

B. The Problem of Evil

READING 8

On Free Choice of the Will

Augustine

Augustine was born in 354 in the town of Tagaste in northern Africa (now Souk-Ahras, Algeria). As a youth he received instruction in Christianity but was not baptized. At 17, he went to Carthage to study rhetoric, which he later taught at Tagaste, Carthage, Rome, and Milan. In 373 Augustine became a member of the Manichaean religion, which held that the equally powerful forces of Light (goodness) and Darkness (evil) govern the universe. Ten years later he abandoned Manichaeism and became attracted to skepticism, the view that it is impossible to attain truth. Augustine then became deeply influenced by the works of Plotinus, an Egyptian-born Roman philosopher who saw himself carrying forward the theories of Plato. When teaching in Milan, Augustine went to hear the sermons of the Catholic bishop Ambrose to study their rhetorical style, but he ended up paying attention to their content. After a dramatic conversion experience, he was baptized by Ambrose in 387. Augustine returned to Tagaste, where he and some friends set up a sort of monastery. In 391 he was ordained a priest at Hippo (now Annaba, Algeria) and four years later became bishop. He remained bishop until his death in 430. Augustine's works include *On Free Choice of the Will* (begun in 388, finished in 395), the *Confessions* (his autobiography, written between 397 and 401), *On the Trinity* (399–419), and *The City of God* (413–426).

Our reading is from Book I of *On Free Choice of the Will*, a work cast as a dialogue between Augustine and his friend Evodius. The topic of the conversation is stated by Evodius in the opening line: "Please tell me: Isn't God the cause of evil?" Augustine begins his answer to Evodius's question by distinguishing the evil that people *suffer* from the evil that they *do*. He argues that God causes the former kind of evil as just punishment for people's sins, but that God does not cause the latter kind. Evil-doers themselves are the cause of the evil they commit because they choose evil by their own free will (hence the title of the dialogue). Augustine holds that the essence of all evil-doing is inordinate desire, and that inordinate desire consists of pursuing temporal and changeable things, which can be lost against our will, at the expense of eternal and unchangeable things, which cannot be lost against our will. Because the mind is stronger than desire, if we yield to temptation and choose the temporal and changeable over the eternal and unchangeable, we do so through our own free choice. And because our evil-doing is voluntary, it is just for God to punish us for it.

BOOK ONE

Chapter 1

EVODIUS: Please tell me: Isn't God the cause of evil?

AUGUSTINE: I will tell you once you have made clear what kind of evil you are asking about. For we use the word "evil" in two senses: first, when

we say that someone has *done* evil; and second, when we say that someone has *suffered* evil.

EVODIUS: I want to know about both.

AUGUSTINE: But if you know or believe that God is good—and it is not right to believe otherwise—then he does no evil. On the other hand, if we acknowledge that God is just—and it is impious to deny it—then he rewards the good and punishes the wicked. Those punishments are certainly evils for those who suffer them. Therefore, if no one is punished unjustly—and we must believe this, since we believe that this universe is governed by divine providence—it follows that God is a cause of the second kind of evil, but in no way causes the first kind.

EVODIUS: Then is there some other cause of the evil that God does not cause?

AUGUSTINE: There certainly is. Such evil could not occur unless someone caused it. But if you ask who that someone is, it is impossible to say. For there is no single cause of evil; rather, everyone who does evil is the cause of his own evil-doing. If you doubt this, recall what I said earlier: Evil deeds are punished by the justice of God. They would not be punished unjustly if they had not been performed voluntarily.

EVODIUS: It seems that no one could sin unless he had first learned how to sin.

And if that is the case, I must ask this: From whom did we learn to sin?

AUGUSTINE: Do you think learning is a good thing?

EVODIUS: Who would dare to say that learning is a bad thing?

AUGUSTINE: What if it is neither good nor bad?

EVODIUS: I think it is good.

AUGUSTINE: Indeed it is, since knowledge is given or awakened through learning, and no one comes to know anything except through learning. Don't you agree?

EVODIUS: I think that we come to know only good things through learning.

AUGUSTINE: Then we do not come to know evil things; for the word "learning" is correctly applied only when we come to know something.

EVODIUS: But if we do not come to know evil things, how is it that human beings perform evil acts?

AUGUSTINE: Perhaps because they turn away from learning and become strangers to it. But whether that is the correct explanation or not, one thing is certainly clear: Since learning is good, and the word "learning" is correctly applied only when we come to know something, we simply cannot come to know evil things. If we could, then they would be part of learning, and so learning would not be a good thing. But it *is* a good thing, as you said yourself. Therefore, we do not come to know evil things, and there is no point in your asking from whom we learn to do evil things. Or else we do come to know them, but only as things to be avoided, not as things to be done. It follows that doing evil is nothing but running away from learning.

EVODIUS: I rather think that there are two sorts of learning: one by means of which we learn to do right, and another by means of which we learn to do evil. But when you asked whether learning was good, the love of

good itself caught my attention, and I saw only the sort of learning by which we learn to do right. That is why I answered that it is good. But now I remember that there is another sort of learning. I have no doubt that it is evil, and I would like to know its cause.

AUGUSTINE: Do you at least consider understanding good?

EVODIUS: Certainly. I consider it so good that I cannot see how any human trait could be better. And I would in no way say that any understanding can be bad.

AUGUSTINE: When someone is being taught but does not understand, would you think that he has learned?

EVODIUS: Of course not.

AUGUSTINE: Well then, if all understanding is good, and no one who does not understand learns, then everyone who learns is doing good. For everyone who learns, understands; and everyone who understands is doing good. So someone who wants to know the cause of our learning something really wants to know the cause of our doing good. So let's have no more of your wanting to hunt down this mysterious evil teacher. If he is evil, he is no teacher; and if he is a teacher, he is not evil.

Chapter 2

EVODIUS: Now that you have convinced me that we do not learn to do evil, please explain to me what *is* the source of our evildoing.

AUGUSTINE: You have hit upon the very question that worried me greatly when I was still young, a question that wore me out, drove me into the company of heretics,¹ and knocked me flat on my face. I was so hurt by this fall, buried under a mountain of silly fairy tales, that if my love of finding the truth had not secured divine help, I would not have been able to get out from under them to breathe freely and begin to seek the truth. And since such pains were taken to free me from this difficulty, I will lead you on the same path that I followed in making my escape. God will be with us, and he will make us understand what we have believed. For we are well aware that we are at the stage described by the prophet, who says, "Unless you believe, you will not understand."² We believe that everything that exists comes from the one God, and yet we believe that God is not the cause of sins. What is troubling is that if you admit that sins come from the souls that God created, and those souls come from God, pretty soon you'll be tracing those sins back to God.

EVODIUS: You have stated plainly what bothers me in thinking about this question. That is the problem that has compelled me and drawn me into this inquiry.

¹Augustine refers to the Manichaeans, who held that the source of evil is the principle of Darkness, which is in eternal combat with the principle of Light (goodness). [D. C. ABEL]

²Isaiah 7:9. The text of the Hebrew Scriptures that Augustine used was a Latin translation of the Greek Septuagint version. Sometimes, as here, the Septuagint rendering of the original Hebrew is inaccurate. The Hebrew of Isaiah 7:9 means "Have faith, or you will not stand firm" (New English Bible). [D. C. ABEL]

AUGUSTINE: Be courageous and go on believing what you believe. There is no better belief, even if you do not yet see the explanation for why it is true. The truest beginning of piety is to think as highly of God as possible; and doing so means that one must believe that he is omnipotent, and not changeable in the smallest respect; that he is the creator of all good things, but is himself more excellent than all of them; that he is the supremely just ruler of everything that he created; and that he was not aided in creating by any other being, as if he were not sufficiently powerful by himself. It follows that he created all things from nothing. He did not create from himself, but generated one who is equal to himself, whom we call the only Son of God. In trying to describe the Son more clearly we call him "the power of God and the wisdom of God,"³ through whom God made all the things that were made from nothing. On that basis let us try, with God's help, to achieve an understanding of the problem you have raised.

Chapter 3

AUGUSTINE: You want to know the source of our evildoing. So we must first discuss what evildoing *is*. State your view on the matter. If you cannot explain the whole thing at once in a few words, you can at least show me your view by naming particular evil deeds.

EVODIUS: Adultery, murder, and sacrilege, not to mention others that time and memory do not permit me to enumerate. Who could fail to recognize these as evil deeds?

AUGUSTINE: Tell me first, why do you think adultery is evil? Because the law forbids it?

EVODIUS: On the contrary. Clearly, it is not evil because the law forbids it; rather, the law forbids it because it is evil.

AUGUSTINE: But suppose someone were to make things difficult for us by extolling the pleasures of adultery and asking why we think adultery evil and deserving of condemnation. Surely you do not think that people who want to understand, and not merely to believe, would have to take refuge in an appeal to the authority of the law? Now like you I do believe, and believe most firmly, and cry out that all peoples and nations should believe, that adultery is evil. But now we are attempting to know and hold firmly by understanding what we have already accepted by faith. So think this over as carefully as you can, and tell me what reason you have by which you know that adultery is evil.

EVODIUS: I know that it is evil because I would not tolerate it if someone tried to commit adultery with my own wife. Anyone who does to another what he does not want done to himself does evil.

AUGUSTINE: What if someone's lust is so great that he offers his wife to another and willingly allows him to commit adultery with her, and is eager to enjoy the same freedom with the other man's wife? Do you think that this man has done nothing evil?

³1 Corinthians 1:24. [T. WILLIAMS, TRANSLATOR]

EVODIUS: Far from it!

AUGUSTINE: But by your rule he does not sin, since he is not doing anything that he is unwilling to have done to himself. You must therefore look for some other argument to show that adultery is evil.

EVODIUS: The reason that I think it is evil is that I have often seen people condemned for this crime.

AUGUSTINE: But haven't people often been condemned for good deeds? Not to refer you to any other books, recall the story that is superior to all others by virtue of its divine authority. There you will find that we must think very poorly of the apostles and martyrs if we intend to make condemnation a sure sign of wrongdoing. All of them were judged worthy of condemnation because of their confession of faith. It follows that if everything that is condemned is evil, it was evil in those days to believe in Christ and to confess that faith. But if not everything that is condemned is evil, find some other way to show why adultery is evil.

EVODIUS: I can't think how to respond.

AUGUSTINE: Then perhaps what makes adultery evil is inordinate desire, whereas so long as you look for the evil in the external, visible act, you are bound to encounter difficulties. In order to understand that inordinate desire is what makes adultery evil, consider this: If a man is unable to sleep with someone else's wife, but it is somehow clear that he would like to, and would do so if he had the chance, he is no less guilty than if he were caught in the act.

EVODIUS: Nothing could be clearer. Now I see that there is no need for a long discussion to persuade me that this is the case with murder and sacrilege and every sin whatsoever. For it is clear now that inordinate desire is what drives every kind of evil doing.

Chapter 4

AUGUSTINE: Do you know that inordinate desire is also called "cupidity"?

EVODIUS: Yes.

AUGUSTINE: Do you think there is any difference between cupidity and fear? Or are they quite the same?

EVODIUS: Indeed, I think there is a huge difference between the two.

AUGUSTINE: I suppose you think so because cupidity desires its object, and fear flees from it.

EVODIUS: You're quite right.

AUGUSTINE: Then suppose a man kills someone, not out of cupidity for something that he desires to gain, but because he fears that some harm will come to himself. Would he be a murderer?

EVODIUS: Yes, he would. But even in this deed, cupidity is the driving force—for a man who kills someone out of fear surely desires to live without fear.

AUGUSTINE: Do you think that living without fear is a small good?

EVODIUS: It is a great good, but that murderer cannot achieve it by his action.

AUGUSTINE: I am not asking what he can achieve, but what he desires. Someone who desires a life free from fear certainly desires a good thing, so his desire is not blameworthy; otherwise we will have to blame everyone who loves the good. Consequently, we will have to say that there is an instance of murder in which cupidity is not the driving force; and it will be false that inordinate desire is what drives all sins, to the extent that they are evil. Either that, or there will be an instance of murder that is not sinful.

EVODIUS: If murder is just killing a human being, then there can be murder that is not sinful. When a soldier kills the enemy, when a judge or his representative puts a criminal to death, or when a weapon accidentally slips out of someone's hand without his willing or noticing it—these people do not seem to me to be sinning when they kill someone.

AUGUSTINE: I agree, but such people are not usually called murderers. So consider someone who kills his master because he fears severe torture. Do you think that he should be classed among those who kill a human being but do not deserve to be called murderers?

EVODIUS: I think this case is entirely different. In the earlier examples, those men are acting in accordance with the law, or at least not contrary to the law; but no law approves of the deed in your example.

AUGUSTINE: Again you refer me to authority. You must remember that we took up this discussion in order to understand what we believe. We believe the laws, and so we must try to understand, if we can, whether the law that punishes this deed does so unjustly.

EVODIUS: It is in no way unjust to punish someone who knowingly and willingly kills his master. None of the men in my earlier examples did that.

AUGUSTINE: But do you not remember that a little while ago you said that inordinate desire is what drives every evil deed, and that this is the very reason why the deed is evil?

EVODIUS: Of course I remember.

AUGUSTINE: And did you not also grant that someone who desires to live without fear does not have an evil desire?

EVODIUS: I remember that too.

AUGUSTINE: It follows that, since the master is killed by the slave as a result of this desire, he is not killed as a result of a blameworthy desire. And so we have not yet figured out why this deed is evil. For we are agreed that all wrongdoing is evil only because it results from inordinate desire, that is, from blameworthy cupidity.

EVODIUS: At this point it seems to me that the slave is unjustly condemned, which I would not dream of saying if I could think of some other response.

AUGUSTINE: You have let yourself be persuaded that this great crime should go unpunished, without considering whether the slave wanted to be free of the fear of his master in order to satisfy his own inordinate desires. All wicked people, just like good people, desire to live without

fear. The difference is that the good, in desiring this, turn their love away from things that cannot be possessed without the fear of losing them. The wicked, on the other hand, try to get rid of anything that prevents them from enjoying such things securely. Thus they lead a wicked and criminal life, which would better be called death.

EVODIUS: Now I've come to my senses. I am glad that I understand so clearly the nature of that blameworthy cupidity that is called inordinate desire. Obviously it is the love of those things that one can lose against one's will. . . .

Chapter 10

. . . AUGUSTINE: Do you think that inordinate desire is more powerful than the mind, which we know is granted control over inordinate desires by the eternal law? I do not think so at all, for it would violate perfect order if the weaker controlled the stronger. Therefore, I think the mind must be more powerful than cupidity, precisely because it is right and just for the mind to rule over cupidity.

EVODIUS: I think so too.

AUGUSTINE: And surely we do not doubt that every virtue is superior to every vice, so that the better and more sublime the virtue, the stronger and more invincible it is.

EVODIUS: Who could doubt that?

AUGUSTINE: Then no vicious spirit defeats a spirit armed with virtue.

EVODIUS: Quite correct.

AUGUSTINE: And I don't think you will deny that any sort of spirit is better and more powerful than any material object.

EVODIUS: No one will deny it who sees (as is easy to do) that a living substance is better than a nonliving one, and one that gives life is better than one that receives life.

AUGUSTINE: Much less, then, can a material object of any sort overpower a spirit endowed with virtue.

EVODIUS: That is quite obvious.

AUGUSTINE: Can a just spirit (a mind that is preserving its proper right and authority) take another mind that is ruling with the same equity and virtue, drive it from its stronghold, and subject it to inordinate desire?

EVODIUS: Not at all, for two reasons. First, each mind possesses the same degree of excellence. And second, any mind that would attempt such a thing must have already fallen from justice and become vicious, and therefore weaker.

AUGUSTINE: Very sharp. It remains for you to say, if you can, whether you think anything is superior to a rational and wise mind.

EVODIUS: Nothing but God, I think.

AUGUSTINE: That is my view as well. But it is a difficult matter, and this is not the time to attempt to come to understand it, although we hold it most firmly by faith. We must complete our careful and deliberate investigation of the question at hand.

Chapter 11

AUGUSTINE: In the present case we can be sure that whatever nature is by right superior to a mind empowered by virtue, it cannot be an unjust one. Therefore, even if it has the power to do so, it will not force the mind to be a slave to inordinate desire.

EVODIUS: Thus far there is nothing that anyone would have the smallest hesitation about accepting.

AUGUSTINE: The conclusions that we have reached thus far indicate that a mind that is in control (one that possesses virtue) cannot be made a slave to inordinate desire by anything equal or superior to it, because such a thing would be just, or by anything inferior to it, because such a thing would be too weak. Just one possibility remains: Only its own will and free choice can make the mind a companion of cupidity.

EVODIUS: I can't see any other alternative.

AUGUSTINE: Then you must also think that the mind justly suffers punishment for so great a sin.

EVODIUS: I cannot deny it.

AUGUSTINE: Surely the very fact that inordinate desire rules the mind is itself no small punishment. Stripped by opposing forces of the splendid wealth of virtue, the mind is dragged by inordinate desire into ruin and poverty; now taking false things for true, and even defending those falsehoods repeatedly; now repudiating what it had once believed and nonetheless rushing headlong into still other falsehoods; now withholding assent and often shying away from clear arguments; now despairing completely of finding the truth and lingering in the shadows of folly; now trying to enter the light of understanding but reeling back in exhaustion.

In the meantime cupidity carries out a reign of terror, buffeting the whole human soul and life with storms coming from every direction. Fear attacks from one side and desire from the other; from one side, anxiety; from the other, an empty and deceptive happiness; from one side, the agony of losing what one loved; from the other, the passion to acquire what one did not have; from one side, the pain of an injury received; from the other, the burning desire to avenge it. Wherever you turn, avarice can pinch, extravagance squander, ambition destroy, pride swell, envy torment, apathy crush, obstinacy incite, oppression chafe, and countless other evils crowd the realm of inordinate desire and run riot. In short, can we consider this punishment trivial—a punishment that, as you realize, all who do not cleave to wisdom must suffer? . . .

Chapter 12

. . . AUGUSTINE: . . . Tell me this: Do we have a will?

EVODIUS: I don't know.

AUGUSTINE: Do you want to know?

EVODIUS: I don't know that either.

AUGUSTINE: Then don't ask me any more questions.

EVODIUS: Why not?

AUGUSTINE: First, because there's no reason for me to answer your questions unless you want to know the answer. Second, because I should not discuss these sorts of things with you unless you want to attain wisdom. And finally, because you can't be my friend unless you want things to go well for me. But surely you have already seen whether you will your own happiness.

EVODIUS: You're right; it can't be denied that we have a will. Do go on—let's see what you deduce from that fact.

AUGUSTINE: I shall. But first tell me whether you think you have a *good* will.

EVODIUS: What is a good will?

AUGUSTINE: It is a will by which we desire to live upright and honorable lives and to attain the highest wisdom. So just ask yourself: Do you desire an upright and honorable life and fervently will to be wise? And is it indisputable that when we will these things, we have a good will?

EVODIUS: My answer to both questions is yes. I now admit that I have not just a will, but a good will.

AUGUSTINE: How highly do you value this will? You surely do not think it should be compared with wealth or honors or physical pleasures, or even all of these together.

EVODIUS: God forbid such wicked madness!

AUGUSTINE: Then should we not rejoice a little that we have something in our souls—this very thing that I call a good will—in comparison with which those things we mentioned are utterly worthless, things that a great many human beings will spare no effort and shirk no danger to obtain?

EVODIUS: Indeed, we should rejoice greatly.

AUGUSTINE: Then do you think that those who do not attain such joy suffer a small loss by missing so great a good?

EVODIUS: It is a great loss.

AUGUSTINE: Then I believe you realize that it is up to our will whether we enjoy or lack such a great and true good. For what is so much in the power of the will as the will itself? To have a good will is to have something far more valuable than all earthly kingdoms and pleasures; to lack it is to lack something that only the will itself can give, something that is better than all the goods that are not in our power. Some people consider themselves utterly miserable if they do not achieve a splendid reputation, great wealth, and various goods of the body. But don't you consider them utterly miserable, even if they have all these things, when they cleave to things that they can quite easily lose, things that they do not have simply in virtue of willing them, while they lack a good will, which is incomparably better than those things and yet, even though it is such a great good, can be theirs if only they will to have it?

EVODIUS: I certainly do.

AUGUSTINE: Then fools, even if they were never wise (which is a doubtful and obscure issue), are justly and deservedly afflicted with such misery.

EVODIUS: I agree. . . .

Chapter 14

AUGUSTINE: . . . Do you think that there is anyone who does not in every way will and desire a happy life?

EVODIUS: Clearly, every human being wills that.

AUGUSTINE: Then why doesn't everyone attain it? We have found that it is by the will that human beings deserve—and therefore receive—either a happy or an unhappy life. There's a sort of contradiction here; unless we take great care to examine it, it will undermine our careful and persuasive argument. How can anyone suffer an unhappy life by the will, when absolutely no one wills to be unhappy? Or to put it another way, how can we claim that it is by the will that human beings achieve a happy life, when so many are unhappy despite the fact that everyone wills to be happy?

Perhaps it is because it is one thing to will rightly or wrongly, and quite another to deserve something because of a good or bad will. Those who are happy, who must also be good, are not happy simply because they will to be happy—even the wicked will that—but because they will it in the right way, whereas the wicked do not. So it's no surprise that unhappy human beings do not attain the happy life that they will. For they do not likewise will the one thing that goes along with the happy life, without which no one attains it or is worthy to attain it—and that is, to live rightly. For the eternal law (to which it is time for us to return) has established with unshakable firmness that the will is rewarded with happiness or punished with unhappiness depending on its merit. And so when we say that it is by the will that human beings are unhappy, we don't mean that they will to be unhappy, but that their will is in such a state that unhappiness must follow whether they will it or not. So it does not contradict our earlier argument to say that everyone wills to be happy but not everyone can be; for not everyone has the will to live rightly, which must accompany the will to live happily. Or do you have some objection to make?

EVODIUS: None at all. . . .

Chapter 16

AUGUSTINE: . . . We have clearly and carefully distinguished between two sorts of things, eternal and temporal; and in turn between two sorts of human beings, those who pursue and love eternal things and those who pursue and love temporal things. We have determined that the choice to follow and embrace one or the other lies with the will, and that only the will can depose the mind from its stronghold of power and deprive it of right order. And it has become clear that we should not blame anything when someone uses the will wrongly; we should blame the one who uses it wrongly. Given all of that, why don't we return to the question we posed at the beginning of this discussion and see whether it has been answered.

We set out to discover what evildoing is. This whole discussion was aimed at answering that question. So we are now in a position to ask whether evildoing is anything other than neglecting eternal things (which the mind perceives and enjoys by means of itself and which it cannot lose if it loves them) and instead pursuing temporal things (which are perceived by means of the body, the least valuable part of a human being, and which can never be certain) as if they were great and marvelous things. It seems to me that all evil deeds—that is, all sins—fall into this one category. But I want to know what you think about this.

EVODIUS: I agree; all sins come about when someone turns away from divine things that truly persist and toward changeable and uncertain things. These things do have their proper place, and they have a certain beauty of their own; but when a perverse and disordered soul pursues them it becomes enslaved to the very things that divine order and law command it to rule over.

And I think that we have answered another question. After we asked what evildoing is, we set out to discover the source of our evildoing. Now unless I am mistaken, our argument showed that we do evil by free choice of the will.

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

⁴metaphysical: relating to *metaphysics*, the study of the nature and kinds of reality. [D. C. ABEL]
⁵ontological: 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?

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."

[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.

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

³Joshua 10:12–13. [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. . . .

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]

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

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

¹⁰egoity: selfhood. [D. C. ABEL]

to sanctification, or *moksha*,¹¹ or *nirvana*¹² 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]

Introduction to Philosophy

First Exam

Address two of the following topics in no more than seven typed pages. Make appropriate use in your answers of the course readings and of the critical analysis of the readings in class.

1. How and why does Plato argue against the divine command theory of morality? How does Plato's critique of the Olympian deities pave the way for the later fusion of Greek philosophy and Judaic-Christianity? Show how the dialogue, the Euthyphro, embodies Plato's conception of philosophy in terms of the allegory of the cave and the divided line.
2. (a) Restate and critically examine Anselm's ontological argument for the existence of God. (b) Restate and critically examine *one* of Aquinas' first three cosmological arguments for the existence of God.
3. Does Paley's design argument necessarily prove the existence of God conceived as a supremely perfect being? Why or why not? Consider Dawkins' and Hume's criticisms of the argument. How does Aquinas' fifth cosmological argument differ from the eighteenth-century deistic version of Paley? Does it succeed against Dawkins? Why or why not?
4. Is belief in the existence of a supremely perfect deity compatible or incompatible with natural and moral evil? Justify your answer. Work with Hick and Mackie.