

A. The Existence of God

READING 3

Proslogion and Exchange with Gaunilo

Anselm

Anselm was born in Aosta, Italy, around 1033. Despite objections from his father, who wanted him to pursue a career in politics, Anselm joined the Benedictine order, entering the monastery at Bec in Normandy, France, in 1060. He became prior of Bec in 1063 and abbot in 1078. As abbot he made several trips to England to inspect the lands that William the Conqueror had given to the monastery. Anselm made many friends in England and in 1093 was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury by William Rufus (son and successor of William the Conqueror). Anselm subsequently became involved in a series of controversies about the authority of secular rulers in ecclesiastical matters, strongly defending the autonomy of the Church. He died at Canterbury in 1109.

Anselm's major works are the *Monologion* ("Soliloquy," originally entitled "An Example of Meditation on the Meaning of Faith"), the *Proslogion* ("Discourse," originally entitled "Faith Seeking Understanding"), and *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God Became a Human Being"). Our readings consist of (1) the section from the *Proslogion* in which Anselm presents his "ontological argument" for the existence of God, (2) an excerpt from a short work by Gaunilo (a monk contemporary with Anselm) that criticizes the ontological argument, and (3) a section from Anselm's reply to Gaunilo. (The term "ontological argument" is not Anselm's; it seems to have been coined in the 18th century by Immanuel Kant.)

Our reading from the *Proslogion* begins with Anselm's declaration that he believes that God is "something than which nothing greater can be thought." But does this God exist? Not everyone thinks so; the fool in the Book of Psalms, for example, says in his heart that there is no God. Anselm observes that the fool nonetheless understands what it is whose existence he or she is denying. And since whatever someone understands exists in the understanding, God exists in the fool's understanding. To exist in the understanding, of course, is different from existing in reality. Anselm then points out that to exist in reality is greater than to exist only in the understanding. But this means that it is self-contradictory to deny that God exists in reality: A person cannot consistently say that "something than which nothing greater can be thought" does not exist in reality, because if this being did *not* exist in reality, the person *could* conceive a greater being—namely, one that exists not only in the understanding but also in reality. And then the being that, by definition, is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one than which a greater *can* be conceived—an obvious contradiction.

Gaunilo, in his brief work "On Behalf of the Fool" (namely, the fool in the Book of Psalms who says that there is no God), contends that the ontological argument is invalid because this type of reasoning leads to obviously false conclusions. One could prove, for example, that a perfect island exists because it wouldn't be perfect if it existed only in our understanding. Anselm responds to Gaunilo's objection by denying that the ontological argument can be applied to an island or to any other finite being. For the only being whose

nonexistence cannot be thought is the being than which nothing greater can be thought, and only God fits this description.

PROSLOGION

Chapter 2. That God Truly Exists

Lord, you who grant understanding to faith, grant that, insofar as you know it is useful for me, I may understand that you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be. Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought. So can it be that no such being exists, since "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'?"¹ But when this same fool hears me say "something than which nothing greater can be thought," he surely understands what he hears; and what he understands exists in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it exists [in reality]. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the understanding and quite another to understand that the object exists [in reality]. When a painter, for example, thinks out in advance what he is going to paint, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand that it exists, since he has not yet painted it. But once he has painted it, he both has it in his understanding and understands that it exists because he has now painted it. So even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding. And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. So if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought is that than which a greater *can* be thought. But that is clearly impossible. Therefore, there is no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

Chapter 3. That He Cannot Be Thought Not to Exist

This [being] exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist. For it is possible to think that something exists that cannot be thought not to exist, and such a being is greater than one that can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought is *not* that than which a greater cannot be thought; and this is a contradiction. So that than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist.

And this is you, O Lord our God. You exist so truly, O Lord my God, that you cannot be thought not to exist. And rightly so, for if some mind could think something better than you, a creature would rise above the Creator and sit in judgment upon him, which is completely absurd. Indeed, everything that exists, except for

¹Psalms 15:1 (14:1 in some versions); Psalms 53:1 (52:1). [D. C. ABEL]

you alone, can be thought not to exist. So you alone among all things have existence most truly, and therefore most greatly. Whatever else exists has existence less truly, and therefore less greatly. So then why did "the fool say in his heart, 'There is no God,'" when it is so evident to the rational mind that you of all beings exist most greatly? Why indeed, except because he is stupid and a fool?

Chapter 4. How the Fool Said in His Heart What Cannot Be Thought

But how has he said in his heart what he could not think? Or how could he not think what he said in his heart, since to say in one's heart is the same as to think? But if he really—or rather, *since* he really—thought this, because he said it in his heart, and did not say it in his heart, because he could not think it, there must be more than one way in which something is "said in one's heart" or "thought." In one sense of the word, to think a thing is to think the word that signifies that thing. But in another sense, it is to understand what exactly the thing is. God can be thought not to exist in the first sense, but not at all in the second sense. No one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist, although he may say these words in his heart with no signification at all, or with some peculiar signification. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Whoever understands this properly, understands that this being exists in such a way that he cannot, even in thought, fail to exist. So whoever understands that God exists in this way cannot think that he does not exist.

Thanks be to you, my good Lord, thanks be to you. For what I once believed through your grace, I now understand through your illumination, so that even if I did not want to *believe* that you exist, I could not fail to *understand* that you exist.

Chapter 5. That God Is Whatever It Is Better to Be Than Not to Be; and That He Alone Exists Through Himself, and Makes All Other Things from Nothing

Then what are you, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought? What are you, if not the greatest of all beings, who alone exists through himself and made all other things from nothing? For whatever is not this is less than the greatest than can be thought, but this cannot be thought of you. What good is missing from the highest good, through which every good thing exists? And so you are just, truthful, happy, and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is better to be just than unjust, and better to be happy than unhappy.

GAUNILO'S REPLY ON BEHALF OF THE FOOL

... I am offered the ... argument that [something than which nothing greater can be thought] necessarily exists in reality, since if it did not, everything that exists in reality would be greater than it. And so this thing, which of course has been proved to exist in the understanding, would not be greater than everything else. To that argument I reply that if we are to say that something exists in the understanding

that cannot even be thought on the basis of the true nature of anything whatever, then I shall not deny that even this thing exists in my understanding. But since there is no way to derive from this the conclusion that this thing also exists in reality, there is simply no reason for me to concede to him that this thing exists in reality until it is proved to me by some unassailable argument.

And when he says that this thing exists because otherwise that which is greater than everything else would not be greater than everything else, he does not fully realize whom he is addressing. For I do not yet admit—indeed, I actually deny, or at least doubt—that this greater being is greater than any real thing. Nor do I concede that it exists at all, except in the sense that something exists (if you want to call it "existence") when my mind tries to imagine some completely unknown thing solely on the basis of a word that it has heard. How, then, is the fact that this being has been proved to be greater than everything else supposed to show me that it exists in actual fact? For I continue to deny, or at least doubt, that this has been proved, so that I do not admit that this thing exists in my understanding or thought even in the way that many doubtful and uncertain things exist there. First I must become certain that this thing truly exists somewhere, and only then will the fact that it is greater than everything else show clearly that it also subsists in itself.

For example, there are those who say that somewhere in the ocean is an island that, because of the difficulty—or rather, impossibility—of finding what does not exist, some call "the Lost Island." This island (so the story goes) is more plentifully endowed than even the Isles of the Blessed with an indescribable abundance of all sorts of riches and delights. And because it has neither owner nor inhabitant, it is everywhere superior in its abundant riches to all the other lands that human beings inhabit. Suppose that someone tells me all this. The story is easily told and involves no difficulty, and so I understand it. But if this person went on to draw a conclusion, and say, "You cannot any longer doubt that this island, more excellent than all others on earth, truly exists somewhere in reality. For you do not doubt that this island exists in your understanding, and since it is more excellent to exist not merely in the understanding, but also in reality, this island must also exist in reality. For if it did not, any land that exists in reality would be greater than it. And so this more excellent thing that you have understood would not in fact be more excellent."—If, I say, he should try to convince me by this argument that I should no longer doubt whether the island truly exists, either I would think he was joking, or I would not know whom I ought to think more foolish: myself, if I grant him his conclusion, or him, if he thinks he can establish the existence of that island with any degree of certainty, without first showing that its excellence exists in my understanding [precisely] as a thing that truly and undoubtedly exists, and not in any way like something false or uncertain.

ANSELM'S REPLY TO GAUNILO

... I said that if [something than which nothing greater can be thought] exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. Therefore, if it exists only in the understanding, the very same thing is

both that than which a greater *cannot* be thought and that than which a greater *can* be thought. Now I ask you, what could be more logical? For if it exists only in the understanding, can it not be thought to exist in reality as well? And if it can, does not the one who thinks it, think something greater than that thing is if it exists only in the understanding? So if that than which a greater *cannot* be thought exists only in the understanding, it is that than which a greater *can* be thought: What more logical conclusion could there be? But of course that than which a greater cannot be thought is not the same in anyone's understanding as that than which a greater can be thought. Does it not follow, therefore, that if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists in any understanding at all, it does not exist only in the understanding? For if it exists only in the understanding, it is that than which a greater can be thought, which is absurd.

But, you say, this is just the same as if someone were to claim that it cannot be doubted that a certain island in the ocean, surpassing all other lands in its fertility (which, from the difficulty—or rather, impossibility—of finding what does not exist, is called “the Lost Island”), exists in reality, because someone can easily understand it when it is described to him in words. I say quite confidently that if anyone can find for me something existing either in reality or only in thought to which he can apply this inference in my argument, besides that than which a greater cannot be thought, I will find and give to him that Lost Island, never to be lost again. In fact, however, it has already become quite clear that that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought not to exist, since its existence is a matter of such certain truth. For otherwise it would not exist at all. Finally, if someone says that he thinks it does not exist, I say that when he thinks this, either he is thinking something than which a greater cannot be thought, or he is not. If he is not, then he is not thinking that it does not exist, since he is not thinking it at all. But if he is, he is surely thinking something that cannot be thought not to exist. For if it could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end, which is impossible. Therefore, someone who is thinking it, is thinking something that cannot be thought not to exist. And of course someone who is thinking this, does not think that that very thing does not exist. Otherwise he would be thinking something that cannot be thought. Therefore, that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought not to exist.

Treatise on God

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was born in Roccaseccà, Italy, around 1224. After receiving his initial education from the Benedictine monks at Monte Cassino, he studied at the University of Naples, where he encountered members of the Dominican order. Attracted to the Dominicans, he joined the order despite opposition from his family. He was trained in philosophy and theology in Paris and in Cologne, Germany, under the Dominican Albert (later known as Albert the Great). After being ordained a priest, Aquinas pursued advanced studies in theology at the University of Paris, receiving his degree in 1256. He taught for a few years at the University of Paris and was then assigned to teach at various Dominican schools in Italy. Aquinas returned to the University of Paris in 1268, but four years later he went back to Italy to establish a new Dominican house of study at the University of Naples. He died in 1274 at Fossanova, Italy, while traveling to Lyons to serve as a papal consultant at the Second Council of Lyons.

Aquinas's major works include *Summa Contra Gentiles* (“Comprehensive Treatise against the Gentiles”), *Summa Theologiae* (“Comprehensive Treatise on Theology”), *Disputed Questions* (summaries of debates he conducted on various topics as a professor of theology), and detailed commentaries on the principal works of Aristotle.

Our reading is from the section of Part One of the *Summa Theologiae* known as the “Treatise on God.” More specifically, the reading is the second “question” (topic) of this section, “On the Existence of God.” This question consists of three “articles” (subdivisions). The first article asks whether the existence of God is self-evident. (If God's existence is self-evident, there would seem to be no need to formulate a proof that God exists.) Aquinas contends that God's existence is self-evident *in itself* but not *to us*. A proposition is self-evident in itself if the subject implies the predicate. Since God *is* existence (as Aquinas argues elsewhere), the term “God” implies “existence” and God's existence is therefore self-evident in itself. But God's existence is not self-evident to us because our limited human minds are incapable of grasping the full meaning of the term “God.”

Since God's existence is not self-evident to us, Aquinas proceeds to ask, in the second article, whether the existence of God can be demonstrated (proved). He explains that God's existence can be demonstrated by reasoning from effects that we experience, back to God as their cause. In the third article, Aquinas presents five proofs that God exists, based on five kinds of facts that we experience. (1) The fact that there are things in motion implies that there is a first mover that is not itself in motion—and this first mover is God. (2) The fact that there are series of efficient causes (agents that bring things into existence or impart change) implies that there is a first efficient cause—and this first cause is God. (3) The fact that there are possible beings (beings that can not-exist) implies that there must be a necessary being (a being that *cannot* not-exist) that is its own source of necessity—and this being is God. (4) The fact that there are beings with different degrees of various perfections (for example, of goodness) implies that there is a being that is the cause of all these perfections—and this being is God. (5) Finally, the fact that natural beings without intelligence act for goals (for example, plants act to grow and reproduce) implies that there is an intelligent being that directs natural beings toward their goals—and this being is God.

Note that Aquinas begins each article by formulating objections against his own view. Then, after setting forth his own position, he responds to the objections he raised.

QUESTION 2. ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

First Article. Is the Existence of God Self-Evident?

I proceed in this way to the first article: It seems that the existence of God is self-evident.

Objection 1. Things of which we possess knowledge by nature, are said to be self-evident to us, as is manifest in the case of first principles. But, as Damascene says in the beginning of his book, "All are by nature endowed with knowledge of God's existence."¹ Therefore, the existence of God is self-evident.

Objection 2. Things that we know as soon as we know terms, are said to be self-evident, and the Philosopher in the *Posterior Analytics* attributes this to the first principles of demonstration;² when one knows what a whole is, and what a part is, one immediately knows that every whole is greater than one of its parts. But when one understands what the term "God" means, one immediately grasps that God exists, for the term "God" means that than which nothing greater can be signified. What exists in fact as well as in the intellect, however, is greater than what exists in the intellect alone. And so, since God exists in the intellect as soon as we understand the term "God," it also follows that God exists in fact. Therefore, the existence of God is self-evident.³

Objection 3. The existence of truth is self-evident, because one who denies the existence of truth admits its existence: If there is indeed no truth, it is true that truth does not exist; if, on the other hand, something is true, it is necessary that truth exists. But God is truth itself, as John says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."⁴ Therefore, the existence of God is self-evident.

On the contrary, no one can think the opposite of what is self-evident, as the Philosopher makes clear in the *Metaphysics*⁵ and the *Posterior Analytics*⁶ concerning the first principles of demonstration. But one can think the opposite of the proposition that God exists, as the Psalm says: "The fool has said in his heart, 'God does not exist.'"⁷ Therefore, the existence of God is not self-evident.

I answer that something may be self-evident in two ways: in one way, in itself but not to us; in the second way, in itself and to us. For a proposition is self-evident because its predicate is contained in its subject's essence, as

¹John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* (a Latin translation of *Pegē Gnōseōs* ["The Fountain of Wisdom"]), Book I, Chapter 1, Section 3. Damascene (about 675–749) was a Greek theologian. [D. C. ABEL]

²Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Book I, Chapter 3. Aquinas regularly refers to Aristotle as simply "the Philosopher." For a biography of Aristotle, see p. 331. [D. C. ABEL]

³This argument, now known as the "ontological argument," was first formulated by Anselm in his *Proslogion*. Anselm (about 1033–1109) was an Italian theologian and philosopher. For a biography of Anselm and the text of his argument, see pp. 34–38. [D. C. ABEL]

⁴John 14:6. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN, TRANSLATORS]

⁵Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book III, Chapter 3. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

⁶Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, Book I, Chapter 10. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

⁷Psalms 15:1 (14:1 in some versions); Psalms 53:1 (51:1). [D. C. ABEL]

in the proposition "Human beings are animals," for "animal" belongs to the nature of "human being." Therefore, if all know the proposition's predicate and its subject's essence, the proposition will be self-evident to all. This is evident, for example, in the case of the first principles of demonstration, whose terms are general notions that everyone knows: being and nonbeing, whole and part, and the like. If, however, some persons happen not to know the predicate and the subject's essence, the proposition will indeed be self-evident in itself but not to those who do not know the predicate and the subject. And so it happens, as Boethius says in his book *De Hebdomatibus*, that only the wise have certain general and self-evident notions, such as "Incorporeal things do not exist in a place."⁸

I say, therefore, that the proposition "God exists" is in itself self-evident, because its predicate is the same as its subject; God is indeed his existence. . . . But because we do not know what God is, the proposition is not self-evident to us but needs to be demonstrated by things more known to us and less known as regards their nature—namely, by effects.

Reply to Objection 1. We are by nature endowed with knowledge of God's existence in a general way, with a certain confusion—namely, insofar as God is the happiness of human beings, for human beings by nature desire happiness, and they by nature know what they by nature desire. But this is not to know unconditionally that God exists, just as to know that someone is approaching, is not to know Peter, although Peter is the one who is approaching. For many deem riches to be the perfect human good, which is happiness, but certain others deem sensual pleasures the perfect human good, while still others deem something else the perfect human good.

Reply to Objection 2. Perhaps someone who hears the term "God," does not understand that it means that than which nothing greater can be thought, since some believe that God is a material substance. Even supposing that someone understands that the term "God" means what we assert (namely, that than which nothing greater can be thought), yet it does not thereby follow that such a one would understand that what the term means, exists in the real world, but only that it exists in the intellect's apprehension. Nor can it be proved that God really exists unless one grants that there really exists something than which no greater can be thought, and this is not granted by those who hold that God does not exist.

Reply to Objection 3. The existence of truth in general is self-evident, but it is not self-evident to us that a First Truth exists.

Second Article. Can We Demonstrate the Existence of God?

I proceed in this way to the second article: It seems that we cannot demonstrate the existence of God.

⁸Boethius, *De Hebdomatibus* ("On Groups of Seven," also known as *How Substances Can Be Good in Virtue of Their Existence without Being Absolute Goods*), Point 1. Boethius (about 480–524) was a Roman politician, philosopher, and theologian. [D. C. ABEL]

Objection 1. The existence of God is an article of faith. But we cannot demonstrate what belongs to faith, since demonstration causes knowledge, while faith concerns things that are not evident, as the Apostle [Paul] makes clear in the Letter to the Hebrews.⁹ Therefore, we cannot demonstrate the existence of God.

Objection 2. The means of a demonstration is something's essence. But we cannot know what God is, but only what he is not, as Damascene says.¹⁰ Therefore, we cannot demonstrate that God exists.

Objection 3. If one were to demonstrate the existence of God, this would be only by his effects. But his effects are not proportioned to him, since he himself is infinite, and the effects are finite, while there is no proportion of the finite to the infinite. Therefore, since we cannot demonstrate a cause by an effect that is not proportioned to its cause, it seems that we cannot demonstrate the existence of God.

On the contrary, the Apostle says in the Letter to the Romans, "The invisible things of God are visible when understood through the things that have been made."¹¹ But this would only be the case if we could demonstrate the existence of God through what he has made, for the first thing that we need to understand about something, is whether or not it exists.

I answer that we demonstrate in two ways. One is by means of a cause, and we call this a "demonstration why" something is so, and it is by means of what is first without qualification. The other is by means of an effect, and we call this a "demonstration that" something is, and this demonstration is by what is first as to us, for we proceed to knowledge of a cause through its effect, because the effect is more manifest to us than its cause is. But we can demonstrate the existence of a particular cause from any of its effects—provided that the cause's effects are nonetheless more known in relation to us—because effects depend on their cause, and so a cause necessarily preexists whenever an effect is posited. Therefore, since God's existence is not self-evident in relation to us, we can demonstrate his existence by means of the effects known to us.

Reply to Objection 1. God's existence and other such matters that natural reason can know about God, as the Letter to the Romans says,¹² are not articles of faith but preambles to the articles, for faith in this way presupposes natural knowledge, as grace presupposes nature, and as perfecting presupposes something perfectible. Nothing, however, prevents someone who does not undertake a demonstration, from accepting as an object of faith something that in itself can be demonstrated and known.

Reply to Objection 2. When a cause is demonstrated by means of its effect, we need to use the effect instead of the cause's definition to prove that the cause exists, and this happens especially in the case of God. This is so because, in

⁹Hebrews 11:1. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

¹⁰John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith*, Book I, Chapter 4. [D. C. ABEL]

¹¹Romans 1:20. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

¹²Romans 1:19. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

order to prove the existence of something, we need to take as the means of demonstration what the term means, not what the object is, since the question "What is it?" logically follows the question "Does it exist?" We posit names of God, however, from his effects. . . . Therefore, when we demonstrate the existence of God from effects, we can take as the means of demonstration what the name "God" means.

Reply to Objection 3. We cannot have perfect knowledge about a cause by means of effects unproportioned to their cause, but we can nonetheless clearly demonstrate the existence of such a cause by any one of the cause's effects, as I have said. And so we can demonstrate God's existence by means of his effects, although we cannot perfectly know him according to his essence by the effects.

Third Article. Does God Exist?

I proceed in this way to the third article: It seems that God does not exist.

Objection 1. It seems that God does not exist: If one of two contraries is infinite, the other would be completely destroyed. But we understand by the term "God" something infinite—namely, something good without limit. Therefore, if God were to exist, we would not find anything bad. But we do find bad things in the world. Therefore, God does not exist.

Objection 2. More sources do not accomplish what fewer sources can. But, supposing that God does not exist, other sources seem capable of accomplishing everything evident in the world, since we trace things of nature back to nature as their source, and we trace things of free choice back to human reason or will as their source. Therefore, we do not need to posit that God exists.

On the contrary, the Book of Exodus says in the person of God: "I am who am."¹³

I answer that we can prove in five ways that God exists.

The FIRST and more evident WAY, moreover, is the one we take from motion,¹⁴ for it is sure and evident to the senses that some things in this world are moved. But everything moved is moved by something else. For an object is only moved insofar as it has potentiality for that to which it is moved, while something produces motion only insofar as it is actual. To move something, certainly, is only to bring it from potentiality to actuality, and only an actual being can bring something to actuality. For example, something actually hot, like fire, causes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes the wood. The same object, however, cannot at the same time be actual and potential in the same respect but only in different respects; for example, something actually hot cannot at the same time be potentially hot, although it is

¹³Exodus 3:14. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

¹⁴*motion*: a change from a state of potentiality to a state of actuality. A being has a potentiality for receiving a new quality if it can receive it but has not actually done so; it is brought from potentiality to actuality when it receives the new quality. In Aquinas's terminology, motion includes not only change in location (locomotion) but other kinds of change as well (such as a qualitative change from cold to hot, to use Aquinas's example). [D. C. ABEL]

at the same time potentially cold. Nothing, therefore, can produce and undergo motion, or move itself, in the same respect and in the same way. Everything that is moved, therefore, needs to be moved by something else. Therefore, if the cause of a motion is moved, the cause itself needs to be moved by another, and that other by another. But this regress ought not to be endless, because there would thus be no first cause of motion and so no other cause of motion, since second causes produce motion only because the first cause moves them. A stick, for example, only causes motion because a hand moves it. Therefore, we need to arrive at a first cause of motion, one that is moved by nothing else, and all understand this first cause of motion to be God.

The SECOND WAY is by considering efficient causes. For we find that there is an order of efficient causes in the case of those sensible¹⁵ objects, and yet we do not find, nor can we, that anything is the efficient cause of its very self, because such a thing would thus pre-exist itself, and this is impossible. But we cannot regress endlessly in the matter of efficient causes. This is so because, in all ordered efficient causes, something first causes something intermediate, and something intermediate causes something last, whether the intermediate things be several or only one. But the effect is taken away if its cause is taken away. Therefore, there will be nothing intermediate or last if there be nothing first in the case of efficient causes. But if we should regress endlessly in the case of efficient causes, there will be no first efficient cause, and there will thus be neither a final effect nor intermediate efficient causes, and this is clearly false. Therefore, we need to posit a first efficient cause, and all call this cause God.

We take the THIRD WAY from the possible and the necessary, and the argument proceeds as follows. We certainly find in reality kinds of things that can exist and can not-exist, since we find that certain things come to be and pass away, and so can exist and can not-exist. But it is impossible that all such things always exist, because what can not-exist, at some point of time does not exist. Therefore, if everything can not-exist, there was a time when nothing really existed. But if this is so, nothing would also now exist, because something non-existent begins to exist only through the agency of something that does exist. Therefore, if nothing existed, nothing could begin to exist, and so nothing would now exist, and this conclusion is obviously false. Therefore, not every being is something that can not-exist, but there needs to be something necessary in reality. But everything necessary either has or does not have the ground of its necessity from another source. There cannot, however, be an endless regress in the case of necessary things that have the ground of their necessity in another source, just as there cannot be an endless regress in the case of efficient causes, as I have shown. We need, therefore, to posit something that is intrinsically necessary, that does not have the ground of its necessity from another source, but that causes other things to be necessary, and all call this intrinsically necessary being God.

We take the FOURTH WAY from the gradations that we find in reality. For we find in reality things that are more good and less good, more true and less true, more excellent and less excellent, and similarly in the case of other such things.

¹⁵sensible: able to be sensed. [D. C. ABEL]

But we say "more" and "less" about different things as they in various ways approximate what is most; for example, an object is hotter if it more approximates what is hottest. Therefore, there is something that is most true and most good and most excellent, and so being in the highest degree, for things that are most true, are beings in the highest degree, as the *Metaphysics* says.¹⁶ What we call most in a genus,¹⁷ moreover, causes everything belonging to that genus; for example, fire, which is hottest, causes everything hot, as the same work says.¹⁸ Therefore, there exists something that causes the existing and the goodness and whatever perfection of every being, and we call this cause-God.

We take the FIFTH WAY from the governance of things. For we see that certain things that lack knowledge—namely, natural material substances—act for the sake of an end.¹⁹ And this is evident because they always or more frequently act in the same way in order to achieve what is best, and hence it is evident that they reach their goal by striving, not by chance. But things that lack knowledge, do not strive for goals unless a being with knowledge and intelligence directs them, as, for example, an archer aims an arrow. Therefore, there is a being with intelligence who orders all the things of nature to their ends, and we call this being God.

Reply to Objection 1. As Augustine says in his *Enchiridion*, "Because God is the highest good, he would in no way allow anything bad to exist in his works were he not so all-powerful and good as to act well even with respect to what is bad."²⁰ It belongs to the infinite goodness of God, therefore, to permit bad things and to bring forth good things from them.

Reply to Objection 2. We also need to trace things produced by nature back to God as their first cause, because nature, by reason of its fixed end, acts at the direction of a higher efficient cause. Likewise, we need to trace even things done by free choice back to a higher cause that is not the reason and will of human beings, since things done by free choice can change and fall short. We indeed need to trace everything that can change and fall short, back to a first source that cannot change and is intrinsically necessary, as I have shown.

¹⁶Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book II, Chapter 1. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

¹⁷genus: category. [D. C. ABEL]

¹⁸Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book II, Chapter 1. [W. P. BAUMGARTH AND R. J. REGAN]

¹⁹end: goal. [D. C. ABEL]

²⁰Augustine, *Enchiridion*, Chapter 11. Augustine (354–430) was a North African theologian and philosopher; for a biography, see p. 74. [D. C. ABEL]

Evil and Omnipotence

J. L. Mackie

J. L. Mackie was born in 1917 in Sydney, Australia. He entered the University of Sydney in 1935 and received his bachelor's degree in 1938. He then went to England to study at Oxford University, where he won the Cromer Greek Essay Prize in 1941 for an essay on Heraclitus. During World War II Mackie served in the British armed forces in the Middle East and Italy, attaining the rank of captain. After the war, in 1946, he accepted a position in philosophy at the University of Sydney. He taught there until 1963, except for his four years as a faculty member at the University of Otago in New Zealand (1955–1959). In 1963 he returned to England, where he became the first holder of the Chair of Philosophy at the University of York. In 1967 he became a fellow and tutor in philosophy at Oxford University. Mackie was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1974. He died in Oxford in 1981.

Mackie's books include *Truth, Probability, and Paradox: Studies in Philosophical Logic* (1973), *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (1974), *Problems from Locke* (1976), *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (1977), *Hume's Moral Theory* (1980), and *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments For and Against the Existence of God* (published posthumously, 1982).

Our reading here is Mackie's 1955 article, "Evil and Omnipotence." Mackie discusses the "problem of evil," the problem of how a theist can consistently hold all three of the following propositions: God is all-powerful, God is all-good, and evil exists. On the face of it, it seems that if there were an omnipotent and completely benevolent God, this God would not permit evil to exist.

Mackie distinguishes logically adequate and logically fallacious solutions to the problem of evil. A theist solves the problem of evil in a logically adequate way if he or she denies one or more of the initial propositions: God has limited power (and therefore cannot prevent all evil), God has limited goodness (and therefore does not want to prevent all evil), or evil does not exist (it is merely an illusion). Although these solutions are logically adequate, they require abandoning the traditional concept of God as an all-good and all-powerful being or maintaining the highly implausible view that there really is no evil.

The fallacious solutions to the problem of evil say that all three of the initial propositions are true, but in the process of explaining how they are compatible, these theories end up implicitly rejecting one or more of them. In other words, these theories *appear* to defend all three propositions but in fact do not. Mackie examines in detail four such arguments. The first two arguments are that good cannot exist without evil and that evil is a necessary means to good. Both arguments end up denying God's omnipotence. The third solution, that the universe as a whole is better with some evil in it than it would be with no evil, compromises God's benevolence. The final solution states that the possibility of evil is a necessary result of God's endowing human beings with free will, which is a good. Mackie argues that this solution denies the omnipotence and benevolence of God, because God could have made human beings in such a way that they always freely choose the good.

INTRODUCTION

The traditional arguments for the existence of God have been fairly thoroughly criticized by philosophers. But the theologian can, if he wishes, accept this criticism. He can admit that no rational proof of God's existence is possible. And he can still retain all that is essential to his position, by holding that God's existence is known in some other, nonrational way. I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another, so that the theologian can maintain his position as a whole only by a much more extreme rejection of reason than in the former case. He must now be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be *disproved* from other beliefs that he also holds.

The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs. It is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action. These points are obvious; I mention them only because they are sometimes ignored by theologians, who sometimes parry a statement of the problem with such remarks as "Well, can you solve the problem yourself?" or "This is a mystery that may be revealed to us later" or "Evil is something to be faced and overcome, not to be merely discussed."

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: The theologian, it seems, at once *must* adhere and *cannot consistently* adhere to all three. (The problem does not arise only for theists, but I shall discuss it in the form in which it presents itself for ordinary theism.)

However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms "good," "evil," and "omnipotent." These additional principles are that good is opposed to 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. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.

A. ADEQUATE SOLUTIONS

Now once the problem is fully stated it is clear that it can be solved, in the sense that the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not

quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

There are, then, quite a number of adequate solutions of the problem of evil, and some of these have been adopted, or almost adopted, by various thinkers. For example, a few have been prepared to deny God's omnipotence, and rather more have been prepared to keep the term "omnipotence" but severely to restrict its meaning, recording quite a number of things that an omnipotent being cannot do. Some have said that evil is an illusion, perhaps because they held that the whole world of temporal, changing things is an illusion, and that what we call evil belongs only to this world, or perhaps because they held that although temporal things *are* much as we see them, those that we call evil are not really evil. Some have said that what we call evil is merely the privation of good, that evil in a positive sense, evil that would really be opposed to good, does not exist. Many have agreed with Pope that discord is harmony not understood, and that partial evil is universal good.¹ Whether any of these views is *true* is, of course, another question. But each of them gives an adequate solution of the problem of evil in the sense that if you accept it this problem does not arise for you, though you may, of course, have *other* problems to face.

But often enough these adequate solutions are only *almost* adopted. The thinkers who restrict God's power, but keep the term "omnipotence," may reasonably be suspected of thinking, in other contexts, that his power is really unlimited. Those who say that evil is an illusion may also be thinking, inconsistently, that this illusion is itself an evil. Those who say that "evil" is merely privation of good may also be thinking, inconsistently, that privation of good is an evil. (The fallacy here is akin to some forms of the "naturalistic fallacy"² in ethics, where some think, for example, that "good" is just what contributes to evolutionary progress, and that evolutionary progress is itself good.) If Pope meant what he said in the first line of his couplet, that "discord" is only harmony not understood, the "partial evil" of the second line must, for consistency, mean "that which, taken in isolation, falsely appears to be evil," but it would more naturally mean "that which, in isolation, really is evil." The second line, in fact, hesitates between two views, that "partial evil" isn't really evil, since only the universal quality is real, and that "partial evil" is really an evil, but only a little one.

In addition, therefore, to adequate solutions, we must recognize unsatisfactory inconsistent solutions, in which there is only a half-hearted or temporary rejection of one of the propositions that together constitute the problem. In these, one of the constituent propositions is explicitly rejected, but it is covertly reasserted or assumed elsewhere in the system.

¹Alexander Pope (1688–1744), an English poet, writes in *An Essay on Man* (Epistle 1, lines 290–91):

"All Discord, Harmony, not understood; / All partial Evil, universal Good." [D. C. ABEL]

²"naturalistic fallacy": the alleged mistake of identifying ethical goodness with a "natural" object. [D. C. ABEL]

B. FALLACIOUS SOLUTIONS

Besides these half-hearted solutions, which explicitly reject but implicitly assert one of the constituent propositions, there are definitely fallacious solutions that explicitly maintain all the constituent propositions, but implicitly reject at least one of them in the course of the argument that explains away the problem of evil.

There are, in fact, many so-called solutions that purport to remove the contradiction without abandoning any of its constituent propositions. These must be fallacious, as we can see from the very statement of the problem, but it is not so easy to see in each case precisely where the fallacy lies. I suggest that in all cases the fallacy has the general form suggested above: In order to solve the problem one (or perhaps more) of its constituent propositions is given up, but in such a way that it appears to have been retained, and can therefore be asserted without qualification in other contexts. Sometimes there is a further complication: The supposed solution moves to and fro between, say, two of the constituent propositions, at one point asserting the first of these but covertly abandoning the second, at another point asserting the second but covertly abandoning the first. These fallacious solutions often turn upon some equivocation³ with the words "good" and "evil," or upon some vagueness about the way in which good and evil are opposed to one another, or about how much is meant by "omnipotence." I propose to examine some of these so-called solutions, and to exhibit their fallacies in detail. Incidentally, I shall also be considering whether an adequate solution could be reached by a minor modification of one or more of the constituent propositions, which would, however, still satisfy all the essential requirements of ordinary theism.

1. "Good cannot exist without evil" or "Evil is necessary as a counterpart to good."

It is sometimes suggested that evil is necessary as a counterpart to good, that if there were no evil there could be no good either, and that this solves the problem of evil. It is true that it points to an answer to the question "Why should there be evil?" But it does so only by qualifying some of the propositions that constitute the problem.

First, it sets a limit to what God can do, saying that God *cannot* create good without simultaneously creating evil, and this means either that God is not omnipotent or that there are *some* limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. It may be replied that these limits are always presupposed, that omnipotence has never meant the power to do what is logically impossible, and on the present view the existence of good without evil would be a logical impossibility. This interpretation of omnipotence may, indeed, be accepted as a modification of our original account that does not reject anything that is essential to theism, and I shall in general assume it in the subsequent

³*equivocation*: the use of a word or phrase in different senses, which makes an apparently correct argument actually incorrect. [D. C. ABEL]

discussion. It is, perhaps, the most common theistic view, but I think that some theists at least have maintained that God can do what is logically impossible. Many theists, at any rate, have held that logic itself is created or laid down by God, that logic is the way in which God arbitrarily chooses to think. (This is, of course, parallel to the ethical view that morally right actions are those that God arbitrarily chooses to command, and the two views encounter similar difficulties.) And *this* account of logic is clearly inconsistent with the view that God is bound by logical necessities—unless it is possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself, an issue that we shall consider later, when we come to the paradox of omnipotence. This solution of the problem of evil cannot, therefore, be consistently adopted along with the view that logic is itself created by God.

But, secondly, this solution denies that evil is opposed to good in our original sense. If good and evil are counterparts, a good thing will not "eliminate evil as far as it can." Indeed, this view suggests that good and evil are not strictly qualities of things at all. Perhaps the suggestion is that good and evil are related in much the same way as great and small. Certainly, when the term "great" is used relatively as a condensation of "greater than so-and-so," and "small" is used correspondingly, greatness and smallness are counterparts and cannot exist without each other. But in this sense greatness is not a quality, not an intrinsic feature of anything; and it would be absurd to think of a movement in favor of greatness and against smallness in this sense. Such a movement would be self-defeating, since relative greatness can be promoted only by a simultaneous promotion of relative smallness. I feel sure that no theists would be content to regard God's goodness as analogous to this—as if what he supports were not the *good* but the *better*, and as if he had the paradoxical aim that all things should be better than other things.

This point is obscured by the fact that "great" and "small" seem to have an absolute as well as a relative sense. I cannot discuss here whether there is absolute magnitude or not, but if there is, there could be an absolute sense for "great," it could mean of at least a certain size, and it would make sense to speak of all things getting bigger, of a universe that was expanding all over, and therefore it would make sense to speak of promoting greatness. But in *this* sense great and small are not logically necessary counterparts: Either quality could exist without the other. There would be no logical impossibility in everything's being small or in everything's being great.

Neither in the absolute nor in the relative sense, then, of "great" and "small" do these terms provide an analogy of the sort that would be needed to support this solution of the problem of evil. In neither case are greatness and smallness *both* necessary counterparts *and* mutually opposed forces or possible objects for support and attack.

It may be replied that good and evil are necessary counterparts in the same way as any quality and its logical opposite. Redness can occur, it is suggested, only if nonredness also occurs. But unless evil is merely the privation of good, they are not logical opposites, and some further argument would be needed to show that they are counterparts in the same way as genuine logical opposites. Let us assume that this could be given. There is still doubt of the correctness of

the metaphysical⁴ principle that a quality must have a real opposite: I suggest that it is not really impossible that everything should be, say, red, that the truth is merely that if everything were red we should not notice redness, and so we should have no word "red"; we observe and give names to qualities only if they have real opposites. If so, the principle that a term must have an opposite would belong only to our language or to our thought, and would not be an ontological⁵ principle, and, correspondingly, the rule that good cannot exist without evil would not state a logical necessity of a sort that God would just have to put up with. God might have made everything good, though *we* should not have noticed it if he had.

But, finally, even if we concede that this *is* an ontological principle, it will provide a solution for the problem of evil only if one is prepared to say, "Evil exists, but only just enough evil to serve as the counterpart of good." I doubt whether any theist will accept this. After all, the *ontological* requirement that nonredness should occur would be satisfied even if all the universe, except for a minute speck, were red, and, if there were a corresponding requirement for evil as a counterpart to good, a minute dose of evil would presumably do. But theists are not usually willing to say, in all contexts, that all the evil that occurs is a minute and necessary dose.

2. "Evil is necessary as a means to good."

It is sometimes suggested that evil is necessary for good not as a counterpart but as a means. In its simple form this has little plausibility as a solution of the problem of evil, since it obviously implies a severe restriction of God's power. It would be a *causal* law that you cannot have a certain end without a certain means, so that if God has to introduce evil as a means to good, he must be subject to at least some causal laws. This certainly conflicts with what a theist normally means by omnipotence. This view of God as limited by causal laws also conflicts with the view that causal laws are themselves made by God, which is more widely held than the corresponding view about the laws of logic. This conflict would, indeed, be resolved if it were possible for an omnipotent being to bind himself, and this possibility has still to be considered. Unless a favorable answer can be given to this question, the suggestion that evil is necessary as a means to good solves the problem of evil only by denying one of its constituent propositions, either that God is omnipotent or that "omnipotent" means what it says.

3. "The universe is better with some evil in it than it could be if there were no evil."

Much more important is a solution that at first seems to be a mere variant of the previous one, that evil may contribute to the goodness of a whole in which it is found, so that the universe as a whole is better as it is, with some evil in it, than it would be if there were no evil. This solution may be developed in either of two ways. It may be supported by an aesthetic analogy, by the fact that contrasts heighten beauty, that in a musical work, for example, there may occur discords

⁴*metaphysical*: relating to *metaphysics*, the study of the nature and kinds of reality. [D. C. ABEL]

⁵*ontological*: relating to *ontology*, a synonym for *metaphysics* (see footnote 4). [D. C. ABEL]

that somehow add to the beauty of the work as a whole. Alternatively, it may be worked out in connection with the notion of progress, that the best possible organization of the universe will not be static, but progressive, that the gradual overcoming of evil by good is really a finer thing than would be the eternal unchallenged supremacy of good.

In either case, this solution usually starts from the assumption that the evil whose existence gives rise to the problem of evil is primarily what is called physical evil, that is to say, pain. In Hume's⁶ rather half-hearted presentation of the problem of evil, the evils that he stresses are pain and disease, and those who reply to him argue that the existence of pain and disease makes possible the existence of sympathy, benevolence, heroism, and the gradually successful struggle of doctors and reformers to overcome these evils. In fact, theists often seize the opportunity to accuse those who stress the problem of evil of taking a low, materialistic view of good and evil, equating these with pleasure and pain, and of ignoring the more spiritual goods that can arise in the struggle against evils.

But let us see exactly what is being done here. Let us call pain and misery "first-order evil" or "evil (1)." What contrasts with this, namely pleasure and happiness, will be called "first-order good" or "good (1)." Distinct from this is "second-order good" or "good (2)," which somehow emerges in a complex situation in which evil (1) is a necessary component—logically, not merely causally, necessary. (Exactly *how* it emerges does not matter: In the crudest version of this solution, good (2) is simply the heightening of happiness by the contrast with misery; in other versions it includes sympathy with suffering, heroism in facing danger, and the gradual decrease of first-order evil and increase of first-order good.) It is also being assumed that second-order good is more important than first-order good or evil, in particular that it more than outweighs the first-order evil it involves.

Now this is a particularly subtle attempt to solve the problem of evil. It defends God's goodness and omnipotence on the ground that (on a sufficiently long view) this is the best of all logically possible worlds, because it includes the important second-order goods, and yet it admits that real evils—namely first-order evils—exist. But does it still hold that good and evil are opposed? Not, clearly, in the sense that we set out originally. Good does not tend to eliminate evil in general. Instead, we have a modified, a more complex pattern. First-order good (for example, happiness) *contrasts with* first-order evil (for example, misery): These two are opposed in a fairly mechanical way; some second-order goods (for example, benevolence) try to maximize first-order good and minimize first-order evil; but God's goodness is not this, it is rather the will to maximize *second-order* good. We might, therefore, call God's goodness an example of a third-order goodness, or good (3). While this account is different from our original one, it might well be held to be an improvement on it, to give a more accurate description of the way in which good is opposed to evil, and to be consistent with the essential theist position.

⁶David Hume (1711–1776) was a Scottish philosopher and historian; for a biography, see p. 46. [D. C. ABEL]

There might, however, be several objections to this solution.

First, some might argue that such qualities as benevolence—and a fortiori⁷ the third-order goodness that promotes benevolence—have a merely derivative value, that they are not higher sorts of good, but merely means to good (1), that is, to happiness, so that it would be absurd for God to keep misery in existence in order to make possible the virtues of benevolence, heroism, and so on. The theist who adopts the present solution must, of course, deny this, but he can do so with some plausibility, so I should not press this objection.

Secondly, it follows from this solution that God is not in our sense benevolent or sympathetic: He is not concerned to minimize evil (1), but only to promote good (2); and this might be a disturbing conclusion for some theists.

But, thirdly, the fatal objection is this. Our analysis shows clearly the possibility of the existence of a *second-order* evil, an evil (2) contrasting with good (2) as evil (1) contrasts with good (1). This would include malevolence, cruelty, callousness, cowardice, and states in which good (1) is decreasing and evil (1) increasing. And just as good (2) is held to be the important kind of good, the kind that God is concerned to promote, so evil (2) will, by analogy, be the important kind of evil, the kind that God, if he were wholly good and omnipotent, would eliminate. And yet evil (2) plainly exists, and indeed most theists (in other contexts) stress its existence more than that of evil (1). We should, therefore, state the problem of evil in terms of second-order evil, and against this form of the problem the present solution is useless.

An attempt might be made to use this solution again, at a higher level, to explain the occurrence of evil (2). Indeed, the next main solution that we shall examine does just this, with the help of some new notions. Without any fresh notions, such a solution would have little plausibility. For example, we could hardly say that the really important good was a good (3), such as the increase of benevolence in proportion to cruelty, which logically required for its occurrence the occurrence of some second-order evil. But even if evil (2) could be explained in this way, it is fairly clear that there would be third-order evils contrasting with this third-order good—and we should be well on the way to an infinite regress, where the solution of a problem of evil, stated in terms of evil (n), indicated the existence of an evil ($n + 1$), and a further problem to be solved.

4. "Evil is due to human free will."

Perhaps the most important proposed solution of the problem of evil is that evil is not to be ascribed to God at all, but to the independent actions of human beings, supposed to have been endowed by God with freedom of the will. This solution may be combined with the preceding one: First-order evil (for example, pain) may be justified as a logically necessary component in second-order good (for example, sympathy), while second-order evil (for example, cruelty) is not *justified*, but is so ascribed to human beings that God cannot be held responsible for it. This combination evades my third criticism of the preceding solution.

The free will solution also involves the preceding solution at a higher level. To explain why a wholly good God gave men free will although it would lead to

⁷*a fortiori*: (Latin, "from the stronger [argument]") with all the more reason. [D. C. ABEL]

some important evils, it must be argued that it is better on the whole that men should act freely, and sometimes err, than that they should be innocent automata, acting rightly in a wholly determined way. Freedom, that is to say, is now treated as a third-order good, and as being more valuable than second-order goods (such as sympathy and heroism) would be if they were deterministically⁸ produced, and it is being assumed that second-order evils, such as cruelty, are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom, just as pain is a logically necessary precondition of sympathy.

I think that this solution is unsatisfactory primarily because of the incoherence of the notion of freedom of the will. But I cannot discuss this topic adequately here, although some of my criticisms will touch upon it.

First, I should query the assumption that second-order evils are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom. I should ask this: If God has made men such that in their free choices they sometimes prefer what is good and sometimes what is evil, why could he not have made men such that they always freely choose the good? If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong; there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly, his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.

If it is replied that this objection is absurd, that the making of some wrong choices is logically necessary for freedom, it would seem that "freedom" must here mean complete randomness or indeterminacy, including randomness with regard to the alternatives good and evil—in other words, that men's choices and consequent actions can be "free" only if they are not determined by their characters. Only on this assumption can God escape the responsibility for men's actions; for if he made them as they are, but did not determine their wrong choices, this can only be because the wrong choices are not determined by men as they are. But then if freedom is randomness, how can it be a characteristic of *will*? And, still more, how can it be the most important good? What value or merit would there be in free choices if these were random actions that were not determined by the nature of the agent?

I conclude that to make this solution plausible two different senses of "freedom" must be confused, one sense that will justify the view that freedom is a third-order good, more valuable than other goods would be without it, and another sense, sheer randomness, to prevent us from ascribing to God a decision to make men such that they sometimes go wrong when he might have made them such that they would always freely go right.

This criticism is sufficient to dispose of this solution. But besides this there is a fundamental difficulty in the notion of an omnipotent God creating men

⁸*deterministically*: in accordance with *determinism*, the doctrine that all events are determined by preceding causes and that we can never act otherwise than we do. [D. C. ABEL]

with free will, for if men's wills are really free this must mean that even God cannot control them—that is, that God is no longer omnipotent. It may be objected that God's gift of freedom to men does not mean that he *cannot* control their wills, but that he always *refrains* from controlling their wills. But why, we may ask, should God refrain from controlling evil wills? Why should he not leave men free to will rightly, but intervene when he sees them beginning to will wrongly? If God could do this, but does not, and if he is wholly good, the only explanation could be that even a wrong free act of will is not really evil, that its freedom is a value that outweighs its wrongness, so that there would be a loss of value if God took away the wrongness and the freedom together. But this is utterly opposed to what theists say about sin in other contexts. The present solution of the problem of evil, then, can be maintained only in the form that God has made men so free that he *cannot* control their wills.

This leads us to what I call the paradox of omnipotence: Can an omnipotent being make things that he cannot subsequently control? Or, what is practically equivalent to this, can an omnipotent being make rules that then bind himself? (These are practically equivalent because any such rules could be regarded as setting certain things beyond his control, and vice versa.) The second of these formulations is relevant to the suggestions that we have already met, that an omnipotent God creates the rules of logic or causal laws, and is then bound by them.

It is clear that this is a paradox: The questions cannot be answered satisfactorily either in the affirmative or in the negative. If we answer "Yes," it follows that if God actually makes things that he cannot control, or makes rules that bind himself, he is not omnipotent once he has made them; there are *then* things that he cannot do. But if we answer "No," we are immediately asserting that there are things that he cannot do—that is to say, that he is already not omnipotent.

It cannot be replied that the question that sets this paradox is not a proper question. It would make perfectly good sense to say that a human mechanic has made a machine that he cannot control. If there is any difficulty about the question, it lies in the notion of omnipotence itself.

This, incidentally, shows that although we have approached this paradox from the free will theory, it is equally a problem for a theological determinist. No one thinks that machines have free will, yet they may well be beyond the control of their makers. The determinist might reply that anyone who makes anything determines its ways of acting, and so determines its subsequent behavior. Even the human mechanic does this by his *choice* of materials and structure for his machine, though he does not know all about either of these: The Mechanic determines, though he may not foresee, his machine's actions. And since God is omniscient, and since his creation of things is total, he both determines and foresees the ways in which his creatures will act. We may grant this, but it is beside the point. The question is not whether God *originally* determined the future actions of his creatures, but whether he can *subsequently* control their actions, or whether he was able in his original creation to put things beyond his subsequent control. Even on determinist principles the answers "Yes" and "No" are equally irreconcilable with God's omnipotence.

Before suggesting a solution of this paradox, I would point out that there is a parallel paradox of sovereignty. Can a legal sovereign make a law restricting its own future legislative power? For example, could the British parliament make a law forbidding any future parliament to socialize banking, and also forbidding the future repeal of this law itself? Or could the British parliament, which was legally sovereign in Australia in, say, 1899, pass a valid law, or series of laws, which made it no longer sovereign in 1933? Again, neither the affirmative nor the negative answer is really satisfactory. If we were to answer "Yes," we should be admitting the validity of a law that, if it were actually made, would mean that parliament was no longer sovereign. If we were to answer "No," we should be admitting that there is a law, not logically absurd, which parliament cannot validly make—that is, that parliament is not now a legal sovereign. This paradox can be solved in the following way. We should distinguish between first-order laws, that is, laws governing the actions of individuals and bodies other than the legislature; and second-order laws, that is, laws about laws, laws governing the actions of the legislature itself. Correspondingly, we should distinguish two orders of sovereignty, first-order sovereignty (sovereignty (1)), which is unlimited authority to make first-order laws; and second-order sovereignty (sovereignty (2)), which is unlimited authority to make second-order laws. If we say that parliament is sovereign we might mean that any parliament at any time has sovereignty (1), or we might mean that parliament has both sovereignty (1) and sovereignty (2) at present, but we cannot without contradiction mean both that the present parliament has sovereignty (2) and that every parliament at every time has sovereignty (1), for if the present parliament has sovereignty (2) it may use it to take away the sovereignty (1) of later parliaments. What the paradox shows is that we cannot ascribe to any continuing institution legal sovereignty in an inclusive sense.

The analogy between omnipotence and sovereignty shows that the paradox of omnipotence can be solved in a similar way. We must distinguish between first-order omnipotence (omnipotence (1)), that is, unlimited power to act; and second-order omnipotence (omnipotence (2)), that is, unlimited power to determine what powers to act things shall have. Then we could consistently say that God all the time has omnipotence (1), but if so no beings at any time have powers to act independently of God. Or we could say that God at once time had omnipotence (2), and used it to assign independent powers to act to certain things, so that God thereafter did not have omnipotence (1). But what the paradox shows is that we cannot consistently ascribe to any continuing being omnipotence in an inclusive sense.

An alternative solution of this paradox would be simply to deny that God is a continuing being, that any times can be assigned to his actions at all. But on this assumption (which also has difficulties of its own) no meaning can be given to the assertion that God made men with wills so free that he could not control them. The paradox of omnipotence can be avoided by putting God outside time, but the free will solution of the problem of evil cannot be saved in this way, and equally it remains impossible to hold that an omnipotent God *binds himself* by causal or logical laws.

CONCLUSION

Of the proposed solutions of the problem of evil that we have examined, none has stood up to criticism. There may be other solutions that require examination, but this study strongly suggests that there is no valid solution of the problem that does not modify at least one of the constituent propositions in a way that would seriously affect the essential core of the theistic position.

Quite apart from the problem of evil, the paradox of omnipotence has shown that God's omnipotence must in any case be restricted in one way or another, that unqualified omnipotence cannot be ascribed to any being that continues through time. And if God and his actions are not in time, can omnipotence, or power of any sort, be meaningfully ascribed to him?

READING 10

An Irenaean Theodicy

John Hick

John Hick was born in 1922 in Scarborough, England. He received his master's degree from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland in 1948 and his doctorate from Oxford University in 1950. He spent the next three years studying theology at Westminster Theological College in Cambridge, England. Hick then served as a Presbyterian minister in Northumberland, England. In 1956 he came to the United States, where he taught at Cornell University for three years and at Princeton Theological Seminary for five years. Returning to England in 1964, he taught at Cambridge University for three years and then was named H. G. Wood Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham. From 1982 until his retirement in 1992, Hick was Danforth Professor of the Philosophy of Religion and director of the Blaisdell Programs in World Religions and Cultures at the Claremont Graduate School in California. He currently lives in Birmingham, England, where he is a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Research in the Humanities at the University of Birmingham.

Hick's publications include *Philosophy of Religion* (1963; 4th ed., 1990); *Evil and the God of Love* (1966; 2d ed., 1977); *Arguments for the Existence of God* (1971); *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (1989; 2d ed., 2004); *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (1993; 2d ed., 2006); *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (1999); and *The New Frontier of Religion and Science: Religious Experience, Neuroscience, and the Transcendent* (2006).

Our reading is from Hick's 1981 article "An Irenaean Theodicy." *Theodicy* is an attempt to "justify God" in the sense of showing that the existence of evil in the world is compatible with belief in an all-good and all-powerful God who created and governs the world. (The word "theodicy" is formed from the Greek nouns *theos* ["God"] and *dikē* ["law, right"].) Hick develops a theodicy based on the views of Irenaeus, as 2nd-century Christian theologian. A tenable theodicy, Hick explains, must be internally coherent and must be consistent with both the religious tradition on which it is based (in this case, the Christian tradition) and the data of science. Hick argues that most widely accepted Christian theodicy, which is based on the thought of the theologian Augustine (354–430), is untenable because it is inconsistent with the contemporary scientific account of the origin of the human species. Hick proposes that we replace Augustinian theodicy with an Irenaean one. Although Irenaeus himself did not develop a theodicy, his theological view that humankind was created in two stages (the "image" of God and the "likeness" of God) can be developed into a theodicy that integrates Christian belief with modern evolution theory. Hick argues the existence of evil is necessary if human beings, at the present state of their growth toward spiritual maturity, are to fulfill their potential to love God freely and to achieve the most valuable kind of moral goodness. Hick concludes by noting that the ultimate plausibility of his Irenaean theodicy requires belief in "a continuation of our lives in another sphere of existence after bodily death."

CONCLUSION

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[I. INTRODUCTION]

Can a world in which sadistic cruelty often has its way, in which selfish lovelessness is so rife, in which there are debilitating diseases, crippling accidents, bodily and mental decay, insanity, and all manner of natural disasters be regarded as the expression of infinite creative goodness? Certainly all this could never by itself lead anyone to believe in the existence of a limitlessly powerful God. And yet even in a world that contains these things, innumerable men and women have believed and do believe in the reality of an infinite creative goodness, which they call God. The theodicy project starts at this point, with an already operating belief in God, embodied in human living, and attempts to show that this belief is not rendered irrational by the fact of evil. It attempts to explain how it is that the universe, assumed to be created and ultimately ruled by a limitlessly good and limitlessly powerful Being, is as it is, including all the pain and suffering and all the wickedness and folly that we find around us and within us. The theodicy project is thus an exercise in metaphysical construction, in the sense that it consists in the formation and criticism of large-scale hypotheses concerning the nature and process of the universe.

Since a theodicy both starts from and tests belief in the reality of God, it naturally takes different forms in relation to different concepts of God. In this paper I shall be discussing the project of a specifically Christian theodicy; I shall not be attempting the further and even more difficult work of comparative theodicy, leading in turn to the question of a global theodicy.

The two main demands upon a theodicy hypothesis are (1) that it be internally coherent, and (2) that it be consistent with the data both of the religious tradition on which it is based, and of the world, in respect both of the latter's general character as revealed by scientific inquiry and of the specific facts of moral and natural evil. These two criteria demand, respectively, possibility and plausibility.

Traditionally, Christian theology has centered upon the concept of God as both limitlessly powerful and limitlessly good and loving; and it is this concept of deity that gives rise to the problem of evil as a threat to theistic faith. The threat was definitively expressed in Stendhal's bombshell, "The only excuse for God is that he does not exist!"¹ The theodicy project is the attempt to offer a different view of the universe that is both possible and plausible and that does not ignite Stendhal's bombshell.

Christian thought has always included a certain range of variety, and in the area of theodicy it offers two broad types of approach. The Augustinian approach, representing until fairly recently the majority report of the Christian mind, hinges upon the idea of the Fall [of the human race through the sin of Adam and Eve], which has in turn brought about the disharmony of nature. This type of theodicy is developed today as "the free will defense." The Irenaean approach, representing in the past a minority report, hinges upon the creation

¹Stendhal (1783–1842) was the pen name of Marie-Henri Beyle, a French writer. [D. C. ABEL, EDITOR]

of humankind through the evolutionary process as an immature creature living in a challenging and therefore person-making world. I shall indicate very briefly why I do not find the first type of theodicy satisfactory, and then spend the remainder of this paper in exploring the second type.

[II. AUGUSTINIAN THEODICY]

In recent years the philosophical discussion of the problem of evil has been dominated by the free will defense. A major effort has been made by Alvin Plantinga and a number of other Christian philosophers to show that it is logically possible that a limitlessly powerful and limitlessly good God is responsible for the existence of this world. For all evil may ultimately be due to misuses of creaturely freedom. But it may nevertheless be better for God to have created free than unfree beings; and it is logically possible that any and all free beings whom God might create would, as a matter of contingent fact, misuse their freedom by falling into sin. In that case it would be logically impossible for God to have created a world containing free beings and yet not containing sin and the suffering that sin brings with it. Thus it is logically possible, despite the fact of evil, that the existing universe is the work of a limitlessly good Creator.

These writers are in effect arguing that the traditional Augustinian type of theodicy, based upon the Fall from grace of free finite creatures—first angels and then human beings—and a consequent going wrong of the physical world, is not logically impossible. I am in fact doubtful whether their argument is sound, and will return to the question later. But even if it should be sound, I suggest that their argument wins only a Pyrrhic victory,² since the logical possibility that it would establish is one that, for very many people today, is fatally lacking in plausibility. For most educated inhabitants of the modern world regard the biblical story of Adam and Eve, and their temptation by the devil, as myth rather than as history; and they believe that so far from having been created finitely perfect and then falling, humanity evolved out of lower forms of life, emerging in a morally, spiritually, and culturally primitive state. Further, they reject as incredible the idea that earthquake and flood, disease, decay, and death are consequences either of a human fall, or of a prior fall of angelic beings who are now exerting an evil influence upon the Earth. They see all this as part of a prescientific world view, along with the stories of the world having been created in six days and of the sun standing still for twenty-four hours at Joshua's command.³ One cannot, strictly speaking, disprove any of these ancient biblical myths and sagas, or refute their confident elaboration in the medieval Christian picture of the universe. But those of us for whom the resulting theodicy, even if logically possible, is radically implausible, must look elsewhere for light on the problem of evil.

²Pyrrhic victory: a victory gained at excessive cost. [D. C. ABEL]

³Joshua 10:12–13. [D. C. ABEL]

[AN IRENAEAN THEODICY]

believe that we find the light that we need in the main alternative strand of Christian thinking, which goes back to important constructive suggestions by the early Hellenistic Fathers of the Church, particularly St. Irenaeus (120–202 B.C.E.). Irenaeus himself did not develop a theodicy, but he did—together with other Greek-speaking Christian writers of that period, such as Clement of Alexandria—build a framework of thought within which a theodicy became possible that does not depend upon the idea of the Fall, and that is consonant with modern knowledge concerning the origins of the human race. . . .

The central theme out of which this Irenaean type of theodicy has arisen is the two-stage conception of the creation of humankind, first in the “image” and then in the “likeness” of God.⁴ Re-expressing this in modern terms, the first stage was the gradual production of *Homo sapiens*, through the long evolutionary process, as intelligent ethical and religious animals. The human being is an animal, one of the varied forms of earthly life and continuous as such with the whole realm of animal existence. But the human being is uniquely intelligent, having evolved a large and immensely complex brain. Further, the human being is ethical—that is, a gregarious as well as an intelligent animal, able to realize and respond to the complex demands of social life. And the human being is a religious animal, with an innate tendency to experience the world in terms of the presence and activity of supernatural beings and powers. This then is early *Homo sapiens*, the intelligent social animal capable of awareness of the divine. But early *Homo sapiens* is not the Adam and Eve of Augustinian theology, living in perfect harmony with self, with nature, and with God. On the contrary, the life of this being must have been a constant struggle against a hostile environment, and capable of savage violence against one’s fellow human beings, particularly outside one’s own immediate group; and this being’s concepts of the divine were primitive and often bloodthirsty. Thus existence “in the image of God” was a potentiality for knowledge of and relationship with one’s Maker rather than such knowledge and relationship as a fully realized state. In other words, people were created as spiritually and morally immature creatures, at the beginning of a long process of further growth and development, which constitutes the second stage of God’s creative work. In this second stage, of which we are a part, the intelligent, ethical, and religious animal is being brought through one’s own free responses into what Irenaeus called the divine “likeness.” . . . His conception of a two-stage creation of the human, with perfection lying in the future rather than in the past, is of fundamental importance. The notion of the Fall was not basic to this picture. . . . Irenaeus himself however could not, in the historical knowledge of his time, question the fact of the Fall; though he treated it as a relatively minor lapse, a youthful error, rather than as the infinite crime and cosmic disaster that has ruined the whole creation. But today we can acknowledge that there is no evidence at all of a period in the distant past when humankind was in the ideal state of a fully realized “child of God.” . . .

⁴Genesis 1:26 states that God created human beings in God’s “image and likeness.” [D. C. ABEL]

Let us now try to formulate a contemporary version of the Irenaean type of theodicy, based on this suggestion of the initial creation of humankind, not as a finitely perfect, but as an immature creature at the beginning of a long process of further growth and development. We may begin by asking why one should have been created as an imperfect and developing creature rather than as the perfect being whom God is presumably intending to create. The answer, I think, consists in two considerations that converge in their practical implications—one concerned with the human’s relationship to God and the other with the relationship to other human beings. As to the first, we could have the picture of God creating finite beings, whether angels or persons, directly in his own presence, so that in being conscious of that which is other than one’s self the creature is automatically conscious of God, the limitless divine reality and power, goodness and love, knowledge and wisdom, towering above one’s self. In such a situation the disproportion between Creator and creatures would be so great that the latter would have no freedom in relation to God; they would indeed not exist as independent autonomous persons. For what freedom could finite beings have in an immediate consciousness of the presence of the one who has created them, who knows them through and through, who is limitlessly powerful as well as limitlessly loving and good, and who claims their total obedience? In order to be a person, exercising some measure of genuine freedom, the creature must be brought into existence, not in the immediate divine presence, but at a “distance” from God. This “distance” cannot of course be spatial; for God is omnipresent. It must be an epistemic⁵ distance, a distance in the cognitive dimension. And the Irenaean hypothesis is that this “distance” consists, in the case of humans, in their existence within and as part of a world that functions as an autonomous system and from within which God is not overwhelmingly evident. . . . In such a world one can exist as a person over against the Creator. One has space to exist as a finite being, a space created by the epistemic distance from God and protected by one’s basic cognitive freedom, one’s freedom to open or close oneself to the dawning awareness of God that is experienced naturally by a religious animal.

This Irenaean picture corresponds, I suggest, to our actual human situation. Emerging within the evolutionary process as part of the continuum of animal life, in a universe that functions in accordance with its own laws and whose workings can be investigated and described without reference to a Creator, the human being has a genuine, even awesome, freedom in relation to one’s Maker. The human being is free to acknowledge and worship God; and is free—particularly since the emergence of human individuality and the beginnings of critical consciousness during the first millennium B.C.E.—to doubt the reality of God.

Within such a situation there is the possibility of the human being coming freely to know and love one’s Maker. Indeed, if the end-state that God is seeking to bring about is one in which finite persons have come in their own freedom to know and love him, this requires creating them initially in a state that is not that of their already knowing and loving him. For it is logically impossible to create beings already in a state of having come into that state by their own free choices.

⁵epistemic: relating to knowledge. [D. C. ABEL]

[III. AN IRENAEAN THEODICY]

I believe that we find the light that we need in the main alternative strand of Christian thinking, which goes back to important constructive suggestions by the early Hellenistic Fathers of the Church, particularly St. Irenaeus (120–202 B.C.E.). Irenaeus himself did not develop a theodicy, but he did—together with other Greek-speaking Christian writers of that period, such as Clement of Alexandria—build a framework of thought within which a theodicy became possible that does not depend upon the idea of the Fall, and that is consonant with modern knowledge concerning the origins of the human race. . . .

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⁵epistemic: relating to knowledge. [D. C. ABEL]

The other consideration, which converges with this in pointing to something like the human situation as we experience it, concerns our human moral nature. We can approach it by asking why humans should not have been created at this epistemic distance from God, and yet at the same time as morally perfect beings. . . .

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 that have been formed within the agent as a hard-won deposit of his own right decisions in situations of challenge and temptation, are intrinsically more valuable than virtues created within him ready-made and without any effort on his own part. This principle expresses a basic value judgment that cannot be established by argument, but that one can only present, in the hope that it will be as morally plausible, and indeed compelling, to others as to oneself. 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 that has been built up through the agent's own responsible choices through time in the face of alternative possibilities.

If, then, God's purpose was to create finite persons embodying the most valuable kind of moral goodness, he would have to create them, not as already perfect beings but rather as imperfect creatures who can then attain to the more valuable kind of goodness through their own free choices as, in the course of their personal and social history, new responses prompt new insights—opening up new moral possibilities and providing a milieu in which the most valuable kind of moral nature can be developed.

We have thus far, then, the hypothesis that one is created at an epistemic distance from God in order to come freely to know and love the Maker; and that one is at the same time created as a morally immature and imperfect being in order to attain through freedom the most valuable quality of goodness. The end sought, according to this hypothesis, is the full realization of the human potentialities in a unitary spiritual and moral perfection in the divine kingdom. And the question we have to ask is whether humans as we know them, and the world as we know it, are compatible with this hypothesis. . . .

As animal organisms integral to the whole ecology of life, we are programmed for survival. In pursuit of survival, primitives not only killed other animals for food but fought other human beings when their vital interests conflicted. The life of prehistoric persons must indeed have been a constant struggle to stay alive, prolonging an existence that was, in Hobbes's phrase, "poor, nasty, brutish and short."⁶ And in his basic animal self-regardingness humankind was, and is, morally imperfect. In saying this I am assuming that the essence of moral evil is selfishness, the sacrificing of others to one's own interests. It consists, in Kantian⁷ terminology, in treating others, not as ends in themselves, but as means to one's own ends. This is what the survival instinct demands. And yet we are

⁶Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Part I, Chapter XIII. Hobbes (1588–1679) was an English philosopher. [D. C. ABEL]

⁷Kantian: based on the thought of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). [D. C. ABEL]

also capable of love, of self-giving in a common cause, of a conscience that responds to others in their needs and dangers. And with the development of civilization we see the growth of moral insight, the glimpsing and gradual assimilation of higher ideals, and tension between our animality and our ethical values. But that the human being has a lower as well as a higher nature, that one is an animal as well as a potential child of God, and that one's moral goodness is won from a struggle with one's own innate selfishness, is inevitable given one's continuity with the other forms of animal life. Further, the human animal is not responsible for having come into existence as an animal. The ultimate responsibility for humankind's existence, as a morally imperfect creature, can only rest with the Creator. The human does not, in one's own degree of freedom and responsibility, choose one's origin, but rather one's destiny.

This then, in brief outline, is the answer of the Irenaean type of theodicy to the question of the origin of moral evil: The general fact of humankind's basic self-regarding animality is an aspect of creation as part of the realm of organic life; and this basic self-regardingness has been expressed over the centuries both in sins of individual selfishness and in the much more massive sins of corporate selfishness, institutionalized in slavery and exploitation, and all the many and complex forms of social injustice.

But nevertheless our sinful nature in a sinful world is the matrix within which God is gradually creating children for himself out of human animals. For it is as men and women freely respond to the claim of God upon their lives, transmuting their animality into the structure of divine worship, that the creation of humanity is taking place. And in its concrete character this response consists in every form of moral goodness, from unselfish love in individual personal relationships to the dedicated and selfless striving to end exploitation and to create justice within and between societies.

But one cannot discuss moral evil without at the same time discussing the nonmoral evil of pain and suffering. (I propose to mean by "pain" physical pain, including the pains of hunger and thirst; and by "suffering" the mental and emotional pain of loneliness, anxiety, remorse, lack of love, fear, grief, envy, and so on.) For what constitutes moral evil as evil is the fact that it causes pain and suffering. It is impossible to conceive of an instance of moral evil, or sin, that is not productive of pain or suffering to anyone at any time. But in addition to moral evil there is another source of pain and suffering in the structure of the physical world, which produces storms, earthquakes, and floods and which afflicts the human body with diseases—cholera, epilepsy, cancer, malaria, arthritis, rickets, meningitis, and so on—as well as with broken bones and other outcomes of physical accidents. It is true that a great deal both of pain and of suffering is humanly caused, not only by the inhumanity of man to man but also by the stresses of our individual and corporate lifestyles, causing many disorders—not only lung cancer and cirrhosis of the liver but many cases of heart disease, stomach and other ulcers, strokes, and so on—as well as accidents. But there remain nevertheless, in the natural world itself, permanent causes of human pain and suffering. And we have to ask why an unlimitedly good and unlimitedly powerful God should have created so dangerous a world, both as regards its purely natural hazards of

earthquake and flood and so on, and as regards the liability of the human body to so many ills, both psychosomatic and purely somatic.

The answer offered by the Irenaean type of theodicy follows from and is indeed integrally bound up with its account of the origin of moral evil. We have the hypothesis of humankind being brought into being within the evolutionary process as a spiritually and morally immature creature, and then growing and developing through the exercise of freedom in this religiously ambiguous world. We can now ask what sort of a world would constitute an appropriate environment for this second stage of creation. The development of human personality—moral, spiritual, and intellectual—is a product of challenge and response. It does not occur in a static situation demanding no exertion and no choices. . . . The intellectual development of humanity has been due to interaction with an objective environment functioning in accordance with its own laws, an environment that we have had actively to explore and to cooperate with in order to escape its perils and exploit its benefits. In a world devoid both of dangers to be avoided and rewards to be won we may assume that there would have been virtually no development of the human intellect and imagination, and hence of either the sciences or the arts, and hence of human civilization or culture.

The fact of an objective world within which one has to learn to live, on penalty of pain or death, is also basic to the development of one's moral nature. For it is because the world is one in which men and women can suffer harm—by violence, disease, accident, starvation, and so on—that our actions affecting one another have moral significance. A morally wrong act is, basically, one that harms some part of the human community; while a morally right action is, on the contrary, one that prevents or neutralizes harm or that preserves or increases human well being. Now we can imagine a paradise in which no one can ever come to any harm. It could be a world which, instead of having its own fixed structure, would be plastic to human wishes. Or it could be a world with a fixed structure, and hence the possibility of damage and pain, but whose structure is suspended or adjusted by special divine action whenever necessary to avoid human pain. Thus, for example, in such a miraculously pain-free world one who falls accidentally off a high building would presumably float unharmed to the ground; bullets would become insubstantial when fired at a human body; poisons would cease to poison, water to drown; and so on. . . . But a world in which there can be no pain or suffering would also be one in which there can be no moral choices and hence no possibility of moral growth and development. For in a situation in which no one can ever suffer injury or be liable to pain or suffering there would be no distinction between right and wrong action. No action would be morally wrong, because no action could have harmful consequences; and likewise no action would be morally right in contrast to wrong. Whatever the values of such a world, it clearly could not serve a purpose of the development of its inhabitants from self-regarding animality to self-giving love.

Thus the hypothesis of a divine purpose in which finite persons are created at an epistemic distance from God, in order that they may gradually become children of God through their own moral and spiritual choices, requires that their environment, instead of being a pain free and stress-free paradise, be broadly the kind of world of which we find ourselves to be a part. It requires that it be such

as to provoke the theological problem of evil. For it requires that it be an environment that offers challenges to be met, problems to be solved, dangers to be faced, and that accordingly involves real possibilities of hardship, disaster, failure, defeat, and misery as well as of delight and happiness, success, triumph, and achievement. For it is by grappling with the real problems of a real environment, in which a person is one form of life among many, and which is not designed to minister exclusively to one's well-being, that one can develop in intelligence and in such qualities as courage and determination. And it is in the relationships of human beings with one another, in the context of this struggle to survive and flourish, that they can develop the higher values of mutual love and care, of self-sacrifice for others, and of commitment to a common good. . . .

In terms of this hypothesis, as we have developed it thus far, then, both the basic moral evil in the human heart and the natural evils of the world are compatible with the existence of a Creator who is unlimited in both goodness and power. But is the hypothesis plausible as well as possible? The principal threat to its plausibility comes, I think, from the sheer amount and intensity of both moral and natural evil. One can accept the principle that in order to arrive at a freely chosen goodness one must start out in a state of moral immaturity and imperfection. But is it necessary that there should be the depths of demonic malice and cruelty that each generation has experienced, and that we have seen above all in recent history in the Nazi attempt to exterminate the Jewish population of Europe? Can any future fulfillment be worth such horrors? . . .

Concerning the intensity of natural evil, the truth is probably that our judgments of intensity are relative. We might identify some form of natural evil as the worst that there is—say the agony that can be caused by death from cancer—and claim that a loving God would not have allowed this to exist. But in a world in which there was no cancer, something else would then rank as the worst form of natural evil. If we then eliminate this, something else; and so on. And the process would continue until the world was free of all natural evil. For whatever form of evil for the time being remained would be intolerable to the inhabitants of that world. But in removing all occasions of pain and suffering, and hence all challenge and all need for mutual care, we should have converted the world from a person-making into a static environment, which could not elicit moral growth. In short, having accepted that a person-making world must have its dangers and therefore also its tragedies, we must accept that whatever form these take will be intolerable to the inhabitants of that world. There could not be a person-making world devoid of what we call evil; and evils are never tolerable—except for the sake of greater goods that may come out of them.

But accepting that a person-making environment must contain causes of pain and suffering, and that no pain or suffering is going to be acceptable, one of the most daunting and even terrifying features of the world is that calamity strikes indiscriminately. There is no justice in the incidence of disease, accident, disaster, and tragedy. The righteous as well as the unrighteous are struck down by illness and afflicted by misfortune. There is no security in goodness, but the good are as likely as the wicked to suffer "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."⁸

⁸William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I, line 58. [D. C. ABEL]

From the time of Job this fact has set a glaring question mark against the goodness of God. But let us suppose that things were otherwise. Let us suppose that misfortune came upon humankind, not haphazardly and therefore unjustly, but justly and therefore not haphazardly. Let us suppose that instead of coming without regard to moral considerations, it was proportioned to desert, so that the sinner was punished and the virtuous rewarded. Would such a dispensation serve a person-making purpose? Surely not. For it would be evident that wrong deeds bring disaster upon the agent whilst good deeds bring health and prosperity; and in such a world truly moral action, action done because it is right, would be impossible. The fact that natural evil is not morally directed, but is a hazard that comes by chance, is thus an intrinsic feature of a person-making world.

In other words, the very mystery of natural evil, the very fact that disasters afflict human beings in contingent, undirected, and haphazard ways, is itself a necessary feature of a world that calls forth mutual aid and builds up mutual caring and love. Thus, on the one hand, it would be completely wrong to say that God sends misfortune upon individuals, so that their death, maiming, starvation, or ruin is God's will for them. But, on the other hand, God has set us in a world containing unpredictable contingencies and dangers, in which unexpected and undeserved calamities may occur to anyone; because only in such a world can mutual caring and love be elicited. As an abstract philosophical hypothesis, this may offer little comfort. But translated into religious language it tells us that God's good purpose enfolds the entire process of this world, with all its good and bad contingencies, and that even amidst tragic calamity and suffering we are still within the sphere of his love and are moving towards his kingdom.

But there is one further all-important aspect of the Irenaean type of theodicy, without which all the foregoing would lose its plausibility. This is the eschatological⁹ aspect. Our hypothesis depicts persons as still in course of creation towards an end-state of perfected personal community in the divine kingdom. This end-state is conceived of as one in which individual egoity¹⁰ has been transcended in communal unity before God. And in the present phase of that creative process, the naturally self-centered human animal has the opportunity freely to respond to God's noncoercive self-disclosures, through the work of prophets and saints, through the resulting religious traditions, and through the individual's religious experience. Such response always has an ethical aspect; for the growing awareness of God is at the same time a growing awareness of the moral claim that God's presence makes upon the way in which we live.

But it is very evident that this person-making process, leading eventually to perfect human community, is not completed on this Earth. It is not completed in the life of the individual—or at best only in the few who have attained

⁹*eschatological*: relating to *eschatology*, the branch of theology that concerns the end of the world, divine judgment, and the afterlife. [D. C. ABEL]

¹⁰*egoity*: selfhood. [D. C. ABEL]

to sanctification, or *moksha*,¹¹ or nirvana¹² on this Earth. Clearly the enormous majority of men and women die without having attained to this. As Eric Fromm has said, "The tragedy in the life of most of us is that we die before we are fully born."¹³ And therefore if we are ever to reach the full realization of the potentialities of our human nature, this can only be in a continuation of our lives in another sphere of existence after bodily death. And it is equally evident that the perfect all-embracing human community, in which self-regarding concern has been transcended in mutual love, not only has not been realized in this world, but never can be, since hundreds of generations of human beings have already lived and died and accordingly could not be part of any ideal community established at some future moment of earthly history. Thus if the unity of humankind in God's presence is ever to be realized it will have to be in some sphere of existence other than our Earth. In short, the fulfillment of the divine purpose, as it is postulated in the Irenaean type of theodicy, presupposes each person's survival, in some form of bodily death, and further living and growing towards that end-state. Without such an eschatological fulfillment, this theodicy would collapse. . . .

On this view the human, endowed with a real though limited freedom, is basically formed for relationship with God and destined ultimately to find the fulfillment of his or her nature in that relationship. This does not seem to me excessively paradoxical. On the contrary, given the theistic postulate, it seems to me to offer a very probable account of our human situation.

¹¹*moksha*: in Hindu doctrine, liberation, emancipation. [D. C. ABEL]

¹²*nirvana*: in Buddhist doctrine, the extinction of desire, which brings complete liberation from suffering. [D. C. ABEL]

¹³Erich Fromm, "Values, Psychology and Human Existence," in *New Knowledge in Human Values*, ed. Abraham H. Maslow (New York: Harper, 1959), p. 156. [J. HICK]