1952

A Study of the Finite God of Edgar Sheffield Brightman

Justin Donald Hayes
Loyola University Chicago

A STUDY OF THE FINITE GOD OF EDGAR SHEFFIELD BRIGHTMAN

by

J. Donald Hayes, S. J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

February

1952

LIFE

Justin Donald Hayes was born in Chicago, Illinois, October 15, 1925.

He was graduated from Loyola Academy, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1943, and in August of that same year entered the novitiate of the Society of Jesus at Milford, Ohio. He was graduated from Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois, June, 1948, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

During the summers of 1948 and 1949 the author studied French at Laval University, Quebec, Canada. From 1950 to 1951 he taught Latin and American History at St. Xavier High School, Cincinnati, Ohio. He began his graduate studies at Loyola University in September, 1948. At present he is continuing these studies at St. Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The year 1951 has been called the year of confusion. Many people attacking both the entire recent foreign policy of the United States and the United Nations' methods in Korea have branded each with the stigma of CONFUSION. The Truman-MacArthur controversy has only perplexed people more. The Kefauver investigation of organized gambling within the borders of America has so aroused public opinion that the whole nation is wondering what the complete story is. More recently crime investigations of large-scale dope peddling, million-dollar narcotic rings, and scandals among public officers have left the man on the street bewildered. Even as this chapter is being written, truce talks are being inaugurated in Korea. The average citizen is still confused about the issues at stake, wondering what the common ground might be for a lasting negotiated peace in Korea between the Communists and ourselves. There are so many opinions, so many reports, so much conjecture and uncertainty, is it any wonder that we are confused? We seem to have lost sight of anything absolute or ultimate on which to base our judgements.

If we look at some of the modern views of God, we can-

not help getting the impression of confusion here too. God is everything from a universal world spirit to a poor suffering being who needs our help as well as our pity. Atheism, pantheism, deism, personalism, finitism, and a host of other "isms"--all with different viewpoints of God, all with their staunch defenders! As we consider these two types of confusion, about God and about present-day world situations, the thought strikes us that they seem like two manifestations of the same root, two effects of the same causes. This is not surprising. Our confusion about what man is and what our relation to our fellow man is, reflects our confusion about what God is and what our relation to Him is.

One of the more popular beliefs in modern times, the one to which our present study is devoted, is theistic finitism. This is simply the belief that God is finite. S. S. Laurie in his two volume work, Synthetica, has left us a modern philosopher faced with an ancient problem. Laurie encounters the problem of the meaning of evil, and he asks an old question: "How is Evil possible if God be One, All-powerful, and Good?"[1] Laurie defines evil as "the failure of God-creative to realize the ideal of the individual and of the whole on the plane of Being which man occupies."[2] Because there is evil in the world, because there are

---

1 S. S. Laurie, Synthetica, II, New York, 1906, 283.

2 Ibid., 286.

flaws in the universe, Laurie concludes that God cannot be all-powerful; He must be finite. God has a lot of good will, tries hard, but often fails.

> Does God truly fail? Our answer must be, Assuredly: and the failure is more conspicuous, the higher the grade of finite being. I think it is Epictetus who says that God does not "take aim for the purpose of missing the mark"; but without doubt, here and now, the mark is constantly missed.[3]

John McT. Ellis McTaggart is another Twentieth Century representative of the theory of a limited God. With him the theory grows out of the problem of time. He claims there can be no causal relation between two substances, one or both of which is out of time. He illustrates the point by imagining there exists a timeless God. Such a God, however, cannot be the cause of the world. In fact, between such a God and the world there can be no causal relation at all.[4] McTaggart treats of the problem of a finite God is some detail in his book The Nature of Existence, especially in a chapter of the second volume entitled "God and Immortality." There McTaggart gives us his definition of God:

> I take the word God to mean a being who is personal, supreme, and good. Personality is the quality of being a self....In including supremacy in the definition of the quality of deity, I do not mean that a being should not be called a God unless he is omnipotent, but that he must

---

3 Ibid., 287.

4 John McT. Ellis McTaggart, Philosophical Studies London, 1934, 170.

> be, at the least, much more powerful than any other self, and so powerful that his volition can affect profoundly all else that exists. In including goodness, I do not mean that a being should not be called a God unless he is morally perfect, but that he must be, at the least, more good than evil.[5]

McTaggart is not unaware that most of the theists believe that God is omnipotent, the creator of all else that exists, and absolutely perfect.[6] Even so, McTaggart sticks to his position and does not hedge even when he says that he is doubtful that his God is of much religious value.[7] This is what McTaggart understands by God, but does he actually hold that such a God exists? He claims there seems no reason why there should not be such a person as his God. On the other hand, there seems no reason why there should be such a person. So McTaggart concludes: "Our conclusions invalidate the usual, and the strongest arguments for the existence of such a being."[8] There cannot be much doubt, then, as to McTaggart's real position. God for him means a finite God; but when it comes to the actual existence of this finite God, McTaggart is really an atheist, or at least an agnostic.[9]

---

5 John McT. Ellis McTaggart, The Nature of Existence, II, Cambridge, 1927, 176.

6 Ibid., 177.

7 Ibid., 183.

8 Ibid., 184.

9 Ibid.

Hastings Rashdall in his book The Theory of Godd and Evil also considers the finiteness of God. He meets the same difficulty occasioned by the existence of evil. It is his belief that evil must be supposed to exist as the necessary means to good.[10] This fact, Rashdall is forced to admit, implies a limitation to divine omnipotence.[11] He thus explains that evil is due to a limitation of God's power rather than to a limitation of His goodness. Again we see, and we shall see it in even greater detail later in this thesis, that the whole question of good and evil is intimately bound up with the theory of God's finiteness. Lewis R. Farnell in the following passage has summarized well the position of Rashdall:

> God created souls, even the bad soul, and the best world he could, because he is finite and could create only what was in his nature to create, and he has often to do evil as a means to good: there is in the ultimate nature of things, that is to say, the ultimate nature of God-- an inherent reason why greater good should not be obtainable.[12]

The idea that God is both one and finite appears rather late in history as a popular belief. It is true that the ancient Greeks and Romans as well as all the gentiles had a sort of hier-

---

10 Hastings Rashdall, The Theory of Good and Evil, Oxford, 1907, 235.

11 Ibid., 237.

12 Lewis Richard Farnell, The Attributes of God, Oxford, 1925, 276.

archy of gods. All these gods, indeed, would have to be considered finite. Some commentators would hold that Plato believed in a finite God.[13] The notion of God, however, which was inherited from the Jewish race and preserved and expounded throughout the Christian centuries had always been the one,[14] simple,[15] eternal,[16] infinite,[17] perfect,[18] good[19] God of St. Thomas and the other scholastics. To make God finite or anything less than omnipotent was to destroy the whole notion of God. For long centuries Christian Western civilization adored a God both infinite in power and infinite in goodness. In recent centuries, however, there has arisen this belief in a finite God. In viewing briefly this change from the notion of an infinite God to that of a finite God, it will be well to consider three influences, David Hume, John Stuart Mill, and William James.

In his work, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, published after his death, David Hume makes mention in passing

---

13 Edgar Sheffield Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, New York, 1945, 289.

14 C. G., I, 42.

15 S. T., I, 3, 7.

16 C. G., I, 15.

17 Ibid., 43.

18 S. T., I, 4, 1.

19 C. G., I, 38.

of the theory that God is finite. The Dialogues is one of the first treatises to appear in English where this theory is even mentioned. The Dialogues take place between Philo, Cleanthes, and Demea; however, it is never entirely clear which of these is speaking Hume's true mind. Norman Kemp Smith in his edition of the Dialogues[20] identifies Hume with Philo. Most of the previous commentators had taken Cleanthes for the real Hume.[21] Be this as it may, both seem to subscribe at times to the idea of God's finiteness. It is Cleanthes in Part XI of the Dialogues who makes the suggestion:

> But supposing the Author of nature to be finitely perfect though far exceeding mankind; a satisfactory account may then be given of natural and moral evils, and every untoward phenomenon be explained and adjusted. A less evil may then be chosen, in order to reach a desirable end: And in a word, benevolence, regulated by wisdom, and limited by necessity, may produce just such a world as the present.[22]

Hume's characters themselves make it sufficiently clear that their author realized the novelty of this idea of a finite God. Speaking to Philo, Cleanthes says that "he would gladly hear,at length, without interruption, your opinion of this new theory."[23]

---

20 Norman Kemp Smith, Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, Oxford, 1947, 22.

21 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 293.

22 Smith, Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, 203.

23 Ibid. Emphasis is mine.

Philo answers that there are four circumstances on which the greater part of the ills that beset sensible creatures depend. Because of these assorted evils that are present in the universe, Philo cannot see a ground for inferring there exists a divine goodness. He claims that if infinity is excluded from the divine attributes, we may be able to show a consistence pointing to the goodness of God. However, these conjectures about God's goodness can never be foundations for any inference that God actually is good.[24] Although Philo's real position seems to be that of a skeptic,[25] he tries at times to champion the cause of God's finiteness. Thus in Chapter V he argues against Cleanthes with somewhat questionable logic. The cause, he says, ought to be proportioned to the effect. The effect, however, as far as we know it, is not infinite. How, then, can we ascribe infinity to the Divine Being which is the cause?[26] Yet in almost the next line Philo is favoring the cause of an infinite God. Proof for such a God must be *a priori*:

> There are many inexplicable difficulties in the works of nature, which, if we allow a perfect Author to be proved *a priori*, are easily solved, and become only seemingly difficulties, from the narrow capacity of man, who cannot

---

24 *Ibid.*, 205.

25 *Ibid.*, 213.

26 *Ibid.*, 166.

trace infinite relations.[27]

Hume's position, then, with regard to the theory of a finite God, was that of the first English draftsman. Certainly he was one of the first men to sketch in the English language the outlines of this doctrine. As we have already mentioned, Hume's Dialogues was a posthumous work published in 1779. Much of Hume's thought was already suspect among the English readers of his day, and it may be that he thought mentioning this new theory of a finite God during his lifetime would only antagonize them. We can agree essentially with Julius S. Bixler's comment on Hume's contribution to the finite God theory:

> Hume in his essay on The Natural History of Religion observes that theism developed out of polytheism by increasing "adulation". That is to say, men vied with each other in ascribing greatness to the Deity until he finally became as great as their words could make him. And in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, he hints that absolutism may have come about in much the same way, and that both philosophy and religion would be better off if the conception of an infinite God were superseded by "a more accurate and moderate" idea.[28]

The first man of really great significance to develop that rough, sketchy outline of Hume's was John Stuart Mill. It was nearly one hundred years after the appearance of the Dia-

---

27 Ibid., 166.

28 Julius Seelye Bixler, Religion in the Philosophy of William James, Boston, 1926, 140.

logues of Hume (1779) that Mill's Three Essays on Religion (1874) was published. We might remark in passing that this, too, was a posthumous work. Mill rejects the argument for the existence of God from the necessity of a first cause,[29] also the one from the general consent of mankind,[30] as well as all a priori proofs, whatever particular form they take.[31] About the proof for God's existence from the marks of design in the universe, Mill cautiously admits:

> It must be allowed that in the present state of our knowledge, the adaptations in Nature afford a large balance of probability in favor of creation by intelligence. It is equally certain that this is no more than probability.[32]

Talking about this same proof from design, Mill states in another place that a very little consideration is enough to show that[33] "though it has some force, its force is very generally overrated."

It is necessary, first of all, to understand what Mill says about nature if we are to try to understand his thinking on the problem of God. In the first of his Three Essays on Religion Mill takes for his subject "Nature." He concludes that the

---

29 John Stuart Mill, Three Essays on Religion, New York, 1874, 153.

30 Ibid., 160.

31 Ibid., 163.

32 Ibid., 174.

33 Ibid., 168.

word nature denotes two things, either "the entire system of things" or "things as they would be, apart from human intervention."[34] In the first sense, the doctrine that man ought to follow nature is unmeaning, since man cannot do anything else than follow nature. In the second sense of the term, the doctrine that man ought to follow nature is irrational and immoral. If man followed nature, for example, if he lived like the animals, he would wound, kill, and devour other men as well as other animals. This is what seems to be in the back of Mill's mind when he says that to follow nature is irrational and immoral.[35] In this section of his essay there seems to be no indication that there might be an essential distinction between man and brute, animal and rational animal.[36] If such a distinction were made, then man could follow nature, his nature, and thus not act like a brute beast.

For Mill, the evils of nature are a tremendous difficulty. The terror of a hurricane, the destruction of a flight of locusts or a flood,[37] the fact that "a large proportion of all animals should pass their existence in tormenting and devour-

---

34 Ibid., 64.

35 Ibid., 65.

36 Ibid., 55-65.

37 Ibid., 30.

ing other animals,"[38] that these animals "have been lavishly fitted out with the instruments necessary for that purpose; their strongest instincts impel them to it, and many of them seem to have been constructed incapable of supporting themselves by any other food."[39]--all these phenomena bewilder Mill. The only answer to these difficulties he sees in the fact that God must be finite. "If we are not obliged to believe the animal creation to be the work of a demon, it is because we need not suppose it to have been made by a Being of infinite power."[40] This, then, is where Mill's consideration of nature has led him, namely, to a finite God:

> The only admissible moral theory of Creation is that the Principle of Good cannot at once and altogether subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral; could not place mankind in a world free from the necessity of an incessant struggle with the maleficent powers, or make them always victorious in that struggle, but could and did make them capable of carrying on the fight with vigour and with progressively increasing success.[41]

Mill believes that of all the religious explanations of the order of nature only one, the theory that God is finite, escapes being contradictory in itself and to the facts it attempts to explain. Man's duty, Mill suggests, consists "in

---

38 Ibid., 58.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 38. The emphasis is Mill's.

standing forward a not ineffectual auxiliary to a Being of perfect beneficence."[42] In other words, Mill's God needs our help. Faith in such a God Mill considers much better adapted for nerving man to exertion "than a vague reliance on an Author of Good who is supposed to be also the author of evil." In fact, Mill thinks that men who have been strengthened and supported by a trust in a superintending Providence have really believed in a finite God.[43] In some cases they do not state this belief openly; in others they do not themselves realize that they so believe.

It would be far beyond the scope of this present paper, in some way or other, to attempt to answer the difficulties which John Stuart Mill has seen. However, we might indicate one possible solution to the problem he raises of suffering in animals. First of all, let us remember that the advantages and benefits which animals, as a whole, enjoy because they are endowed with sensation seem to surpass by far the pain that this or that animal occasionally feels. Again, the very nature of sensation would seem to necessitate the possibility of pain. An excess of pleasurable sensation is frequently the cause of pain. It would

---

42 Ibid., 39.

43 Ibid., 39, 40. There we find this: "Those who have been strengthened in goodness by relying on the sympathizing support of a powerful and good Governor of the world, have, I am satisfied, never really believed that Governor to be...omnipotent. They have always saved his goodness at the expense of his power."

require a continual miracle on the part of God to give animals a sense nature which, on the one hand, could enjoy pleasures, and on the other, could never suffer pain in that sense nature. Animals have no right to such a miracle, since, as a matter of fact, they have no right to their very existence. Their existence is a free gift from God. Lastly, we do not know how much pain animals suffer, but it would seem to be less than that of human beings. Animals which lack an intellect would seem to be unable to collect the pain that has passed, or to foresee the pain of the future. We know from our own experience that the anticipation of pain is frequently harder to bear than the actual pain itself.

In his third essay on religion, entitled "Theism", Mill rejects several proofs for God's existence, finally admitting the probability of the proof from the design shown in the universe. But Mill argues that design means contrivance or means to attain an end, and this, he says, proves the finiteness of God. At first glance Mill's argument is appealing:

> It is not too much to say that every indication of Design in the Kosmos is so much evidence against the Omnipotence of the Designer. For what is meant by Design? Contrivance: the adaptation of means to an end. But the necessity for contrivance--the need of employing means--is a consequence of the limitation of power. Who would have recourse to means if to attain his end his mere word was sufficient?... Wisdom and contrivance are shown in oversoming difficulties, and there is not room for them in a Being for whom no difficulties exist. The evidences, therefore, of Natural Theology distinctly imply that the author of the Kosmos worked

> under limitations; that he was obliged to adapt himself to conditions independent of his will, and to attain his ends by such arrangements as those conditions admitted of.[44]

From this last argument and from what has gone before, there is not much danger in mistaking Mill's position. That he held that God is finite can be stated with certainty. It would seem worthwhile to say something about the discussion of contrivance and design quoted above. In one short paragraph we cannot hope to solve Mill's objections completely, but perhaps we can, at least, indicate one approach to solving it. Mill's position boils down to this: God is not omnipotent because He has to use contrivance or design, means to attain His end. However, we may well inquire what is the end of creation from God's viewpoint. Is it something already attained by God, or is it something yet to be attained? If we hold that God's goodness is the end in creation, Mill's difficulty seems less of a difficulty. For thus on God's part He has perfectly attained this end since He always possesses entirely His own divine Goodness. On the part of creatures, however, this end, the participation of God's goodness, is yet to be attained. On their side, then, there can be and is contrivance, means to attain their end. If we recognize that all contrivance is on the part of creatures striving to attain their end, and that God, so to speak, has forever perfectly

---

44 Ibid., 176, 177.

attained His end, then we can agree to Mill's meaning of design. Our conclusion, however, does not lead to a finite God but rather to a God who is omnipotent. This, in brief, would seem to be the barest outline of one possible solution to the objection.

In the latter part of his essay on "Theism" Mill again reverts to the difficulty about the evils in the world. Again his solution is that God must be finite, the Creator "less than Almighty." In making his Deity imperfect, Mill escapes what seems to him an insoluble problem, or rather, a downright contradiction. It is the impossible problem of reconciling infinite benevolence and justice with infinite power in the Creator of such a world as Mill daily saw about him.[45] Although this limited God of Mill's sidesteps certain difficulties, it is not entirely free from inconsistencies. The fact of limitation in God implies some limiting agent. In one place[46] Mill suggests that this limitation is due either to the material with which God has to work or to His limited knowledge and ability. Both of these replies, however, would imply that there is something more ultimate than God. They thus raise more difficulties than they solve. We can see from the following conclusions of Mill that his answer is not entirely satisfying:

---

45 Ibid., 186.

46 Ibid., 174.

> These, then are the net results of Natural Theology on the question of the divine attributes. A Being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture; of great, and perhaps unlimited intelligence, but perhaps also more narrowly limited than his power: who desires and pays some regard to the happiness of his creatures, but who seems to have other motives of action which he cares more for, and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose alone.[47]

Whereas Hume might be called the first draftsman of the modern theory of a finite God, and Mill, its first great developer, the American, William James, was one of its best popularizers. According to James, God in the religious life of the common run of men is "a superhuman person who calls us to co-operate in his purposes, and who furthers ours if they are worthy. He works in an external environment, has limits, and has enemies."[48]

James's theory of a finite God was but a logical outcome from Mill's theory. In fact, James dedicates his work, Pragmatism, to Mill with the following words: "To the memory of John Stuart Mill from whom I first learned the pragmatic openness of mind and whom my fancy likes to picture as our leader were he alive today."[49] In A Pluralistic Universe James states his position for a finite God in unmistakable terms, thus show-

---

47 Ibid., 194.

48 William James, A Pluralistic Universe, New York, 1909, 124.

49 William James, Pragmatism, New York, 1947, Dedication.

ing himself to be a loyal follower of Mill:

> When John Mill said that the notion of God's omnipotence must be given up, if God is to be kept as a religious object, he was surely accurately right; yet so prevalent is the lazy monism that idly haunts the region of God's name, that so simple and truthful a saying was generally treated as a paradox: God, it was said, could not be finite. I believe that the only God worthy of the name must be finite.[50]

One of the reasons for James's belief in the finite God theory is that it saves one from "the irrationalities incidental to absolutism." The absolutism James is opposed to, however, is the absolutism of Hegel. This Absolute has nothing outside itself to account for the irrationalities in the universe. The finite God of James may conceivably have almost nothing outside himself but the minutest fraction of the universe. Nevertheless, that fraction would save God from being responsible for evil and other "irrationalities." James's God is responsible only for such things in the universe as He knows enough and has power enough to have accomplished. An omnipotent God James regards as a disease of the philosophy-shop.[51]

James has some rather harsh words to say about the scholastic descriptions of God. One such description he calls "a pretentious sham." And he further declares: "It means less

---

50 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 124.

51 William James, Letters of William James, edited by his son, Henry James, II, Boston, 1920, 269.

than nothing, in its pompous robe of adjectives."[52] James offers pragmatism as a substitute for the pretentious sham of the scholastics. He turns his back on "the intellectualist point of view altogether." To what does he turn? "'God's in his heaven; all's right with the world!'--That's the real heart of your theology, and for that you need no rationalist definitions."[53]

In his book The Varieties of Religious Experience James recognizes the practical needs and experience of religion. Belief in God had been the answer to those needs. But an infinite and omnipotent God is not necessary. Belief in a power both other than and larger than ourselves is all that is necessary. This power must, of course, be friendly to ourselves and to our ideals.[54]

James denounces evil almost as harshly as he does the scholastics. Evil is emphatically irrational. "Evil is a pure abomination to the Lord, an alien unreality, a waste element, to be sloughed off and negated, and the very memory of it, if pos-

---

52 James, Pragmatism, 121.

53 Ibid.

54 William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, 1936, 515. "Anything larger than ourselves will do, if only it be large enough to trust for the next stop. It need not be infinite, it need not be solitary."

sible, wiped out and forgotten."[55] For James, as for all the other finite God theorists, the moral and physical evils present in the world are the real stumbling block. We will see more of this in Chapter IV. For the present, let us be content to see the conclusion which James reaches in his work, A Pluralistic Universe. It is in this book that much of his thought about a finite God is contained.

> The line of least resistance, then, as it seems to me, both in theology and in philosophy, is to accept, along with the superhuman consciousness, the notion that it is not all-embracing, the notion, in other words, that there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once.[56]

Such, in brief, is a partial history of this theory of a finite God in English-speaking countries. It was suggested by Hume, developed by Mill, and popularized by James. Laurie, McTaggart, and Rashdall are some of the modern philosophers who have carried on the theory. Many of the same theories, problems, and solutions that have been considered in this chapter will come up again in a study of another modern philosopher, Edgar Sheffield Brightman.

---

55 Ibid., 130.

56 James, A Pluralistic Universe, 311.

CHAPTER II

PROOFS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Edgar Sheffield Brightman was born September 20, 1884, in a Methodist parsonage in Holbrook, Massachusetts.[1] At Brown University he received the A.B. and A.M. degrees. He continued his studies at Boston University, where he received a theological degree in 1910 and the doctorate in 1912. He was a follower of the absolutism of Royce for a while but was later converted to James' pragmatism. It was while at Boston University that he came under the influence of Borden Parker Bowne, one of the foremost American philosophers of his day. Soon he turned to Bowne's personalism although he took a more empirical approach than Bowne did. Brightman was very emphatic about seeking a coherent account of experience. "In his criticism of other philosophies the emphasis is on their failure to take all aspects of experience coherently into account. Personality is affirmed to be the key to reality."[2]

---

1 Edgar S. Brightman, "Religion as Truth," Contemporary American Theology. This article gives details of the author and his early life.

2 Walter G. Mueller and Laurence Sears, The Development of American Philosophy, Boston, 1940, 510.

Professor Brightman has written much about God. A mere disconnected survey of his books will impress one with the importance he places on theism: The Problem of God, The Finding of God, Is God a Person?, Religious Values, Personality and Religion, Moral Laws, and his most recent book, A Philosophy of Religion. In reading these books one is struck by the earnestness and sincerity of this man in his quest for truth and for a solution to some of the problems of life. His treatment of God is always reverent, and his "approach to the problems of human experience has always been philosophical rather than theological."[3] Reason, then, is his method of approach.

> The practical reason is reason; and no amount of respect for conscience or mystical experience or experimental method or strong personalities can justify the thinker in being satisfied with what he knows to be irrational--that is, contradictory or incoherent.[4]

Professor Brightman sees no contradiction between faith and reason. He relies on both; the two are necessary.

> If faith is not to contradict itself or known fact, it must be reasonalbe. A faith "contrary to reason" (to use Locke's expression) is a faith in the self- contradictory, that is, the impossible and the unreal.[5]

---

3 Brightman, "Religion as Truth," 53.

4 Ibid., 54.

5 Edgar S. Brightman, An Introduction to Philosophy, New York, 1925, 324.

Under the guidance of reason and in the footsteps of the great thinkers of the ages, Professor Brightman begins his search for God.[6]

In Chapter V of his book, The Problem of God, entitled "The Resultant Idea of God," Professor Brightman investigates the nature of God. He gives a lengthy definition of God and then elaborates on this definition. The following chapter is called "The Evidence for God." Here he considers and proposes several arguments for the existence of God. It is true that it is often convenient to use some workable definition of God before actually proving His existence. However, to consider in detail the nature of God and to give a full definition of Him before considering whether or not He actually exists, seems very much of a case of putting the cart before the horse. If God does not really exist, or if we do not know He exists, how can we explain His nature? What need really is there to bother about the question of what

---

6 Whether Professor Brightman realized it or not, another philosopher centuries before him had mapped out reason as the foundation and groundwork of his philosophy. Back in 1264 St. Thomas wrote in his Summa Contra Gentiles: "It is necessary to have recourse to natural reason to which all are compelled to assent." (C.G., I, 2) In another place (C.G., I, 7) he treats specifically the problem that Professor Brightman has considered above, namely, the relation between faith and reason. It is interesting to note that their conclusions are the same. Truth is one and can never be self-contradictory. Or as St. Thomas puts it, "Since therefore falsehood alone is contrary to truth, it is impossible for the truth of faith to be contrary to principles known by natural reason."

God is unless we know that He is? We think it more logical, then, to consider first Professor Brightman's treatment of the existence of God and then the nature of Professor Brightman's God, as seen from his definitions of Him.

We should mention in the beginning that Professor Brightman has a criterion by which he wishes to test all proofs for God's existence. It is: "the standard of whether they are based on a consideration of all the facts."[7] The author gives six evidences which he considers proofs for God's existence. Because of the limits of this paper we will not be able to consider them in the detail in which we would like to treat them. Since they do directly affect Brightman's concept of God Himself and indicate the way to a finite God, we must give them some attention in this study of God's finiteness. Our author summarizes them thus:

> The chief evidence for God, as I see it, may well be summarized under six heads: the evidence of the rationality of the universe, the evidence of the emergence of novelties, the evidence of the nature of personality, the evidence of values, the evidence of religious experience, and the evidence of systematic coherence. To some extent these fields overlap; indeed, they must if they all take in the whole of experience from differing points of view. I do not present them as finalities but simply as the best conceptions I have been able to find.[8]

---

7 Edgar S. Brightman, The Problem of God, New York, 1930, 148.

8 Ibid.

Looking at Brightman's proofs for the existence of God, we will see that all of them lead to his position of a finite God. The first of our author's "evidences" for God is the rationality of the universe. Concerning this proof, he says: "Whatever shows the universe to be rational, shows it to be what one would expect from the handiwork of a supreme mind."[9] Brightman admits that rationality is a very general term and declares that a rational order in the universe does not necessarily imply such a God as religion worships. However, he claims that an irrational universe would exclude the possibility of a God, that we must show the universe to be rational if there is to be a God. What Professor Brightman means by rational universe is not, of course, that the universe as a whole is capable of reasoning. Rather, he means that it is a universe which gives signs of order and that this order, in turn, must have come from a mind.[10] One of his proofs that the universe is rational is the following:

> The fact of interaction among things implies a unitary and rational ground of interaction. All science assumes that the universe is such a system of activity that any change anywhere implies changes elsewhere; and these changes occur in accordance with laws.[11]

---

9 Ibid., 148.

10 Ibid., 150. Thus he says, "Despite the problems raised by Heisenberg and others our cosmos remains an ordered whole. And its rational order must be everlasting."

11 Ibid., 149.

Brightman's conclusion is that the universe must be thought of as one rational and eternal system. Thus he is led to God, but still "this does not yet give us a complete God, but it makes God intellectually possible."[12] There is no indication that this God is infinite. In fact, "imperfections" in the order of the universe, for example, earthquakes, tornadoes etc., as we will see later, convince Professor Brightman that this God must be finite.

His second proof for God's existence is the emergence of novelties. The author explains what he means by this evidence:

> To say that novelties emerge is to say that new properties appear now and then in the universe which cannot be regarded as mere recombinations of what preceded them in time. Many believe that life has properties so utterly different from those of inorganic matter that no mere combination of inorganic substances could produce living substances unless there were a creative power in the universe.[13]

He regards it as certain that consciousness is a novelity with properties totally different from those of unfeeling and unthinking matter. In spite of the apparent wastefulness of life and the vast amount of seemingly unnecessary inorganic matter in the universe, Professor Brightman sees that "there is far more continuity and plan in the novelties that arise than could possibly

---

12 Ibid., 150.

13 Ibid., 151.

be accounted for by mere blind chance."[14] He claims that faith in a personal God is a far more intelligent and less blind faith than "faith that chance could produce life and mind and society and genius and art and religion without any guidance by purpose."[15] The appeal to mere chance is an unpardonable philosophical sin. Brightman explains why: "It assumes a rational effect with no cause but chance." The emergence of novelties not only points the way to a personal God, but to a finite God also.

> It is also to be noted that the view of a finite God developed in the previous chapter is far more compatible with this combination of waste prodigality with purposive advance than is the traditional view of an omnipotent and benevolent creator.[16]

> The entire study of emergent novelties has led in each of its aspects to God as the most reasonable explanation of the facts of experience, and, I may add, to a creative but finite God.[17]

The third main type of evidence for God, according to Professor Brightman, is that of the nature of personality. In his discussion of novelty this proof has been anticipated to a certain extent, "for conscious personality is a most striking novelty in a world of impersonal atoms and force."[18] However,

---

14 Ibid., 151.

15 Ibid., 153.

16 Ibid., 154

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

our author judges that the uniqueness of the problem of personality requires a special discussion. He sees that "in various ways the existence of personality makes the existence of a personal God reasonable." One proof of this Professor Brightman gives as follows:

> Personality is organic to the universe...Since mind and things are in one constant process of interaction and interchange, it is reasonable to suppose that the whole world is one kind, and that, the kind that we experience directly in consciousness....Thus the fact of personality points to a world beyond our personalities, but essentially of the same kind, that is of thought and action and experience, yet on a cosmic scale. To this cosmic experience...we give the name God.[19]

Brightman sees another proof of God's existence in the cause of consciousness. This cause of consciousness, he says, "surely cannot be a reduced and stupid seventh cousin of consciousness; it must be a closer relative, more like a father than a cousin.[20] In other words, consciousness must emerge and be produced from a source that can really explain it. For Professor Brightman, "a cosmic consciousness is the only conceivable source of evolution which can be clearly seen to be adequate to the facts."[21] God is but another name for this "cosmic consciousness" of which our author speaks. In this way, the nature of

---

19 Ibid., 155, 156.

20 Ibid., 157.

21 Ibid.

personality takes Brightman to God; but since God's personality is "essentially of the same kind, that is, of thought and a ction and experience" as ours, He can hardly be said to be infinite any more than we are infinite.

The fourth type of evidence for God is that from value. Professor Brightman states: "In man's experience we find not merely facts of sense and of self-consciousness, but we also find values."[22] The existence of values among men, like the existence of personality, is a fact to be explained. Moreover, man is not alone in experiencing values.

> The world of nature behaves like human nature in this respect: it acts as though it, too, were living for some purpose. Man strives towards ends which he values; nature strives towards ends, such as the development of law and order, life and mind, which it seems to value. Thus we may consider values in nature in connection with values in human personality.[23]

Professor Brightman recognizes the many facts in nature which evidently show signs of purpose. They "all point to the presence of a purposive power in the universe." This purposive power is none other than God. However, a difficulty arises. It is the difficulty of explaining the presnece of evil in the world. Evil seems the strongest argument and most concrete evidence against the existence of God. As we shall see in greater detail in Chap-

---

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., 158.

ter IV, this difficulty is for the present author surmountable. Professor Brightman himself offers at least three weighty solutions to this problem in his work, The Problem of God.[24] He holds, too, that his theory of a finite God accounts for much of the evil in the world. There are simply certain things and events over which God does not have complete power. Evil is one of these things. Thus Brightman concludes that "theism gives the most rational explanation of the facts of our value experience, both of its evils and of its goods."[25]

Concerning the fifth main type of evidence, that from religious experience, Brightman declares:

> It is true that a religious experience, taken by itself, cannot well be used as evidence for the existence of the divine object toward which it is directed; but taken in connection with the rest of experience and with our total world view, it may be regarded as strong empirical confirmation of belief in God.[26]

This fifth evidence for God is a supplament and confirmation of the other evidences. The author we are treating seems to imply that this proof from religious experience leads to a finite God. He does not expressly state this in The Problem of God; but since his four previous proofs of that book brought Brightman to a finite God, this strong "empirical confirmation" would seem to lead to the same conclusion. In The Finding of God Brightman

---

24 Ibid., 160.

25 Ibid.

explicitly states that religious experience leads to a finite God.

> What sort of God, then, is the God to whom religious experience leads? In the nature of the case it must be a finite God. No possible experience could possibly reveal unlimited and absolute power.[27]

Certainly some will disagree with the line of reasoning in the above statement. They might ask whether Professor Brightman is not confusing the experience with its object, God. Does it necessarily follow that the object of our experience, God, has to be finite because our experience is finite? Is it not possible to have a finite experience of an infinite God? To say that God is finite because our experience of Him is finite, seems like saying that the ocean contains just one quart of water because we only have a quart-size dipper to measure it.

The importance our author attaches to his sixth and last proof for God is evidenced by his following statement: "All of the other types of evidence reduce to and must be judged by the standard of the evidence from systematic coherence, which is

---

26 Ibid., 161.

27 Edgar S. Brightman, The Finding of God, New York, 1931, 131. The text continues: "The God revealed in expereince, then, is powerful enough to lead the world toward higher levels, yet if we are to believe the evidence of experience, not powerful enough to do it without great difficulty....The God suggested by religious experience, then, is a spirit contending agaisnt obstacles."

the sixth and last type."[28] The ultimate reason for belief in God, then, is simply because such a belief provides the best solution to the riddle of life and experience. These are Brightman's own words:

> Hence, the best reason for believing in God is that acceptance of the proposition that he exists and manifests himself in the ongoing of experience leads to the most connected and coherent view of our experience as a whole.... Reality is better understood as the life work of a Supreme Person than in any other way. Every possible view leaves us painfully aware of the limitations of human knowledge and of the need for further insight; but this view has the advantage of pushing thought as far as it can go toward the light.[29]

One reason why all of Professor Brightman's proofs for the existence of God point the way to a finite God seems to be their lack of metaphysical depth. Very laudably, they start on the empirical plane, yet they never rise any higher. These proofs of his do not seem to penetrate beneath the surface meaning of things and get to the heart of their true significance. Certainly they do not probe deep enough into the whole problem of being. As far as they go, they may be good; but that is precisely the difficulty: they do not go far enough. They stay on the empirical level and cannot rise to anything higher than a finite God. That, too, seems to be why they appear so uncertain.

---

28 Brightman, The Problem of God, 161.

29 Ibid., 162.

There is a note of hesitance that characterizes all six of Professor Brightman's proofs. Such phrases a s "makes God intellectually possible,"[30] "contributes to belief in God,"[31] "has led...to God as the most reasonable explanation,"[32] and "makes the existence of a personal God reasonable,"[33] seem to betray a lack of conviction in the certainty of the proofs offered. Evidently Professor Brightman thought that probability as to God's existence was all that was possible. In a later book, Personality and Religion, published in 1934, Brightman acknowledges that his evidence for God gives only probability:

> From a strictly logical standpoint, therefore, knowledge about the real world and God is not absolute, but merely probable. It is useless to pretend that science or philosophy can bring absolute proof--much less disproof--of God. But with all the limitations of his reason, man can see that faith in a personal God has a degree of probability which exceeds that of rival theories.[34]

Turning now from a consideration of Professor Brightman's proofs for God's existence and how they led him to a finite God, we can take a brief look at several definitions of God given by our author in his various works. The following appears in his

---

30 Ibid., 150.

31 Ibid., 151.

32 Ibid., 154.

33 Ibid., 155.

34 Edgar S. Brightman, Personality and Religion, New York, 1934, 63.

book, The Problem of God. It is the most complete definition which we will find in any of Brightman's works, and although it is lengthy, it is worth quoting in its entirety.

> God is a conscious person of perfect good will. He is the source of all value and so is worthy of worship and devotion. He is the creator of all other persons and gives them the power of free choice. Therefore his purpose controls the outcome of the universe. His purpose and his nature must be inferred from the way in which experience reveals them, namely, as being gradually attained through effort, difficulty, and suffering. Hence there is in God's very nature something which makes the effort and pain of life necessary. There is within him, in addition to his reason and his active will, a passive element which enters into every one of his conscious states, as sensation, instinct, and impulse enter into ours, and constitutes a problem for him. This element we call The Given. The evils of life and the delays in the attainment of value, in so far as they come from God and not from human freedom, are thus due to his nature, yet not wholly due to his deliberate choice. His will and reason acting on The Given produce the world and achieve value in it.[35]

Although Professor Brightman calls the above paragraph a "definition", it is obvious that he does not mean a definition in the strict sense of the word. It is rather a descriptive definition or a description.

For a personalist such as Brightman, one of the most important ideas in the above description of God is that He is a Person. Personality is the key note of personalism. We find a good passage in Professor Brightman's Is God a Person? which indicates his stand on the meaning of personality.[36] The eternal

---

35 Brightman, The Problem of God, 113.

reality in the universe for the personalists is personality. What we call matter and energy and their laws are simply the functioning of a cosmic personality. The relation between matter and spirit, then, is really a relation between spirit and spirit. Brightman admits that this personalist view of the universe is "a hypothesis to be tested in relation to the rest of our experience and thinking."[37] What does our author mean when he says that God is a conscious Person? He himself remarks: "To call God personal is to hold that the functions of conscious personality are present in him to the highest possible degree. These functions are feeling, thought, and will."[38] This type of personalism which Professor Brightman holds seems, at times, to come very close to pantheism:

> The important thing is the agreement of personalists on the belief that the processes of the universe are all forms of conscious purpose; that evolution is the striving of God himself; and that every material thing as well as every person has some place in that purpose.[39]

The note of God's perfect good will seems also to be essential to Brightman theory of God as seen in the lengthy description of God given on the previous page. Our author holds

---

36 Edgar S. Brightman, Is God a Person?, New York, 1932, 12.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 55.

39 Ibid., 15.

that God is the creator, and he maintains that man receives free-will as a gift from God. Brightman also mentions God's purpose and His nature. He states that these "must be inferred from the way in which experience reveals them, namely, as being gradually attained through effort, difficulty, and suffering."[40] Here we must say again that there is danger in confusing "the way in which experience reveals" God's nature and purpose with the nature and purpose of God in themselves. The way of experience with us finite creatures is always going to be finite. If, therefore, we confuse the way of our knowing God with the nature of God in Himself, we cannot help reaching a finite God. We will have more to say about the purpose of God in a later chapter. Without stopping to consider it in detail, we should also mention the peculiar element of The Given in Brightman's description of God. The Given, we must remember is a passive element contained in God's very nature. We will have to turn to this internal element in God in Chapter V to understand Professor Brightman when he offers his explanation of evil.

Brightman sums up the descriptive definition of God which we have been considering in the following terms:

> God is a person supremely conscious, supremely valuable, and supremely creative, yet limited by the free choices

---

40 Brightman, The Problem of God, 113.

> of other persons and by the restrictions within his own nature.[41]

For Brightman, then, God is definitely limited, a finite God. Three important notes of his theory of God are: (1) that God is a person--and for Brightman consciousness is an important part[42] of personality; (2) that He is the creator; (3) that He is supremely good or valuable.

In a later work, Professor Brightman explicitly includes some qualities in God which he had not previously mentioned. Thus in Personality and Religion our author says:

> God is an eternal conscious personal spirit, infinite in duration, self-existent, limited only by the eternal reason and content of his own personality and, of course, by such conditions as he voluntarily imposes upon himself.[43]

Here we see that Brightman mentions the fact that God is a spirit as well as a person. Since He is infinite in duration, He has existed from all eternity. We will see later, however, that according to Professor Brightman, God is affected by time even though He is eternal. Here, too, the note of self-existence makes its appearance. As we go on, we shall see that is a note which is extremely important. In the present definition, Brightman sees God as limited by the eternal reason and content of his own personality. This is the same as the Given mentioned already.

---

41 Ibid., 113.

42 Cf. Edgar S. Brightman, A Philosophy of Ideals, New York, 1928, 5.

God is also limited by "the conditions he voluntarily imposes on himself." This last limitation of God would include "the free choices of other persons" which Brightman considered a limitation of God in one of the foregoing definitions. Thus, in Personality and Religion Brightman augments but does not contradict or deny what he held in his previous work.

In his latest work, A Philosophy of Religion, Professor Brightman stresses exceptionally strongly the note that God's will is finite. "Strictly we should speak of a God whose will is finite rather than a finite God."[44] In another passage in this same work, Brightman gives this note of God's finite will as the distinguishing mark between theistic finitism and theistic absolutism:

> The two forms of theism agree in the proposition that God is an eternal, conscious spirit, whose will is unfailingly good. The difference between the two may best be brought out by saying that theistic absolutism is the view that the will of God faces no conditions within the divine experience which that will did not create (or at least approve), whereas theistic finitism is the opposing view, namely, that the will of God does face conditions within the divine experience which that will neither created nor approves.[45]

This, it would seem, is an excellent summary of the two positions.

---

43 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 97.

44 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 337.

45 Ibid., 281, 282.

Perhaps it would have been better, however, had Brightman in the above quotation substituted the phrase "or at least permit" in place of "or at least approve." Because of man's free-will, God permits sins. We can never say God approves sin. According to Professor Brightman, theistic absolutism tends to overemphasize the perfections of God and of creatures; theistic finitism, on the other hand, raises questions about the perfections of the creator.[46]

Professor Brightman's proofs for the existence of God seem naturally to lead him to a finite God. In his definitions of God, he consistently defines God as a finite Person. Although he may emphasize this or that characteristic in different definitions, there is one note to be found in all of them, namely, that there is limitation within the very nature of God. Finally, in his latest book, Brightman locates that limitation in God as coming from His finite will. To understand a little more about this finite God theory of our author, we shall consider in our next chapter his thought on some of the attributes of God.

---

46 Ibid., 283.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

We learn the nature of a particular being from that being's actions and operations. The same is true of God; from a study of His work in the universe around us we learn something about God Himself. From the effects of God's actions we know the actions themselves; and knowing them, we attribute certain qualities to His nature. An attribute, we know, is a quality that is due to something. It is characteristic of the nature of this particular thing. The attributes of God, then, are those qualities or marks which are to be ascribed to God, precisely as God. It is of the very nature of God that He be thus and not otherwise. Now the attributes ascribed to God will differ according to this or that theory about God. In this chapter, five attributes which are important in Brightman's theory of God will be considered; for these attributes plainly show that the nature of his God is finite. The first attribute to be investigated is the perfection of God.[1]

Professor Brightman declares: "God, then, is by defini-

---

1 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 76.

tion the ens perfectissimum, the most perfect being."[2] He consults the etymology of the word "perfect" and finds that perfectio means "completion."[3] Something perfect, then, would be something finished or completed. But is it possible for God to be completed? Certainly not! Thus our author concludes that God is not perfect but rather infinitely perfectible:

> There is no perfected person whose being is completed and whose perfection is finished; but there may be a person whose will is unfailingly good and whose task is eternal and inexhaustible. Such a person would be divine; his perfection would not be an infinite completeness but an infinite perfectibility.[4]

In A Philosophy of Religion Professor Brightman sums up the total teaching of his earlier works on this point, saying: "When, however, we substitute for perfection the ideal of the inexhaustible perfectibility, we have a concept applicable to both God and man and adequate to man's religious needs."[5]

It is true that perfection does have the etymological meaning of "completion" or totaliter factum. To say that this is the meaning of the word when applied to God, however, is to misunderstand word usage. Etymologically, manufacture means to make by hand, but who would say that is the common meaning of the word

---

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid., 78.

4 Ibid., 79

5 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 340.

today? Today it has more the meaning of making by machinery. Perfection, according to standard dictionaries, can mean "supreme excellence" or "the condition, state, or quality of being perfect or free from all defect," while perfect can mean "in the state of complete excellence; free from any flaw or imperfection of quality," or again, "having all the essential elements, qualities or characteristics."[6] Taken in this sense, "perfection" can be applied to God without implying any perfectibility or change in Him. It is not perhaps an absolutely suitable word to describe the Deity, but then what human word is?

An error much more serious than that of confusing the etymology of a word with its true meaning is Professor Brightman's confusion of perfection and perfectibility. "The divine perfection, then," Brightman holds, "is an infinite series of perfectings. Perfection means perfectibility."[7]

Really, Professor Brightman understands that perfection can be considered in two radically different ways:

There is the impersonal perfection of a circle that is

---

6 James Augustus Henry Murray, (ed.) A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, Oxford, 1928, VII, 682-684.

7 Brightman, The Problem of God, 183.

> perfectly circular, or of a mountain, the proportions of which are perfectly satisfying. There is also the personal perfection of a blameless character and a thoroughly adequate intelligence engaged in the inexhaustible creation of new forms of spiritual life.[8]

Impersonal perfection is "icily regular, splendidly null." In it "there is no life, no change, but magnificient death." Personal perfection, also, has changeless, eternal, perfect laws to which the good will always conforms. But in addition to this type of changelessness, there is the essential note of perfectibility.[9] We can agree with Professor Brightman that perfection of human beings on this earth does involve a note of perfectibility. We learn this from our every day contact with persons. No one is so perfect that he cannot improve. But can this fact of perfectibility, taken as it is from experience with human persons, directly be applied to God?

Perfectibility implies the potential power to receive a perfection. For example, if there were potentiality in God, He would have to receive a perfection from some other being than Himself. Consequently, that being would be more perfect, more ultimate than God. If this second being were perfect in the sense of perfectible, it too would have to receive any new perfection from a third being, and so on, to an infinite series. An

---

8 Brightman, The Finding of God, 130, 131.

9 Ibid.

infinite series, however, does not give a rational reason for the existence of any existing perfectible being nor of the whole series. This whole question is, perhaps, best seen from the example of contingent beings.

We see around us thousands of contingent beings, things that are capable of existing or not. At one time they did not exist; then they came into being; and, perhaps, in a short while they will cease to exist. The ultimate answer for their existence cannot be from other contingent beings, for they, too, have to look outside themselves for the reason of their existence. Nor is an infinite series of contingent beings an answer. This fails to answer the question of how the infinite series came into being. No, the answer must rest in a being that must necessarily exist, a being who is existence. This being we call God. And this God is Pure Act, that is, the Principle of being, supremely actual, capable of receiving nothing from any other being simply because He contains in His very nature the actualization of existence and all perfections connected with existence. There is no room for imperfection in Him. He has no potency to be actuated; hence, God, the Ultimate, is all perfect. Professor Brightman contradicts himself when he makes his God ultimate and yet perfectible; his theory of a finite God is an attempt to get out of this contradiction.

to wonder whether Professor Brightman holds that God is infinite. He states the argument for this position well. Then we come to a passage which looks very much like a paradox: "The truth and value of divine infinity can hardly be questioned, and is not questioned even by those who call God finite, when the finiteness supposed is within God and not imposed by anything external to him."[12] This, we shall see presently, is really the position of Brightman. He holds that God is finite-infinite, that is, finite in some respects and infinite in others.

This doctrine is expressed in Personality and Religion in the chapter, "The Finite-Infinite God." However, the author had proposed the idea of a finite God in a previous work, The Problem of God. There he introduced his idea of The Given as an internal limitation in God:

> The Given must be within the divine consciousness and not external to it; for otherwise it does not explain why God has so much genuine difficulty in expressing his ideal purposes, combined with so much control and achievement.[13]

In The Finding of God Brightman repeats this idea that God is finite, "limited by an uncreated 'Given' in his eternal nature as well as by his will."[14] But experiences teaches Professor Brightman that the divine will can solve every problem and bring

---

12 Ibid., 75.

13 Brightman, The Problem of God, 182, 183.

14 Brightman, The Finding of God, 13.

value out of every situation, no matter how evil it may be.[15] Thus Brightman calls God the Controller of The Given.[16]

In his latest work, A Philosophy of Religion, our author reiterates that The Given is "first, eternal within the experience of God and hence had no other origin than God's eternal being; and secondly, that it is not a product of will or created activity."[17] For Brightman, then, God's finiteness does not mean that He began nor that He will end nor that He is limited by anything outside Himself. "Strictly we should speak of a God whose will is finite rather than a finite God; for even the finite God is absolute in the sense of being the ultimate source of all creation."[18] Our author gives a good summary of his position on a "finite-infinite God in A Philosophy of Religion:

> God's will, then, is in a definite sense finite. But we have called him "finite-infinite." Although the power of his will is limited by The Given, arguments for the objectivity of ideals give grounds for the postulate that his will for goodness and love is unlimited; likewise, he is infinite in time and space, by his unbegun and unending duration and by his inclusion of all nature within his experience; such a God must be unlimited in his knowledge of all that is, although human freedom and the nature of The

---

15 Ibid., 13.

16 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 336.

17 Ibid., 337.

18 Ibid.

> Given probably limit his knowledge of the precise detail of the future.[19]

How did Professor Brightman arrive at this position of a "finite-infinite" God, and why does he maintain it? The following passage will, I believe, start us toward a partial answer:

> A real infinite must be definite; although the word means "boundless," a real infinite must have bounds. To say that the real God is infinite, then, means that he is the self-existent source of all being; but it does also mean that he contains and recognizes limitations. If he didn't he w would be formless, meaningless, lawless chaos--a Greek infinite instead of a religious infinite.[20]

In the first book of The Metaphysics, Aristotle narrates that most of the earliest philosophers regarded principles of a material kind as the only principles of all things. Thus Thales held that the first principles of everything was water; Heraclitus of Ephesus, fire; Anaximenes believed it was air; and Empedocles said it was a combination of the above three plus earth.[21]

Some of the early Greeks seem to identify the infinite with something material. Because the infinite is in the category of quantity, Aristotle says that substance or quality or af-

---

19 Ibid., 337.

20 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 75, 76.

21 Cf. Aristotle, Metaphysics, I, 3, 983b, 984a

fection cannot be infinite.[22] Professor Brightman cites Plato (Philebus, 27D) in warning against a blind devotion to the word, "infinite," and especially against "supposing that there is any intellectual or religious value in the idea of an utterly unlimited infinite."[23]

The Greeks, then, whether or not they believed that the infinite was this or that material principle or, on the other had, denied that the infinite was to be identified with matter, did agree on this, namely, that the infinite was indeterminate. As such it had infinite potentialities and was, therefore, imperfect. Because the infinite was undetermined, it was also unintelligible. Professor Brightman seems to confuse the infinity which the Greeks thought of as a formless chaos with the formal infinity that is one of the attributes of God. That is the reason why Brightman says that God has to contain limitations. Otherwise, "...if he didn't [contain limitations] he [God] would be formless, meaningless, lawless chaos."[24] It is only if we realize that Brightman has in the back of his head the idea of Greek undetermined infinity that the foregoing words have meaning. That is why he says: "A real infinite must be definite....

---

22 Aristotle, Physics, III, 6, 207a.

23 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 75.

24 Ibid., 76.

a real infinite must have bounds."[25] It was partially to protect God from being considered a "meaningless chaos" that Professor Brightman proposed his theory of a "finite-infinite" God. His theory, he believes, is a rational interpretation of the empirical facts.[26]

Brightman admits that God is the "self-existent source of all being."[27] If, however, God is self-existent, unbegun, and unending, He is the necessary being that we have seen from a consideration of contingent being. We saw that there had to exist a being which contained in its very nature the reason of its own existence. This being we call God. It is God's very nature to exist. He is neither from determining matter, nor is He matter determined by form. If God, then, is self-sufficient, He is Pure Act unbounded by any potency, any restriction, any limitation. Consequently, He is infinite. It is simply because the divine act of being is not received in anything, in other words because God is his own self-subsistent act of being, that He is both infinite and perfect. Definiteness implying finiteness, then, is the second attribute which is characteristic

---

25 Ibid., 75.

26 Ibid., 97.

27 Ibid., 75.

of Brightman's theory of God.

Two other points which are contained in Brightman's thinking about God and which clearly indicate that God is finite are change and time. From what we have already seen of Brightman's notion of the perfectibility of God, it is evident that he believed God could really change; for without change God could not grow in perfection. Change and time are closely allied. Our author treats them as twin sisters, and we shall attempt to follow him in this.

In a chapter on "The Patience of God" in his book, The Finding of God, Professor Brightman investigates "whether the time in which this patience of God is revealed is a revelation of the very nature of God himself, or whether God, the Eternal, is elevated above all time."[28] In spite of the fact that there is much philosophical thought that points toward God as an utterly timeless being, Professor Brightman thinks that an utterly timeless eternity is "much easier to adore unthinkingly or to discuss verbally than to comprehend intelligently." In the following passage he tells what he means by the word "timeless":

> To be timeless means to lack all of the attributes of time, to have no before or after, no change, no activity, no past, no present, no future. Offhand it would seem that

---

28 Brightman, The Finding of God, 125.

> an utterly timeless being could not possibly stand in any causal or significant relation to the world of time. Any being that causes temporal changes would itself have to change or act in order to initiate those changes.[29]

Brightman admits that there is a type of timeless object which we find in our temporal experience. He gives the example of the conception of a triangle. However, he sees that " a timeless mathematical triangle has no cause and can have no effects....is eternal and powerless."[30] God cannot be timeless as mathematical principles, or universals, or the laws of logic are timeless.

> A god, to have value either as a metaphysical explanation of our real experience in time or as an object of religious worship, must it is true, have a character which is the same at all times and which neither begins nor ends, but he must also stand in active, dynamic relations to the changing world of experience. Unless there is activity and time within him, he stands in an utterly unintelligible relation to a world of activity and time. How could an utterly changeless being generate change?[31]

> Not only is an absolutely timeless eternity inconceivable but if it could be conceived, it would fail to explain the time-order and the part that is played by time in every experience and every fact of the real world. It would render the whole cosmic evolutionary process superfluous and meaningless.[32]

Professor Brightman considers in some detail the rea-

---

29 Ibid., 126.

30 Ibid., 127.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid., 128.

sons for time in God. Whether God is an omnipotent Creator or a finite Creator, "in either case, we must think of him as acting in time; in either case, creation actually occurs only when the creature begins to be."[33] Our author points out that this is true whether we believe that the world is an eternal creation or a creation at some definite time; "for in both cases, one or infinitely many acts of creation are performed in time, and in both, the time process has to be continually conserved and sustained."[34] Revelation also points to time in God: "This is especially true if the coming of Christ had any significance for God."[35] The God of history is a God for whom historical changes are real, a God "who somehow brings his will to expression in human life through them."[36] Lastly, religious experience definitely points to a theory of God which admits time and change in God, so Professor Brightman believes:

> A real change occurs when man turns from self to God, from human sin to divine righteousness. That change, if religious faith be at all warranted, is not merely a change in man's attitude, but also a change in God. God could not rightly treat the repentant and the unrepentant, the indifferent and loyal, the hostile and the loving, all in the same way...Hence, things happen in God's experience; time is real for him; he looks ahead with patience to what his children have not yet become.[37]

---

33 Ibid., 128.

34 Ibid.

35 Ibid., 129.

36 Ibid.

Our author sees one serious objection to this temporalistic view of God, namely, that it necessarily detracts from the divine perfection. But with his understanding that perfection means perfectibility, as we explained above, Brightman can without contradiction hold that time is essential to God.

For Brightman, however, this view of time as a real and essential aspect of God does not deny his concrete eternity. "It denies only his abstract timelessness and it alone makes his eternity even approximately intelligible."[38]

> The divine eternity means God's endless duration (durée réelle)...There must be something eternal, for timeless nothingness could not have produced a world. The difficulties with endless duration, then, are difficulties of our imagination which inhere in any possible view of reality.[39]

Professor Brightman's temporalistic view "recognizes that God transcends time by his eternally perfect goodness and his eternal knowledge of all that is knowable (if it is worth knowing)."[40] According to Brightman's theory, this knowledge would have to exclude the future choices of free persons. To sum up, his position is that God is eternal in duration, goodness, and knowledge, but that "time is essential to the very nature of God and is a

---

37 Ibid., 129, 130.

38 Ibid., 131.

39 Ibid., 131, 132.

40 Ibid., 132.

condition of the divine perfection."[41] Belief in such a God is "a moral necessity for freedom; a religious necessity for redemption; a metaphysical necessity for creation; and an ideal necessity, if God's perfection be perfectibility."[42]

Without delaying longer on this question of change and time, we may say that Professor Brightman's position springs from the notion that to effect something in time the cause must be actually in time. This is certainly true of contingent causes which work by motion. The element of time is essential to their activity. However, time does not seem to be essential for a creative cause. Here the effect occurs simply by the willing of the creator. This will act can be from all eternity. It has to be, if God is changeless. The terminus or object of that volition does not have to exist actually from all eternity as a separate being, but only at such a point when God wills that it should here and now actually begin to exist. This is possible because the world follows not from the nature of God, but from the free will of God according to the determinations, including those of time and place, decreed by God through His intellect and will. The object of God's volition is eternal in the sense that God sees this particular being from all eternity and wills that it should exist.

---

41 Ibid., 134.

We have seen that it was the self-existence of God which led to our conviction of His infinity. This self-existence Professor Brightman readily admits.[43] Taking this common ground of God's self-existence, let us see if God's immutability cannot be demonstrated. Self-existence, as we have already seen in this present chapter, is the prerogative of a being whose existence is not contingent but necessary. This necessary being is in a state of complete actuality. We call this being God, the Pure Act in whom there is no potency whatever. Having no potency, then, God is incapable of any change; for a change is the actualizing of some potency. If God is self-existent, He must be unchangeable.

From the immutability of God it is only a half-step to his eternity. Whatever is unchangeable, and thus, without succession or change, without beginning or end, cannot be measured by time; for time is the measurement of "before" and "after" in movement. Because God is immutable, and because time has to do with changeable beings, time cannot be "essential to the very nature of God". The measurement of God's duration is called eternity. Boethius defines eternity as interminabilis vitae tota

---

42 Ibid., 133, 134.

43 Cf. Brightman, Personality and Religion, 75, 76.

investigation into the apparent limitation of God's power.

First of all, let us investigate what the meaning of the word omnipotence is. Does it mean the power to do anything and everything? Or rather, does it mean the power to do everything that is absolutely possible, in other words, everything that does not contain a note of self-contradiction? In his book The Problem of God Professor Brightman seems to indicate that, for him, omnipotence means the power to do anything at all:

> Traditionally God has been thought of as self-caused (causa sui) and as pure actuality (actus purus)--a being completely self-determined with no potentiality for further development...If God be regarded as a wholly self-caused will, we are brought into serious difficulties. Can God choose whether his nature shall be in time or not? The old questions haunt us: Can he make a round triangle, a two which multiplied by two will produce six, a time prior to his own existence? Manifestly not...His nature as a conscious being sets limits to his will; God must be finite.[47]

It is important to note that the conclusion, "God must be finite", follows because there seems to be a limitation of God's power.

In The Finding of God our author seems to hedge somewhat on what he has said in The Problem of God. He seems to retreat to a sort of middle way by denying that there is a real concept of omnipotence: "The concept of omnipotence as a power to do everything is absurd; but when it is conceived as a power

---

47 Ibid., 133.

to do everything possible-- to 'do the doable,' as Bowne said-- it is a limited omnipotence."[48] It is better, Brightman says, not to claim the power to do everything when some things are admitiedly impossible.

A person is said to be omnipotent, however, if he is able to do everything that is possible, absolutely speaking. Now a thing is <u>said</u> to be possible if the predicate can be joined to the subject in a proposition. A thing <u>is</u> possible if there is no contradiction in its intrinsic notes. We see an example of a true possible in the proposition: The man is tall. There is nothing about tallness which is contradictory to the idea of manhood. The predicate can be correctly joined to the subject. On the other hand, an example of something impossible would be: The man is a horse. There are contradictory notes in the actual being; the predicate cannot be joined correctly to the subject; so this second proposition is not possible.[49]

The only thing opposed to the notion of being is non-being. A non-being is likewise unable to fulfill the definition of a possible since at the same time it includes the idea of <u>being</u> and <u>non-being</u>. Such a "thing" does not come under the scope of divine omnipotence, therefore, because it is not "doable".

---

48 Brightman, <u>The Finding of God</u>, 180.

50 Cf. <u>S. T.</u>, I, 25, 3.

It is self-contradictory. It is more correct, then, to say that such a thing cannot be done than to say that God cannot do it.[50]

Thus the proof for God's omnipotence again stems from the self-existence of the divine being. The foundation of divine power is the divine nature which, because of its self-existence, is infinite. Subsistent being, however, is not restricted to any particular type of being; it has within itself the perfection of all being. Thus whatever can have the true nature of being is contained under the possibles. And in respect to these, God is said to be omnipotent.

With this understanding of omnipotence, which seems to be the most satisfying, and with the realization that this attribute flows from the self-existence of God, we can now trace briefly the steps which led Professor Brightman to his conviction that God is limited in power. The first step has already been given: Brightman's misunderstanding of the meaning of omnipotence. Secondly, our author stresses the point that his idea of God best coincides with the facts of experience.[51] Looking at nature, Brightman concludes it is the work of a power, but that this power is working under great difficulties[52]

---

50 Ibid.

51 Brightman, The Problem of God, 125.

52 Brightman, The Finding of God, 117.

In the third place, Brightman speaks more explicitly in referring to the evils in the physical world around us, "the presence of earthquakes, cyclones, and disease germs" in the world. He argues that if all that we regard as hindering good is, from God's standpoint, for the best, then our knowledge of good and evil is so imperfect that we cannot safely pass judgement at all about what is mean by either good or evil. He sees a more serious and more far reaching danger in this further problem:

> If our hypothesis requires us to regard every natural disaster, every disease, mental or physical, every item of apparent waste or futility in evolution, every dinosaur and imbecile, as really a perfect means to the perfect end, ought we not in fairness to the limitations of our experience and knowledge rather to avow agnosticism than theism?[53]

Professor Brightman admits that human sin is a sufficient answer for some evils. But he sees "that the universe contains obstacles to the will of God besides the obstacles due to human sin." Since these obstacles delay the fulfillment of goodness and beauty, they cannot be due to the will of God.[54] Intimately bound up with this whole problem of the evil forces existing in the world is the two-fold problem of God's love and His power. Brightman's stand cannot be mistaken: "If we ask ourselves why a loving God lets such forces loose in his world, we

---

53 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 96.

54 Brightman, The Finding of God, 118.

have no answer as long as we hold to divine omnipotence."[55] His conclusion is that the concept of God's love or that of His power must be revised; it is the latter which Professor Brightman chooses to amend: "On our view, God is perfect in will, but not in achievement; perfect in power to derive good from all situations, but not in power to determine in detail what those situations will be."[56]

Professor Brightman's theory of the attributes of God does point to his theory of a finite God. Thus his conclusions picture God as perfectible, finite-infinite, changeable, eternal yet affected by time, and lastly, limited in power. To understand more fully the nature of God according to Professor Brightman and the limitation of God's power, it seems best to consider next the problem of evil. It is principally this problem that has led our author to his belief in God's limited power. It is this problem that is at the heart of his theistic finitism.

---

55 Ibid., 153.

56 Brightman, The Problem of God, 137, 138.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROBLEM OF GOOD-AND-EVIL

Belief in God raises several difficulties. One of the most perplexing problems for Professor Brightman is the problem of good-and-evil. He maintains that it is a two-fold problem, "not the problem of good or the problem of evil, but the compound problem of good-and-evil."[1] This problem is Brightman's chief reason for holding that God is finite. If a satisfactory answer can be given to this weighty and difficult question, Brightman's theory of theistic finitism will have to be revised. He determined, as we saw in Chapter III, that the only reasonable solution to this problem of good-and-evil was the conclusion that God's nature was limited. In this chapter, another solution will be attempted, a solution which will not sacrifice the omnipotence and the dignity of God. In treating Professor Brightman on this matter, we will quote rather frequently from his latest book, A Philosophy of Religion. This will assure us of being fair in giving our author's own words and his latest position and conclusions.

---

1 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 241.

As we read through the works of Professor Brightman, we become aware that there is a common note underlying much of his thinking on this problem of good-and-evil. It is the note of optimism, the doctrine that everything should be absolutely the best. In The Finding of God we find him saying that God's ways are strange and not such as we would prefer if we were doing the choosing. "If God is the omnipotent being he is traditionally believed to be, it is very strange that he has chosen the slow and costly means of evolution for the creation of life."[2] If God is conceived as limited within His nature, Brightman says that the strangeness is partially explained. "But it is still mysterious," he adds.

In Personality and Religion, he remarks that the apparent waste or futility in evolution can hardly be regarded "as really a perfect means to the perfect end."[3] In other words, evolution is a difficulty against the omnipotence of God precisely because it does not seem to be a perfect means to the perfect end. If we claim that it is a perfect means and therefore God is omnipotent, the author claims we ought "in fairness to the limitations of our experience and knowledge rather to avow

---

2 Brightman, The Finding of God, 149. We should note that Brightman all along assumes evolution to be an established fact. This "fact", however, is still hypothetical of its nature.

3 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 96.

agnosticism than theism,"[4] Unmistakable throughout this whole passage is the underlying current that God has to use a perfect means to the perfect end if He is omnipotent. Hence Brightman's conclusion that, since He does not use this means, God is, therefore, a limited God.[5]

Our author again refers to what he believes to be the imperfection of evolution in A Philosophy of Religion:

> The means used in the evolutionary process were wasteful and cruel in the extreme, and for many millions of years seem to have served no intrinsic value. The famous La Brea tar pits in Los Angeles, where mastodons, saber-tooth tigers, and other animals perished, illustrate the suffering and futility which prevailed for long ages in evolution.[6]

The importance of this imperfection in the evolutionary process is evident "if there is a God in control of cosmic processes." Such a God would clearly be responsible for the operation of causal laws in nature. If there are causal processes in nature which, apart from human intervention, lead to evils or "dysteleological results" as Brightman calls them, then "it is impossible to avoid the question of God's responsibility for evil."[7] According to Brightman's theory, this is only true if God is omni-

---

4 Ibid., 96.

5 Ibid.

6 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 247, 248.

7 Ibid.

potent, if He is in control of cosmic processes. The question resolves into a dilemma. Either God is omnipotent and the cause of evil; or He is finite, and something else--The Given-- is the cause of evil. Firmly convinced of God's goodness, Brightman prefers to believe in God's finiteness. The whole foundation of this method, we must remember, is this: If God were omnipotent, He would by His very nature choose a perfect means to the perfect end.

This theory would also hold for moral evil. If God were able to stop moral evil, He would. The best summary of Professor Brightman's position on this doctrine of optimism is contained in The Finding of God, in a chapter entitled, incidentally, "The Goodness of God." It is worth quoting in full:

> Surely, if God were omnipotent beyond our poor power to conceive, he would have created a race of free beings who would always choose righteously (as he himself, being also free, always chooses righteously), even though in theory they were free to sin (as he also is). There must be something in "the nature of things" to render impossible the creation of a race of free beings who would never sin, even though they were free to. If it were possible, God would have created them. The impossibility must lie in the very nature of God, for if it lay merely in the created world, we should have to ask why God created such a world. There would have to be something in him which rendered such a creation the best possible--and surely he would always do the best possible. This "something in him" is, again, an aspect of The Given.[8]

---

8 Brightman, The Finding of God, 173.

Laying aside the strange concept of a God who is free to sin, we may say that the above paragraph is a logical conclusion from our author's first premise. This first premise, however, seems almost to have been thrown in as an after-thought, a sort of self-evident truth which hardly needs mentioning. What is it? "Surely he (God) would always do the best possible." In the sense intended by the author, that premise is untrue. It means that God, if He were able, would have made the best possible world. But is this really correct? An omnipotent God is able to make a million worlds--all of them, taken objectively, more perfect than the present one. Does not the following seem more correct: God by His very nature would have to make the best possible world, that is, the world best suited to His divine purpose in making it? With the statement thus qualified, the imperfections of nature can be freely acknowledged and still be explained as the work of a perfect God. Thus, although some things are imperfect, they are the means He has chosen as best in accordance with his ultimate end and purpose in creating this present world of things.

Let us look at the problem for a moment from a field other than that of philosophy. This statement, namely, that God only has to create the world best suited to His divine purpose, should not be hard for Christians to grasp. Granted that God had made Brightman's "race of free beings who would never sin,"

would God's goodness have been as forcefully manifested as it is under the actual circumstances? There would be no Incarnation, no Bethlehem, no Calvery! Are we not, in the long run, infinitely better off as a sinful race with Christ, than we would have been as a self-righteous race without Him, come what may? Is it not at least conceivable that God created our race, even though He knew it would fall; that He created it knowing it was the desirable means of showing His love and mercy by sending a Redeemer? What was God obliged to do, as a perfect Being? Create a perfect world? No, rather, create a world perfect for His divine purpose; a world in the creation of which He, the Creator, committed no injustice. That is all God's nature obliged Him to do in creating.

The further question of why God created this present world is wrapped in the unfathomable mystery of God's nature and His divine purpose. We cannot hope to fathom God. Can the creature exhaust the Creator? Can a being of limited intelligence hope to comprehend a Being who is Intelligence Unlimited? Brightman admits this himself as one of the factors of the mystery of God:

> The mystery of God seems to be due to two factors. One factor is human incapacity and ignorance. We cannot penetrate into the heart of ultimate reality; we cannot grasp the full sweep of divine purpose. It is beyond us. We mightlearn to understand more of it for increasing aeons, yet still find mystery ahead. God's nature is inexhausti-

ble, and man's powers are limited.[9]

What must be understood, is that it is this false doctrine of optimism which is at the root of all of Professor Brightman's thought on the problem of good-and-evil. Unless this is understood, we will hardly grasp the true significance of his treatment of the problem. Once it is understood, we can proceed to a consideration of the problem itself.

Analyzing evil as it is met with in experience, Professor Brightman catalogues it into five types: (1) a will that is more or less incoherent; (2) the intellectual evil of ignorance; (3) maladjustment; (4) incompetence; and (5) the dysteleological surd.[10] Concerning this fifth type, the author explains: "A surd in mathematics is a quantity not expressible in rational numbers; so a surd in the realm of value experience is an evil not expressible in terms of good, no matter what operations are performed on it."[11] A surd, then, is something which is entirely evil; there is no portion, no aspect of good in it at all. This undoubtedly is the worst of all evils:

> The other types may sometimes be superseded by internal development; an incoherent will may become relatively more coherent; ignorance may be enlightened; maladjustments may be overcome by proper relationships; and incompetence may be supplanted by skill. But a dysteleological surd is a

---

9 Ibid., 164, 165.

10 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 244, 245.

> type of evil which is inherently and irreducibly evil and contains within itself no principle of development or improvement.[12]

For Professor Brightman, then, the question of evil resolves inself into the question of surd evil. Other evils may be explained away, but this one alone remains to point the way to God's finiteness. "The problem of evil in its most acute form is the question whether there is surd evil, and so, what its relation to value is."[13] But Professor Brightman is not clear about whether these surds actually do exist. "It is debateable," he says in one place, whether there are dysteleological surds; it is conceivable that such surds may exist."[14] In another, "If there be any truly surd evil, then it is not in any sense an instrumental good; good comes in spite of it, not because of it."[15] From this hypothetical thinking, our author passes to categorical conclusions without offering any really solid proof. He never actually defines surd evil in so many words. He gives examples of surd evil, but fails to prove that they are surd evil. Let us look at them. We will find that they are explainable in some other way.

---

11 Ibid., 244, 245.

12 Ibid., 245, 246.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 246.

15 Ibid.

> Take, for example, the phenomenon of imbecility. Let us grant that imbecility may encourage psychiatry and arouse pity; yet, if it be an incurable condition, there remains in it a surd evil embodied in the intrinsic worthlessness of the imbecile's existence and the suffering which his existence imposes on others.[16]

The principle mistake in Brightman's considertaion of imbecility is his viewpoint. He is looking at the situation entirely from this life. To estimate the condition rightly, it is necessary to consider the whole of man's existence, both before and after death. Without going into a discussion of immortality, for that would be beyond the scope of this present inquiry, we must say that it is only in the light of the next life that the condition of imbecility can be understood. An imbecile, although his reason is undeveloped, is, nevertheless, a man. As a man he is destined for perfect happiness in the next life if he lives a moral life and is baptized. Being capable of no moral evil, since he is not responsible for his actions, a baptized imbecile is assured of happiness in the next life. How, then, can Brightman speak of "the intrinsic worthlessness of the imbecile's existence?" He has not followed his own standard of taking into consideration <u>all</u> the facts. He has limited himself to the present life. Certainly imbecility, looked at in this light, cannot be considered a surd evil.

---

16 <u>Ibid</u>., 246.

Evolution provides us with another of Brightman's examples of surd evil. Already in this chapter[17] we have quoted our author when he speaks of the famous La Brea tar pits. He states that the remains of prehistoric animals found in these pits "illustrate the suffering and the futility which prevailed for long ages in evolution."[18] Instead, do not the La Brea pits seem to be more an evidence of Divine Providence? It is by means of them that God has provided man with actual data about the animals which inhabited the earth in prehistoric times. The dinosaur, mastodon, saber-tooth tiger and other extinct animals are not examples of the futility of evolution. They are, rather, examples of the tremendous variety and ingenuity of the Divine creative Power. These animals have adequately served their purpose if the memory of them and their remains are signs to mankind of the power of God. There is no need for God to keep their species in existence. When these animals existed, they served to give material praise to their Creator. Even though they are now extinct, the signs and evidences of their former existence gives like praise to God. As for the suffering of these and other animals, that is another problem.

In a previous chapter it was pointed out that suffering

---

17 Cf. above, page 65.

18 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 248.

of animals was a difficulty for John Stuart Mill.[19] We can only repeat briefly in answering Brightman's difficulty what we have already said to Mill. The advantages of sensation and the pleasures animals enjoy through it far outweigh the pain that is here and there felt. Animals are far better off having sensation, even though pain is sometimes occasioned by it, than they would be without sensation. Again the pain of animals seems to be far less in intensity than that of human beings. Finally, it would require a continual miracle on the part of God to give animals a sense nature which could enjoy pleasures, andstill withold suffering from them. This miracle animals have no right to, since, in fact they have no rights at all. Only beings possessed of intellect and will have rights. Neither does God owe this miracle to His own justice or goodness. For these reasons, then, Brightman's arguments for the finiteness of God because of the suffering in animals appear to be invalid.

The same may be said of his arguments from "the apparent waste or futility of evolution."[20] If evolution is true, and that still remains to be proved conclusively,--indeed, it is of such a nature that it can never be so proved--even so, evolution is not an indication of waste by the divine goodness. It

---

19 Cf. page 9 ff.

20 Brightman, Personality and Religion, 96.

is rather an instance of the lavishness of the divine wisdom which has left for mankind a sign of God in everything, "tongues in trees, books in the running brook, sermons in stones, and good in everything."[21]

Our consideration of Brightman's treatment of the problem of good-and-evil has advanced this far. We have seen the importance the author puts on the existence of surd evil; we have also seen his failure to prove that there is such a thing as surd evil. The fact of imbecility and that of evolution can be adequately explained without the invention of surd evil. Does our author give any other examples of surd evil? This is what Brightman states in a general way about the surd:

> What has been said about the futilities and the waste of evolution may be extended to apply to all the "surd evil" which figures so prominently in the entire problem of good-and-evil. There seems to be evil in the universe so cruel, so irrational, so unjust that it could not be the work of a good God.[22]

Moral evil can hardly be called surd evil and used as a proof for God's finiteness. Professor Brightman admits that "moral evils may be explained as a result of human freedom."[23] Surd evil, then, would be restricted to natural evil, which

---

21 William Shakespeare, As You Like It, II, 1.

22 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 318.

23 Ibid., 260.

"would include pain, disease, death, earthquakes, and tornadoes. ..."[24] But are these phenomena so "inherently and irreducibly evil"? Let us examine them and see.

The possibility of pain in animals, we have seen, is necessary if they are to enjoy sensation. The good sensation brings them far overshadows the evil of pain. This is also true of man, but there is the added fact that pain in man can be the cause of a higher good. By suffering pain man is often forced to turn to God and to lead a good moral life after he has sinned. There is no comparison in value between the good that results and the physical evil which occasions it. For both the converted sinner and the saint, pain can be the occasion of merit for the next life. Thus, far from being a surd evil, pain can be a tremendous benefit to man. What we have said of pain applies also to disease.

Death is not entirely evil either. In animals it is the natural result of their composition. It is not the good of the individual but rather the common good of the species which is of prime importance where animals are considered. Thus an individual animal can be and often is sacrificed for the good of the group. We see an instance of this in certain kinds of spiders

---

24 Ibid., 243.

does are also classed by Brightman in the category of intrinsic evils. But what is a flood or an earthquake, a tornado or a storm at sea? Are they not supreme manifestations of the divine power. Man realizes his insignificant power when he experiences the tremendous force of a hurricane. He realizes that the difference between God's might and his weakness illimitable. In themselves these phenomena are but evidences to man that an Almighty God still reigns. In addition to this, they are often the occasion of moral purgation. Frequently in the wake of the natural disorders that upset our lives men acknowledge their sinfulness and turn to God. This higher spiritual good far surpasses any amount of physical evil. One soul alone is priceless.

In conclusion, we can state that Brightman has failed to prove that such a thing as surd evil exists. Every example of surd evil that he proposes can be explained adequately in another way. His theory of surd evil has been the result of not adhering to his own standard of considering all the facts. He sometimes limits his viewpoint to this life instead of judging by eternal values. At other times he considers the evil of the individual rather than viewing the good of the whole of creation. Again he remains on the mere physical plane, instead of viewing things from the higher moral plane. His theory of surd evil has resulted from a failure to see the whole question in perspective. For this reason we must reject Brightman's theory.

If we except his mistaken undertone of optimism and his acceptance of surd evil, we can agree that Professor Brightman has himself given a rather accurate answer to the objections arising from the problem of evil in the world. In one of his earlier works, The Problem of God, he gives three explanations:

> First, much of the natural evil is a wholesome discipline: suffering purifies and obstacles strengthen the soul. Secondly, moral evil is a necessary consequence of the abuse of the divine gift of freedom. Thirdly, much that seems evil to us may be due to the fact that God's purposes are unknown to us.[25]

In A Philosophy of Religion Brightman discusses ten solutions to the problem of evil. The first three of these seem to do a rather thorough job of answering many of the difficulties of this problem. The three solutions he enumerates are: (1) Moral evils may be explained as a result of human freedom. (2) Non-moral evils are sometimes viewed as a punishment for moral evils. (3) Non-moral evils, if not penal, may be regarded as disciplinary. Let us consider each of these three more in detail.

The explanation that moral evils result from human freedom is a satisfactory one. Brightman indicates that "much weight may be granted to this argument."[26] He holds that Kant's, Vatke's and Bosanquet's objections to man's free will are a pri-

---

25 Brightman, The Problem of God, 160.

26 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 260.

ori and unempirical. However, Brightman finds it hard to reconcile a saying from St. Paul that "God is faithful, and will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able," (I Cor., 10, 13) with the fact of human sin. Human freedom, then, while it explains much of the moral evil in the world, is not entirely satisfying for Brightman:

> Nevertheless, human freedom leaves many aspects of evil, even moral evil, unexplained. Why are there in the nature of things, independent of human choice, so many temptations and allurements to evil choices so utterly debasing and disasterous?...Freedom, we repeat, explains much of the moral evil, but it does not explain either the force of temptation or the debasing consequences of moral evil.[27]

If we explain the force of temptation as a result of the concupiscence of our fallen nature and even the existence of a devil, and finally as a means God uses to increase our merit, we see that this objection is reasonably answered. The debasing consequences of moral evil may be explained as the result of our rebelling against Almighty God and violating the integrity of our God-given nature. Human freedom, consequently, stands out as the essential answer to the problem of moral evil.

Brightman rejects the second solution of evil, that non-moral evils are sometimes a punishment for moral evils. His reason for entirely rejecting this theory is that "it is repug-

---

27 Ibid., 260, 261.

nant to the ethical sense of modern idealists."

> Even criminology has repudiated the motive of punishment in favor of the reformation of the criminal. Shall a good God harbor resentment? Does perfect love punish? Further, the unjust distribution of nonmoral evils, both intrinsic and instrumental, makes it impossible to suppose that any consistent desire to punish affords an explanation of more than a few evils...The whole theory of punishment as a solution to the problem of evil collapses of its own weight.[28]

Our author occasionally injects a bit of divine revelation into his philosophy to augment his arguments. There is an instance of it here: "This crude theory of punishment was rejected by the writer of the book of Job and by Jesus (according to John, 9, 3)."[29] The citation of the gospel refers to a cure Jesus worked on a man blind since his birth. Christ's disciples had asked Him whether the man himself or his parents had sinned that the man was afflicted with blindness. Our Lord replied that neither the man himself nor his parents were being punished for sin in this blindness. Rather, Christ explained, the blindness had occurred in order that God's works be manifested through this blind man. Thereupon Christ healed the man of his blindness. From this single instance it is hardly correct to say that Jesus rejected the theory of punishment. Our Lord Himself told the paralytic at the pool of Bethsaida to sin no more lest something

---

28 Ibid., 261, 262.

29 Ibid.

worse happen to him (John, 5, 14). The classic example of punishment for sin is found in the Book of Genesis, chapter 18, verse 19. There we read of the distruction of Sodom and Gomorrah because of the sinfulness of these two cities. Other examples could be cited from the Old Testament of plagues, wars, famine, and disease which were sent to punish a nation or an individual for sin. But because these pertain to revelation they cannot be accounted as philosophical evidence here.

To say that God will not punish rebellion against Him--sin, in other words--is to falsify the idea of God. God is not only good; He is also just. In fact, if God did not punish evil, would He not actually be encouraging sin? Men, being what they are, would take advantage of this one-sided goodness of God and behave when it was convenient for them to behave. Thus, the just man would be the one to suffer, for both he and the unjust man would be treated alike by God. We can see, then, that not only would God be encouraging sin, but the whole order of justice would be unbalanced. Such a notion contradicts the very idea of God; it also contradicts Scripture.[30]

---

30 Although God desires the salvation of all, Scripture has many instances of His punishing unrepentant sinners. In The Book of Wisdom (3, 10), we read: "The wicked shall be punished according to their sins." In St. Matthew: "These shall go into everlasting punishment" (Matt., 25, 46).

There is a two-fold aspect of punishment. One looks to the offender, the other looks to society. Criminology may favor the reformantion of the criminal, but that does not hinder us from closing the prison doors on thousands of criminals every year. Such a punishment serves to achieve two ends: (1) to reform the individual offenders, and (2) to serve as a warning to other members of society whomight be tempted to commit crime. Some punishment does not attain both these ends entirely. The electric chair may not reform a murderer, but it does serve to reform society as a whole, and it restores balance to the order of justice. Without punishment, justice would soon become a mockery.

It is, then, precisely because God favors the repentence of sinners that He sometimes sends them natural evils as punishments for their sins. Witness the terrible social diseases that often follow the misuse of sex. Is it hard to see in them a punishment for sin as well as a strong inducement to live a good moral live? No, the theory that non-moral evils are sometimes a punishment for moral evils is a sound one. The word <u>sometimes</u>, however, is an important part of the explanation of punishment. This explanation of evil can be and is, from time to time, misapplied. But these misapplications do not hinder it from remaining an integral part of the complete explanation of the problem of evil.

The third solution to the problem of evil is that non-moral evils may be regarded as disciplinary. Professor Brightman cautiously admits there is some truth to this explanation, but he concludes that "the whole theory of evil as disciplinary falls far short of being philosophically adequate."[31] In his consideration of this third solution, Brightman uncovers an objection and offers a solution to it. Both are worth noting:

> We find that sometimes evil facts are explained as actually leading to nobler and more spiritual living; also that sometimes--and perhaps more frequently--evil facts lead to more and more resentful, debased, depressed, and hopeless living...Defenders of this disciplinary view, however, retort that these facts do not show a lack of disciplinary intent on God's part, or even a lack of wisdom, justice, or power, but indicate the presence of a misuse of freedom by man in the face of disciplinary opportunities.[32]

After making this analysis, Brightman proceeds to probe deeper into the heart of disciplinary evil. Because he presupposes that discipline is the purpose of all evil, the author sets up two conditions that disciplinary evil should meet. First and foremost, these evils should appear wherever they are needed and only when they are needed. Secondly, they should be perfectly adapted to their end. We realize the first condition is unnecessary when we freely admit that discipline is not the purpose of all evil, that it is not the total answer to the problem. The

---

31 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 262.

32 Ibid., 262, 263.

> freedom and discipline. But neither freedom nor discipline nor the two taken together approach a complete or coherent account of actual evil.[35]

Freedom and discipline and punishment are all parts of the total solution to the problem of evil. Another important part of the entire answer is the fact that God frequently uses physical evil to achieve a higher spiritual good. All these parts taken together still do not give a complete solution. To know that, we would have to comprehend the purposes of God. This last is the all-important link we must not forget. The parts of the solution here offered do give a coherent and reasonable account of evil. They seem to go as far as human limitations can, to solve a problem which is both human and divine.

If the existence of natural evils does not contradict the omnipotence of God, and since moral evil can be classified as an abuse by men of their freedom, there seems to be no just reason to argue against the infinite nature of God from the presence of evils in the world. The Given of Brightman should, neverhteless, merit some consideration, since it constitutes a striking and important feature of our author's own explanation of evil. The Given, then, will be considered in the concluding chapter.

---

35 Ibid., 264.

CHAPTER V

THE GIVEN: CONCLUSION

The concept of a "Given" did not originate with Edgar S. Brightman. Although he did not use the same name, John Stuart Mill wrote about the same idea in his work, Three Essays on Religion, published in 1874. Analyzing experience, Mill finds that there are preserving agencies and destroying agencies present in the world.[1] These latter, he says, we might be tempted to ascribe to the will of a different Creator. But Mill passes over this temptation to dualism, stating that it cannot be supposed "that the preserving agencies are wielded by one Being, the destroying agencies by another." His reason is that "the destroying agencies are a necessary part of the preserving agencies." Mill attributes the imperfections in the universe either "to the shortcomings in the workmanship as regards its intended purpose, or to external forces not under the control of the workman."

Mill's "Given" would seem to be only external matter extrinsic to God. Mill describes his "Given" in these words:

---

1 Mill, Three Essays on Religion, 185.

> We may conclude, then, that there is no ground in Natural Theology for attributing intelligence or personality to the obstacles which partially thwart what seems the purposes of the Creator. The limitation of his power more probably results either from the qualities of the material --the substances and forces of which the universe is composed not admitting of any arrangements by which his purposes could be more completely fulfilled; or else, the purposes might have been more fully attained, but the Creator did not know how to do it; creative skill, wonderful as it is, was not sufficiently perfect to accomplish his purposes more thoroughly.[2]

Professor Brightman goes into some detail to explain his theory of these "obstacles which partially thwart what seem the purposes of the Creator." To these obstacles he gives the name of The Given. His proof for the existence of The Given lies in the fact that there is evil in the world which cannot be imputed to man.[3] "The difficulties under which the divine will evidently labors in expressing the perfection desired in the world" also give evidence to the belief "that there is an eternal Given element in divine experience which is not the product of divine will."[4] An example of these difficulties is seen in the slow and painful processes of life, and in the presence of earthquakes, cyclones, and disease germs in the world.

It is in The Problem of God that Brightman introduces

---

2 Ibid., 186.

3 Brightman, The Problem of God, 126.

4 Ibid., 127.

his theory of The Given. His definition of The Given is really the latter half of his definition of God:

> There is within him God in addition to his reason and his creative will, a passive element which enters into every one of his conscious states, as sensation, instinct, and impulse enter into ours, and constitutes a problem for him. This element we call The Given. The evils of life and the delays in the attainment of value, in so far as they come from God and not from human freedom, are thus due to his nature, yet not wholly to his deliberate choice. His will and reason acting on The Given produce the world and achieve value in it.[5]

We see from this descriptive definition that Brightman differs from Mill on this theory, and is, at the same time, more definite than Mill. Brightman's theory is that the obstacles to God's purpose, the limitation of God's power, is something internal to God. It is an essential mark of the divine nature. The Given is the source of an eternal problem to God. It is irrational. In itself, it "cannot be understood; yet an understanding use may be made of it, and through the conquest and shaping of it meaning may be achieved."[6]

Our author gives five aspects of The Given which need to be considered in order to understand the theory. The Given is conscious, for "it is conscious experience of God...There is no unscious matter in God." It is complex: "it stands for the

---

5 Ibid., 113.

6 Ibid., 183.

entire uncreated and eternal nature of God...This Given enters as a partially distorting and delaying factor into every creative act of God. Time, also, is an aspect of the complex Given." It is eternal; otherwise, it would have to be a divine creation. It is impossible to conceive of God's creating the present sort of world unless there is "something in God which renders such a creation the best possible; that something...is the eternal Given." It is internal to God; it limits him "within as truly as without...an uncreated eternal limitation, within the divine nature." It is controlled by God: "It explains the presence of the horrible evils and distortions...But all of these factors are patiently faced by the divine goodness and our of them all God brings meaning."[7] This view, Brightman remarks, is an "open-eyed and honest" view of the goodness of God. It recognizes

---

7 Brightman, The Finding of God, 174-177. Our author gives his five aspects of the Given in this section. One rather amusing aspect of The Given reflects, it seems, Brightman's Methodist background. The Given is not a teetotaler: "The thought of The Given has an inspiring aspect. The hinderances to value with which life abounds are not simply to be accepted as the will of God. They are rather that against which God is battling, and he invites us to join the battle...Our faith may reply that God has no desire that there shall be any alcohol; its presence thus far is the outcome of God's struggle with The Given. If we join with God in the struggle, it may be that alcohol will always exist, but at least its evil consequences can be overcome, if men will conquer the appetite for drink, refuse to use alcohol as a beverage and join with God in driving it out of its present place of mastery over human wills and bodies and happiness." (Ibid., 181)

the evils of life and does not try to sugar-coat them. "On the other hand it does not ascribe them to God's will and thus make him morally so remote from all that we know of goodness as to be almost a monster."[8]

In spite of Brightman's lengthy description, it is not altogether clear just what the exact nature of The Given is. It must be either a being or a non-being. If it is a non-being, certainly it cannot be "a source of problem and task to God."[9] If it is a being, it must be either created or uncreated. Professor Brightman holds that we could never know why God would create such a thing.[10] The Given, he concludes, is "an uncreated limitation."[11] To avoid the difficulties of dualism, which appear to be insoluble, our author makes The Given a limitation within the nature of God. This limitation, however, is the eternal source of the evil against which God is struggling. God, then, must be thought of as struggling against the evil of which His eternal nature is the source. God, in other words, is struggling with himself. Still, Brightman's concept of God is that of "a Person of supremely good will."[12] And he claims

---

8 Ibid., 178.

9 Brightman, The Problem of God, 183.

10 Ibid.

11 Brightman, The Finding of God, 177.

12 Ibid., 113.

that The Given "stands for the entire uncreated and eternal nature of God."[13] There appears to be a contradiction in having God "a Person of supremely good will" and an "entire uncreated and eternal nature" that is passive and a problem for God. How can God's nature be a problem to Himself, how can it be passive, if it is supposed that God is uncreated and eternal? If God's nature is composite, and from what we have already seen of Brightman theory, it can hardly be concluded otherwise, then He cannot be uncreated and eternal. Composition as such is an imperfection and could only have as its ultimate source a perfect Being who is also simple. To make God composite, then, is to make Him created. Also, in trying to avoid the difficulties of dualism, Brightman has made The Given internal to God. But what other conclusion is to be drawn than that this theory of The Given makes God the supreme principle of both good and evil? Dualism is not avoided. It is simply drawn into the very Godhead; for God is a "Person of supremely good will," and at the same time The Given, which we must remember is an essential part of God's nature, is the source of all evil, excepting that caused by human freedom.

Thus the theory of The Given does not solve the problem of evil, nor does it absolve God from the natural evils of earthquakes, cyclones, and diseases. The theory of The Given tends to prove that which its inventor wanted it to disprove.

13 Ibid., 175

In short, it is self-contradictory, for it makes God both supremely good and at the same time the source of evil.

It has been shown that the whole theory of The Given was proposed by Brightman as a solution to the problem of evil, especially the problem of surd evil. But since he has failed to prove that surd evil exists, since all other evils can be rationally explained without calling on The Given, and since the very theory of The Given contains a note of self-contradiction, it seems only reasonable to reject Brightman's explanation.

In Chapter X of his work, A Philosophy of Religion, Brightman lists five main objections to the position of an infinite God. As a summary and conclusion of this thesis, a brief refutation of these objections of our author will be attempted. By this refutation, it is hoped that the stability of theistic absolutism will be shown; and, at the same time, the weaknesses of theistic finitism, uncovered. Brightman summarizes his objections thus:

> There are five objections to theistic absolutism which, taken together, render it a highly improbable view. These are (1) its appeal to ignorance, (2) its ascription of surd evils to divine will, (3) its tendency to make good and evil indistinguishable, (4) its cutting the nerve of moral endeavor, and (5) its unempirical character. Let us consider these in order.[14]

---

14 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 309.

(1) Its appeal to ignorance. "The argument for theistic absolutism," Brightman claims, "entails the admission that we cannot explain the surd evils--the waste, the cruelty, the injustice of nature--and that we must admit our ignorance." To avoid needless repetition, we will limit ourselves to the charge that the position of an infinite God appeals to ignorance to explain the evils of the world. We will treat of surd evil when dealing with the second objection. In the foregoing chapter, we have already presented several reasonalbe explanations for the presence of evil in the world. Moral evil is explained by the freedom of man's will. Non-moral evil can be explained as a punishment for sin, a disciplinary action, a means of effecting a higher spiritual good, a testing ground and way for us to merit a greater reward. We admit that in individual cases one or all of these explanations may not be the complete solution, for we can never comprehend the divine purposes in permitting natural evil. This is not strange. We are limited creatures and cannot expect to exhaust the knowability of the Creator. Brightman himself admits only a partial explanation is possible:

> If God is the omnipotent being he is traditionally believed to be, it is very strange that he has chosen the slow and costly means of evolution for the creation of life. If he is limited by the eternal existence of uncreated given experience within his nature, the strangeness is partially explained and interpreted; but it is still mysterious.[15]

---

15 Brightman, The Finding of God, 149.

(2) Its ascription of surd evil to divine will. This second objection is not exactly accurate. First, Professor Brightman said that theistic absolutism "cannot explain the surd evils;" now he adds that "An upholder of that view must find the ultimate source of all surd evils in the will of God." It may be said in reply that if absolutism cannot explain surd evil, it is simply because there is no such thing. And if there is no such thing, we can hardly ascribe it to the divine will. Brightman has yet to offer any substantial proof for the existence of surd evil. So far his main argument for it seems to be the suffering in animals and the "waste" in evolution. Both of these have been explained in the foregoing chapter, where it was pointed out that the possible suffering in animals is necessitated by the very nature of sentient being, and that the pleasures far outweigh the suffering in animal life. It was also shown that the "waste" in evolution is more an example of the lavishness and prodigality of divine power.

Citing Sutherland's book, The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct,[16] Brightman says "that the number of fish that are eating other fish in a given minute is about equal to the nu-

---

16 Alexander Sutherland, The Origin and Growth of the Moral Instinct, London, 2 vols., 1898.

ber of drops of water going over Niagara Falls in that minute."[17] Our author appears to consider this fact "collossal waste in the life processes." A complete answer to this difficulty would require reference to variety and order in the universe, to the good of activity, and to the enlightening of man. Here we will only ask if there is anything so intrinsically wrong about having a lower fish used to sustain a higher type of fish. This process seems more a tremendous argument for the divine Providence of God. With all those billions of fish eating billions of fish every minute, our lakes, streams, and oceans still remain stocked with plentiful fish of all varieties. We can only begin to imagine the terrible evil that would result from the over-surplus of fish if they did not eat one another.

Let us take that same example of the fish to show the inconsistency of Brightman's position on The Given as an explanation of surd evil. Our author would consider the waste of fish a surd evil which is necessitated by The Given. God would like to do something to save all those fish, but He does not have the power. Yet Brightman also tells us plainly that The Given "stands for the entire uncreated and eternal nature of God."[18] Thus, we can justly argue: (1) The Given is the cause of surd

---

17 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 315, 316.

18 Brightman, The Finding of God, 175.

evil. (2) But The Given stands for the entire nature of God. (3) Therefore, the entire nature of God is the cause of this evil. But how can God be supremely good and the cause of evil? Brightman says that theistic absolutism is wrong because it ascribes surd evil to the divine will. Although Brightman has not proved the existence of surd evil, his own position would logically lead to ascribing evil to the divine nature.

(3) Its tendency to make good and evil indistinguishable. This difficulty emerges from Brightman's idea that "absolute theism entails the proposition that all apparent evil is really good."[19] Brightman would argue that from the absolutist's view, both good and evil are caused by the divine will and are therefore good. Believers in an infinite God, however, make a clear distinction between good and evil. In the case of moral good and evil, the distinction is very definite. It is morally evil to murder someone, whether that someone is an unborn infant, an aged cancer patient, or the teller in a neighborhood bank. It is morally evil to practice artificial birth control, both for rich and poor. In general, whatever action leads us to our ultimate end, God, is morally good; whatever action deters us from that end is morally evil. Yet it can be argued that God permits moral evils and, therefore, in some sense wills them.

---

19 Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion, 311.

What God directly wills, however, is that man should receive and exercise his God-given gift of free-will. God wills and co-operated in all actions, considered in their material aspect. Their formal goodness or wickedness, though, depends on man.

Brightman was more likely referring to natural evils when he said we must consider them as good. Without qualification his charge is not true. The believer in an infinite God certainly holds that a raging flood is a natural disaster. He recognizes cancer as a physical evil we must work to combat. If his son gets polio, he grieves just as the theistic finitist would, and works just as hard to have him cured. He realizes that these things are evils on the natural plane. There is a question of different planes, however. What is evil (only relatively) on its own plane can be a good in relation to a higher one. It is somewhat the same as the case where a thing in act on one plane can be in potency with regard to another. The absolutist knows that physical ills can be used to benefit man in a spiritual way. Yet he does not cease trying to conquer them, since they are, naturally speaking, evil. In short, he is fully convinced of the truth of St. Paul's words: "For those who love God, all things work together unto good" (Romans, VIII, 28). But he still helps build a flood wall, has his children vaccinated, and gives his dollar to the cancer fund.

(4) Its cutting the nerve of moral endeavor. To sub-

stantiate this objection, the following claim is made be Brightman:

> From a theoretical standpoint, theistic absolutism, like other types of absolutism, removes all incentive for moral reform of the individual or of society...Absolutism holds to an optimism which implies that the world is already timelessly perfect. If it is perfect, why try to improve it? If every evil is really a good, why try to eliminate evils?[20]

On the contrary, theistic absolutism does not claim that this present world is altogether perfect; it is perfectly willing to admit imperfections in the universe. It freely admits that God, objectively speaking, could have made a much more perfect world. Nor does absolutism deny that physical evils are really evils and try to sugar-coat them as good. A hurricane is a frightening force. It can cause dreadful physical ruin in a town, say, in Florida. As such it is a physical evil. However, that same hurricane may make the citizens of that town realize that eternal values come first. As such, it is an instrument for good.

Absolutism, far from removing all incentive for moral reform, recognizes this present world as a trial and testing ground. It spurs men on, since their whole eternity hangs in the balance, to fight the good fight in this life, to strive and to conquer, that their eternal reward may be exceedingly great. In other words, because theistic absolutism takes into account the whole of man's existence, both before and after death and

---

20 Ibid., 312.

does not narrow its view to this present life, it imparts true meaning and purpose and enthusiasm to our moral endeavors. Here again, Brightman's position seems to be based on a false optimism. He would insist that God has done as perfect a job on the world as a limited God can do. Now we on our part should help such a God make the present world as perfect as we can. No doubt, such a view has its commendable points, but there is the danger of mistaking means for the end of our existence. There is danger of putting an undue emphasis on the present life and forgetting its essential character of a testing ground for a better life to come. The end of our existence is not to lead a safe, comfortable life without cares or sorrows. It is, rather, to become as like to God as possible; and frequently the best means of accomplishing this is the hard road of overcoming difficulties, trials, and self-love.

(5) Its unempirical character. Brightman explains the import of this objection when he states: "The root of all the objections to theistic absolutism is that it is a theory founded in a priori faith, which in turn grows out of desires found in certain types of religious experience."[21] Belief in an infinite God is founded on faith and does not take into account all the facts of experience. It is unscientific. Is this actually true?

---

21 Ibid., 313.

Let us take as an example the quinque viae of St. Thomas to see whether the position of an infinite God is really as unempirical as some claim. Take the third proof for the existence of God, the argument from contingency. The fact of contingency is at the core of every being that exists, aside from God Himself. This proof looks at every creature that has existed or is existing or can exist, every flower, every star, every man, every zebra; from analyzing these empirical contingent beings it rises to the one necessary being, God. The same is true of the arguments from cause and motion. These arguments look at the empirical facts of cause and motion that enter into our everyday lives. From a consideration of these concrete, individual facts the argument advances to the nature of cause and motion; from this analysis of the nature of the two it concludes that there must be a First Uncaused Cause, a Prime Mover. Certainly such reasoning cannot be branded unempirical. In the fourth and fifth arguments, scholastic philosophers, looking at the grades of beauty and the perfection in beings about them, and reflecting on the order in non-intellectual beings and in the universe as a whole, arrive at God precisely because they find in Him the true meaning of the empirical facts that surround them. The question could be put: Does Brightman take all the facts into consideration. Does he see beyond the surface meaning of everyday contingent being to something eternal? Rather,

does not he seeem to be the one who is failing here to live up to the standard he has set for himself, namely, to consider all the facts?

In philosophical considerations there is the necessity of making sure that one has the true facts and as many of them as it is possible to attain. But above and beyond this, we must search out the meaning of these facts. It is nefessary to consider them from every angle, to get beneath their surface meaning and grasp their true significance. Brightman himself makes this same plea in The Problem of God:

> So with God; you may constantly be dealing with facts that come from him yet entirely miss finding him. We must get away from the pedantic worship of mere facts; here, I suspect, the professor and the businessman often commit the same error. They often cry, "Let's get down to the facts!" Yes, by all means, but unless we can find out what the facts mean, what they point to, what they are worth, all the facts in the world will be useless to us.[22]

It would seem that Professor Brightman has unwittingly fallen into the snare about which he is warning others. He has considered the empirical facts, but has failed to see their ultimate significance. He has investigated the evils in the world, but not entirely, not from an eternal viewpoint. He has become lost in the problem of good-and-evil. The only solution he has seen to this problem is the one offered by finitism. The principal difficulty of Brightman, it appears, is a metaphysical one.

---

22 Brightman, The Problem of God, 145.

He seems to fail to realize that the main question in philosophy is the question of being. He has come in contact with thousands of contingent beings, but has never penetrated to the true significance of their contingency. This the the reason he can make the statement: "It is true that there is no real fact which taken by itslef, is conclusive evidence that God is real."[23] This is true if Brightman means direct evidence, but from the context as well as from other sources in his writings, he is speaking of any evidence, direct or indirect. This is why his conclusions are so uncertain, why he is forced to admit "that final intellectual certainty is impossible."[24] It is why he must, at the end of his search, make the following admission:

> Such is the outcome of our search for God. It may be that we have seen dimly and wrongly. But we have searched and can do no more than tell what we have found. Whether or not what we have found really is a step nearer to the divine truth only God himself knows.[25]

In this thesis, then, something of the background of Professor Brightman's position has been seen by a brief consideration of the theories of Hume, Mill, and James. The proofs Professor Brightman offers for the existence of God are such that they can only lead to a finite God. The attributes he maintains

---

23 Ibid., 144.

24 Brightman, The Finding of God, 69.

25 Ibid., 193.

exist in God were shown to presuppose and reflect the doctrine of theistic finitism. The problem of good-and-evil has been seen as Brightman's greatest reason for holding that God is finite. But it has been shown that a false optimism underlies his thinking on this matter. Brightman's failure to prove the existence of surd evil was also noted. On the other hand, reasonable explanations, some of them from Professor Brightman himself, have been advanced to interpret the existence of evil in the world: Moral evil is due to the freedom of man's will. God is directly the cause of all entitive being but not of all privations. Since even physical evil is a privation, God cannot be held directly responsible. God can and does use physical evils in such a way as to contribute to the higher good of an individual or group of individuals. In the animal world, we have seen that the common good is to be considered before the good of the individual animal. Finally, Brightman's theory of The Given has been considered and rejected as untenable, since it implies a contradiction.

In short, Professor Brightman has failed to prove the necessity of finiteness in God. Nor has he validly established any essential flaw in the position that God is infinite. To repeat, God must be infinite in order to have a sufficient reason for our own existence or that of the world in which we live. All else outside of God is contingent. No finite being or infinite

series of finite contingent beings can validly explain the existence of other contingent beings. The reason is simply that they must look to another being for their own existence. From the fact of existing contingent beings the existence of a Necessary Being, the One dependent on nothing else for existence, is proved. This Necessary Being is called God. And this God must be infinite in all respects, for otherwise He is not a Being that is Necessary with respect to existence itself. Otherwise, He would take on, in this or that respect, the nature of a contingent being.

Although we cannot agree with Professor Brightman's position, we can and do admire the sincerity and earnestness of his quest for God and for truth. Undoubtedly, he puts God in the foremost place of importance in his philosophy; after reading his works, we can reasonably suppose that he has done the same in his own personal life. He has undertaken his study and investigations to protect the honor of God and the cause of religion. His conclusion to The Finding of God expresses a thought to which we can all agree, one which we can all hope to follow:

> Yet there is one thing that all may know: if God exists at all, there is more to learn about his nature and his purposes than stands written in any book or has been thought by any human mind. May we never close our minds against this prospect of growth.[26]

---

26. Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. PRIMARY SOURCES

Aristotle, The Basic Works of Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon, New York, 1941.

Boethius, Anicius Manlius Severinus, The Consolation of Philosophy, with the English translation of "I.T." (1609), revised by H. F. Stewart, Loeb Classical Library, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1926.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, The Finding of God, New Yor, 1932.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, An Introduction to Philosophy, New York, 1925.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, Is God a Person?, New York, 1932.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, Personality and Religion, New York, 1934.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, A Philosophy of Ideals, New York, 1928.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, A Philosophy of Religion, New York, 1945.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, The Problem of God, New York, 1930.

Brightman, Edgar Sheffield, "Religion as Truth", Contemporary American Theology, edited by V. Ferm, New York, 1932.

James, William, The Letters of William James, edited by his son, Henry James, Vol. II, Boston, 1920.

James, William, A Pluralistic Universe, New York, 1909.

James, William, Pragmatism, New York, 1947.

James, William, The Varieties of Religious Experience, New York, 1936.

Laurie, S.S., Synthetica, Vol. II, New York, 1906.

Lippmann, Walter, A Prefece to Morals, New York, 1929.

McTaggart, John McT. Ellis, The Nature of Existence, Vol. II, Cambridge, 1927.

McTaggart, John McT. Ellis, Philosophical Studies, London, 1934.

Mill, John Stuart, Three Essays on Religion, New York, 1874.

Rashdall, Hastings, The Theory of Good and Evil, Oxford, 1907.

Smith, Norman Kemp, Hume's Dialogues Conderning Natural Religion, Oxford, 1947.

Thomas Aquinas, Saint, Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, edited by Anton C. Pegis, New York, 1944.

Thomas Aquinas, Saint, Summa Contra Gentes, Leonine Manual Edition, Rome, 1934.

Thomas Aquinas, Saint, Summa Theologiae. Marietti Edition, Rome, 1948.

II. SECONDARY SOURCES

Bixler, Julius Seelye, Religion in the Philosophy of William James, Boston, 1926.

Farnell, Lewis Richard, The Attributes of God, Oxford, 1925.

Mueller, Walter G. and Laurence Sears, The Development of American Philosophy, Boston, 1940.

Schneider, Herbert W., History of American Philosophy, New York, 1947.

Werkmeister, W. H., A History of Philosophical Ideas in America, New York, 1949.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Mr. Donald Justin Hayes, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of Philosophy.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Jan. 29, 1952
Date

Murrel R. Vogel, SJ
Signature of Adviser