

## *Soul-Making*

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### **Irenaeus (120-202)**

Irenaeus was a Greek theologian and Bishop of Lyons. He was born in Asia Minor. Irenaeus was the earliest Father of the Church to systematize those Christian beliefs that would later be accepted as orthodox doctrine and is cited frequently by later theologians. Only two of his works survive, neither in the original Greek. The five-volume *Against Heresies* establishes Christian doctrine against the Gnostics and supplies much information on Gnosticism. The *Epideixis* is a concise exposition of Christian doctrine.

Irenaeus argues that human beings have the freedom of choice and it is this freedom that causes evil to exist. We are here to develop our souls so that we can have a loving relationship with God.

#### ***Vocabulary:***

Indolent:	lazy
Surmise:	guess
Tenacious:	persistently
Nauseous:	to become sick; displaying strong disgust
Obstinately:	stubbornly

#### ***Concepts:***

Soul-Making:  
Zoe:  
Bios:  
Free Will:

**Questions:**

1. *What has man received from God and how has this affected his life?*
2. *What should man pursue in light of what he has received from God?*
3. *Who is responsible for man's disobedience towards God?*
4. *How does Hick understand Irenaeus' theodicy?*

**Book IV: Chapter XXXIX.**

Man is Endowed with the Faculty of Distinguishing Good and Evil; So That, Without Compulsion, He Has the Power, by His Own Will and Choice, to Perform God's Commandments, by Doing Which He Avoids the Evils Prepared for the Rebellious.

1. Man has received the knowledge of good and evil. It is good to obey God, and to believe in Him, and to keep His commandment, and this is the life of man; as not to obey God is evil, and this is his death. Since God, therefore, gave to man such mental power man knew both the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that the eye of the mind, receiving experience of both, may with judgment make choice of the better things; and that he may never become indolent or neglectful of God's command; and learning by experience that it is an

evil thing which deprives him of life, that is, disobedience to God, may never attempt it at all, but that, knowing that what preserves his life, namely, obedience to God, is good, he may diligently keep it with all earnestness. Wherefore he has also had a twofold experience, possessing knowledge of both kinds, that with discipline he may make choice of the better things. But how, if he had no knowledge of the contrary, could he have had instruction in that which is good? For there is, thus a surer and an undoubted comprehension of matters submitted to us than the mere surmise arising from an opinion regarding them. For just as the tongue receives experience of sweet and bitter by means of tasting, and the eye discriminates between black and white by means of vision, and the ear recognizes the distinctions of sounds by hearing; so also does the mind, receiving through the

experience of both the knowledge of what is good, become more tenacious of its preservation, by acting in obedience to God: in the first place, casting away, by means of repentance, disobedience, as being something disagreeable and nauseous; and afterwards coming to understand what it really is, that it is contrary to goodness and sweetness, so that the mind may never even attempt to taste disobedience to God. But if any one does shun the knowledge of both these kinds of things, and the twofold perception of knowledge, he unawares divests himself of the character of a human being.

2. How, then, shall he be a God, who has not as yet been made a man? Or how can he be perfect who was but lately created? How, again, can he be immortal, who in his mortal nature did not obey his Maker? For it must be that thou, at the outset, should hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God. For thou dost not make God, but God thee. If, then, thou art God's workmanship, await the hand of thy Maker which creates everything in due time; in due time as far as thou art concerned, whose creation is being carried out. Offer to Him thy heart in a soft and tractable state, and preserve the form in which the Creator has fashioned thee, having moisture in thyself, lest, by becoming hard-

ened, thou lose the impressions of His fingers. But by preserving the framework thou shall ascend to that which is perfect, for the moist clay which is in thee is hidden there by the workmanship of God. His hand fashioned thy substance; He will cover thee over, too, within and without with pure gold and silver, and He will adorn thee to such a degree, that even "the King Himself shall have pleasure in thy beauty." But if thou, being obstinately hardened, dost reject the operation of His skill, and show thyself ungrateful towards Him, because thou weft created a mere man, by becoming thus ungrateful to God, thou hast at once lost both His workmanship and life. For creation is an attribute of the goodness of God but to be created is that of human nature. If then, thou shall deliver up to Him what is thine, that is, faith towards Him and subjection, thou shall receive His handiwork, and shall be a perfect work of God.

3. If, however, thou wilt not believe in Him, and wilt flee from His hands, the cause of imperfection shall be in thee who didst not obey, but not in Him who called thee. For He commissioned messengers to call people to the marriage, but they who did not obey Him deprived themselves of the royal supper. The skill of God, therefore, is not defective, for He has power of the stones to raise up chil-

dren to Abraham; but the man who does not obtain it is the cause to himself of his own imperfection. Nor, in like manner, does the light fail because of those who have blinded themselves; but while it remains the same as ever, those who are thus blinded are involved in darkness through their own fault. The light does never enslave anyone by necessity; nor, again, does God exercise compulsion upon anyone unwilling to accept the exercise of His skill. Those persons, therefore, who have apostatized from the light given by the Father, and transgressed the law of liberty, have done so through their own fault, since they have been created free agents, and possessed of power over themselves.

4. But God, foreknowing all things, prepared fit habitations for both, kindly conferring that light which they desire on those who seek after the light of incorruption, and resort to it; but for the despisers and mockers who avoid and turn themselves away from this light, and who do, as it were, blind themselves, He has prepared darkness suitable to persons who oppose the light, and He has inflicted an appropriate punishment upon those who try to avoid being subject to Him. Submission to God is eternal rest, so that they who shun the light have a place worthy of their flight; and those who fly from

eternal rest, have a habitation in accordance with their fleeing. Now, since all good things are with God, they who by their own determination fly from God, do defraud themselves of all good things; and having been thus defrauded of all good things with respect to God, they shall consequently fall under the just judgment of God. For those persons who shun rest shall justly incur punishment, and those who avoid the light shall justly dwell in darkness. For as in the case of this temporal light, those who shun it do deliver themselves over to darkness, so that they do themselves become the cause to themselves that they are destitute of light, and do inhabit darkness; and, as I have already observed, the light is not the cause of such an unhappy condition of existence to them; so those who fly from the eternal light of God, which contains in itself all good things, are themselves the cause to themselves of their inhabiting eternal darkness, destitute of all good things, having become to themselves the cause of their consignment to an abode of that kind.

From Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book IV, 39, 1-4.

#### **Excerpts from John Hick:**

John Hick is a professor of Philosophy at Claremont Graduate School. In

his book *Evil and the God of Love* (1966), he presents Irenaeus' theodicy. He argues that according to the Irenaean tradition, Adam was not viewed as a free agent rebelling against God, but rather as a child developing maturity. The fall of humanity was caused by immaturity, not rebellion. God is still working with humanity in order to bring it from physical life (*bios*) to a state of spiritual life of self-realization in divine love (*zoe*). This life is a vale of soul-making.

There is thus to be found in Irenaeus the outline of an approach to the problem of evil which stands, in important respects, in contrast to the Augustinian type of theodicy. Instead of the doctrine that man was created finitely perfect and then incomprehensibly destroyed his own perfection and plunged into sin and misery, Irenaeus suggests that man was created as an imperfect, immature creature who was to undergo moral development and growth and finally be brought to the perfection intended for him by his Maker. Instead of the fall of Adam being presented, as in the Augustinian tradition, as an utterly malignant and catastrophic event, completely disrupting God's plan, Irenaeus pictures it as something that occurred in the childhood of the race, an understandable lapse due to

weakness and immaturity rather than an adult crime full of malice and pregnant with perpetual guilt. And instead of the Augustinian view of life's trials as a divine punishment for Adam's sin, Irenaeus sees our world of mingled good and evil as a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards the perfection that represents the fulfillment of God's good purpose for him...Irenaeus was the first great Christian theologian to think at all systematically along these lines, and, although he was far from working out a comprehensive theodicy, his hints are sufficiently explicit to justify his name being associated with the approach that we are studying in this part.

The world is seen, instead, as a place of "soul-making" in which free beings, grappling with the tasks and challenges of their existence in a common environment, may become "children of God" and "heirs of eternal life."

Hick, J., *Evil and the God of Love*, 1978.