Necessary Evil or Unnecessary God?
Evaluating the Problem of Suffering
by
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I discuss the philosophical problem of evil and, as a response, John Hick’s soul making theodicy. First, I discuss the transformation of the problem. I examine how the problem has shifted from logical to evidential in recent history. Next, I offer a faithful rendition of Hick’s position – one which states the existence of evil does not provide evidence against the existence of God. After reconstructing his argument, I go on to exposes its logical faults. I present four main contentions to Hick’s theodicy. First, I analyze the psychology of dehumanization to question whether we have any evidence that soul making is happening in response to the suffering in the world. Second, I argue that Hick’s theodicy is self-defeating if accepted because it undermines the central point on which his argument depends. Third, I claim that Hick’s theodicy is self-defeating given his eschatological views. Finally, I discuss how Hick’s theodicy does not account for the animal suffering that widely exists in the world now, and that exists in our evolutionary history. My hope is to show that Hick’s theodicy fails to solve the problem of evil. I claim that the amount of gratuitous suffering in the world does provide evidence against the existence of God.
To Megan and “Duck”: I am infinitely grateful for all of the love and support you each have given me. In a world full of darkness and sorrow, you are the light that inspires me to persevere. Being a shoulder to cry on, or a soothing voice to comfort me in times of despair, your efforts will be forever cherished. I love you both more than words can ever express.
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Introduction

No matter where one falls on the continuum of belief regarding the existence of God\(^1\), many have wondered: if God exists, why is there so much evil? Eli Wiesel wrote in *Night* that his faith died as he suffered in the concentration camps:

Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed.
Never shall I forget that smoke.
Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky.
Never shall I forget those flames that consumed my faith forever.
Never shall I forget the nocturnal silence that deprived me for all eternity of the desire to live.
Never shall I forget those moments that murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to ashes.
Never shall I forget those things, even were I condemned to live as long as God Himself.
Never.\(^2\)

Mother Teresa, who is considered one of the most pious persons to exist, wrote in personal letters that she struggled with the existence of evil and why an all-good God would allow so much of it.

Now Father – since 49 of 50 this terrible sense of loss – this untold darkness – this loneliness this continual longing for God – which gives me that pain deep down in my heart – Darkness is such that I really do not see – neither with my mind nor with my reason – the place of God in my soul is blank – There is no God in me – when the pain of longing is so great – I just long & long for God – and then it is that I feel – He does not want me – He is not there –... God does not want me – Sometimes – I just hear my own heart cry out – “My God” and nothing else comes – The torture and pain I can’t explain.\(^3\)

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1 By “God” I am referring to the God of theism – the Abrahamic God of the *Torah*, Bible, and *Qur’an*. That is a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, and the Creator of the universe. I will continue to use the traditional masculine pronoun “Him” or “He” when referring to God.

2 Wiesel, *Night*, 1972, p. 34.

It is critical to recognize that evil comes in two main categories: moral evil and natural evil. The former is when evil is perpetuated by human agency. Genocide, for example, is a moral evil because it results from the choices of moral agents. Natural evil, however, is when natural occurrences result in pain or suffering. Hurricanes, earthquakes, and natural diseases like childhood cancer are all examples of natural evil. In the first chapter, I give a brief history of the problem of evil. I try to illustrate how the problem was originally formulated as a logical problem. Then, in chapter two, I discuss how the problem has transitioned from logical to evidential. In the third chapter, I examine the soul-making theodicy in response to the problem of evil. Finally, I raise objections to the soul-making theodicy and discuss how it is does not sufficiently solve the problem of evil.

Chapter 1 – The Logical Problem of Evil

“The problem of vindicating an omnipotent and omniscient God in the face of evil is insurmountable.”
~Sam Harris

The earliest formulations of the problem of evil, stretching all the way back to the pre-Socratics, are presented as logical problems. The gist of these arguments are that God’s essential properties (omniscience, omnipotence, and omnibenevolence) cannot all exist in a single being given the existence of suffering. A simple example of a logical problem is a four-sided triangle. This is called a logical problem because the concept cannot exist in any possible world. A triangle, by definition, is a shape with three sides. A four-sided figure cannot have only three sides. This is a contradiction because one is claiming that the shape has three sides and not three sides (four sides). In order to argue
that the existence of God is *logically* impossible, then, one must examine His essential properties and look for an example of $P \land \neg P$. If one can find an example of a contradiction within the properties of God, then it must be the case that He cannot have both properties simultaneously. Thus, if it is essential for God to have those properties, then God cannot exist.

This is the type of argument one finds when looking at one of the earliest renditions of the problem of evil. In the works of Epicurus, he states the following argument trying to elicit a contradiction.

God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; If He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; If He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; If He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them?\(^4\)

Epicurus argues that there is a contradiction between the properties of omnibenevolence (all-good) and omnipotence (all-powerful) because of the existence of evil in the world.

The argument can be stated more formally in the following form:

**Argument 1 – Epicurus’ Argument**

1. If God exists, then God is omnibenevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent.

2. If God is omnipotent, He would be capable of stopping all evil.

3. Evil Exists

4. Either God does not want to prevent evil or God is incapable of preventing evil.

\(^4\) Lactantius, *On the Anger of God*, c. 310 CE, translated in 1951 by William Fletcher. There is some debate that this argument may have been misattributed to Epicurus because it does not exist in any of his writings, but Lactantius claims this to be an argument from Epicurus.
5. Thus, God is either not omnipotent or not omnibenevolent.

C. Therefore, God does not exist.

As seen by the argument above, the existence of evil means one of two things: either God cannot prevent evil, or does not want to prevent evil – making Him either not all-powerful or not all-good. This is the contradiction that Epicurus is attempting to elicit in his argument. The argument tries to show that the triune of omnipotence, omnibenevolence, and the existence of evil cannot simultaneously hold. Something must give. Since we know there is evil in the world as a result of our direct experiences\(^5\), either God’s omnipotence or omnibenevolence must falter. Whichever property is revoked, the God that is defined as an all-powerful and all-good being does not exist. This is the ‘P ∧ ~P’ one originally hoped to find: “God is all-powerful and all-good” and “God is not all-powerful and all-good” – Contradiction.

The debate did not end with the work of Epicurus. In 1955, the Australian philosopher J. L. Mackie argued the nonexistence of God in a way that is similar to Epicurus. Mackie argued that there is a contradiction between the three claims: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; Evil exists. Mackie claims that if any two of them were true, the third would have to be false Mackie does admit, however, that the contradiction is not as direct as ‘P ∧ ~P’. One requires more premises and clearly defined principles for the meaning of ‘good’, ‘evil’, and ‘omnipotent’ in order to get the contradiction needed. The additional principles that Mackie presents are the following: “Good is opposed to

\(^5\) There is some debate about this, however. Some philosophers think that evil has metaphysical existence, while others think that evil is merely the absence of good. A quote by young Albert Einstein encapsulates this position: “God did not create evil. Just as darkness is the absence of light, evil is the absence of good.”
evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. These are the only two additional concepts needed to demonstrate the logical problem, according to Mackie. Let us formulate this argument carefully and examine if Mackie’s conclusion indeed follows.

Argument 2 – Mackie’s Argument

1. If God exists, He is omnibenevolent.
2. If God exists, He is omnipotent.
3. Evil exists.
4. Good things eliminate evil things as much as possible.
5. An omnipotent being has no limits of power.
6. If an omnibenevolent omnipotent thing exists, it would eliminate evil completely.
7. By (3) and (6), an omnibenevolent and omnipotent thing does not exist.
C. Therefore, God does not exist.⁷

Since good and evil are opposite notions God, being all-good, would have to oppose evil as much as His power allows. Since God’s power is infinite due to his omnipotence, God would be able to eliminate evil completely. If he could not, Mackie claims, then God would not be all-powerful. Since evil clearly exists in the world, one must conclude that God cannot eliminate the evil completely, or He does not want to eliminate evil completely. Each disjunct leads to a contradiction within God’s properties.

⁷ Ibid., p. 211-212.
Therefore, Mackie concludes, God does not exist. This argument is valid and sound; if one accepts all of the premises, then the conclusion follows. Therefore, defenders of theism have to find a flaw in the argument. For this, let us move to Alvin Plantinga who challenges premise (6).

Mackie claims in premise (6), if an omnibenevolent omnipotent being exists, it would eliminate evil completely. Christian philosopher Alvin Plantinga challenges this assumption. Due to the fact that God is omnibenevolent, He would want to create a state of affairs where maximum moral good is possible, and this, Plantinga argues, requires that God create beings who possess significant free will: “A world containing creatures who are sometimes significantly free (and freely perform more good than evil actions) is more valuable, all else being equal, than a world containing no free creatures at all.”

That is, the existence of free beings necessitates the possibility that those beings will perform evil actions, but significant freedom, Plantinga argues, morally justifies such a possibility. Let us examine Plantinga’s argument more formally:

**Argument 3 – Plantinga’s Argument**

1. God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent.

2. Evil exists.

3. If there is a morally legitimate reason for God to allow evil, the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of God.

4. Free will is a morally legitimate reason for God to allow evil.

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8 Plantinga, 1971, p.166.
C. Therefore, from (3) and (4), the existence of evil is logically consistent with the existence of God.\(^9\)

Through this argument, Plantinga is objecting to the premise by Mackie stating that an omnipotent and omnibenevolent being would try to stop all evil. From Mackie’s argument, Plantinga calls premise (6) into question. Plantinga argues that evil is consistent with God’s existence if there is a morally legitimate reason to allow evil. Plantinga states that the morally legitimate reason is the existence of free will. God wants to create a world in which maximum goodness is possible. A world in which humans are free is such a world. Thus, since humans have free will and there is evil the world, God is morally justified in allowing evil because the world has the potential to be better than the corresponding world without free will.

What did Plantinga gain from this argument? By demonstrating the existence of a possible reason a morally perfect being and all-powerful being would allow evil to occur, Plantinga has shown that there is not a *logical* problem of evil. If the triad of omniscience, omnipotence, and evil were logically contradictory, there would be no possible world in which the three could all be true. By Plantinga’s argument, it is *possible* to have a world in which the existence of evil can coexist with God’s omnipotence and omniscience. Therefore, the logical problem of evil has been debunked. Thus, more contemporary philosophers of religion have approached the problem of evil as an evidential problem, i.e., while not providing a logical argument against the existence of

God, does the existence of evil provide probable *evidence* against the existence of such a being?

*From Logical to Evidential*

There are some evils that are intrinsically bad, but instrumentally good. It is intrinsically bad to cause a child pain, but vaccines are instrumentally good. They cause pain to children, but they prevent a worse evil (like a disease) from occurring. These can be viewed as necessary evils. For philosopher William Rowe, an evil is *gratuitous* when it does not lead to a greater good or prevent a worse evil from occurring.⁹ The problem now, then, is how to interpret the phenomenon of suffering in the world. A theist will claim that the existence of suffering does not provide any evidence against God; atheists disagree with this claim. Let us consider Rowe’s evidential argument against the existence of God.

**Argument 4 – Rowe’s Evidential Argument**

1. 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.

2. 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.

C. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.¹¹

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⁹ Rowe, 1979, p. 336-337.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 336.
Rowe claims that God would prevent any instances of intense suffering that do not serve a greater good or prevent evil that is equally bad or worse. However, it does indeed appear to be the case that gratuitous instances of suffering prevalently exist. Perhaps the most powerful example of gratuitous evil is the Holocaust. Millions were killed in the Holocaust, but it did not appear to generate any good – at least any good that is comparable to the amount and intensity of the suffering for the victims. The same can be said of other genocides in human history. The Rwandan genocide claimed nearly one million lives, and seems void of any positive consequences. Gratuitous evil appears on the small scale, too. Consider the sufferings and deaths of children under the age of five years old. According to the World Health Organization, the child mortality rate in 2007 was 9 million. That means that 9 million children died before they reached the age of five years old. This statistic also states that roughly 70% of those deaths “could be prevented or treated with access to simple, affordable interventions.”12 Even though 70% of the diseases were preventable, the other 30% were not. This mean there were 2.7 million children that died before the age of 5 in 2007 and there was no way to prevent it.13 This is the type of suffering Rowe is seeking in his argument. The suffering of infants appears not to generate any goodness at all. Rowe’s archetype example of gratuitous suffering shows that animals can be


13 To understand the magnitude of this number, if a child under the age of 5 died every single second, it would take an entire month to reach 2.7 million children (31.25 days, to be exact).
subject of gratuitous evil as well: “In some 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.” An injured fawn slowly starving to death appears to serve no greater purpose nor does it prevent a worse evil in the grand scheme of the world. Therefore, as Rowe argues, a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good cannot exist. This argument is controversial, however. The second premise, sometimes called the theological premise, is open to debate. Before discussing Hicks’ theodicy, I would like to discuss recent research from a subset of theists called skeptical theists that calls into question our epistemic position to assert the theological premise.

Skeptical Theism

Skeptical theism claims that, given the complexity of reality and the cognitive limits of humankind, humans are not in the epistemological position to determine whether an act is really an instance of gratuitous evil or not. Stephen Wykstra gives an account of what he calls Conditions on Reasonable Epistemic Access (hereafter, CORNEA). Wykstra claims that “one cannot see that P” does not imply the stronger claim “it is not the case that P.” This is what philosophers call the noseeum inference. There are certain conditions under which the failure to see P is evidence of not-P. For example, if I look for my black shoes in a white room, I should expect to see them; if I do

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14 Ibid., p. 337

15 The word “Noseeum” comes from “If I do not seem them, then they are not there” or, less formally, “If I no see ‘um, they aren’t there.”
not, then that is evidence to claim they are not there. There are also many cases, however, in which the failure to see P is not, on its own, evidence against not-P. My failing to see a contact lens in the same room is not, on its own, evidence that there is no contact lens in the room. This is because it is not the kind of thing to which I can reasonably have epistemic access. Theists claim the latter case is akin to why God allows evil. If there were such a greater good to justify the immense suffering in the world, it is not the kind of thing one should expect to be able to see. Thus, the fact that we cannot conceive of these reasons is not sufficient evidence that there are no such reasons. It may be the case that humans simply do not have the right epistemic conditions to understand God’s intentions. According to Wykstra,

> If we think carefully about the sort of being theism proposes for our belief, it is entirely expectable – given what we know of our cognitive limits – that the goods by virtue of which this Being allows known suffering should very often be beyond our ken.\(^{16}\)

This defense does have some allure. There is reason to think that humankind is not far advanced on the spectrum of intelligence to understand the will of God, if God exists. It is plausible that God is allowing evil for reasons that humans could not comprehend. There are, however, some undesired consequences of accepting Wykstra’s CORNEA argument and skeptical theism as a whole. At the very least, it seems that humans would never be in a position to judge anything morally given the fact that God would have reasons for allowing it. Further, it seems to undermine the relationship that God has with humankind. If skeptical theism is true, it appears that much of God’s being would be outside of our cognitive scope, which seems to contradict all that theologians

\(^{16}\) Wykstra, 1984, p. 91.
claim to know about Him. In fact, it appears that given this constraint, theologians would be hard-pressed to produce any positive claims about God’s nature. As it will be presented later, Hick is making such assumptions about the nature of God – His intentions, His desires, and even the path through which God exercise His will. Thus, skeptical theism is insufficient to defend Hick’s argument because Hick is violating basic epistemic assumptions about God.17

Theologians are committed to claiming there are no instances of gratuitous evils, while atheologians attempt to present evidence to show the existence of gratuitous evils. So, knowing that evil exists, does that provide evidence that God does not exist? Theodicies are attempts to answer ‘no’ to that question. If one can construct a reason to think God has good reasons for allowing suffering, then the existence of such suffering does not provide evidence against God. One such theodicy is that of John Hick’s Soul Making theodicy.

Chapter 2 – The Soul-Making Theodicy

“Out of suffering emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.”
~Khalil Gibran

Two different traditions of Creation

There are two major traditions of Creation that must be understood before advancing to Hick’s argument. There is the Augustian tradition of Creation and the

17 There has been substantial work done on the topic of skeptical theism, but, since it does not pertain to my project directly, see Dougherty & McBrayer, 2014 for further essays on skeptical theism. For arguments against skeptical theism, see Draper, 2013, for example.
Irenaean tradition. Both traditions accept the story of Adam and Eve, but there are differences within the interpretation of the story. In St. Augustine’s work, he claims humans are made perfectly by God but, due to a misuse of their free will, fall into sin. To quote Augustine:

For we are all in that one man [Adam], since we all were that one man who fell into sin by the woman who was made from him before the sin. For not yet was the particular form created and distributed to us, in which we as individuals were to live, but already the seminal nature was there from which we were to be propagated and this being vitiated by sin, and bound by the chain of death, and justly condemned, man could not be born of man in any other state. And thus, from the bad use of free will, there originated the whole train of evil, which, with its concatenation of miseries, convoys the human race from its depraved origin, as from a corrupt root, on to the destruction of the second death, which has no end, those only being expected who are freed by the Grace of God.18

Eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden was the first misuse of free will.19 All of the moral evil that follows can be traced back to the fall. In Augustine’s words, the fall was the beginning of the “train of evil.” This is the dominate view today regarding those who accept the Creation story. Humans were created perfectly, but fell into evil by their own freedom. The framework that Hick uses for his theodicy does not fit into Augustine’s Creation narrative. Instead, Hick focuses on what he calls the “minority report” for his theodicy – the Irenaean tradition. The Irenaean tradition of creation states that God deliberately created Adam and Eve imperfectly and intended for them to grow by their own freedom. That is, moral perfection needs to be earned rather than given from the start. Thus, there is a fundamental divide in how evil can be viewed from both of

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these traditions. For Augustine, evil is the result of our fallen state, which came from Adam and Eve’s initial use of free will. For Irenaeus, experiencing evil is a stage in the development of humans. God deliberately created humans morally immature to allow for earned moral perfection. To quote Irenaeus on this point:

The man is rendered spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God. But if the Spirit be wanting the soul, he who is such is indeed of an animal nature, and being left carnal, shall be an imperfect being, possessing indeed the image [of God] in his formation, but not receiving the likeness [of God] through the Spirit.  

Thus, according to Irenaeus, humans are created in the image of God, but not initially in the likeness of God. Instead, humans are created purposely imperfect. This is the claim on which Hick pivots to formulate his soul-making theodicy.

The Irenaean tradition that Hick utilizes claims that God created humankind in two stages: Bios and Zoe. The Bios stage of Creation was the physical formation of humankind and the universe. This is just creating humans physically. In this stage, there is no other type of development; it can be thought of as an animal-like plane of existence. The second stage, Zoe, is the process toward moral perfection in the likeness of God. This is the progress toward maturing. As Irenaeus states,

Now it was necessary that man should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened, should abound; and having abounded, should recover; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord.  

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20 Irenaeus, c. 180, Bk. v, chap. v, par. 1.

21 There is something to be said here about what the “image of God” actually means, since God is not thought to be a physical being. According to Hick, Irenaeus is referring to the “the raw material for a further and more difficult stage of God’s creative work” (Hick, p. 254, 1966).

22 Ibid., Bk. iv., Chap. xxxviii, par. 3.
According to Irenaeus, the process of growth can lead one to be glorified and experience the likeness of God. Hick utilizes this for his theodicy. Moral growth helps us become in the likeness of God. The process of Creation for Irenaeus is comparable to the relationship between parents and a child. The parents create the child (Bios), but trying to get them to become descent human beings is the challenge. It is a process that requires the child to learn from their own mistakes while being guided in the right direction. It is a process that can be difficult but incredibly valuable (Zoe). This is the type of argument Hick is going to formulate when defending God. The transition from Bios to Zoe is “a transition from one level of existence, that of animal life (Bios), to another and higher level, that of eternal life (Zoe), which includes but transcends the first.23” If humans were created intentionally morally imperfect with foresight toward gaining moral goodness, rather than being given it, God’s creation of a world in which suffering appears to be unwarranted is sensible. Therefore, if God is giving humankind an opportunity to grow morally though evil, the theological premise would be refuted.

*Hick’s Theodicy*

John Hick relies on the Irenaean tradition to build on his point of soul making. That is, Hick tries to show that the existence of evil in the world is part of a process to build moral characteristics including care, compassion, and love. This is the Zoe from the Irenaean tradition being formulated to fit the theodicy. Hick argues two central points in

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his work: (1) The process of moral growth\textsuperscript{24} is intrinsically valuable and (2) Evil and suffering have to \textit{appear} unnecessary (that is, it must appear gratuitous) in order to incite human beings into moral maturity. Let us examine the main points of Hick’s work and try to determine if soul-making is taking place.

First, Hick argues that the process of moral growth is intrinsically valuable. To argue this, he appeals to a basic virtue that working for something makes it more valuable. For this, the following example is applicable: imagine a teenager – call him Bob – is given the car of his dreams for his 18\textsuperscript{th} birthday. The car has all of the features he wants. It is the perfect color, and it could not be any better. Now, consider an alternate picture of this: suppose that Bob worked two jobs while going to school to pay for the exact same car. He saved up his money after two years and finally had enough money to buy the car, with all of the features he wanted. Between the two situations, it seems that the latter is more intrinsically valuable. The reason behind this may be clear, but there is something intrinsically valuable about working for something. Putting one’s own effort changes how much something is worth. This parallels Hick’s reasoning behind Creation:

Why was humanity not initially created in possession of all the virtues, instead of having to acquire them through the long hard struggle of life as we know it? The answer, I suggest, appeals to the principle that virtues which have been formed within the agent as a hard won deposit of his own right decisions in situation of challenge and temptation are intrinsically more valuable than virtues created within him ready made and without any effort on his own part.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{24} Here, there is a distinction that can be made between “individual growth” or “societal growth.” In my project, I am mostly referring to societal growth.

\textsuperscript{25} Hick, \textit{An Irenaean Theodicy}, 1981, p. 45.
According to Hick, the process of growth is more valuable than if humankind were created ready-made because it requires effort on the part of humankind. Though it may seem counterintuitive for a perfect being to create imperfectly, Hick offers two possibilities for this: 1) free beings cannot be created perfectly; or 2) there is intrinsic value in earning moral perfection rather than having it given. Either way, because we are made to grow in moral virtue, God had to create a work conducive to that growth. This is a world with suffering, but also a world which encompasses opportunities for growth and soul-making toward moral perfection. Thus, God created humans to be part of a grand process that has worth. According to Hick, in order for moral growth to be a process, one must have the opportunity to cultivate morally positive traits. This is why the existence of evil does not undermine the existence of God. It is a necessary condition for the creation of morally perfect beings. This is the bedrock of Hick’s argument. I will get into more detail with that claim later, but this paragraph should give present a strong case that the first of Hick’s central points is true. Let us now move to point (2).

Hick’s second central point is that evil must appear to be gratuitous for it to cultivate soul-making qualities. This premise is aimed at Rowe’s argument in the previous section. For Rowe, the best explanation for why evil appears gratuitous is simply because it is. For Hick, gratuitous evil must appear that way in order to create soul making. After all, if suffering did not appear to be unnecessary, one could argue it would not cultivate any soul making virtues like bravery, compassion, and camaraderie. Hick argues that times of evil allow for times of good, and that progress will be made through evil. To give a recent example, consider hurricane Harvey. The pain and suffering that Harvey caused was massive. Many people were displaced because of the
hurricane, and there were several injuries and even deaths because of the destruction. All of that is the unfortunate truth. However, it is also the case that it brought out the best qualities in citizens. There were ordinary citizens taking their boats and trying to rescue others. There was support from all over the country, and millions of dollars were donation to foundations trying to provide support for the victims. This is the type of situation that Hick is driving toward. The hurricane was a terrible natural disaster, but it produced so much altruistic behavior. Qualities like compassion and courage appear most in times of hardship, and that is the process that God set up for humankind. The same can be seen in the horrific shooting in Las Vegas. One man opened fire and killed 58 people and injured 546 others. Though this was a terrible act of moral evil, it brought out many instances of heroism and resilience. Many, including myself, donated blood to the victims of the shooting. In fact, a report from the Washington Post showed that there was “a line of people that twisted around the blood center and several city blocks. According to one woman’s tweet, it took her seven hours to get to the front of the line.” This the type of virtue that Hick is talking about in his theodicy. Humans tend to act their very best in response to tragedies where innocent victims appear underserving of the suffering they have endured. Humans tend to act their very best in response to tragedies where an innocent person appears utterly undeserving of the suffering they have endured. In contrast, it seems humans deride, or even take pleasure, in evil that appears deserved. There are the Darwin awards – awards that are given to people for dying though stupidity

26 Nutt, 2017. To further support Hick’s point, Nutt’s article explained how there is always a spike in blood donations after disasters. The same situation happened with the 2013 Boston bombing. So, to Hick’s point, evil in the world has the potential to create immense opportunity for good.
– that are viewed as a form of comedy. There are numerous viral “Karma” videos that show angry drivers losing control and crashing their car. The typical response to these videos are joy because the punishment seems to be deserved. There is empirical evidence that shows humans simply respond best when the suffering appears utterly undeserved. Recent neurological evidence shows the existence of cubelli neurons or mirrors neurons which strengthens Hick’s point. Neurological studies have been conducted on monkeys where the researcher exhibits a certain behavior, and the monkey tries to mimic that behavior for themselves. In particular, when one sees undeserved suffering, one reacts neurologically similar to how they would react if they were suffering themselves. Conversely, if one sees suffering that they perceive as deserved, different parts of the brain fire, and the same compassion is not experienced.27 The discovery of mirror neurons in the brain have been compared to the discovery of DNA by scientists because it provides a whole new technique for viewing compassion, language, and even life itself. Thus, it seems Hick’s theodicy is strengthened by scientific evidence.

Some philosophers have argued that Hick’s theodicy cannot account for the intensity of the suffering that exists in the world.28 After all, Hick’s theodicy sounds strong in principle, but what explanation can there be for the intense suffering of children? To this, Hick does have an answer. If God eliminates a great evil, like childhood cancer, there will always be another evil supplant it; Hick gives his explanation

27 Bloom, Just Babies, 2013, p. 41

28 Madden & Hare, God and The Concept of Evil, 1968, ch. 5 is a strong example of a work in which Hick’s theodicy is challenged due to intense suffering. In an essay, Hick provides this source as a reference for further reading.
here: “But in a world in which there was no cancer, something else would then rank as
the worth form of natural evil.”²⁹ Perhaps cancer is viewed as the worst natural evil and if
God removed it perhaps the world would be a better place. Then, some other evil (a
disaster or disease) would replace it as the worst evil. Then, God would have to remove
*that* as well. If this process continued, it seems that one would eventually have a world in
which the common cold is the most powerful natural evil in the world. According to
Hick, if God removes one, He would be committed to removing more. Thus, since evil is
a necessary condition for soul making, God cannot remove one evil. So, all of the
suffering that we experience, no matter the intensity or duration, can be viewed as a
necessary part of building our character and moral stature.

Now that we have seen the central points of Hick’s argument, I want to present
the argument more formally.

**Argument 5 – Hick’s Theodicy**

1. God exists and created humankind in accordance with the Irenaean tradition.

2. Moral perfection requires a world with evil to allow for moral growth.

3. Freedom and Evil allow humans the opportunity to develop their moral
character, their soul, and become more God-like.

4. Becoming morally God-like justifies all evil in the process.

C. Therefore, the existence of evil is justified and does not lessen the probability
of God’s existence.³⁰

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³⁰ Ibid., p. 48.
Hick’s theodicy is attractive to theologians because it has elements that “feel right.” Most agree that working for something makes it more intrinsically valuable. It seems ‘right’ that God would put us in an environment that allows humankind to grow and adapt. This claim harmonizes well with evolutionary theory as well. Since the existence of evil in the world accompanies growth, one can see what makes the theodicy reasonable. I will argue in the next chapter that the theodicy does not solve the problem of evil and there are rationally justified reasons to think that the theistic God does not exist.

*Skeptical Form of Hick’s Theodicy*

Before moving to the next chapter, I want to bring up a continuation of skeptical theism as it applies to Hick’s theodicy. There is an argument to be made that it is *epistemically possible* for God to co-exist with evil given the epistemic limitations for humans. For all humans know, God’s purpose in creating the universe *might be* soul making. Thus, given the fact that this relies on epistemic limits and our lack of knowledge, this is a skeptical type of argument. Here is the argument.

**Argument 6 – A Skeptical Form of Hick**

1. We are not (yet) in a position to know what God’s purposes are (or are not) in allowing the kinds of evil that exist.

2. Soul making in Hick’s sense *could* be a purpose for God allowing evil.

3. Soul making *could* occur in ways we cannot yet know about, e.g., in an after-life, or across a vast spatial, or temporal, or modal space, that we cannot (yet) know about. There might be perceptual or memory or causal connections in such an afterlife or across such a space.
C1. We can’t know that God’s purpose in allowing the kinds of evil that actually occur is not soul-making across a spatial, temporal, or modal space that we cannot (yet) know about.

C. Therefore, it is epistemically possible that God allows evil for the purposes of soul making.

Looking at this argument, one sees the existence of an epistemic possibility. Since humans are not yet in a position to understand God, if He exists, then it is possible that humans are not yet able to grasp why He allows evil. According to this weakened form of Hick’s argument, it is possible that God accounts or evil on a cosmic scale. This could be through the afterlife, or even on a deep time view of the universe. Either way, it is something that humans cannot yet understand. Thus, it is epistemically possible that God is allowing evil for the purposes of soul making – soul making that is not well-understood by humans yet. I will encounter this argument again at the end of next chapter.

Chapter 3 – Arguments against the Soul-Making Theodicy

“He who passively accepts evil is as much involved in it as he who helps to perpetrate it.”

~Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

In this chapter, I argue that Hick’s soul making theodicy is problematic. I will use four main contentions to argue my point. First, I will question whether we have any
evidence that soul-making is happening in response to the suffering in the world, on both a personal and societal level. Second, I argue that Hick’s theodicy is self-defeating when considering the logical consequences of accepting it. Third, I try to show that Hick’s theodicy is self-defeating in a different way considering Hick’s presupposed eschatology. Fourth, I question whether Hick’s theodicy accounts for the suffering in animals over the evolutionary history of the earth. I aim to establish that the soul making theodicy is a strong in the abstract, but fails to solve the problem of real suffering in the world.

**Contention 1: Is Soul-Making Working? A look at the Psychology of Dehumanization.**

Hick reasons that moral growth justifies the evil in the world. According to Hick, civilization will become more mature and grow morally over time. In this contention, I argue that this is empirically false, and I use the psychology of dehumanization to corroborate my point. If credence is to be granted to Hick’s argument, it is that there is evidence that soul making can happen on a personal level. It is true that more people volunteer and put themselves in a vulnerable position when humanitarian crises occur. In that respect, the existence of evil can bring out the best in humanity. However, the psychological signs of dehumanization have remained unscathed for millennia. As early as Aristotle, there has been a psychological tendency to separate “us” from “them” and claim that others are not as human as oneself. Aristotle, for instance, thought that one’s rationality is what sets apart the humans from the animals. This allowed him to justify slavery.

We may thus conclude that all men who differ from others as much as the body differs from the soul, or an animal from a man (and this is the case with all whose
function is bodily service, and who produce their best when they supply such service) all such are by natural slaves.\textsuperscript{31}

Over the years, others had different views on what made one human and what made them an animal. Attempting to classify one’s group members above others is called the \textit{outgroup bias}. The outgroup bias was the start of another critical aspect of dehumanization: \textit{ethnocentrism}. This is the outgroup bias on a larger scale. Ethnocentrism posits that one’s groups is superior to other groups. These are the psychological ingredients for disaster; once a group sees themselves above all other groups, they are less likely to sympathize with the other groups and view them as humans. With outgroup bias and ethnocentrism, even the greatest minds can be coerced into thinking others are less than human. Take the following passage from David Hume for example.

The great superiority of civilized Europeans, above barbarous Indians, tempted us to imagine ourselves on the same footing with regard to them, and made us throw off all restraints of justice, and even of humanity, in our treatment of them.\textsuperscript{32}

Given how harshly Hume thought of the Indians, he was able to justify treating them with a decreased level of compassion and equality.

For a more recent example, consider the way the Nazis treated the Jews in the Holocaust. Nazis were explicit in expressing that Jews should not be viewed humans. In fact, as Claudia Koonz points out, “Nazi public culture was constructed on the mantra ‘not every being with a human face is human.’\textsuperscript{33}” If one is able to dehumanize the enemy,

\textsuperscript{31} Aristotle, \textit{Politics}, 1254b 16-21; Cited in David Livingstone Smith, \textit{Less than Human}, 2011, p. 35
\textsuperscript{32} Hume, \textit{An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals}, p. 88; Cited in Smith, 2011, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{33} Koonz, \textit{The Nazi Conscience}, 2003, p. 173.
it makes the task of hurting or killing them much easier. Dehumanization is a common
technique to use in war or conflict – killing animals is not as reprehensible as killing
other humans, so try to picture the enemy as animals. Unfortunately, dehumanization is
still prevalent today. Even the rhetoric that President Trump employs in his speeches on
immigrants or criminals can incorporate aspects of dehumanization.34 This psychological
aspect that seems deeply entrenched in the human brain appears to undermine Hick’s
core point. If the ‘outgroup bias’ and ‘ethnocentrism’ have mercilessly persisted through
time, where is the moral progress that Hick proposes? It seems that there has been no
progress on the front of moral psychology. Also, evolutionary psychology has
demonstrated that these qualities have been embedded in humans since their inception.
Further, it seems that God designed humans poorly if these hostile psychological traits
are instinctive. Here is a formal presentation of my argument.

**Argument 7 – Psychology of Dehumanization**

1. According to Hick, evil and suffering can be justified through the process of
moral growth.

2. Dating back to antiquity, humans have enslaved and exterminated others
because of their innate psychological biases, culminating in dehumanization.

3. Since human psychology has remained largely unchanged, humans still
dehumanize others.

4. Thus, there is no psychological progress toward moral growth.

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34 In a recent speech in New York before law enforcement, President Trump claimed that the criminals that
the police are up against are “animals.” This is the dehumanization that has long persisted thorough the
human psyche for eons, and it impedes on the moral progress that Hick proposes (Resnick, 2017).
C. Therefore, evil and suffering cannot be justified because there is no moral growth taking place.\(^{35}\)

Given this argument, one may look beyond Hick’s failure to justify suffering. The fact that humans have a psychosocial predisposition to devalue others that are not in their immediate group poses a problem for the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God. As mentioned above, evolutionary psychologists claim that those psychological biases are ‘built-in’ to the human brain. How does this impact the theist’s claim that humans are made in the image and likeness of God? It appears that God pitting humans against each other is a cruel design – not an elegant one. Thus, it appears that when considering the history of evolutionary psychology and the trend of dehumanization throughout the centuries, there is no moral progress. Thus, Hick’s argument is insufficient for solving the problem of evil, and, given this lack of progress, there is reason to doubt the existence of God.

**Contention 2: Is Hick’s Theodicy Self-Defeating?**

Hick’s theodicy claims that evil must *appear* unnecessary in order to elicit soul making properties. However, Hick states that all suffering is indeed necessary because it provides the opportunity for moral growth. This results in Hick’s theodicy being self-defeating in a certain sense. Once we accept this theodicy (indeed, *any* theodicy) also accept that no instance of evil is gratuitous. Yet suffering must *appear* gratuitous for soul

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\(^{35}\) Smith’s book *Less than Human* inspired my formulation of this argument. Given the fact that dehumanization has been critical in genocide and war over thousands of years, it shows that no moral progress has been made.
making opportunities to be effective. Thus, accepting the soul-making theodicy leads to no soul making actually occurring – since we need suffering to appear gratuitous in order for soul making to occur but we also believe, as a result of accepting this theodicy, that no suffering is gratuitous.

**Argument 8 – Hick’s Self-Defeating Theodicy**

1. Suffering must *appear* unnecessary in order for moral growth to take place.
2. According to Hick, suffering occurs because it produces moral growth.
3. If moral growth justifies suffering, then the suffering is a necessary evil.
4. Acceptance of Hick’s theodicy makes it impossible for suffering to appear unnecessary.

C. Therefore, per Hick’s theodicy, moral growth will not take place.

It also appears that accepting Hick’s theodicy (indeed, *any* theodicy) can have the consequence of deadening compassion toward those who suffer.\(^{36}\) Consider a personal story: recently, my uncle passed away after a long and painful struggle with cancer. While at his memorial, there was a priest who reassured everyone that his struggle with cancer is not a reason to lose faith in God. He went on to defend the existence of God through biblical quotes citing that God had a reason for what happened to him. There were no signs of sympathy or empathy in his speech. At most, he hardly acknowledged the suffering that some in the room were feeling. The following morning, visiting my uncle’s house for the first time after his death, my mother was crying and devastated that

\(^{36}\) I am not the first to formulate this objection. David Ray Griffin has also briefly critiqued Hick in this way (Griffin, 2001). I am building upon his work in my argument.
the house was missing her only brother. While dramatically sobbing, another family-friend told her, while sitting on the couch watching football, to just remember what the priest said and not to be too sad – “it all happens for a reason,” she said. I thought this was an astonishing amount of insensitivity toward someone who was visiting the house of her only brother for the first time after his death. This story shows the flaws in accepting theodicies. If one feels that God allows all suffering from some overarching good reason, then all suffering, including the intense and excessive suffering of my uncle, is permissible. One must “have faith” that God is behind it all. Compassion is clearly absent in these discussions. There is no compassion because there is no reason to feel bad; it was all a part of the plan to begin with. This undermines the notion of moral growth, because the knowledge that the suffering must be justifiable lacks the critical aspect of compassion that is necessary for building one’s soul. Without compassion, there is no soul making. Compare the responses between ones who accept theodicy and those who reject it. A person who accepts theodicy attempts to explain the tragedy as being part of “the plan.” They try to describe how “everything happens for a reason” and trust that the loss was part of a larger plan. Consider sympathy and empathy: sympathy is defined as feeling sorry for another’s misfortune, while empathy is being able to relate to another’s sorrow. It appears that theodicy intellectualizes the problem in such a way that

Further, there is no reason to feel sad because many believe that he is going to Heaven. Thus, if one is feeling sad about his death, they are feeling it for only selfish reasons. There is no reason to be sad because he is in the best place he could be. It raises the question of why one is sad when losing a loved one. If one is sad, it seems that it is only because they lost their loved one – which is a selfish reason. Else, with the belief that many hold, it seems there is no reason to be sad because he is with God. This just emphasizes my point about how these beliefs can decrease compassion.
makes it more challenging for the theist to feel compassion.\textsuperscript{38} Therefore, it seems that theodicies try to explain why suffering is so prominent in the world; they do not sympathize or empathize with those who suffer. Thus, the acceptance of theodicy decreases one’s compassion.

Contestation 3: Is Soul-Making Useful in Hick’s Eschatology?

The third contention is aimed further at illustrating the self-defeating nature of Hick’s soul making theodicy, particularly in consideration of his conception of the afterlife. According to Hick, the goal is of soul making is to eventually obtain a spiritual state where persons are morally God-like and there is no evil. Philosopher Stanley Kane claims that soul making is useless if this is the case.

But in Hick’s theodicy it is not the manifestation in behavior that is the most important factor, for in his view the final state of man, which is the fully perfected state of man, is one in which there will be no call for the actual showing of such traits in behavior. The final state will be one from which all evil has been banished and, according to Hick, it is logically impossible to show any of these traits in actual behavior when there is no evil.\textsuperscript{39}

Kane makes the point that if one is working toward soul-making properties, they will have no use after the process is complete.\textsuperscript{40} Accruing traits like unselfishness, courage, and compassion have no use in the afterlife because there are no situations where those qualities will be needed. There is no situation where one would need to be

\textsuperscript{38} This is not the same as claiming that the theist necessarily has no compassion. Clearly this is false. Instead, I am claiming that a theist, by believing in God, exercises more explanatory thought processes than compassionate ones when faced with instances of real suffering. This is because a theist necessarily holds there is no unnecessary suffering. Thus, any suffering that occurs must have an explanation. In searching for an explanation, one distances themselves from compassionate qualities like sympathy and empathy.

\textsuperscript{39} Kane, 1975, p. 8-9.

\textsuperscript{40} Kane’s objection was not aimed at Hick’s conception of the afterlife. I am building upon Kane’s work to formulate an objection involving Hick’s eschatology.
brave, for example, because there is never strife in Heaven to warrant bravery. If Kane is correct, all of the suffering that took place to acquire these properties would be unnecessary and unneeded. To show the flaw in Hick’s theodicy, Kane compares the parent-child relationship to the God-human relationship.

Suppose that a father and mother knew that, the moment their child turned twenty-one, he would become part of a world that is entirely different from the present one. The new world be one without any pain or suffering, one that is devoid of all want and deprivation, one that is free of all sorry and hardship— in short, one without any evil in it at all. How would this affect the manner in which the parents would treat their child as he was growing up?41

It is important here to ponder this question. If there were to be a sudden change in a child’s life so that they never experienced evil, how should the parents prepare the child? It seems the parents should try to avoid all instances of suffering since the child will not have to experience that after the change. In fact, it would be cruel to put the child through excessive suffering because the child will never have to experience it again. With this, Kane continues to make a similar point.

It would no longer be important to subject the child to the common hardships and frustrations that occur in his life so as to strengthen him for facing them on his own as an adult, for he would not have to face any as an adult. (...) For there is no reason for the child to develop the qualities that such trials and troubles help to forge, since once he grows up they would be otiose and in the meantime he has his parents to care for him.42

If we assume that the job of the parent is to properly prepare their child for the future, then allowing them to experience suffering would be unnecessary. It would be exposing

41 Ibid., p. 11.
42 Ibid., p. 12.
them to hardships that they will never have to experience again. Here is the argument more formally:

**Argument 9 – Kane’s Argument**

1. In Hick’s eschatology, there is no evil.
2. Soul making qualities are unnecessary in a place with no evil.
3. Thus, soul making qualities are unnecessary in Hick’s eschatology.
4. If soul making qualities are ultimately unnecessary in Hick’s eschatology, then the process that leads to soul making qualities is unnecessary.
5. Evil is the process that leads to soul making qualities.

C. Therefore, per Hick’s theodicy, Evil is unnecessary.

Kane’s argument shows that Hick’s argument is self-defeating when considering his eschatology. At best, building soul making properties are positive yet unnecessary; at worst, they are cruel, torturous, and meaningless in every way.

**Objection to Contention 3: Ticket to Heaven and Aristotelian Ethics**

One may object that the acquisition of the soul making properties is what qualifies one to get into Heaven in the first place. According to Hick, to be in the presence of God, one must cultivate moral character over the course of their life. Thus, evil does indeed serve a role in developing the moral traits that are required to get into Heaven. As Hick states, it is more intrinsically valuable to learn from the evil in the world and cultivate soul making properties than to be given them in the first place.
It is, to repeat, the judgment that a moral goodness which exists as the agent’s initial given nature, without ever having been chosen by him in the face of temptations to the contrary, is intrinsically less valuable than a moral goodness which has been built up through the agent’s own responsible choices through time in the fact of alternative possibilities.\textsuperscript{43}

Thus, Hick states that a habit of virtuous living is the way to build one’s soul. Put another way, it is impossible to cultivate moral growth if there is never an opportunity to do so. Thus, Hick’s claims have Aristotelian underpinnings. To become virtuous, Aristotle claims, one must continue to do virtuous acts. Building character is a habit of doing virtuous acts over the course of a lifetime – it is not a single act.\textsuperscript{44}

Response to Objection: \textit{Is Heaven full of amoral souls?}

If Hick’s argument is correct, then it appears that Heaven is populated by amoral souls – souls that are either good nor bad. If one needs strife to cultivate compassion and empathy, for instance, and they live on a plane of existence in which there is no strife, then it seems one also lives on a plane of existence where there is no compassion and empathy. If a world of suffering is necessary to gain and cultivate a moral character, then Heaven would be a place where such cultivation is simply not possible. One may claim that once these soul making qualities are achieved, one \textit{always} has them, but, still, Heaven would provide you no opportunities to show them. So, Heaven appears to be

\textsuperscript{43} Hick, \textit{An Irenaean Theodicy}, 1981, p. 44

\textsuperscript{44} Aristotle, \textit{Nichomachean Ethics}, c. 350 B.C.E., bk. II.
populated by individuals who have somehow reached moral perfection, but have no opportunities now to exercise that perfection. This seems anti-climactic at least. It is certain that, if Hick is correct, at best, there are amoral souls populating Heaven.

Contention 4: *Does Soul-Making Account for Evolutionary History?*

Hick’s theodicy justifies the existence of suffering via the lens of aiding human beings, as moral agents, to attain moral perfection. However, this fails to sufficiently cover the animal suffering that has occurred throughout the history of our planet. *Homo sapiens* have existed for approximately 200,000 years in the roughly 4.5 billion years of Earth’s history. This is 0.004% of the time the Earth has existed. What was happening during the other 99.996% of the time? For some of that 4.5 billion years, other life forms were present on this planet; animals that certainly had their share of suffering. Surely there were times where animals starved to death trying to survive. The extinction of the dinosaurs, for example, had to be full of animal suffering. Since, according to Hick, evil is justified because it produces moral growth for humans, it seems that all of the suffering that occurred before the existence of humans was gratuitous - and there is no indication to think Hick thought of animals as moral agents who themselves could morally evolve as a result of their own suffering. Since there were no humans to grow from their suffering, there could not be any soul making. Here is the argument.

**Argument 10 – Pain, Suffering, and Evolutionary History**

1. Evil occurs because it allows humans the opportunity of building soul making properties and become morally God-like.

2. *Homo Sapiens* have only existed for less than 1% of Earth’s history.
3. Some animals experienced pain and suffering in the 99% of Earth’s history without humans.

4. The evil that occurred during this time did not contribute to human soul-making.

C. Therefore, Hick’s theodicy is insufficient to explain all instances of evil.

So, given Hick’s framework, what reasons could there be for justifying animal suffering, or, even more broadly, the suffering of non-moral agents, who cannot themselves morally grow from the experience of suffering – i.e., animals, but also human non-agents, such as infants? According to Hick, suffering can lead to moral growth for either (1) the one who is experiencing the suffering or; 2) others who witness that suffering within the same community. Consider an infant with a terminal disease. From beginning to end, the entire life of the infant will consist of persistent and intense suffering. Also, given the fact the disease is terminal, there is no way for the infant to grow morally from this hardship. In fact, since they do not have the status of a moral agent, it is impossible for them to morally grow. Thus, the only remaining option for moral growth would be for the parents, or the infant’s caregivers. Though this may seem viable, there is a problem with this response. This would imply that God is using the infant merely as a means to an end; namely, as a tool to help others grow morally. Clearly, this violates some very basic moral principle, most notably Immanuel Kant’s prospection against treating persons as mere means to an end.⁴⁵ If God is allowing

another sentient being to suffer for the good of others, when that sentient being is incapable of morally evolving from that suffering, it appears as if God would be violating this moral imperative. Though perhaps it is possible to counter that God may simply not be a Kantian, at the very least it is problematic to think that God would ignore the well-being of a sentient creature, and allow it to suffer horribly, only to benefit someone else. At the very least, it calls into question how to properly understand God’s beneficence.

If God uses suffering infants as a tool to grow the parents, then it seem that God is unnecessarily cruel. There must be a variety of other options that could have achieved moral growth for the parents without the gratuitous suffering of their child. For example, God could have created an opportunity in the lives of the parents to get an advanced degree. This would surely test their patience and perseverance. This is one example, and it seems that one could come up with many more. Thus, the suffering of the infant is unnecessary. Apply the same logic to the last 200 million years in evolutionary history. For millions of years, there was animal suffering with no moral agents who could morally evolve from that suffering. All of that suffering, from the perspective of the soul making theodicy was simply gratuitous.

Both sides of this message can be found in the Bible. The following is a verse about how punishment applies only to the one who was guilty of the wrongdoing: “The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of the parent, nor will the parent share the guilt of the child. The righteousness of the righteous will be credited to them, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against them” (Ezek. 18:20, New International Version). This message is also opposed earlier in the Bible when it appears that God is punishing future generations for the transgressions of the parents – clearly contradicting what was said in Ezekiel. “[God] punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:7, New International Version).

Perhaps one of the best illustrations of a similar point is in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s novel The Brothers Karamazov where Ivan Karamazov describes the intense pain and suffering that befall children. In particular, Ivan describes how “artistically cruel” humans can be to each other. Animals kill in nature, but not in such dramatic ways to vastly exaggerate suffering the way humans do. Ivan states, “a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. A tiger only tears and gnaws, that’s all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it” (Dostoyevsky, 1880).
Objection to Contention 4: *Is Animal Suffering a Necessary Evil?*

One may object that suffering in the animal kingdom does not apply to the soul making theodicy because animals fall within a different purview. Some philosophers, for instance, do not think animals have a soul, so there would be no possibility of soul making. Richard Swinburne claims that the suffering of animals has instrumental value because it teaches the animal what to cherish and what to fear.

In any case it is not only men who learn from animal suffering. Animals learn themselves. They do of course avoid many situations and do many actions instinctively; but in those cases they cannot be said to be doing the action or avoiding the situation through knowledge of its consequences. If it is good (as it might well appear) that they too should save their lives and those of their offspring through knowledge of consequences, this is only to be had by experience thereof. Other animals must suffer if some animals are to learn to avoid suffering for themselves and their offspring.\(^{48}\)

Instead of viewing animal suffering from a soul making perspective, one can take Swinburne’s argument and claim that evil is instrumental for animal knowledge. If there were no animals suffering, then it would be impossible for the animals to know what was beneficial or harmful to them. For instance, if eating a certain plant was poisonous, it would be impossible for the animals to learn that if there was never any suffering. The argument can be formed in the following way.

**Argument 11 – Swinburne’s Animal Suffering**

1. Suffering at the cost of precious knowledge is permissible.
2. Animals suffer at the cost of precious knowledge.
3. Thus, animal suffering is permissible.

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Swinburne continues to make a further point about the intensity of animal suffering. Since, per the argument above, suffering in animals is necessary for helpful knowledge, there is no reason for it to be intense. Thus, according to Swinburne, this is the reason God made suffering for animals far less intense than the suffering of humans.

In connection with animal suffering, it is appropriate to make the obvious point that presumably this is far less intense than human suffering. For if man suffers and inanimate matter and plants do not, then suffering presumably increases with mental and nervous complexity. Animals in general are far less intelligent and have a far less developed nervous organization than men; one would expect their suffering to be correspondingly much less. According to Swinburne, then, the suffering of animals is justified because it allows them to correctly navigate the world, while guiding them away from harm. Further, given their limited nervous system, they experience less intense suffering than humans do. Thus, the suffering that occurs is limited and is more of a corrective mechanism than gratuitous suffering. Therefore, if one assumes that animals do not have souls when compared to humans, Swinburne’s work can be used in lieu of Hick’s soul making theodicy.

Response to Objection: The Problem of Intensity and Isolation

The response offered by Swinburne in defense of animal suffering is a microcosm of the whole ‘problem of suffering’ debate. It appears that Swinburne’s response to animal suffering does not evade the Rowe-type arguments that were developed earlier. In some respects, Swinburne’s argument appears true – animals suffer, but they gain

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knowledge that can be propagated to save many more lives, so it is necessary. Thus, it can be viewed as a necessary evil. This, however, does not solve the problems of a lone animal experiencing gratuitous suffering on account of natural causes. The defense by Swinburne does not account for Rowe’s “burning fawn in the forest” because there is nothing for the animal (or those around it) to learn. There is no way that a lonely suffering animal could convey information about what it dangerous or not when starving to death because of a tree falling on it and breaking its leg. And, if the animal could, then the animal would merely be a means to an end. Even if one supposes that the suffering of animals is less intense than that of a human – and that is a debatable point – lonely suffering of an animal in the forest still appears impermissible. Animal suffering, therefore, is a problem that has remained unsolved by the theist.

Response to The Skeptical Form of Hick’s Theodicy

Given the skeptical argument that was presented at the end of chapter 2, there is reason to think that there is some skeptical form of Hick’s theodicy that may remain unscathed from the arguments I have presented. In this brief section, I want to show that despite the fact that it is epistemically possible for Hick’s theodicy to work, Hick’s skeptical theodicy seems to pose no problem for the evidential argument. Therefore, I argue that the evidential problem of evil is damaging to the likelihood of Hick’s original theodicy, but a different argument would be required to address the skeptical version proposed in chapter 2. Since I have argued against Hick’s theodicy thus far, I will now briefly shift my attention to the skeptical version of his theodicy.
For the skeptical form of Hick’s theodicy to work, it would require that there could exist a vast spatial, temporal, or modal space through which God could justify evil. I admit that this could be possible. So, it may be true that it is epistemically possible, but, at the very least, it seems metaphysically implausible (at this time). Given the intensity and frequency of gratuitous evil that exists in the world, I claim that the evidential problem of evil is not impacted by this distant possibility. In fact, I think it makes the case for an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient God weaker.50

**Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have shown the transformation of the problem of evil. I have shown that it was first posed as a logical problem and now, due to the work of Plantinga, has largely been examined with an evidential lens. I discussed the work of Rowe to pose the problem of gratuitous evil. I focused on Hick’s soul making theodicy and his attempt to show that gratuitous evil does not exist. After faithfully reconstructing his arguments, I subsequently went on to expose its logical faults. First, I pointed out the fact that there is no psychological evidence to support the fact that humans are growing morally. For as long as humans have been roaming the earth, they have dehumanized each other to the point of genocide. Second, I argued that Hick’s theodicy is self-defeating once accepted. Once Hick’s theodicy is accepted, it becomes impossible to view the suffering as unnecessary. Thus, according to Hick, it is impossible for moral growth to ensue. Third, I criticized Hick’s theodicy from an eschatological position. I argued that Hick’s theodicy cultivates properties that become ultimately unnecessary in his conception of the afterlife.

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50 Admittedly, this is tangential to the focus of my project. I will not go into any deeper detail here.
Finally, I discussed the problem of animal suffering. I argued that Hick does not account for the intense suffering of animals in his theodicy because it is impossible for a non-moral agent to grow morally. Given my arguments, it is reasonable to doubt Hick’s soul making theodicy as a solution to the problem of evil.

Given that I have shown the flaws in Hick’s theodicy, I claim that the problem of evil mercilessly persists. The reality of suffering is far too extreme. Moral evil has ruthlessly remained unchanged for millennia. There are still mass genocides in the world. There appears to be no moral progress. The occurrences of natural evil are no better. There are hurricanes that destroy towns within days, earthquakes that collapse buildings within minutes, and tornados that can obliterate homes within seconds. There are diseases that debilitate children and adults all across the world, people that do not have access to clean water, and animals who slowly starve to death. Given the persistence of this intense suffering, one can plausibly claim that the problem of evil cannot be solved. Though it would require an auxiliary argument and further justification, given what I have presented here, there is reason to doubt the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent God. It appears that belief in God is comparable to the evil that exists every day – unnecessary.⁵¹

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⁵¹ For clarification purposes, I am arguing against the acceptance of Hick’s theodicy, and, in some sense, theism. This is not to be confused with arguing in favor of atheism. I am merely claiming that the problem of evil remains unsolved. Thus, my thesis is compatible with agnosticism, since it merely refutes a proposed solution to the problem of evil.
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