - J Hick refers to this as epistemic distance
 - The natural world could not be a paradise
 - True freedom demands that we can cause harm
- Life does not always end in human development
 - Many suffer badly throughout life
 - Therefore only a supreme life in heaven can justify the present suffering
 - Even evil people are victims and deserve the mercy and justice of God

Weaknesses

- The view of creation presented by Irenaeus is radically at odds with the Biblical account in which man is created perfectly. It is certainly not to be considered wholly 'orthodox'.
- The significance of Christ's sacrifice is devalued as humanity's moral perfection is guaranteed as an end result.
- If the end result of man reaching God by weakening the epistemic distance is already assured, how can philosophers maintain that humanity possesses free-will?
- Can the end justify the means? Is it satisfactory to state that all the suffering experienced within the world is justifiable because it will lead to knowledge of God and moral perfection?
- God creates the world out of pre-existent matter which challenges the idea that he is omnipotent as he is no longer the source of everything (contrary to Augustine's view).
- The concept of heaven for all is unjust and it does not correspond with biblical view of eternal punishment
- It makes good moral behaviour pointless. Therefore there is no incentive to develop which is the point of Irenaeus' theodicy
- The quantity and gravity of suffering is out of proportion to rewards. Even if suffering is necessary it could be restricted. For example, if Jews had to die in the Holocaust why not 1 million instead of 6 million?
- Surely suffering cannot be an expression of God's love?
- **D Z Phillips** argues that it is never justifiable to harm someone in order to help them. However, this is precisely what the medical profession does when operating on someone

Optional Extension

Read the extract from Jordan (Old AQA A2 textbook) to help with the following activities.

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Whether Irenaean type theodicies are credible in the 21st century

Irenaean type theodicies find their origins in the mid-3rd century CE. Irenaeus of Lyons, in reflecting on the relationship that human beings had with God and the place that they occupied in the created order, realised that humans were unique. As such, humans were the only created being that had been made *Imago Dei* (in the image of God) and as such possess the potential to develop the sort of characteristics of God himself and become 'like God'. This idea was based on the verse in Genesis 1:26 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. As far as the 21st century is concerned, this idea fits in with the scientific understanding that life on earth develops qualities that help it survive more effectively within the natural environment (as per Natural Selection and the Theory of Evolution). In this sense, the Irenaean type theodicies appear to have some credibility in the 21st century.

However, others may state that basing a theodicy on a document that is nearly 3000 years old makes any claim for credibility suspect at least. The idea that the existence of evil and suffering can be explained away as some kind of 'spiritual workout' may even sound obscene to some – particularly those whose suffering is so acute that seeing any positives come from it is virtually impossible.

In fact the very immensity of suffering that has occurred throughout human history from genocides, such as those faced by the Bosnian Serbs, the victims of Stalin, the peoples of Rwanda and European Jewry (and those are just events from the past 80 years of recorded human history), completely undermine the idea that suffering is there to help individuals become spiritually mature – such an idea becomes abhorrent if that is the price that needs to be paid – what sort of God would exact such a terrible cost from His creation?

Where the theodicies may have credibility in the 21st century is in the promise of hope given to all. The suggestion that this process of developing from image to likeness will one day be realised by all human beings, no matter how long it takes for each individual gives something for everyone to aspire to in the sense that suffering and pain will be removed for ever and all will be able to partake in spiritual perfection in an eternity with God. Such is the hope for those that follow Liberation Theology – in that, one day suffering will be overcome and God will restore us to him in the original relationship envisioned in Eden.

Objections to this view are many though. Critics would claim that the idea of a universal salvation appears abhorrent. Does this mean that some of the most wicked, evil and cruel humans ever to have lived will be given precisely the same eventual reward as those humans who dedicated their lives to good works, selfless acts and the improvement of others? Do we really mean that Gandhi and Stalin will be treated the same? How does this demonstrate God's justice? Why should anyone even bother to try in this life now, if eventually we will all end up in Heaven? The idea seems preposterous and seriously undermines any credibility this theodicy may have in the 21st century.

In conclusion, despite the initial attractiveness of human development and a universal hope of eternal reward, the contradictions contained with Irenaean type theodicies are too severe for this theodicy to be able to maintain any credibility in the 21st century.

This section covers AO2 content and skills

Specification content

Whether Irenaean type theodicies are credible in the 21st century.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Irenaean type theodicies are not credible because they do not take the issue of evil seriously enough.
2. It is the unfairness of the theodicies that causes the lack of credibility in the 21st century.
3. If the Bible is accepted as a reliable source then the Irenaean theodicy makes perfect sense.
4. Developing spiritual perfection is a credible idea because it relates closely to the theory of evolution.
5. The Irenaean type theodicies lack credibility in the 21st century because they are not equipped to deal adequately with the intensity, immensity and utter unfairness caused by evil and suffering.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

Specification content

The extent to which Irenaeus' theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism.

The extent to which Irenaeus' theodicy succeeds as a defence of the God of Classical Theism

The problem of evil is a long-standing challenge to believers in the God of Classical Theism. Throughout history there have been attempts to support this belief and to attack the problem of evil. One such example can be found in the theodicies (attempts to justify God in the face of the existence of evil) associated with the works of Irenaeus of Lyons.

Irenaeus bases his main ideas on Genesis 1:26 that states: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. The basic thread that runs throughout Irenaeus' works (the theodicy was never written as a composite – it is a theme that runs throughout many of his writings) is that human beings were made in God's image – in other words had the potential to be like God, but only through undergoing the trials of suffering that life presents and responding to these appropriately (freely choosing to do good rather than evil) would we develop into God's likeness – i.e. would fully actualise God's qualities within ourselves. In this Irenaeus faces the problem of evil head on and admits that evil exists. Not only does it exist, but it was also part of God's plan for humanity. God, in Irenaeus' view, has deliberately created evil so that we could develop our spiritual qualities and become better people. In this sense, the Irenaean theodicy is a successful defence of the God of Classical Theism because he admits the 'third corner' of the inconsistent triad but overcomes this by stating that there is a very clear reason for the existence of evil – to help human beings achieve spiritual and moral perfection.

Irenaeus speaks of God being like a craftsman, and evil is one of his tools that allows him to mould humans into perfection when they act in faith towards him (i.e. they freely choose to do good in the face of evil and suffering). The theodicy is also successful if we consider John Hick's development of Irenaeus' theodicy when he makes the point that God's mercy extends beyond this life and that, by virtue of his divine mercy, all human beings will eventually develop into spiritually perfect beings and be united with him in Heaven. This would, at first glance, seem another successful defence of the God of Classical Theism in the face of the existence of evil – in that the promise is that, one day, it will not only be overcome, but that all individuals will one day achieve the end that God has set out for them and all of creation will be one in harmony together.

Unfortunately for supporters of the Irenaean theodicy there are too many issues that are unresolved. The extent of suffering is not evenly spread. Not all humans experience the same amount of suffering in their lives and some manage to become moral and spiritually good people even without undergoing trials of suffering and evil. In fact, some of those that undergo suffering have so much to deal with that they do not develop but actually regress – some into cycles of violence and cruelty themselves, some in taking their own lives because they cannot stand to suffer another moment. Neither of these is taken account of in the theodicy and both pose a serious challenge to its effectiveness as a defence of the God of Classical Theism. Furthermore, the concept of universal salvation seems to entirely undermine any reason for choosing to do the right thing in the here and now – what's the point if all humanity will eventually up with God anyway?

Therefore, in conclusion, following the points made above, the Irenaean theodicy fails as a successful defence of the God of Classical Theism.

AO2 Activity Possible lines of argument

Listed below are some conclusions that could be drawn from the AO2 reasoning in the accompanying text:

1. Irenaean type theodicies weaken the concept of God's omnipotence.
2. Irenaean type theodicies are incompatible with a loving God.
3. Irenaean type theodicies suggest that God is arbitrary in distributing evil and suffering, incompatible with the God of Classical Theism.
4. Irenaean type theodicies do not explain why an all-knowing God would allow such a complex plan.
5. Irenaean type theodicies are successful because they are the only way of explaining free will.

Consider each of the conclusions drawn above and collect evidence and examples to support each argument from the AO1 and AO2 material studied in this section. Select one conclusion that you think is most convincing and explain why it is so. Now contrast this with the weakest conclusion in the list, justifying your argument with clear reasoning and evidence.

'IRENÆAN TYPE THEODICIES HAVE NEVER BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN RESPONDING TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.'

EVALUATE THIS VIEW. 30 marks

The basis of the Irenaean type theodicy is that human beings are developing towards perfection. The emphasis is to understand the world as a "vale of soul making". God deliberately created a world in which it is not immediately and overwhelmingly evident that there is a God. This allows human beings to have freedom to come to God and to make free and responsible moral choices. Evil and suffering are justified since they are the means by which all human beings will eventually succeed in becoming morally perfect. Indeed, some moral goods are responses to evils and hence cannot exist without them – for example, compassion.

In the 21st century this approach to the problem of evil has some attractions. It is compatible with a scientific view of evolution and therefore is more successful than the Augustinian type theodicy. However, if the Biblical accounts are regarded as depicting historical events then the Irenaean type theodicy would not be persuasive. Indeed, for a Christian theodicy, it would seem to be wanting as the atoning work of Christ and his redemptive power of salvation through death on the Cross seems to be irrelevant. There seems no place for the forgiveness of sins. Also, surely an all-powerful benevolent God could find a more compassionate mechanism for his creation to grow and develop towards God? Indeed, evil often ruins and destroys people rather than making them perfect. However, such criticisms may not be sufficient to reject the theodicy. It does have strengths that may outweigh its apparent weaknesses. For instance, it seems reasonable that some goods do require the existence of evil (e.g. compassion) and the end does justify the means since all ultimately experience the ultimate joy and that joy lasts eternally. There is clearly purpose in the experience of evil. The theodicy also involves genuine human responsibility and so respects genuine human free will.

Furthermore, it is true that it removes the problem of hell since all achieve perfection, i.e. the end result is guaranteed since that is the justification for the existence of evil – it achieves its end. But if the end result of perfection is guaranteed then what is the point of going through all the pain and suffering? In addition surely we could use our free will to rebel eternally and so never reach perfection?

The arguments show that it can offer a solution to the problem of evil but not without some serious difficulties remaining. However, it could be argued that the alternative theodicies raise even greater problems and so many may feel that the Irenaean type theodicy is not totally unsuccessful. After all it does provide a solution but the extent it is persuasive will be up to the individual to weigh up and decide. In particular, the problem of the lack of the need for the death of Jesus may be for many, a deciding factor in rejecting the theodicy.

QUESTION 1

Discuss in a group and write down to what extent you think this answer has fully addressed the question set

QUESTION 2

Identify effective aspects of the answer in terms of its style. Create a list.

QUESTION 3

How does this answer differ from the style of evaluative answer that lists arguments in favour and then lists arguments against?

QUESTION 4

Discuss any ways that the answer could have been improved upon?

Look back at the comments to question 1 and think ways in which you could incorporate those into the answer.

QUESTION 5

Underline and create a list of any words in the answer that show it is evaluative.

QUESTION 6

Now attempt to write your own answer to the question set.