

Evaluating Hick's Theodicy – developed points

A key skill in writing high level answers is to write evaluative paragraphs that make a Point, Explain the point, Assess or counterargue before coming to an evaluative judgement. You will note that the acronym is PEACE. So to write well at A level – Give PEACE a chance.

A sample paragraph on Dostoevsky's criticism of theodicies is below

'Although some suffering can be good for us, what about suffering that has no obvious purpose or is far too great for any greater good to be achieved. (P) In the novel 'The Brothers Karamazov' Dostoevsky gives the example of soldiers in the Crimean war killing infants by throwing them into the air and catching them on bayonets. This suffering is to great and is 'dysteleological' - has no purpose.(E) One response to this which may support Hick has come from Richard Swinburne. In discussing the holocaust, Swinburne argues that our free will has to include the freedom to commit large scale horrors. If we say that God should only allow a certain amount of suffering then we are really asking that God make a 'toy world' where things matter but not much, the big choices would remain with God. (A/C) Swinburne argues that only an omniscient God could know how much suffering is too much and whether it would be worth it. Yet whilst this may technically be correct this would seem to rule out challenging God on any topic including evil hence this is not helpful (E)'

Use the notes below to have a go at writing some PEACE paragraphs of your own

Objection 1 : Phillips and the Instrumental Criticism

D Z Phillips (1934-2006) objected that Hick's Theodicy was immoral as it involved God using evil as a tool to create a greater good. If God is all good and completely perfect there is something very wrong about such a God using evil at all. For Phillips there is no greater purpose in the 'screams of the innocent' and anyone who suggests there can be has a corrupt mind! He rejects the idea of thinkers such as Swinburne who argues that even the Holocaust might be ultimately justified as part of God's plan to bring about greater good.

RESPONSE: Hick is aware that such a criticism of his view is possible. He accepts that much suffering appears dysteleological. (pointless) In a way Phillips main objection is to the language used by Swinburne. Hick does not attempt to justify the holocaust or other large scale evils. Ultimately for Hick this is a mystery and the fact that all are eventually saved will bring about a greater good.

Objection 2 : Mackie and Free will

John Mackie (1917-80) rejects Hick's view of free will. Although accepting that humans having free will is better than a world of pre-programmed machines, Mackie wonders whether God could create free creatures who always do what is right. If humans can sometimes choose good why can't they always do so? He argues that humans being free and always choosing the good is not logically impossible – after all some believers expect heaven to be like this. If God really were all powerful he would be able to create free creatures who always choose the good.

RESPONSE: Hick and Swinburne both reject this idea. They accuse Mackie of not really understanding what is meant by free will. Free will does carry the risk that large scale horrors will be carried out. If God gives freedom to only do options that are good so that we don't really harm each other, we are in effect living in a 'toy world' where our choices don't matter.

Objection 3 : Universalism

Although he agrees with the theodicy of Hick, one problem raised by Richard Swinburne (1934 -) is around the idea of universalism. For Swinburne the idea that all are ultimately saved is unfair. It would make us wonder what the point was in behaving morally if we were all to get to heaven in the end. For Swinburne part of our free will requires the possibility of rejecting God and his salvation. If there is no Hell then we are not truly free. Freedom includes the real freedom to 'damn ourselves.'

"If you cannot damn yourself no matter how hard you go on trying, your salvation is inevitable. A God who wishes all men to be saved is of dubious moral status." (Swinburne)

RESPONSE: Hick's view on universalism comes from two main ideas. Firstly his contact with people of other faiths during his time working in Birmingham. Secondly, Hick believes that if we truly understand God's Omni benevolence then we will see no place for an eternal punishment. God's love is so great that eventually the whole universe will be won over and brought to perfection with him.