

The Irenaean Theodicy

The theodicy of Irenaeus (AD 130-202) was similar to that of Augustine's in that he traced evil back to human free will. He differed from Augustine because:

- a) he admitted that God did not make a perfect world;
- b) God is partly responsible for evil; and,
- c) he argued that evil has a valuable role to play in God's plan for humans.

1. God is partly responsible for evil

- God created humans imperfectly and made it their task to develop to perfection. His aim when He created the world was to make humans flawless, in His likeness.
- Humans are made in God's image but have to *develop* into his likeness. As indicated by **Genesis 1: 26** "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."
- Being in 'God's image' = intelligence, morality and personality. *But* this lacks *completion* which is only gained upon transformation into 'God's likeness'.

2. Why is the *potential* for evil necessary?

- Attaining the likeness of God requires the 'willing co-operation of human individuals'. Genuine human perfection cannot just be bestowed upon humans by God: it must develop through human involvement.
- The willing co-operation of humans in their process of perfection requires genuine freedom / free will: it isn't willing co-operation if people are forced into it. There has to be the possibility of choosing evil instead of good, of disobeying God instead of obeying Him.
- God's plans therefore required the genuine possibility that human actions might have produced evil. The *potential* for evil was therefore essential to God's plan of transforming humans *from* God's image *to* God's likeness.
- Irenaeus accepted the story of the Fall as outlined in Genesis. Evil and suffering first came into the world when Adam and Eve used their free will to disobey God.

3. Why does God not intervene to overcome *actual* evil?

- Having accepted that the *potential* for evil is necessary if humans are to make a genuine choice to follow God, one could reasonably ask why God does not intervene to remove *actual* evil and suffering whenever it has been chosen?

- Irenaeus offers two reasons to explain why God allows evil and suffering:
 - Evil is beneficial because it enables humans to understand what good is: "*How, if we had no knowledge of the contrary, could we have instruction in that which is good?*" **Irenaeus**
 - If God intervened to remove evil whenever it was committed, there would not in fact be any freedom to commit evil. Being human entails having freedom to choose between good and evil and this involves an awareness of the consequences of our actions. If the negative consequences of our choices were always removed by God, in what sense could we really be said to have made a choice? Removing evil would compromise human freedom.

4. What is the future of humanity?

- Irenaeus argued that everybody will eventually complete their development into God`s likeness and go to Heaven. This marks the completion of God`s creation.
- When this happens, their sufferings on earth will be forgotten. But the suffering was essential to their transformation: ultimately, it was beneficial to them.

Comparing and contrasting Augustine and Irenaeus

Like Augustine, Irenaeus accepts that:

- Evil first came into the world with the Fall when humans chose evil instead of good. Evil therefore originated with the mis-use of human free will.

Unlike Augustine, Irenaeus argues that:

- God`s creation was deliberately imperfect: giving humans genuine free will meant that God`s design of the world contained the potential for evil and suffering
- God is therefore partly responsible for evil and suffering.
- Evil and suffering is essential to God`s plan of human growth and perfection.
- Man is redeemed through his own actions rather than the salvific action of Jesus: God remains at a distance rather than saving humans through his grace.

Augustine`s theodicy has become known as a *soul-deciding* theodicy. Irenaeus` theodicy has become known as a *soul-making* theodicy. What does `soul-making` mean?

