

**THE PROBLEM OF EVIL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO P. T.  
FORSYTH, JOHN WISDOM AND LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN**

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THE PROBLEM OF EVIL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO  
P.T. FORSYTH, JOHN WISDOM AND LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

By

Stephen J. Vicchio

Submitted to St. Mary's College of the University  
of St. Andrews

1985

in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy



The time has past when I think I should have written  
a good book.

Ludwig Wittgenstein

I certify that ..... has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No.1 (as amended), and is qualified to submit this thesis in application for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

.....

Signature of supervisor

I was admitted as a reserach student under Ordina<sup>n</sup>ce 350 (General No. 12) on 1 October, 1983 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. under the Resolution of the University Court, 1967, No. 1 (as amended) on 1 April 1984.

The following thesis is based on the results of research carried out by myself, is my own composition, and has not previously been presented for a higher degree. The reserach was carried out in the University of St. Andrews under the supervision of Dr. George Hall.

.....

Signature of candidate

## Acknowledgements

The principal problem with acknowledging the various kinds of help one has received in the process of completing a project such as this is that there are too many to thank, and too little space in which to do it. There is a clear and present danger of inadvertently leaving out someone important. Still, it would merely be within the bounds of common courtesy to thank the following:

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Finally, I reserve a special acknowledgement for my parents. They have taught me more about taking the individual sufferer seriously than I think I should have learned anywhere else. It is to them this work is dedicated.

Stephen J. Vicchio  
Deanscourt  
St. Andrews  
Fife

### Abstract

Chapter one begins with a definition and exposition of the concept of theodicy, and a topology for characterizing comparative theodicies is suggested. It is argued that the basis on which theodicies might be compared is the foundational ontological principles on which they are built. Chapter two is a lengthy discussion regarding the meaning of terms such as omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, moral evil and natural evil. Chapter three begins with a critical analysis of a variety of theodicies found throughout the history of Christian theology. The final conclusion drawn in this chapter is that none of the proposed answers is acceptable. Acceptability is measured in three important ways: First, is the position logically consistent, second, does it conform, at least in a broad way, to the major tenets of the Christian form of life, and third, does this position take the individual sufferer seriously? In chapter four a foundation is laid for a response to the problem of evil which is to follow in chapter five. In this penultimate chapter an analysis of the Book of Job is offered which centers on the interpretation of Yahweh's speeches out of the whirlwind. It is suggested that the crux of Job's repentance is to be understood in connection with Job "seeing God." In chapter five, an attempt is made, using the help of Karl Barth, D.M. Mackinnon, P.T. Forsyth, Ludwig Wittgenstein and John Wisdom, as well as some insights gained from chapter four, <sup>to argue</sup> that there is a teleological response to the problem of evil that is logically consistent, true to the Christian form of life and sensitive to the needs of the individual sufferer.

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## Introduction

There is something the writers of introductions seldom reveal but readers should never forget: though read first, they are written last. Introductions usually serve as a kind of conclusion set at the beginning of a work. It is for this reason no conclusion can be found at the end of this thesis. If one is wanted, it is quite easy to reread the introduction. A good introduction acts as a set of promises already delivered. It is perhaps best, then, that the introduction be read first, before the thesis, and then again upon its completion. It is a way of checking to see if promisory notes have been filled.

This thesis is concerned with why the world is not such an easy place in which to live. We, as its most sentient creatures, live daily in a morally ambiguous environment. Most of us experience contentment, happiness, and even profound joy. But these experiences are all too often interspersed with unwarranted suffering, excruciating pain and irrational violence. Although human life at times may seem like heaven on earth, it can also be more like scenes from a Kafka novel or a canvas of Edvard Munch. This work is primarily concerned with the problem of reconciling these latter kinds of experiences with a God who is thought to be omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent.

Chapter one begins with a definition and exposition of the concept of theodicy. As Peter Berger suggests, "Theodicy is the part of a belief system that serves to maintain religious meaning in spite of evil and suffering."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (New York: Anchor Books, 1969) pp. 53-54.

Berger maintains that it is possible to analyze historical types of theodicy on a continuum of rationality to irrationality. According to Berger's scheme, theodicies can vary in type from an irrational identification of the self with society, as in primitive societies, to the most rational kinds of answers found to the problem of evil, those suggested in the Indian religious traditions. Somewhere between the most rational (karma-samsara) and the least rational (covenantal relationship of the ancient Hebrews), Berger locates several intermediate forms of theodicy which include this worldly compensation (cargo cults), other worldly compensation (ancient Egyptian religion), dualism (Platonic metaphysics and limited God theories), as well as most of the answers to the problem of evil offered in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

In this work, Berger's thesis is criticized on a number of fronts. First, he gives an insufficient definition of what it means to be "rational". Second, he examines these various theodicies from outside of each of the particular forms of life in which they are placed. It is argued that Berger makes many of the same kinds of intellectual mistakes found among members of what is sometimes called the "Primitive Materials" tradition. E.B. Tylor, Max Muller and Sir James Frazer, for example, all too often seem to misunderstand or misinterpret the "primitive mind" because they frequently failed to understand the depth grammar of the cultures in which these religions were placed.

Peter Winch's article, "Understanding a Primitive Society", and Ludwig Wittgenstein's Remarks on Frazer's 'The Golden Bough' are used in criticizing Berger's approach to comparative theodicy.

In the remainder of the first chapter an alternative topology for characterizing comparative theodicies is suggested. It is argued that the basis on which theodicies might be compared is the foundational ontological principles on which the various religious forms of life are built. Thus, monistic faiths like Brahmanic Hinduism and Hinayana Buddhism might properly be called "religions of dissolution" with respect to the problem of evil, for the adherents to these traditions maintain that at bottom level the phenomenal world, as well as the souls who inhabit that world, are illusory. The problem of evil, for these faiths, is not resolved, it is dissolved.

A second cluster of theodicies might be labeled "religions of solution". This approach to the problem of evil is most dramatically displayed in the ancient Persian religion, Zoroastrianism. The religions of solution are fundamentally dualistic - the foundational ontological principle on which they are based is the notion that ultimate reality is essentially bifurcated. For these faiths, the problem of evil is not dissolved, as it is for the monistic religions, it is solved. In addition to Zoroastrianism, the dualism of Plato and the limited God theorists can also be seen as offering versions of the "religions of solution" with respect to the problem of evil.

A discussion of a third group of theodicies, the "religions of paradox", follows. These traditions, chiefly Judaism and Christianity, are called religions of paradox because they seem committed to a distinctive combination of monism and dualism, or an ethical dualism set within the framework of an ultimate ontological monism. The religions of paradox seem

committed on the one hand to belief in a God whose attributes include omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence, while at the same time adhering to the notion that there is real evil in the world.

In the end of this first chapter, J.L. Mackie's formulation of the problem of evil is used to introduce the dilemma for the religions of paradox.

In chapter two a lengthy discussion is developed regarding the meanings of terms like 'omnipotence', 'omniscience', 'omnibenevolence', 'moral evil' and 'natural evil'. A variety of possible formulation for each of these terms is explored. In each case an attempt is made to discern the most logically coherent definition of each term. Chapter two concludes with a discussion of whether the problem of evil, as formulated by the religions of paradox, really involves one in a formal logical contradiction. The notions of 'prima facie evil', 'apparent evil' and 'actual evil' are also introduced toward the end of the second chapter. These concepts will be very important in understanding our final view of the problem of evil.

Chapter three begins with a critical analysis of a variety of theodicies found in the Christian theological tradition. Twelve theodicies in all are discussed. These are divided into four basic groups:

- (1) Punishment and Warning theodicies;
  - (2) Unreality of Evil theodicies;
  - (3) Evil is Logically Necessary theodicies; and
  - (4) Teleological Theodicies.
- The final conclusion drawn in this chapter is that none of the proposed answers to the problem of evil is acceptable. Acceptability is measured in three important ways. First, is the position logically consistent. Second, does it conform, at least in a broad way, to the

major tenets of the Christian form of life. And third, does this position take the individual sufferer seriously?

In Chapter four a foundation is laid for a response to the problem of evil which is to follow in chapter five. In this penultimate chapter an analysis of the Book of Job is offered that centers on the interpretation of the Yahweh speeches out of the whirlwind. Using the work of MacKenzie, Rudolph Otto, George O'Brien, and others, it is suggested that the crux of the Yahweh speeches is to be understood in connection with Job "seeing God" in 42:6. O'Brien suggests that the problem for Job switches from a formal one to an existential one, a common shift which takes place when an overriding concern for an existential relation displaces the need for formal explanation. The chapter ends with O'Brien's insights being applied specifically to the problem of evil as it is formulated by the religions of paradox.

Chapter five begins by reminding the reader of a distinction made clear in chapter three. There it was suggested that there are some theodicies in the Christian tradition which seem to be prohibited by reason. Because of one or more logical flaws, these responses fail as consistent answers to the problem of evil. We have also seen that there are other theodicies which might be said to be allowed by reason. Hick's teleological response is numbered among these. Most of the theodicies that are allowed by reason, however, still fail as acceptable answers to the problem of evil, for they fail the second and/or third criteria of an acceptable Christian theodicy. In Hick's case, his position fails, not on logical grounds, but because he gives insufficient weight to the person of Christ in his theodical scheme. Hick is correct to point out,

nevertheless, that any rationally coherent answer to the problem of evil must be teleological in nature.

In the remainder of this thesis an attempt is made to argue, using the help of Karl Barth, D.M. MacKinnon, P.T. Forsyth, Ludwig Wittgenstein, John Wisdom, and some insights gained from chapter four, that there is a teleological response to the problem of evil that is at the same time logically consistent, true to the Christian form of life, and sensitive to the needs of the individual Christian victim of suffering.

Chapter One: The Varieties of Theodicy

I stand near Soberanes Creek, on the knoll over the sea, west of the road. I remember  
This is the place where Arthur Barclay, a priest in revolt, proposed three questions to himself:  
First, is there a God, and of what nature? Second, whether there is anything after we die but worm's meat? Third, how should men live? Large time-worn questions no doubt; yet he touched his answers, they are not unattainable;  
But presently lost them again to the glimmer of insanity.

Robinson Jeffers

I want to be there when everyone suddenly knows what it has all been for. All the religions of the world are built on this longing.

Fyodor Dostoyevski

In Escape from Evil Ernest Becker observes that "what man really fears is not so much extinction, but extinction with insignificance".<sup>1</sup>  
This holds true, I think, not only for the fear of death, but also for human responses to suffering. Death, disease and natural calamity are brutal reminders of how little control human beings have over the world. Although we often imagine ourselves immortal and impregnable, the cruel facts suggest that our physical existence is limited more or less to the Biblical seventy years. The presence of evil in the world is a terrible burden which demands a response. Thus, when we are confronted with it, "our lives become meditations on evil and a planned venture for controlling and forestalling it".<sup>2</sup> And when that is not possible, for making meaning out of it.

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1  
Ernest Becker, Escape From Evil (New York: Free Press, 1975) p. 2.

2  
Ibid., p. 3.

People in all cultures face problems that cannot be resolved either with the use of common sense or scientific expertise. To be human is to suffer and die, and to have one's aspirations and desires subject to failure and frustration. The transitoriness of life and the uncertainty that plagues human ventures confront all people with situations in which, as sociologist Thomas O'Dea has remarked, "Human knowledge and social forms display a total insufficiency for providing either means of solution or mechanisms for adjustment and acceptance."<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that religious systems provide, or attempt to provide, the contexts in which the existence of evil, both moral and natural, is integrated into the larger picture of reality. Religious systems, if they are to be lasting, must have something to say in what Paul Tillich has called "the boundary situations", when our capacity to say yes to life is most threatened. And that "something to say", I think, must consist of at least two important elements. First, religious responses to suffering must have an existential element. Indeed, the experience of suffering is first an existential one, an experience to be lived through. It is usually only later that it becomes an intellectual one to be explained. Clifford Geertz has come very close to making this same point when he writes: "The problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering, but how to make physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat, or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable, something, as we say, sufferable."<sup>4</sup>

3

Thomas O'Dea, Introduction to the Sociology of Religion (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966) p. 63.

4

Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Culture (New York: Basic Books, 1973) p. 171.



Religious responses to suffering must also exhibit another important dimension: they must deal with evil in a coherent and intellectually honest way. Religious forms of life must not only help the sufferer live through the experience of pain, disappointment and suffering, they must also help the sufferer give meaning to the experience.

The various ways in which the religions of the world have attempted to give meaning to suffering might be called the study of comparative theodicy, from the Greek theos and dike.<sup>5</sup> Peter Berger, in his book, The Sacred Canopy, has suggested a typology that may be helpful in differentiating among various styles of theodicy making.<sup>6</sup> The general vocabulary and system of categorization employed by Berger provide a rather neat hermeneutical tool for interpreting the various responses to the problem of suffering.

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5  
Leibniz appears to have been the first to use the word 'theodicy' in its distinctive modern sense. In a letter written in 1697 he spoke of employing the term as the title of an impending work, and in 1710 the work duly appeared. The complete title was Essais de Theodicees sur la Bonte de Dieu, la liberte de l'homme et l'origine du Mal. Since that time, the word 'theodicy' has been in common use in French, German and English. The writing of Leibniz's essay actually came about because the Queen of Prussia had become distressed by the writings of the French iconoclast, Pierre Bayle. Bayle, who was a confirmed fideist, had suggested that faith was not only unsupported by reason, it actually ran contrary to it. Leibniz attempted to ease the Queen's mind in light of Bayle's work. Later in the century Leibniz's position would also be used to explain the Lisbon earthquake which killed 40,000 people in 1747. In modern times, the usage and scope of the term 'theodicy' is often quite vague and ill-defined. Sometimes it is a synonym for philosophy of religion or philosophical theology. At other times, the term has a more specific meaning in keeping with its etymological origin. When we use the term it will be in connection with any systematic religious response to the problem of evil.

6  
Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (New York: Anchor Books, 1969)

Berger begins by defining a theodicy as "the part of a belief system that serves to maintain religious meaning in spite of evil and suffering".<sup>7</sup> He very carefully points out that theodicies are by no means employed to make people happy, or even necessarily to show them that they may be redeemed. "Indeed", he suggests, "some theodicies carry no promise of redemption at all - except for the redeeming assurance of meaning itself".<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Berger maintains

It is possible to analyze historical types of theodicy on a continuum of rationality-irrationality. Each type represents a particular posture, in theory and practice, vis a vis the anomic phenomena to be legitimized or nomized.<sup>9</sup>

According to Berger's scheme, theodicies can vary in type from an irrational identification of the self with society, as in primitive societies or the covenantal relationship of the ancient Hebrews, to the most rational type of theodicy found in Indian religious forms of life - the "karma-samsara complex". Berger suggests that Vedantic Hinduism and Hinayana Buddhism should be considered the most rational form of religious responses to suffering because these traditions are governed by a series of rewards and punishments in successive incarnations according to the degree to which one has been faithful to the tasks imposed by former lives.

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-54.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., Berger's analysis of theodicy seems to lean very heavily on the earlier model offered by Max Weber in "Das Problem der Theodizee", in Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (Tubingen, 1947). In that work, Weber distinguishes between what he calls "four rational types of theodicy": the promise of compensation in this world; the promise of compensation in a world beyond; dualistic solutions; and karmic theories. Weber, like Berger, finds the last of these to be the most "rational". It is also clear that Berger is deeply indebted to Emile Durkheim, especially the Elementary Forms of Religious Life (New York: Collier Books, 1961), for the notion of the self-transcending character of religious institutions.

Somewhere between these poles of the rational and the irrational Berger finds several intermediate forms which include "this worldly" messianic-millinarism (Jewish Sabbatianism and cargo cults), "other worldly" compensations (exemplified by the elaborate mortuary customs of the ancient Egyptians and Chinese), and dualism, in which all evil is ascribed to some ultimate reality other than God. Berger cites Manicheanism, Mithraism, and Zoroastrianism as examples of this third type, though the view taken by John Stuart Mill in his Three Essays on Religion, as well as Plato in the Timaeus, and E.S. Brightman in his Philosophy of Religion can also be seen to fall quite naturally in this category.<sup>10</sup>

In this intermediary cluster of theodicies Berger also places more common types, especially in the West, such as those found in the Book of Job, as well as those stressing the redemptive power of the suffering of an incarnate deity, as in most forms of Christianity.

There is much to recommend Berger's work. Though he has clearly based his study on the pioneering work of Max Weber, Berger considerably broadens the discussion by including an analysis of a number of traditions to which Weber has paid little or no attention.

The Sacred Canopy is an ingenious and comprehensive piece of scholarship,<sup>11</sup> but it is not without its conceptual problems. The major flaw in Berger's method of categorization seems to rest on his rather

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10

The important distinctions among these various thinkers will be discussed later in this chapter.

11

Other classifications of types of theodicies can be found in Brian Hebblethwaite's Evil, Suffering and Religion (London: Shelton Press, 1979) pp. 14-39; Charles Barrett's Understanding the Christian Faith (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1980) pp. 230-260; and John Hick's Evil and the God of Love (London: Macmillan and Co., 1977) parts II and III.

dubious assumption that one can clearly assess the comparative degree of rationality in each of the various theodicies. One would be hard pressed, I think, to come up with clear sufficient or even necessary conditions for calling something "rational". Alvin Plantinga points to this very sticky problem:

Now an apparently straightforward and promising way to approach this question would be to take a definition of rationality and see whether belief in God conforms to it. The chief difficulty with this appealing approach, however, is that no such definition of rationality seems to be available. If there were such a definition, it would set out some conditions for a belief's being rationally acceptable, conditions that are severally necessary and jointly sufficient. That is each of the conditions would have to be met by a belief that is rationally acceptable; and if a belief met all these conditions, then it would follow that it is rationally acceptable. But it is monumentally difficult to find any non-trivial necessary conditions at all.<sup>12</sup>

Nowhere in Berger's chapter on theodicy does he entertain the question of what the proper definition of the "rational" might be. Indeed, it may well be the case that by examining various religious forms of life from the outside, and measuring them by use of a rather murky and implicit notion of rationality, Berger has missed the particular coherence of each, in the same way that Americans sit bored and confused at a cricket match until suddenly they understand the rules of the game.

In some ways Berger succumbs to the same intellectual elitism that was present among anthropologists and sociologists of religion at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one. Individuals like E.B. Tylor, Max Muller and Sir James Frazer, all began with certain assumptions about the level of "rationality" among "primitive" peoples,

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12

Alvin Plantinga, "Rationality and Religious Belief", Nous., Vol. 15 (1981) pp. 41-42.

and then developed elaborate theories about the origin of religion based on the study of the "pre-logical" frames of mind of these people.<sup>13</sup>

In some of the literature from this period "primitives" were not labelled "irrational" or "pre-logical" but rather "unscientific". Perhaps one of the clearest examples is to be found in E.E. Evans-Pritchard's Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azandes.<sup>14</sup> Evans-Pritchard suggests that the African Azandes believe that some of the members of their tribe are witches capable of various occult influences on the tribe and its individual members. Given this belief about witches, the sorts of activities the Azandes engage in with reference to these particular members of society are quite understandable; indeed, quite logical. But Evans-Pritchard indicates that although the Azandes are logical, they reason unscientifically, for they don't check their truth claims in a scientific way.

Peter Winch in an influential article, "Understanding a Primitive Society",<sup>15</sup> objects to Evans-Pritchard's point of view. Winch suggests that hidden in Evans-Pritchard's perspective is the assumption that the Azandes view of witches must be seen as a possible scientific claim. Winch also objects to the notion that "being in accord with objective reality" can only be understood within the context of scientific reasoning. Indeed, he suggests that Evans-Pritchard's notion of "reality" and "being in accord with reality" are really shorthand ways of saying "that which is verified by science", and it is only within this context

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13

Cf.: E.B. Tylor's Primitive Culture, two volumes (London: Longmans 3rd edition, 1891); Max Muller's Lectures on the Origin and Growth of Religion (London: Longmans, 1878); and Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough (London: Longmans, 1914), particularly parts ii and x and Belief in Immortality and Worship of the Dead, Gifford Lectures, St Andrews, 1913.

14

E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azandes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 3rd edition, 1976)

15

Peter Winch, "Understanding a Primitive Society", American Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 1 (1964) pp. 307-324.

that Evans-Pritchard's comments are intelligible. Winch remarks:

Evans-Pritchard is trying to work with a conception of reality which is not determined by its actual use in language. He wants something against which that use itself can be appraised. But this is not possible; and no more possible in the case of scientific discourse than it is in any other. We may ask whether a particular scientific hypothesis agrees with reality and test this observation and experiment. Given the experimental methods, and the established use of the theoretical terms entering into the hypothesis, then the question whether it holds or not is settled by reference to something independent of what I, or anybody else, care to think. But the general nature of the data revealed by the experiment can only be specified in terms of criteria built into the methods of the experiment employed and these, in turn, make sense only to someone who is conversant with the kind of scientific activity within which they are employed.<sup>16</sup>

Winch continues by arguing that there are other contexts where "reality" and "being in accordance with reality" are also meaningful, and these may have little or nothing to do with scientific views of the world. Winch is not proposing a new kind of relativism here.<sup>17</sup> What he is doing, I think, is sketching out in a more definitive way some remarks made by Ludwig Wittgenstein regarding the realization that we cannot determine the meaning of a concept disconnected from the use that particular concept is given in a certain language game.<sup>18</sup> Whether and how language is meaningful can only be determined from inside that particular language game. Berger attempts to stand outside the traditions he has analyzed, as if he could be an ideal observer in these matters, and has tried to discern which theodicies are the most rational and which the least. But

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16

Ibid., p. 309.

17

A more detailed discussion of why I think that Winch and Wittgenstein are not epistemological relativists is carried on in chapter five of this thesis.

18

There is an extensive collection of Wittgenstein's notes on this issue of understanding radically different "forms of life", which he made in connection with reading James Frazer's The Golden Bough. Remarks on Frazer's 'The Golden Bough', edited by Rush Rhees (London: Brynmill Press, 1979).

in taking this kind of approach he fails to take into account the contexts in which each of these particular answers to the problem of evil is placed.

Winch sums all this up quite well:

The check of the independently real is not peculiar to science. The trouble is that the fascination science has had on us makes it easy for us to adopt its scientific form as a paradigm against which to measure the intellectual respectability of other modes of discourse. Consider what God says to Job out of the whirlwind: "Who is it that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? ... Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof. Tell me, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it? ... Shall he that contendeth with the Almighty instruct him? He that reproveth God, let him answer it." Job is taken to task for having gone astray by having lost sight of the reality of God; this does not, of course, mean that Job has made any sort of theoretical mistake, which could be put right, perhaps by means of experiment. God's reality is certainly independent of what any man may care to think, but what reality amounts to can be seen from the religious tradition in which the concept of God is used, and this use is very unlike the use of scientific concepts, say of theoretical entities. The point is that it is within the religious use of language that the conception of God's reality has its place, though, I repeat, this does not mean that it is at the mercy of what anyone cares to say; if this were so, God would have no reality.<sup>19</sup>

Wittgenstein makes several remarks about Sir James Frazer's The Golden Bough which amount to the same thing. One of Wittgenstein's major objections to Frazer's work is that the latter makes the beliefs of the peoples he studied look like mistakes or false hypotheses. Wittgenstein puts the matter this way:

Frazer says it is very difficult to discover the error in magic and this is why it persists for so long - because, for example, a ceremony which is supposed to bring rain is sure to appear effective sooner or later. But then it is queer that people do not notice sooner that it does not rain sooner or later.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 308-309.

<sup>20</sup>Wittgenstein, Remarks on Frazer's "The Golden Bough", p. 2.

Berger, in judging these various theodicies according to their degree of rationality, seems to commit the same kind of error. He has some notion of what it would mean to think or act rationally, and he applies this notion quite unreflectively to the traditions in question.

Another important problem with Berger's typology is that it ignores several of the most important responses to the problem of evil to be found in the Western tradition. Little or no mention is made, for example, of retributive justice, the idea that evil is God's tool for punishing the guilty or warning those who are tempted to sin. He also makes little reference to the contrast theodicy, the notion of evil as privation, the free will defense, or various teleological theodicies that have been offered in the Judeo-Christian tradition.<sup>21</sup>

A third and perhaps most important flaw in the method of categorization found in The Sacred Canopy is that Berger gives very little attention to the various presupposed ontological underpinnings of each of the traditions' answers. If more time had been spent in looking for what Wittgenstein called "the hidden grammar" of each of these faiths, a very different typology might have resulted.<sup>22</sup>

I would suggest that we might place in one group Brahmanic Hinduism and Theravadan Buddhism. Although Berger is correct to point out that these two religions share the important notions of karmic rebirth and transmigration, he says nothing about an even more crucial metaphysical presupposition which they have in common: that the individual personality

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This same point might be made regarding the other traditions Berger has mentioned as well. In the Hebraic tradition, for example, one can identify at least the following: the yetzer ha ra, the richly mythological response of the Kabbalists, the Fall story in Genesis 3, the resurrection response in Daniel 12, etc. I suspect that the same kind of variety could also be found in the other traditions as well.

22

Ludwig Wittgenstein, The Philosophical Investigations (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott, 1953) section 373.



17.

or soul is obliterated at nirvana or moksha. For both the Vedantic Hindus, as well as the small raft Buddhists, it is that instant when it will become clear that the phenomenal world, as well as the individual personalities in that world, were fundamentally illusory. Reality for both of these religious traditions collapses into a kind of ultimate monism. As John Bowker suggests:

The individual who has an adequate grasp of Brahman will find that suffering falls away in insignificance. Since everything that happens is a manifestation of Brahman, it follows that true understanding only arises when the accidents of time and space are penetrated and seen to reveal Brahman. Brahman pervades all things without being exhausted in any one of them; which means that suffering and sorrow cannot be the final truth of existence.<sup>23</sup>

The Katha Upanisad makes the same point about the fundamental monistic character of ultimate reality:

As fire, which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to the object it burns, so also the one Self within all beings becomes varied according to whatever it enters and also exists outside them all. As air which is one, entering this world becomes varied in shape according to whatever it enters and also exists outside them all. Just as the sun, the eye of the whole world, is not defiled by the external faults seen by the eye, even so the one within all beings is not tainted by the sorrow of the world, as he is outside the world.<sup>24</sup>

Bowker expresses the relationship between this ultimate monism and the problem of evil quite well:

Suffering occurs as a problem for Hinduism only when duality in the universe, the contrast between pain and pleasure, is seen as an abiding truth about existence. Then, inevitably, the individual self spends itself in trying to find a solid

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John Bowker, Problems of Suffering in the Religions of the World (London: Cambridge University Press, 1970) p. 212.

24

Katha Upanisad., ii, 2, 9-11 in The Principal Upanisads., translated by Sri Purchit Swami and W.B. Yeats (London: Faber and Faber, 1937).

and secure home in objects that prove ephemeral and transitory. Suffering ceases to be a problem when it is realised that the individual self can transcend occurrences of suffering by finding its identity in Brahmin.<sup>25</sup>

If the phenomenal world and all that it contains is an illusion,<sup>26</sup> then there can be no individual personalities. Of course, where there are no individual personalities, there can be no individual suffering. Where there is no individual suffering, there can be no problem of evil. The problem of evil is not solved in these monistic faiths, it is dissolved.<sup>27</sup> Thus we might call this first type of response to the problem of evil the "religions of dissolution".

A second cluster of theodical responses might be labelled, "religions of solution", for rather than dissolving the problem of evil, they attempt to solve it. Religions of solution are most dramatically exemplified in the ancient Persian faith, Zoroastrianism. Religions of solution can be easily identified by two necessary conditions which taken together become sufficient. First, they are committed to an ethical dualism. In these

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Bowker, Problems of Suffering, p. 215. It should also be pointed out here that both Hinduism and Buddhism have a number of other alternative explanations for suffering. Theravadan Buddhism, for example, postulates the four noble truths as the sine qua non of the problem of evil. The various sects of Mahayana Buddhism and sectarian Hinduism have also developed highly mythologized responses to the problem of suffering, sometimes quite different from the traditional monistic answer offered by the religions of dissolution.

26

A rather beautiful poetic Hindu account of the illusory character of the world of the senses can be seen in the Indian tale of Vishnu and Narda. Lord Vishnu grants the wish of Narda that he be shown the secret of maya (the illusory nature of the phenomenal world). But before revealing the secret Vishnu requests Narda bring him a drink of water. The disciple goes to a nearby village seeking to fulfill the Lord's request. While in the village, however, he quickly falls in love, marries, has children. Several years pass. Finally, one day a severe flood carries away his wife and children. Grief stricken, Narda collapses into darkness. But upon awakening he hears the comforting voice of Lord Vishnu. "Where is the water you have gone to fetch me? I have been waiting here for more than a half an hour." Heinrich Zimmer, Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961) pp. 32-34.

27

A curious echoing of this monistic position toward the problem of evil can be found in Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science, where the reality

faiths human beings are thought to be endowed with freedom of choice and thus have the power to choose between two real alternatives, good and evil. The other necessary condition is that adherents to the religions of solution are committed to a metaphysical presupposition that there is at least one other eternal principle in the universe besides God.<sup>28</sup>

Geddes MacGregor points quite clearly to the gist of these two necessary conditions when he writes:

God, though indeed as benevolent as the devout say, eternally faces conditions not of his own making. As in the Timaeus, God is the divine artist ever working on a recalcitrant and eternal stuff. Upon this inchoate stuff, he is imposing order. The stuff is 'evil' in the sense that it can be an obstacle that the divine goodness has to overcome and subdue. All the chance and arbitrariness commonly associated with the naturalist view of the universe are in it. It is physic (nature). To say that nature is cruel is to read into it human interpretation. Nature is simply indifferent; but that seems as cruel as when sailors talk of the 'cruel seas', which of course are cruel only in the sense in which a brick

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of the phenomenal world is upheld, while the reality of evil is not. More sophisticated versions of Western monism can be found in the writings of Spinoza (Ethics trans. by W. Hale White, London: Oxford University Press, 1930) and in Nicholas Bedyayev's The Destiny of Man (Glasgow: The University Press, 1954). In that work, Bedyayev makes the following rather cryptic remark: "The feud between the creator and the creature which overshadows our whole existence concerns evil and its origins. And the struggle against the Creator is waged not only by those who distort with evil the image of the created world, but also by those who suffer from the evil in it ... The good as well as the wicked rebel against God, for they cannot reconcile themselves to the existence of evil. The wicked hate God because He prevents them from doing evil, and the good are ready to hate Him for not preventing the wicked from doing evil, and for allowing the existence of evil." (p. 23). With all this said, however, Bedyayev then proceeds to offer a dissolution of the problem of evil along the lines of German mystical theology.

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I have used the phrase "at least one other eternal principle" here for it is logically possible that there could be more than two gods, for example, who were exactly equal in power and intelligence and ruled the universe. An unstated dimension of this second necessary condition is that at least one of these eternal principles cannot be overcome by the other. If that were not an implied feature of the second necessary condition then both Judaism and Christianity would have to be considered as members of the religions of solution. I will argue later that because of the traditional attributes of God, neither Judaism nor Christianity can correctly be viewed as religions of solution.

wall seems cruel to me when I run into it. In this view even God finds nature like that, and in our struggle with nature we find ourselves co-workers with God. The scope of this struggle is presumably far greater than ours and his power and skill far beyond ours in coping with nature, but the task is essentially the same.<sup>29</sup>

An example of the religions of solution where this competing force takes on the character of a personified deity can be seen in Zoroastrianism. In this ancient Persian tradition there is a belief in two eternally opposed deities. One, Ahura Mazda, is totally good, while his counterpart, Angra Mainya, is thought to be absolutely evil. The radical conflict between these two gods is evident throughout the nature of the universe and human life. In the Zoroastrian view the conflict between good and evil on earth is an indication of the fundamental cleavage at the very root of being. The daily conflicts between good and evil in our characters and lives is only a manifestation of the universal war between these two eternal powers.

Zoroaster, the prophet, puts it this way:

I will speak out concerning the two spirits of whom, at the beginning of existence, the holier spoke to him who is evil: "Neither our thoughts, nor our teachings, nor our wills, nor our choices, nor our words, nor our deeds, nor our convictions, nor yet our souls agree."<sup>30</sup>

And again, Zoroaster points to this fundamental split in reality:

In the beginning the two spirits who are well endowed twins were known as the one good and the other evil in thought, word and deed. Between them, the wise chose the good, not so the fools. And when these spirits met they established in the beginning life and death that in the end the evil should meet with the worst existence, but the just with the best mind. Of these two spirits, he who was of the lie chose to do the worst things; but the most holy spirit, clothed in heaven chose

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Geddes MacGregor, Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973) p. 149.

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R.C. Zaehner, editor, The Teachings of the Magi: A Compendium of Zoroastrian Beliefs (London, 1956) Yasna xlv. 2.

righteousness (or truth) ... as did all those who sought with zeal to do the pleasure of the wise lord by doing good works.<sup>31</sup>

In these two passages Zoroaster implies the metaphysical dualism that underlies his faith by suggesting that Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainya are twins, identical, eternal, and presumably equal in power and strength. This ontological dualism is the key to understanding the duality of human life, and thus brings us to the Zoroastrian answer to the problem of evil. Evil has its source in the bad god, Angra Mainya. Human beings, through their volitions, can choose to ally themselves with "he who was the lie", or with the good god, Ahura Mazda. The problem of evil is solved, not dissolved, by turning toward the good god. This position is logically sound, indeed, perhaps irrefutable, because the Zoroastrian ethical dualism corresponds rather neatly to their basic metaphysical presuppositions about ultimate reality.

A somewhat milder form of the religions of solution, and one that is much closer to the quotation by MacGregor, can be found in sections 30a to 48 of Plato's Timaeus, as well as Book x of the Laws and Book II of The Republic, where Plato devises the following dialogue:

Goodness, then, is not responsible for everything, but only for what is as it should be. It is not responsible for evil.

I agree.

It follows, then, that the divine being, being good, is not, as most people say, responsible for everything that happens to mankind, but only for a small part; for the good things in human life are far fewer than the evil, and, whereas the good must be ascribed to heaven only, we must look elsewhere for the causes of evil.<sup>32</sup>

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Ibid., Yasna xxx 3-6.

32

Plato, The Republic, F. MacD. Conford, translator, Book II, 379 (London: Oxford University Press, 1970) p. 71.

In Book x of the Laws and section 29 of the Timaeus, Plato makes similar references to the notion that god is not the cause of evil.<sup>33</sup> If we look carefully at these texts, it becomes clear that Plato has made this assertion for two reasons: First, the souls, although created by the demiurge, once made, have autonomy and thus the power to initiate evil.<sup>34</sup> And second, unlike the god of the Old Testament, Plato's god does not create ex nihilo. Instead, he brings order to a pre-existent chaos.<sup>35</sup> And some of that chaotic stuff remains eternally resistant to change.

Plato answers the question of the origin of evil by suggesting that it ostensibly could have two sources: the souls or the unordered chaos. His position can be seen as a religion of solution, for it meets our two necessary conditions cited above. First, like Zoroastrianism, Plato's position includes a commitment to ethical dualism. And second, his position presupposes a metaphysical notion that there are two eternal substances, the demiurge and at least some elements of the pre-existent chaos which predate the existence of the souls.

Various forms of the finite deity doctrine popular among modern Western thinkers might also serve as good illustrations of the religions of solution. The first appearance of the finite deity doctrine in modern philosophy can probably be attributed to David Hume.<sup>36</sup> Since the late 18th century, this position has not suffered from a lack of supporters. John Stuart Mill, E.S. Brightman, H.G. Wells, John McTaggart, Albert Einstein,

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Plato's Timaeus and Critias, A.E. Taylor, translator, (London: Methuen and Company, 1929) pp. 26-27; Plato's Laws, Trevor J. Saunders, translator, (London: Penguin Books, 1970) pp. 437ff.

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Plato's Timaeus, 39e to 42, pp. 36-40.

35

Ibid., 47-48, pp. 45-47.

36

David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1959), particularly sections xi and xii.

F.H. Ross and Peter Bertocci, have all at one time or another identified themselves as believers in a finite god doctrine.<sup>37</sup>

John Hick rightly points out, however, that there are really two different but related finite deity doctrines;<sup>38</sup> he refers to the first as "external dualism", and suggests that this position is best characterized by John Stuart Mill. The other position he calls "internal dualism". It can most clearly be seen in the work of E.S. Brightman. The difference between the two would seem to reside in the fact that in the external variety the limitations on God's power come from the outside (as in Plato), while in the internal version the limitations can be seen as coming from a given to be found in the nature of the deity itself.

Brightman refers to this limitation in God's nature when he says:

The Given consists of the eternal uncreated laws of reason and also equally eternal and uncreated processes of non-rational consciousness which exhibits all the ultimate qualities of sense objects (qualia), disorderly impulses and desires, and experiences of pain and suffering, the forms of space and time, and whatever in God is the source of surd evil.<sup>39</sup>

Although this passage suffers from a crusty opaqueness, the point to be made, I think, is that evil, whatever it may be, is not something willed by God, but rather an eternal part of his nature. Hick seems to take the same view of the passage in question when he comments:

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J.S. Mill, Three Essays on Religion (London: Longmans Green, 1885); E.S. Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1940); H.G. Wells, God the Invisible King (London: 1936); John McTaggart, Some Dogmas of Religion (London: Edward Arnold, 1906); Albert Einstein, Out of My Later Years (New York: 1950); F.H. Ross, Personalism and the Problem of Evil (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940); Peter Bertocci, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice Hall, 1951).

38

Hick, Evil and the God of Love, pp. 31-39.

39

Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 337.

He (Brightman) unites under one label of deity two diametrically opposed realities, namely the perfect and holy will of God and the evil nature that opposes that will.<sup>40</sup>

If Hick is correct about Brightman, and I believe that he is, it should be clear that Brightman's internal dualism meets our conditions for a religion of solution. Whether it possesses the same internal consistency as Zoroastrianism or the metaphysics of Plato, is, of course, another question.<sup>41</sup>

John Stuart Mill's external dualism, on the other hand, seems quite logically consistent. In discussing the source of natural evil Mill suggests the following possibilities:

There is no ground in Natural Theology for attributing intelligence or personality to the obstacles which partially thwart what seems the purpose of the Creator. The limitations of His power more probably result either from the quality of the material - the substance 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 purpose might have been more fully attained, but the Creator did not know how to do it; creative skill, wondrous as it is, was not sufficiently perfect to accomplish his purpose more thoroughly.<sup>42</sup>

Either scenario painted by Mill in the passage above would be sufficient to produce a solution to the problem of evil. If God is not all powerful, there is nothing he can do about certain aspects of the make-up of the universe. If he is not all knowing, he might be quite capable of doing

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Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p. 39.

41  
Mr Peter Coxon, Lecturer in Hebrew and Old Testament at the University of St Andrews has suggested to me that this view of God may be quite like that expressed in some of the earliest portions of the Old Testament. There, he suggests, God is seen as good, but also as possessing a darker more malevolent side as well. Carl Jung also expresses a similar point of view in his Answer to Job, translated by R.F.C. Hull, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973).

42  
Mill, Three Essays on Religion, pp. 176-177.



something about natural evil, but not at all sure about how to go about it.<sup>43</sup> Another possibility that Mill does not entertain is that God is omniscient in all matters except with respect to the existence of evil.

Mill does not explicitly state his position on the origin of moral evil, but Hick suggests the following reading of Mill:

Presumably, he (Mill) would have to hold that matter and energy together with the laws of their operation, as to the circumstances that God had not created and with which he had to contend, somehow necessitates man's moral frailty and failure. He would presumably argue that such a psycho-physical creature as man, organic to his material environment and subjected by it to a multitude of strains and stresses, must inevitably become self-centred, and that from this circumstance have developed the moral ills of human life.<sup>44</sup>

Hick makes an additional observation about Mill's position:

Nor does this seem to be an unreasonable speculation. This form of dualism is capable of being expanded into a comprehensive and consistent position, and one that has the great merit that it solves the problem of evil.<sup>45</sup>

McTaggart seems to follow the same basic line of thought on this issue:

It seems to me that when believers in God save his goodness by saying that he is really not omnipotent, they are taking the best course open to them, since both the personality and goodness of God present much fewer difficulties if he is not conceived as omnipotent.<sup>46</sup>

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Some of the lesser known versions of external dualism include: Christian Ehrenfels's Cosmology, translated by Mildred Focht (New York: Comet Press, 1948) and Edwin Lewis's The Creation and the Adversary (New York: Abingdon and Cokesbury Press, 1948). Also, a new version of the external limited God theory has recently appeared in a very popular book in both Great Britain and the United States entitled, When Bad Things Happen to Good People by Harold Kushner (London: Pan Books, 1982). Kushner's position very much resembles that of Mill's, which is why it is odd to find Gerald Priestland's comment on the back of the book: "Rabbi Kushner writes with a wealth of Jewish wisdom and pastoral devotion, but his theology is, I find, wholly in keeping with contemporary Christian thought".

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Hick, Evil and the God of Love, pp. 34-35.

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Ibid., p. 34.

46

McTaggart, Some Dogmas of Religion, p. 243.

A little further on, McTaggart concludes:

It is not a very cheerful creed, unless it can be supplemented by some other dogmas which can assure us of God's eventual victory. But it is less depressing and less revolting than the belief that the destinies of the universe are at the mercy of a being who, with the resource of omnipotence at his disposal, decided to make a universe no better than this.<sup>47</sup>

Another modern version of the limited God theory, and therefore, a religion of solution as well, can be found in the doctrine known as panentheism, or what is more often called the process view of God. This position has its historical roots in Plato's Timaeus, and they extend up through Socinus in the 16th century, to modern thinkers such as Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne.<sup>48</sup>

Although Whitehead's contributions to process thought are immense, in many ways his thought is much more difficult and inaccessible than Hartshorne.<sup>49</sup> Like the rest of Whitehead's philosophy, his thoughts on God are frequently expressed in highly technical language. Often, it is not fully worked out. For these reasons, it seems best to comment on Hartshorne's version of process theology rather than that of Whitehead.

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Ibid., p. 244.

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Geddes MacGregor on p. 149 of his Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought suggests some affinities between Whitehead and Brightman. Hick makes a similar judgement in Evil and the God of Love, p. 36.

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There are some important differences between Whitehead and Hartshorne that should not go unmentioned. Whitehead employs an empirical method. His metaphysical understanding is reached through seeking to identify by empirical analysis those elements which are necessary to all experience as human bodies. Hartshorne seems much more committed to using a priori reasoning to reach his conclusions. He suggests that since metaphysical truths are a priori truths, they apply to any state of affairs. Still, for all their differences, Whitehead and Hartshorne share a common view of reality. What is real for both is what is in process. To be unchanging in all respects is to be inert, abstract or dead. To be actual, in their view, is not to be static, but rather a momentary event in a series of events in which each successive actual occasion creatively determines itself.

For Charles Hartshorne, God is as good as it is now possible for him to be. God is, in effect, developing, improving, and has not yet managed to eliminate evil, if such an elimination can ever occur. As human beings struggle against both natural and moral evils, we can assist God in his own development.<sup>50</sup> In Hartshorne's version of the finite deity theory God cannot know the future, hence he can never be absolutely certain about how the details of history will work out. According to Hartshorne, this fact is due both to the randomness of nature and because he has endowed human beings with freedom of choice. Because God is situated in time, and was not the creator of the universe, he suffers and rejoices with human beings, but he cannot control them. God and humans may enter into a partnership, aligned in a project to reduce or eradicate evil, but God cannot force them to assist him. Any conforming to God's will comes about through persuasion, not coercion.

Hartshorne believes that his model will solve the problem of evil for the theist. If God is subject to the limitations of the basic structure of a universe he did not create, then the laws of that universe are eternal necessities, not matters that could be altered by divine decision. Thus, Hartshorne has a ready-made answer to the problem of evil. The process answer to the problem of moral evil can best be understood by looking at the following quotation from David Ray Griffen, a member of the youngest generation of process thinkers:

God does not refrain from controlling creatures simply because it is better for God to use persuasion, but because it is necessarily the case that God cannot completely control his creatures.<sup>51</sup>

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Charles Hartshorne, The Divine Relativity (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948) pp. 134ff.

51

David Ray Griffen, God, Power and Evil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976) p. 276.

Since omnipotence, for the process thinkers, does not involve omnicausality, there is no logical commitment to God being the active cause of all moral evil existing in the world. When moral evil is introduced into the world it is through human initiative, not divine. In the process view, mankind is responsible for the ubiquitous moral evil in the world, not God. And since God suffers as the world suffers, the pain we inflict on our fellow humans is ultimately inflicted on God as well.

But the problem of theodicy is not completely solved by making room for human freedom and responsibility. God suffers with us not only in our sinfulness, but also in our finitude. Much of the pain and suffering in the world is not the result of human volitions. It comes as the result of the structure of the universe being the way it is. Nothing immoral is involved when man A and man B are both interested in the same beautiful, intelligent woman. But at least one of those suitors is doomed to failure and its accompanying pain. In process thought, God did not make the universe the way it is, a universe which appears to be necessary,<sup>52</sup> and in which the fulfillment of competing interests is impossible, that is, possible separately, but not possible at the same time.

Thus, we see that Hartshorne's position on the problem of evil is

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This is another important place where Whitehead and Hartshorne disagree. Whitehead argues that the ultimate metaphysical principles on which the universe operates were initially established by divine, primordial fiat. Hartshorne, and Griffen as well, suggest that these laws of the universe are necessities. For a discussion of Hartshorne's differences from Whitehead see Hartshorne's "On some Criticisms of Whitehead's Philosophy", The Philosophical Review vol. 44, no. 4 (1935).

quite similar to the external forms of the limited God theory.<sup>53</sup> There is something about the universe which will not, or could not, conform to the deity's wishes. The God of process thought is not omnipotent, either with respect to human beings or the universe as a whole, nor is he omniscient with respect to the future. Jim Garrison, much influenced by the process perspectives of Hartshorne and J.A.T. Robinson, shows clearly that the degree of human freedom suggested in the process point of view makes the traditional conception of God's omniscience inappropriate. He makes a similar remark about God's omnipotence:

Thirdly, while God does commit what we define as intrinsic evil as well as what we define as intrinsic good, God as infinitely free and powerful (though not omnipotent), can use those intrinsically evil and good acts committed by God and humanity alike instrumentally for a higher purpose.<sup>54</sup>

The process perspective qualifies as a religion of solution in regard to the problem of evil because, first, human beings possess freedom of choice, and the universe is such that they have both the possibility of good and evil moral choices, and second, the process thinkers of the Griffen-Hartshorne persuasion are committed to an ontological presupposition about the pre-existence of the universe which makes God less than omnipotent with respect to the given structure of the universe.

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In the preface to God, Power and Evil Griffen writes, "In John Hick's Evil and the God of Love the Whiteheadian position is not even mentioned except for the false suggestion that it is essentially the same as E.S. Brightman's". Ironically, in the rest of the book Griffen never returns to the task of showing why we should not view it that way, nor does he show why Hartshorne's position should not be counted as an external form of dualism much like that of Plato's Timaeus. Indeed, Hartshorne on p.62 of A Natural Theology for our Time writes "in a sense, however, the objection points to a truth, the old platonic one that evil and partial disorder in the world do mean more than one agent influencing reality. However, there is no clear sense in which this can amount to a plurality of 'Gods'."

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Jim Garrison's The Darkness of God: Theology after Hiroshima (London: SCM, 1982) p. 52.

Once again, as we have seen in the other forms of the religions of solution, the process answer to the problem of evil can be said to be both logically sound and providing a clear and cogent way out of the dilemma.<sup>55</sup>

If we now return to Berger's The Sacred Canopy, and even grant him the use of his rather fuzzy notion of what "rationality" amounts to, it is clear that his claim that Plato's view, and we might add the other limited God theories as well, belong somewhere in the middle of his continuum of theodicies, is mistaken. These dualistic answers to the problem of evil are quite logically sound by any ordinary usage of that term. Moreover, Hinduism and Buddhism, the religions of dissolution, are also highly rational responses to the problem of evil, but not for the reasons Berger would have us believe. Berger believes the Indian traditions should be counted as the most rational by virtue of their rather neat balance of debits and credits with respect to the law of karmic rebirth.<sup>56</sup> But if that were the real reason for making this judgement then certainly the

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For more on process thought, as well as process theodicies, see the following: Delwin Brown and Ralph James' Process Philosophy and Christian Thought (New York, 1971); John Cobb's A Christian Natural Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965); Charles Hartshorne's The Divine Relativity (New Haven: Yale University, 1948); and A Natural Theology for Our Time (Lasalle: Open Court, 1973); and Alfred North Whitehead's Religion in the Making (London: World Publishing Co., 1926)

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In a real way Berger confuses two separate theodicies for a single one. Monism and karmic rebirth are logically distinct notions which need not be found together. Although we have already said a great deal about the former, little has been said about the latter. The chief tenet of the karmic-reincarnation answer to the problem of evil is that evil is the result of the sins of past lives. The doctrine is suggested by Plato, defended by Pythagoras and Plotinus, and assumed to be true by many Greco-Roman mystery religions. Remnants of this position may also be found in the Talmud, and Kaballah, in Origen, and in contemporary Rosacrucians and Scientologists. This model is logically possible and probably incapable of empirical refutation. There is a growing body of literature about individual who claim to recall details of past lives. The best of these stories has been gathered by Ian Stevenson in Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation 2nd edition (Charlotte: University of

retributive justice of the Deuteronomic code should be counted as just as reasonable. The same notion of "reaping what one sows" is at the heart of the biblical idea of lex talionis.<sup>57</sup>

It seems to me that a better reason for considering the religions of dissolution to be rationally cogent responses to the problem of evil is that by suggesting that individual life<sup>58</sup> ultimately ends in a reabsorption back into the One, they have developed a metaphysical monism that matches quite well with their ultimate ethical monism. (If we have no individual personalities, we can have no individual evil, either moral or natural.)

But although both the religions of dissolution and the religions of solution are logically consistent, they are still not without their difficulties. The monistic religions of dissolution are unsatisfactory for at least three important reasons. First, there seems to be no real

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Virginia Press, 1974); Cases of the Reincarnation Type, volume I; Ten Cases in India, volume II; Twelve Cases in Lebanon, and volume III: Ten Cases in Sri Lanka (Charlotte: University of Virginia Press, 1975-1979). There are at least two major difficulties with this reincarnation approach to the problem of evil. The first has to do with forming a sufficiently clear definition of the "self" so that we may understand what it is that purportedly moves from one body to the next. Even if this problem were surmountable, we would still be left with the second problem of demonstrating from whence the evil committed by the soul in its very first body has come. In a real way, the incarnation answers merely redefine the problem by pushing it back a few steps.

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For good examples of the notion of retributive justice among the ancient Hebrews, cf.: Deuteronomy 11:13-21; Deuteronomy 28; Leviticus 26 and 28 and Numbers 12:1-15.

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I have used the expression "individual life" here rather than "soul" or "spirit" because there is a fundamental difference in the Indian traditions on this point. Classical or Brahmanic Hinduism subscribes to the notion that it is a "soul" that becomes reincarnated. The Theravadan or small raft Buddhists, however, believe that it is a bundle of sense impressions and character traits, which they call skandas, that is reborn. The former approach bears many resemblances to the notion of the soul found in traditional Christianity, while the latter is more similar to David Hume's notion of the self as a "bundle of perceptions". Of course, Hinduism and Buddhism agree that individual personality is obliterated at nirvana, when atman becomes brahman.

connection between the karmic law and their ultimate end point, nirvana. If it is the case that at bottom level all of reality is of the same substance, why is so much emphasis placed on this series of rebirths that seems to "pretend" that individual personalities and the phenomenal world are real? Second, this position quite simply seems to offend common sense. The phenomenal world may ultimately be an illusion, but it certainly appears to be real.<sup>59</sup>

One might raise an important objection at this point and suggest that I have failed to understand the particular religious forms of life of the Brahmanic Hindus and Theravadan Buddhists. But I could reply by pointing out that the adherents of these traditions also seem to take the phenomenal world, as well as the individual personalities in it, a good deal more seriously than they might if they were really to hold fast to the basic metaphysical assumption on which these faiths are based.

Another way of looking at this second objection is to see that in a real way ultimate monism tends to offend what Wittgenstein would call the "certainties" of life, the foundational principles we hold to be true, without evidence, but on which all our other judgements about the world are based. Many of the comments Wittgenstein makes in On Certainty in regard to scepticism could also be made with reference to any view that the phenomenal world is an illusion.<sup>60</sup>

A third problem with regard to the monistic responses to the problem

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This discussion is quite like the Buddhist story where the young student asks his teacher what the latter would do, given the fact that the world is an illusion, if he were about to be attacked by an illusory tiger. The monk responded, "I would climb an illusory tree".

60

Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty (Oxford: Basil Blackwood, 1977).



of evil is that they seem to leave a very important question unanswered. We may at once admit that the phenomenal world, and thus evil, is an illusion, but we still seem to be left with the inexplicable problem of viewing it as if it were real, and that seems to present the monistic faiths with another kind of problem of evil to replace the old one.

The religions of solution, it seems to me, also suffer from some intractable flaws, though I have no real quarrel with the logical cogency of these views. The real problem I have with dualistic answers to the problem of evil is that they seem to know so much more about what God is like and what he is doing than I do. Although they each represent a logically possible state of affairs, I see no clear reason for picking any one over the view, for example, that God is omnipotent, omnibenevolent, but terribly absent-minded.<sup>61</sup>

Another more fundamental problem I have with the religions of solution is that none of the limited God theories seems to be describing a God that is even remotely similar to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, or even the God of the philosophers for that matter.<sup>62</sup> The process theodicy is tempting, but their God hardly seems like the one to whom I might be interested in praying. Indeed, what does prayer amount to for Hartshorne's God? It strikes me as more like a committee meeting where God takes suggestions for how the universe might be straightened out.

I am also not at all sure what precisely it means in the process view to say that God is "in time". At the very least it can be said that Hartshorne's view of time suffers from a lack of development. I am reminded

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This view, or something quite like it, is suggested in James Branch Cabell's novel Jurgen (London: 1919), particularly chapter 49.

62

Geddes MacGregor suggests in Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought that because "Brightman and other exponents of the view have wished to exhibit it as compatible with traditional Christian theism, they have tried to minimize its dualistic aspects". p. 149.

of Unamuno's remark, "Time is the most terrible of mysteries, the father of them all".<sup>63</sup>

It should be kept in mind, however, that the criticisms of both the religions of solution and the religions of dissolution which I have outlined do not lie on purely rational grounds. In the case of the latter, they lodge more in the realization that absolute monism seems counter-intuitive, even, it seems to me, to those engaged in that particular form of life. I have criticised the religions of solution not so much for logical shortcomings, as a failure to present a picture of God that is sufficiently enough like the orthodox Christian conception that he is worthy of worship.

John Hick seems to raise a similar point about John Stuart Mill in particular, and the religions of solution in general, when he writes:

From the point of view of Christian theology, however, a dualism of this kind is unacceptable for the simple but sufficient reason that it contradicts the Christian conception of God. Mill's type of dualism does not face, and therefore does not solve, the problem of evil as it arises for a religion that understands and worships God as that than which nothing more perfect can be conceived. Dualism avoids the problem - but only at the cost of rejecting one of the most fundamental items of the Christian faith, belief in the reality of the infinite and eternal God, who is the sole creator of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible. The belief is so deeply rooted in the Bible, in Christian worship, and in Christian theology of all schools that it cannot be abandoned without vitally affecting the nature of Christianity itself. The absolute monotheism of the Judeo-Christian faith is not, so to say, negotiable; it can be accepted or rejected, but it cannot be amended into

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63

St Augustine (Book XI, chapters 14-28 of the Confessions) seems to have had a similar difficulty in getting a handle on time. "What is time?" When no one asks him, he knows. When someone does ask, however, he does not know. He knows how to use the word 'time' and cognate temporal words such as 'before', 'after', 'past', and 'future', but he can give no clear account of them. (My translation.) Wittgenstein's puzzlement about time seems much like that of Augustine. (Blue and Brown Books Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958). Ronald Suter's "Augustine on Time, with Some Criticisms From Wittgenstein", Revue Internationale de Philosophie vol. 16 (1962) pp. 319-322, is the source of my musings about Hartshorne's insufficient discussion of time.

something radically different. This then is the basic and insuperable Christian objection to dualism; not that it is intrinsically impossible or unattractive, but simply that it is excluded by the Christian understanding of God and can have no place in Christian theodicy.<sup>64</sup>

The rejection of the religions of solution as orthodox responses leads us to the realization of a third cluster of religious perspectives on the problem of evil. This group might most aptly be labelled the "religions of paradox" and includes Judaism, Christianity and Islam, though, as will soon become apparent, I will confine my comments almost exclusively to the first two of these traditions. This third type is called religions of paradox for they each embody a distinctive combination of monism and dualism, or of an ethical dualism set within the framework of an ultimate ontological monism.<sup>65</sup>

These faiths seem committed on the one hand to the metaphysical presuppositions that God is all good, all knowing and all powerful, as well as being creator of the universe in some ex nihilo way, while at the same time holding that both moral and natural evils exist. Another way then to state the necessary conditions of the religions of paradox is to say that they are simultaneously committed to the truth of two propositions: first, belief in a God who possesses the omni-attributes,<sup>66</sup> and second, belief in an ethical dualism which sharply distinguishes good from evil.

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64

Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p. 35.

65

John Hick, in his article, "The Problem of Evil", The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Paul Edwards, editor, vol. III, p. 136, suggests that this combination of monism and dualism exemplified in Judaism and Christianity represents "the main contribution of western thought to the subject".

66

It must be admitted that it is not at all clear just how long these omni-attributes have been considered as descriptive of the nature of God. Consider, for example, chapter 10 of Leviticus where Moses' nephews, Nadib and Abihu fail to mix the incense properly for a burnt offering. Yahweh is so angry that he sends down a fire to devour them. There is

Unlike the limited God theories of the religions of solution, here in this third type we have a conception of God that most closely resembles the classical conception of God in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In being faithful to that conception of God, however, we seem to leave no room for the existence of evil. At first blush this seems to be an insoluble problem, and thus we see the appropriateness of the name, the religions of paradox.

Brand Blanshard seems to put the conundrum quite succinctly:

The question at issue is a straightforward one: how are the actual amount and distribution of evil to be reconciled with the government of the world by a God who is in our sense good?<sup>67</sup>

After raising this question, Blanshard goes on to answer it:

So straightforward a question deserves a straightforward answer, and it seems to me that only one such answer makes sense, namely that the two cannot be reconciled.<sup>68</sup>

But before we too quickly concede victory to Blanshard, let us first attend carefully to what he has had to say. Notice Blanshard makes no mention of God's power and intelligence. This immediately allows us an escape hatch through which the problem raised by Blanshard might be solved - the limited God theories of the religions of solution. One could readily

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no indication in the text that the nephews had made a deliberate mistake. In Leviticus 24, when the son of an Israelite mother and Egyptian father blasphemes the name of God, Yahweh commands Moses to have them stoned to death and decrees ex post facto that henceforth anyone guilty of a similar crime must meet the same fate. In Numbers 16 a group of 250 influential men rebelled against Moses and Aaron. Yahweh causes an earthquake to swallow the leaders of the opposition, followed by a consuming fire that destroyed the rest. After the Israelites complain that Moses has killed "the people of the Lord", Yahweh sends a plague that kills 14,700 more of the chosen people. It is unlikely that a notion that God is all good, all knowing and all powerful engendered stories such as these. The view of God depicted here seems more like the "cold mad feary father" of the last page of Finnegan's Wake, or the deity depicted in Thomas Hardy's "Nature Questing".

67

Brand Blanshard, Reason and Belief (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) p. 546.

68

Ibid., p. 538.

end the argument with Blanshard by simply suggesting, with John Stuart Mill or David Hume, that God is either not omnipotent, not omniscient, or perhaps both.

David Hume puts the dilemma for the religions of paradox in perhaps sharper detail:

Is He (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?<sup>69</sup>

Augustine raises the problem in almost identical terms:

Whence, then, is evil, since God who is good made all things good? It was the greater and supreme good who made these lesser goods, but Creator and created are alike good. Whence then comes evil? Could he who was omnipotent be unable to change matter wholly so that no evil might remain in it? Indeed, why did he choose to make anything of it and not by the same omnipotence cause it wholly not to be?<sup>70</sup>

The problem seems no less acute for Thomas Aquinas:

It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the name God means that He is infinite goodness. If therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world, therefore, God does not exist.<sup>71</sup>

Among contemporary philosophers, the problem of evil for the religions of paradox is given almost identical formulation; consider this comment from J.L. Mackie:

The problem of evil ... is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs ... In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent, God is wholly good; and yet evil exists.<sup>72</sup>

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69

David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, p. 178.

70

Augustine, The Confessions and Enchiridion, translated and edited by A.C. Autler (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1955) chapter 5. A very similar phrasing of the problem can also be found in Book XI of the City of God chapter 16.

71

Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, I question, 2 answer, 3, 1. in A.C. Pegis' The Basic Writings of St Thomas Aquinas (New York, 1945).

72

J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", Mind (April, 1955) p. 209.

These words of H.J. McCloskey seem quite familiar:

The problem of evil is a very simple problem to state. There is evil in the world; yet the world is said to be the creation of a good and omnipotent God. How is this possible? Surely a good omnipotent God would have made a world which is free of evil of any kind.<sup>73</sup>

All of these comments seem to agree on three points that produce the horns of the dilemma for the religions of paradox. All five thinkers, in their own particular language, express the belief that evil exists, while at the same time ascribing to a cluster of metaphysical presuppositions that include God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence.

But if we look carefully, we can see that in each of the five examples something crucial is missing. In order to see more clearly what has been left out consider the example of Crunch, the greatest rugby player in the world. In fact, he plays with such power and grace that Crunch is seen by most experts to be invincible. In addition to Crunch's skill and love for the game, he is also known as the most sportsmanlike and gentlemanly character on the pitch. The only problem with poor Crunch is that no one has sent him a copy of this season's venue, and since he lives far outside of town, he has no idea of when the games are being played.

The purpose of this example is to show that it is logically possible for a god to exist who has essentially the same problem as poor Crunch. This deity could be all good and all powerful, but completely unaware that evil exists. Evil could be a peculiar blindspot or lacuna in this god's knowledge. He would be perfectly happy to do something about evil, indeed, because of his goodness he would be compelled to do something about it, but he just doesn't know that it is there. This position calls for no limitation in God's power. He would not only be quite willing, he would

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73

H.J. McCloskey, "God and Evil", The Philosophical Quarterly, volume 10, number 39 (April, 1960) p. 97.

also be quite able to fix the evil, if only he knew about it.

What we have in this answer, of course, is another version of the limited God theories. And, indeed, if this is a logically possible state of affairs, and I think it is, it is a quite simple solution to the problem as stated by the five representatives above. It might be added that this solution suffers from the same flaw Hick has pointed out in regard to the other limited God theories. But it does, nevertheless, meet the formulations of all five inquisitors head on. As the problem is stated by all five, however, it does not involve the religions of paradox.

It should be clear that what is needed to create the dilemma as it exists for the religions of paradox is the notion that God is also omniscient.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the proper formulation of the problem of evil for the religions of paradox would look something like the following: God is by definition omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent, yet evil exists in the world in both moral and natural forms.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup>  
In J.L. Mackie's recent book, The Miracle of Theism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), it appears that he came to realise the importance of including the attribute "omniscience" in any discussion of the problem of evil in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He amends his version of the problem to read: "According to traditional theism, there is a God who is both omnipotent (and omniscient) and wholly good, and yet there is evil in the world. How can this be?" p. 150.

<sup>75</sup>  
It is of some historical interest to note that one of the very first thinkers in the Christian tradition to phrase the problem in just these terms was Tertullian in his tract Adversus Marcionem, (ii. 5-6). There Tertullian writes the following: "And now for those questions of yours you dogs, whom the apostles turn out of doors, you will bark at the God of Truth. These are the bones of the argument that you chew over. 'If God is good and has foreknowledge and power to avert evil, why has he allowed men to be beguiled by the devil and to fall away from obedience to His law into death; seeing that man is in God's own image and likeness, yes, in His own substance too, because of the status of the soul? For if He is good, He would not wish such a thing to happen; if prescient he would not be ignorant that it was to happen; if powerful He could prevent its happening: every event must be consistent with those three attributes of the divine majesty.'" (My translation.)

In the next chapter we will examine these terms very carefully. A careful analysis will be made of omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, moral evil and natural evil in an attempt at getting clear on what these terms mean and how they are related. Additionally, we will discuss whether the problem of theodicy, as formulated by the religions of paradox, really involves one in a formal, logical contradiction.



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Chapter Two: A Clarification of Terms

I know that one has no right to say things like that. I know. Man is too small, too humble and inconsiderable to seek to understand the mysterious ways of God. But what can I do? I'm not a sage, one of the elect, nor a saint. I'm just an ordinary creature of flesh and blood. I've got eyes too, and I can see what they are doing here (in a concentration camp). Where is the divine mercy? Where is God? How can I believe, how can anyone believe, in this merciful God?

Elie Wiesel

Apparently with no surprise  
To any happy flower  
The frost beheads it at its play -  
In accidental power -  
The blonde assassin passes on -  
The sun proceeds unmoved  
To measure off another day  
For an approving God.

Emily Dickinson

In the first chapter it was suggested that the dilemma of the problem of evil for the adherents to the religions of paradox can be expressed in the following group of propositions, all of which are held to be true:

God is omnipotent  
omniscient  
omnibenevolent  
and evil exists (in both moral and natural forms).

Judaism, Christianity and Islam are called religions of paradox with respect to the problem of evil because they seem to involve one in an apparent contradiction or paradox about the origin and existence of evil. Another way to put this idea of apparent paradox, we have suggested in the first chapter, is to say that Judaism, Christianity and Islam seem committed to an ethical dualism set within the framework of an ultimate metaphysical monism.

In this present chapter, we have two distinct but related aims: first, to get clear, as best we can, on the meaning of various terms used in formulating the apparent paradox (omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, moral evil and natural evil). And second, to discuss briefly whether the use of these terms in formulating the problem of evil as framed by the religions of paradox involves one in a logical contradiction. The first of these tasks shall take some time, so we must keep the second task in the backs of our minds.

In the religions of paradox, God is endowed with characteristics that radically distinguish him from all other forms of being. He is thought to be wholly limitless throughout the whole range of His existence. Unlike the God of Hegel, or that of the process theologians, the God of traditional theism does not need the world as a sphere for His self-development. God's essence is identical with His existence, as Thomas Aquinas held when he suggested that the most appropriate name for God is that disclosed to Moses, according to the Vulgate text of Exodus: qui est, He who is.<sup>1</sup>

If the God of classical theism is thus infinite, he must possess all properties in a mode that is free of limitation. The properties we shall now be concerned with are omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence. In this discussion we will make no attempt to prove the existence of the God of classical theism. Rather, we shall show that given the existence of God as He is traditionally conceived, the following definitions of His attributes would seem to be the most logically compelling and consistent.

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<sup>1</sup>  
Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, translated by Anton Pegis, (New York: Doubleday, 1955) Book I, chapter 22, p. 121.

## Omnipotence

Let us begin this discussion by considering for a moment this note from Frederick Ferre's Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion:

Different theistic traditions interpret this term differently. Some insist that "omnipotence" must involve the possibility of God's doing literally anything - whether it be "making a stone so heavy that He cannot move it", or "killing Himself", or other standard conundrums and dilemmas - while others interpret "omnipotence" as the possibility of doing anything logically possible or anything worthwhile.<sup>2</sup>

Ferre rightly suggests that when we say that God is omnipotent, philosophers, as well as the common man, may mean by that term one of two things.<sup>3</sup> Either (a) An omnipotent being is one who can<sup>4</sup> do absolutely anything. Or (b) An omnipotent being is one who can do anything that is logically possible. For reasons that will become apparent later, we must also offer a third formulation of God's omnipotence: (c) An omnipotent being is one who can do anything that is logically possible and is consistent with his other attributes.<sup>5</sup> Let us proceed by first examining formulation (a).

The notion that an omnipotent being is one who can do absolutely anything is at least as old as the philosophy of Rene Descartes. His belief in this interpretation of omnipotence is actually connected to and

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2  
Frederick, Ferre, Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967) p. 123.

3  
Later in chapter five it will be argued that the Christian form of life actually provides a fourth alternative to these three traditional notions of omnipotence.

4  
'Can' is used here as the can of ability.

5  
There are some less convincing definitions of omnipotence which, for the sake of brevity, I have not entertained here. One other possibility is that an omnipotent being can do "anything he wants". This view is sometimes attributed to Augustine. Anthony Kenny in The God of the Philosophers (London: Clarendon, 1977), chapter 7, suggests that this formulation of God's omnipotence is defective, for any person on earth who realizes his or her limitations could be said to do whatever he or she wants and thus a possessor of omnipotence.

dependent upon another Cartesian notion that the truths of logic and mathematics are made true by virtue of the will of God. In a letter to his friend, Father Mersenne, on 15th April, 1630, Descartes makes this point very clearly:

The mathematical truths which you call eternal have been laid down by God and depend on Him entirely no less than the rest of His creatures. Indeed, to say that these truths are independent of God is to talk of Him as if He were Jupiter or Saturn and to subject Him to the Styx and the Fates. Please do not hesitate and to assert and proclaim everywhere that God who has laid down these laws in nature just as a king lays down laws in his kingdom ... If God established these truths He could change them as a king changes his laws.<sup>6</sup>

A short time later, Descartes sent Mersenne a second letter on this same point:

As for the eternal truths, I say once more that they are true or possible only because He knows them as true or possible. They are not known as true by God in any way which would imply that they are true independently of Him ... In God willing and knowing are the same thing, in such a way that by the very fact of willing something He knows it, and it is only for this reason that such a thing is true.<sup>7</sup>

It should be clear that Descartes thought the laws of logic and simple mathematics were necessary truths, and so he counted them among his small bag of simple and distinct ideas. But although he thought they were necessary truths, he did not think that they were what Geach has suggested

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6  
Rene Descartes, Descartes' Letters, edited by C. Adam and P. Tannery (Paris, 1964) I, 35. A modern formulation of this same notion of omnipotence can be found in H.G. Frankfurt's "The Logic of Omnipotence", in Philosophical Review, volume 73 (1964). There he argues that God "invents" the laws of logic just as he "invents" the laws of nature.

7  
Ibid., I, 147.

Descartes would call "necessarily necessary truths".<sup>8</sup>

Descartes makes a reference which amounts to this same point in a third correspondence with Mersenne:

It would seem rightly so if the question was about something which exists or if I was setting up something immutable whose immutability did not depend on God ... I do not think that the essence of things and the mathematical truths which can be known of them are independent of God, but I think they are immutable and eternal because God so willed and so disposed.<sup>9</sup>

And again in a fourth letter:

It was free and indifferent for God to make it not be true that the three angles of a triangle were equal to two right angles, or in general that contradictories could not be true together. Even if God had willed that some truths should be necessary, this does not mean that He willed them necessarily or to be necessitated to will them.<sup>10</sup>

In Descartes' point of view, God freely establishes the laws of logic in much the same way He has established the laws of nature. Although once he establishes the laws of logic, they are then necessary, it does not mean that he willed them necessarily.

Still, Geach has his problems with Descartes's interpretation of the concept of omnipotence.

Descartes's motive for believing in absolute omnipotence was not contemptible; it seems to him that otherwise God would be subject to the inexorable laws of logic as Jove was to

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8

P.T. Geach, Providence and Evil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) pp. 9-10. Modal logicians these days seem to be quite enthralled with expressions like "possible possibly p" and "it is not necessary that necessarily p", which can produce all sorts of possible expressions about possible worlds. But clearly this is a good deal farther than Descartes would, I think, have wanted to go. He would not, for example, have been willing to say "it is possible that God does not exist" nor even in the modal spirit "it is possibly possible that God does not exist".

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Descartes' Letters, VII, 380.

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Ibid., IV, 110.



the decrees of the fates. The nature of logical truth is a very difficult problem, which I cannot discuss here. The easy conventionalist line, that our arbitrary way of using words is what makes logical truths, seems to me untenable, for reasons that Quine among others has clearly spelled out. If I could follow Quine further in regarding logical laws as natural laws of very great generality; laws revisable in principle, though most unlikely to be revised in a major theoretical reconstruction, then perhaps after all some rehabilitation of Descartes on this topic might be possible. But in the end I have to say that as we cannot say how a supralogical God would act or how He could communicate anything to us by way of revelation, so I end as I began: a Christian need not and cannot believe in absolute omnipotence.<sup>11</sup>

The problems with absolute omnipotence to which Geach gives hints are difficulties noticed by Thomas Aquinas as well. This is precisely what led him to conclude in the Summa Theologica, "Nothing which implies contradiction falls under the omnipotence of God".<sup>12</sup> In a following passage he gives a more detailed account of his reasons for holding this point of view:

Whatever implies being and nonbeing simultaneously is incompatible with the absolute possibility which falls under divine omnipotence. Such a contradiction is not subject to it, not from any impotence in God, but because it simply does not have the nature of being feasible or possible. Whatever, then, does not involve a contradiction is in the realm of the possible with respect to which God is omnipotent. Whatever involves a contradiction is not within the scope of omnipotence because it cannot qualify for possibility. Better, however, to say that it cannot be done, rather than God cannot do it.<sup>13</sup>

The central flaw with the notion of absolute omnipotence, as Thomas and others have pointed out, is that it inevitably commits one to a host of rather bizarre contradictions. For example, if God can do absolutely anything could He make His left hand so heavy that His right hand could

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<sup>11</sup> Geach, Providence and Evil, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, (latin text) (New York: McGraw Hill, 1963) I. Q25 A4, p. 164.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., I. Q25 A3, p. 163-164.

not pick it up? Notice that if we give an affirmative answer then after God made His hand sufficiently heavy there would be something He could not do, namely, pick it up. Hence, He would not be omnipotent. On the other hand (no pun intended) if we answer no, God could not make His left hand so heavy that His right hand could not pick it up, then immediately there would be something that He could not do, and consequently He would not be omnipotent. We could ask similar questions about whether God could create a thing that was simultaneously itself and not itself, but I think the point about the inherent weakness in the concept of absolute omnipotence has already been made.<sup>14</sup>

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For an interesting early Medieval discussion of omnipotence paradoxes cf. the dinner conversation between Desiderio of Cassino and Saint Peter Damiani, recorded in the latter's De Divina Omnipotentia which is reprinted in J. Migne's Patrologia Latina (Paris: no date) vol. 145. J.L. Mackie develops a number of interesting examples of these omnipotence paradoxes. Both Alvin Plantinga in God and Other Minds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967) pp. 168ff., and Richard Swinburne in The Coherence of Theism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) pp. 156ff., deal with the Mackie examples. Swinburne seems to think that the answer to puzzles such as these is to say, "Yes, He could create beings who were not in His control". But He would not do it for in doing so He would actually be forfeiting His omnipotence. Plantinga argues that a coherent formulation of omnipotence cannot be developed. In a related round of arguments: George Mavrodes argues that the paradox of the stone can be resolved since even if God could not create a stone so heavy He could not lift it, this would be no challenge to His omnipotence, since creating a stone so heavy that God could not lift it is a logically impossible task. Mavrodes uses a similar argument for suggesting that God cannot sin but that is also no challenge to His omnipotence, since God committing a sin is not a logically possible task. ("Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence", The Philosophical Review vol. 72 (1963). C.W. Savage, in his article, "The Paradox of the Stone", Philosophical Review vol. 76 (1967) agrees with Thomas Aquinas that God cannot create a stone so heavy that He cannot lift it, and also suggests that this is no real limitation on God's power. But Savage's reasons for making this claim are very different from Thomas'. Savage argues that to say that God could not make such a stone is equivalent to saying that God can lift any stone he makes, and to say this is surely to place no limitations on God's power. Perhaps the best solution to these omnipotence paradoxes is to say that God can do anything that is logically possible and which does not contradict his other attributes. This view will be the one endorsed later in this chapter.

Let us now examine the second formulation, (b) An omnipotent being is one who can do anything that is logically possible.<sup>15</sup> Our first task is to get clear on what we mean by the "logically possible" and the "logically impossible". Aristotle suggests a very simple and cogent pair of definitions: the logically possible is found when it is not necessary that its contrary is false. The logically impossible, he suggests, is to be found when its contrary is necessarily true.<sup>16</sup>

To cite an example from the realm of simple mathematics, it is impossible that  $2 \text{ plus } 2 \neq 4$ , because its contrary  $2 \text{ plus } 2 = 4$  is necessarily true. If I define a triangle as "a 3-sided figure whose angles are equal to 180 degrees", it makes no sense to say that God could create a 4-sided triangle. This is no limit on God's power. It is a limit in our ability to find meaning in a meaningless sentence. This, of course, applies to the physical world, as well as the world of mathematics and geometry. To ask if God could slide two beads up the rod of an abacus, then two more beads up the same rod, and, without creating another bead, produce five beads at the top of the rod, is to ask God to do something that is logically impossible. This is not a limitation on God's power. It is a limitation on our ability to make sense of what it means to say that two beads and two beads equals five beads. To expect God to do the logically impossible is to expect God to do what cannot be done by any being. Indeed, as Thomas Aquinas suggests, if the sentence is logically contradictory, there is nothing there to be done.

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As was suggested in footnote 14, 'logically possible' includes only those actions which are not contrary to His nature, when predicated of God.

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Aristotle, The Prior and Posterior Analytics, edited by W.D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949) 12, 32a 6-14.

The importance of the above examples should be clear. If the elements of a concept are contradictory (for example, a round-square), then the concept can never be instantiated. It is, in effect, a pseudo-concept that refers to nothing at all. When we become critical of God because He cannot make a round square or a married bachelor, we are chiding Him for not doing something when there is nothing there to be done. When there are things to be done, an omnipotent being can do them, provided they are not contrary to His nature. Thus, the proper definition of an omnipotent being is one who can do anything that is logically possible.

C.S. Lewis points unambiguously to this same notion of omnipotence and suggests that the first alternative, formulation (a), involves meaningless combinations of words that do not suddenly acquire meaning simply by virtue of the fact that we preface them with the words "God can".<sup>17</sup>

Thus Lewis concludes:

His omnipotence means the power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracle to Him, but not nonsense. There is no limit to His power. If you choose to say "God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it", you have not succeeded in saying anything about God ... It remains true that all things are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for His weakest creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets the obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.<sup>18</sup>

Still, with all this said in its favour, (b) is, nevertheless, an

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Anthony Flew quotes this section of Lewis with approval in his "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom", New Essays in Philosophical Theology (London: SCM Press, 1955). This may be one of the few times Flew and Lewis agreed on anything having to do with the philosophy of religion.

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C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan Co., 1978) p.28.

inadequate definition of the concept of God's omnipotence, though it might now do quite satisfactorily as a formulation for any being x who is said to be omnipotent. In order to see why this is the case consider whether an omnipotent being could commit suicide or sin. Surely, there is nothing amiss in saying that both of these actions are logically possible. There is nothing logically incoherent or contradictory in saying that an omnipotent being could, for example, tell lies or take his own life.

But if we also make the stipulations that this omnipotent being is also eternal and omnibenevolent, then it follows that it would be logically impossible for him to tell lies or think himself out of existence. God cannot sin because it contradicts his omnibenevolence. He cannot commit suicide because he is eternal. Thus, the proper formulation of God's omnipotence is (c) An omnipotent being is one who can do anything that is logically possible and is consistent with his other attributes.

### Omniscience

Once again, perhaps it is best to begin with a helpful note from Ferre's Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion:

As in the case of omnipotence, different theistic traditions interpret omniscience differently. Some allege that the term involves God's knowledge of even future events, in which case the traditional problem arises in explaining how future human actions can be considered genuinely free and undetermined (if they are so considered) and at the same time known with perfect assurance by God. Others maintain that "omniscience" will be satisfied as long as God knows all there is to know; and if future indeterminate actions are not yet, it is no imperfection of knowledge not to know what is not yet knowable. Omniscience on this view would be complete knowledge on all actualities and all possibilities and the distinction between them.<sup>19</sup>

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Frederick Ferre, Basic Modern Philosophy of Religion, p. 24.

In this passage, Ferre makes an important distinction between two different views of omniscience: (c) For every proposition  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, an omniscient being knows that  $p$ , but only in so far as  $p$  is determined now by what is already the case. And (d) For every  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, an omniscient being knows that  $p$ . We will also examine the less convincing formulations of God's omniscience: (a) for every  $p$ , an omniscient being knows that  $p$ . and (b) For every  $p$ , if  $p$ , an omniscient being timelessly knows that  $p$ .

Version (a) can be seen to be an inadequate definition of omniscience for if we were to take a proposition like "Vicchio is a member of the Royal family" and substitute it for  $p$ , we would have the following: "Vicchio is a member of the Royal family, and an omniscient being knows that Vicchio is a member of the Royal family". But clearly this will not do. Any satisfactory formulation of omniscience must take into account the distinction between knowing something false and knowing that something is false. An omniscient being does not know false propositions but he should know when propositions are false. We must therefore amend our definition to take this into account. Formulation (b) corrects the simple error of (a).

Formulation (b) of omniscience can be easily understood by looking at the following remark from Boethius:

Since God lives in the eternal present, His knowledge transcends all movement of time and abides in the simplicity of its immediate present. It encompasses the infinite sweep of past and future, and regards all things in its simple comprehension as if they were now taking place. Thus, if you think of the foreknowledge by which God distinguishes all things, you will rightly consider it to be not a foreknowledge of future events, but knowledge of a never changing present.<sup>20</sup>

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Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy Richard Green, (trans.) (New York: Random House, 1962) Book V, prose 6, p. 116.

Thomas Aquinas was also a staunch proponent of this view. In the Summa Theologica, he writes:

Things reduced to acts in time, are known to us, successively<sup>21</sup> in time but by God are known in eternity, which is above time.

St Anselm, addressing God in the Proslogion, develops a similar perspective:

You were not, then, yesterday, nor will you be tomorrow, but yesterday and today and tomorrow you are, or rather, neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow you are, but simply, you are, outside of time.<sup>22</sup>

What these three figures have in common is that they all view the concept of omniscience as the ability to know the past, the present and the future, simultaneously, as if happening all at once. From this it follows, all three would argue, that it is terribly misleading to talk about God knowing the future. for in reality, his knowledge of the future is a knowledge of an eternal present, for He is outside or above time.

The major difficulty with this view of omniscience can be found in the last sentence of the above paragraph. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to figure out what it means. It is not at all obvious what it means to say that any being is "above" or "outside" time. But whatever those expressions may mean, if they mean anything at all, they are surely not intended to suggest that God does not know every action which is performed by all His creatures. But it is also clear that His creatures perform actions which by their very nature could not be performed simultaneously. For example, I may open the window in my study in the

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Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica I. Q14 A13.

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Anselm, The Proslogion in St Anselm Sidney Norton Dean, (trans.) (Lasalle: Open Court Publishing, 1962) p. 25.

morning to allow some air in the room, and later, after the sun has set, I may close it because I then have a chill. But I cannot perform both of these actions at the same time. I must perform the first action before I can perform the second. It makes no sense to talk about closing an already closed window. In order for God to be omniscient, he must know the sequence. It makes no sense to say that God "sees" me opening and closing the window simultaneously.

A similar kind of difficulty with formulation (b) of God's omniscience is pointed to by Anthony Kenny:

The whole concept of a timeless eternity, the whole of which is simultaneous with every part of time, seems to be radically incoherent. For simultaneity as ordinarily understood is a transitive relation. If A happens at the same time as B, and B happens at the same time as C, then A happens at the same time as C. If the BBC programme and the ITV programme both start when Big Ben Strikes ten, then they both start at the same time. But on St Thomas' view, my typing of this paper is simultaneous with the whole of eternity. Therefore, while I type these few words, Nero fiddles heartlessly on.<sup>23</sup>

Elsewhere, Kenny suggests that this same kind of difficulty with formulation (b) has been expressed by Suarez in De Scientia Dei Futurorum Contingentium. Suarez analyzes the passages mentioned above from Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and Boethius, and adds a fourth by Augustine. He goes on to suggest that although all four thinkers believe that presence or coexistence is both a necessary and sufficient condition for explaining God's knowledge of future events, they are mistaken. Kenny explains:

Suarez insists that though temporal things coexist with the whole of eternity, because eternity coexists with all times, past, present and future, yet these different times do not coexist with each other. God coexists now with one thing

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Anthony Kenny, Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays (London: Macmillan, 1969) p. 264.



and now with another thing, without changing in Himself: like a tree standing motionless in a river which is successively present or adjacent to different masses of flowing water. The only sense in which things are eternally present to God is as objects of His knowledge. The statement of their presence, therefore, is a restatement of God's knowledge of the future, and not an explanation of it.<sup>24</sup>

In contemporary philosophical circles, two other major objections to formulation (b) of God's omniscience have been raised. The first of these might be called the argument from indexicals. It can be found in the work of A.N. Prior, and is also followed by Norman Kretzmann and Nicholas Wolterstorff.<sup>25</sup> In short, Prior suggests that if one is committed to the view that God's knowledge is timeless, then an undesired by-product of this position is that God's knowledge would be restricted to those truths which don't change over time. Prior puts the problem this way:

I want to argue against this view [formulation (b)] on the ground that its final effect is to restrict what God knows to those truths, if any, which are themselves timeless. For example, God could not, on the view I am considering, know that the 1960 final examinations at Manchester are now over. For this is not something that he or anyone else could know timelessly. It's true now but it wasn't true a year ago (I write this on 29 August 1960) and so far as I can see all that can be said on this subject timelessly is that the finishing date of the 1960 final examination is an earlier one than the 29th August, and this is not the thing we know when we know that those examinations are over. I cannot think of any better way of showing this than one I've used before, namely the argument that what we know when we know that the 1960 final examinations are over can't

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Anthony Kenny, The God of the Philosophers p. 39.

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A.N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience", Philosophy (1962); Norman Kretzmann, "Omniscience and Immutability", The Journal of Philosophy vol. 63 (1966); Nicholas Wolterstorff, "God Everlasting" in God and the God: Essays in Honor of Henry Stob C.J. Orlebeke and L.B. Shedes, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

be just a timeless relation between dates, because this isn't the thing we are pleased about when we're pleased the examinations are over.<sup>26</sup>

Nelson Pike successfully challenges Prior's position by arguing that he has not identified a range of facts a timeless being could not know. Rather, he has merely pointed out certain linguistic forms a timeless being could not use when talking about his knowledge.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Pike points out that the fact reported in an expression like "It is raining in St Andrews on 17th April, 1984" could be expressed by God in sentences that do not employ temporal indexicals. H.N. Casteñada and Richard Swinburne<sup>28</sup> employ similar strategies in answering Kretzmann's version of the indexical argument against formulation (b) of God's omniscience. Swinburne writes:

A knows on 2 October the proposition 'It is now 2 October'. Surely B on 3 October can know that A knew what he did on 2 October. How can B report his knowledge? By words such as 'I know that A knew yesterday that it was then 2 October'. How can we report B's knowledge? As follows: B knew on 3 October that on the previous day A knew that it was then 2 October. Hence ... B knows on 3 October what A knew on 2 October, although B will use different words to express the same knowledge.<sup>29</sup>

Casteñada points to a similar resolution:

If a sentence of the form 'x knows that y knows that \_\_\_\_\_' formulates a true statement, the person x knows the

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A.N. Prior, "The Formalities of Omniscience", p. 116.

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Nelson Pike, God and Timelessness (New York: Macmillan, 1970).

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H.N. Casteñada, "Omniscience and Indexical Reference", Journal of Philosophy vol. 64 (1967); Richard Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977).

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Richard Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism p. 165.

statement formulated by the clause filling in the blank.<sup>30</sup>

What Pike, Swinburne and Castañeda all point to is the realization that if you know that Washington D.C. is in the United States, and I know that you know that Washington D.C. is in the United States, then it is clear that I know the same fact that you know. Castañeda and Swinburne suggest that Kretzmann's dilemma is really a pseudo-problem, the result of Kretzmann not noticing how words like "now" and "current" function in certain types of discourse. Once one gets clear about the logic of these quasi-indicators, the problem suggested by Kretzmann and Prior disappears.

A more telling criticism of formulation (b) of God's omniscience has been suggested by William Kneale in his "Time and Eternity in Theology".<sup>31</sup> In that article Kneale attacks the notion of God's knowledge being timeless because he (Kneale)

can attach no meaning to the word 'life' unless I am allowed to suppose that what has life acts ... life must at least involve some incidents in time and if, like Boethius, we suppose the life in question to be intelligent, then it must involve also awareness of the passage of time.<sup>32</sup>

This same argument is ratified and embellished by J.R. Lucas in his A Treatise on Time and Space and by Richard Swinburne in The Coherence of Theism.<sup>33</sup>

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H.N. Castañeda, "Omniscience and Indexical Reference", p. 116.

31  
William Kneale, "Time and Eternity in Theology", Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society vol. 61 (1960-61).

32  
Ibid., p. 99.

33  
J.R. Lucas, A Treatise on Time and Space (London: Methuen, 1973) pp. 300-308; Richard Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism pp. 162ff.

The thrust of this final criticism of God's timeless omniscience is that if one believes that God is outside time, as Boethius and Thomas Aquinas have suggested, then one must deny, in effect, that God is a person. Lucas' suggestion for resolving this dilemma is to argue that since minds are necessarily in time but only contingently in space it is reasonable to suppose that everything that exists is present to God spacelessly, but not timelessly.<sup>34</sup> I think that Lucas' suggestion is a sound one, but enough has been said already, I think, to cast serious doubts on formulation (b) of God's omniscience. We shall now turn to formulation (c). For every p, if p is true, an omniscient being knows that p, but only in so far as p is determined now by what is already the case.

Friedrich Schleiermacher is a good example of this third account of omniscience. In his book, The Christian Faith, Schleiermacher describes God's foreknowledge in the following way:

In the same way we estimate the intimacy of relationships between two persons by the foreknowledge one has of the actions of the other, without supposing that in either case the one or the other's freedom has thereby been endangered, so even divine knowledge cannot endanger freedom.<sup>35</sup>

What Schleiermacher seems to be suggesting is that God's foreknowledge,

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Ibid., One of the first modern versions of the theory that God is everlasting, existing within time, can be found in Oscar Cullmann's Christ and Time (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950)

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Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith H.R. MacKintosh and J.S. Stewart, eds. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke) p. 57. James Ward in his Naturalism and Agnosticism (London: A. and C. Black, 1915) and F.R. Tennant in Philosophical Theology vol. II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930) also hold similar points of view. Both would hold that it is contradictory to say that free choices can be known in any sense until they are made. Both suggest that God is ignorant of future free human choices and that this ignorance is the result of self-limitation. God must do this, they argue, in order to guarantee human freedom.

and therefore His omniscience with respect to the future, is based on God knowing His creatures so well that He has a very good idea of what each of them is to do in the future. The analogy often used in connection with this view of omniscience is that God sits in a high tower and, because of his knowledge of the predelictions and characters of each of His creatures, He can establish what they will do next.

In order to better understand formulation (c) of God's omniscience, consider the following example. Two brothers exit from two different pubs at closing time on a particular evening. Both are quite intoxicated. Both have had drinking problems for a number of years. Both stumble out of their respective pubs and enter their automobiles, one headed north, the other south. Proponents of formulation (c) of divine omniscience suggest that God's knowledge of future contingent events would be analogous to a third brother who sits high in a flat in the middle of the same street on which the two brothers travel. Because he knows his brothers so well, the third can glance in both directions, spot both cars, and "know" that the brothers will come to an abrupt crash in the middle of the street. He does not cause the crash to occur, but he knows his siblings so well he realizes that the accident is inevitable. The believers in formulation (c) of God's omniscience might then go on to add that God not only knows about the future actions of the two brothers, but he also possesses this kind of knowledge about all the creatures he has made.

The problem with this view of omniscience is that the analogy does not quite work. For one thing, in traditional theism God not only knows that there will be a crash, he also knows the name of the ambulance driver,

the hospital to which they will be taken, how much blood each brother will lose, and the number of cobblestones that will be covered by both vehicles before the collision. Indeed, the God of classical theism knows all these things before either of the dead brothers was born.

Formulation (c) of God's omniscience will not do as a proper interpretation. The reason is quite simple. If it were the proper definition we would be beset with the major difficulty that most human beings of normal intelligence would be logically possible possessors of the kind of knowledge attributed to (c). All (c) implies is that if one were able to make the proper kinds of inferences he could tell future events by virtue of the availability of those inferences now. But surely when we refer to the omniscience of God we mean to say a good deal more than that I should think.

This leads us quite naturally to an analysis of (d) For every  $p$ , if  $p$  is true, an omniscient being knows that  $p$ . If it is true that it rained on this date last year in St Andrews, then an omniscient being knows that it rained on this date in St Andrews last year. If it is true that it is presently raining in St Andrews, then an omniscient being knows that it is presently raining in St Andrews. And if it is true that on this date next year it will be raining in St Andrews, then an omniscient being knows that it will be raining in St Andrews on this date next year.

The principal objection raised in connection with this formulation is that in using this approach God's omniscience seems to be incompatible with human freedom. There are various ways in which this problem might be phrased. For our purposes, we will take the following argument as

being fairly representative:

- i. If God is omniscient, he knows the future.
- ii. If someone knows that p, it follows that p.
- iii. If God knows some future event will occur, it could not be otherwise.
- iv. If some future event could not be otherwise, then the event is necessary.
- v. Human actions can either be free or necessary.
- vi. If God knows future human actions, then they could not be otherwise.
- vii. Therefore, if God is omniscient, there can be no free human actions.

This formulation of God's omniscience does not deny God's omniscience, but it does suggest that the absence of free human actions is the price paid for its truth.

The question this argument against omniscience addresses is one that is as old as the history of Christian theology. In a curious way the argument continues to reemerge in the history of the tradition.<sup>36</sup> But what is not seen by the proponents of the deterministic objection, of which our sample argument is an example, is that there is a fatal ambiguity concerning what is meant by the term "necessary" in premises iv. and v. When speaking of the concept of necessity it is important to distinguish between necessity de dicto and necessity de re. Necessity de dicto is used to describe a class of propositions that are necessarily true, e.g., 'If Socrates is sitting, then Socrates is sitting'. Necessity de re is used in connection with statements that take the form 'x is y necessarily', e.g., 'Socrates is sitting necessarily'. The latter use is a

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Cf., for example, Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will (1754), section 12, reprinted in Baruch Bordy's Readings in the Philosophy of Religion (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1974); and Luther's position in Luther Oder Erasmus (Basil: Freidrich Rheinhardt, 1972)

kind of short hand for saying that nothing could prevent Socrates from sitting, while the former is related to tautological expressions.

Thomas Aquinas seems to make this same distinction between these two different uses of "necessity" when he speaks of omniscience:

'All that God knows must necessarily be' is usually distinguished: it can either apply to the thing or the statement. Understood of the thing, the proposition is taken independently of the fact of God's knowing, and false, giving the sense 'everything that God knows is a necessary thing'. Or it can be understood of the statement, and thus it is taken in conjunction with the fact of God's knowing and true, giving the sense, 'the statement, a thing known by God is, is necessary'.<sup>37</sup>

What Thomas is suggesting here is that someone who believes that 'God is omniscient' and 'There are some future free actions' are incompatible would be led to the conclusion 'Future free actions are necessary'. But two different interpretations of 'Future free actions are necessary' can be given, for we have two distinct uses for the word "necessity". Thus 'Future free actions are necessary' could mean:

(1) If God knows that 'Socrates will sit tomorrow', then 'Socrates will sit tomorrow' is necessarily true.

or

(2) 'God knows that Socrates will sit tomorrow' entails that Socrates will necessarily sit tomorrow.

Although (1) is certainly true, (2) is not. There is nothing contradictory in saying that Socrates will not always be sitting as a matter of necessity. If Socrates is sitting, his sitting is necessary. But this does not show that Socrates always sits necessarily.

If we use this distinction between necessity de dicto and necessity de re to examine premises iii. and iv. of our sample argument against

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Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica Ia Q14 A13.



formulation (d) of God's omniscience, it should be plain that there is nothing contradictory in saying that God could know free human actions in advance. If premise iii. and iv. become suspect, the conclusion in vii. does not follow.

Thus, our analysis of the concept of omniscience is complete. We have examined four competing notions of what it means to say that a being is omniscient, eventually settling on the most logically satisfactory formulation: (d) For every p, if p is true, an omniscient being knows that p.

#### Omnibenevolence

Omnibenevolence is a synonym for perfect goodness. But moral goodness is not the same as perfect goodness. We can and often do attribute moral goodness to people who are morally imperfect. Most if not all people fail morally at some time or other (they are dishonest, unkind, selfish, etc.), but if generally they attempt to avoid these pitfalls, and are most often successful in these attempts, we call them morally good. A morally perfect being, however, acts well always, though failure to act in an evil way is not sufficient for calling a being morally perfect or omnibenevolent. On the other hand, one single act of evil is sufficient for saying a particular being is not morally perfect or omnibenevolent. An omnibenevolent being must not only avoid evil, he must also do the good. These two necessary conditions taken together become sufficient for calling a being morally perfect or omnibenevolent.

Of course, one initial problem with this definition of moral perfection or omnibenevolence is that we have said nothing about what it means to say an action is morally good. We often contrast morally good

acts with good acts of other kinds. George might be a very bad harmonica player, for example, but his playing may be morally good because he does it for the enjoyment of people in an old age home. What is it, then, to judge that some actions are morally good?

I would suggest that to say an action is morally good is to say that that particular action is a better action, on balance, than any other actions that might be done in its stead. A morally good action is one we have an overriding obligation to perform. It is an action where the overriding reasons for doing it outweigh any reasons for not doing it. Conversely, a morally bad or evil action is one a moral agent should refrain from doing. When we say that God never does actions that are morally wrong we mean that in choosing between alternatives God never selects an action which is on balance worse than any alternative action He might have chosen instead. When we say that God is morally perfect we mean that God always chooses that action which on balance is better than any other action He could have performed.

But an important problem arises for our view of moral perfection. The problem is sometimes referred to as the Euthyphro dilemma, for it is first found in the Platonic dialogues. Briefly stated, the problem is this: does belief that God is morally perfect imply a moral standard external to God by which we measure God to see if He is, in fact, morally good. Or is it the case that when we say that God is omnibenevolent it means that God is, by definition, morally perfect. In this second view God's nature, whatever it might be, is the standard by which we decide goodness. Both of these positions, as Plato has shown, involve their proponents in difficulties. If God is good in

relation to some external source, then God could be said to not be the only ultimate reality. If this position is correct, the universe is one where its moral character was not ordained by God.

On the other hand, if God is good by definition, then whatever God commands is morally permissible, indeed, morally obligatory. Thus, if God were to decide that the ten commandments should be rearranged such that those which contain a "not" should have it removed, while those which contain no "not" should have one inserted, that would be morally acceptable since what is ethically "good" is solely determined by the will of God.

But as Mackie has skillfully pointed out, the horns of this dilemma need not impale us. They only do so if we make the mistaken assumption that moral qualities are atomistic, that is, they only come in unanalyzable atomic units which either are wholly dependent or independent of the will of God. Mackie suggests that we can, in fact, take them apart:

It might be that there is one kind of life which is, in a purely descriptive sense, most appropriate for human beings as they are - that is, that it alone will fully develop rather than stunt their natural capacities and that in it, and only in it, can they find the fullest and deepest satisfaction. It might then follow that certain rules of conduct and certain dispositions were appropriate (still purely descriptive) in that they were needed to maintain this way of life. All these would then be facts as hard as any in arithmetic or chemistry, and so logically independent of any command or prescriptive will of God, though they might be products of the creative will of God which, in making men as they are, will have made them such that this life, these rules, and these dispositions are appropriate for them.<sup>38</sup>

Mackie continues his analysis by suggesting that God might require human beings to conform to this appropriate life by enjoining them to obey certain rules. This would add a certain objective and prescriptive element to these descriptive truths. Mackie then adds that it might also be the case that this appropriate life as well as these connected rules are what human beings ought to strive to conform to, though they may not be completely accessible to people in a direct way, through some kind of experimental or empirical method. Still, God knows what this appropriate life amounts to and desires that people should live it. So, Mackie concludes, it is perfectly coherent to hold that God somehow reveals the sense of these corresponding rules.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of Mackie's response to the Euthyphro problem lies in the fact that it allows us to say that the descriptive component of moral distinctions is logically independent of what God may wish, while at the same time suggesting a prescriptive component which is intimately related to God's will. The picture of God as a divine ogre is replaced by the belief that He demands of His creatures that they should live in the best way possible.<sup>40</sup>

#### Natural and Moral Evil

We have already spent some time in discussing what constitutes a moral evil. It is clear, however, that the willful causing of human

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Ibid., p. 231.

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Ibid., pp. 231-232. For more on the Euthyphro dilemma see the following: Kai Nielson, "An Examination of an Alleged Theological Basis of Morality", Illiff Review (1964); Brian Hebblethwaite, The Adequacy of Christian Ethics (London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1981) pp. 13-14; and H. Meynell's "The Euthyphro Dilemma", in Aristotelean Society Supplementary vol. 46 (1972).

suffering is different in kind from hurricanes which may take human lives, or cancers which may cause suffering and death. The latter should be considered evil because anyone who desired them for their own sake would clearly be acting irrationally.<sup>41</sup> Another reason for viewing certain kinds of natural occurrences as evil is that an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being who caused these things to happen, when he alternatively could have created a world without them, with no loss of overall balance of good over evil, would be thought to be an evil or malevolent being. If this were not the case, it would be difficult to figure out just what the problem of evil is about.

But this distinction between natural evil and moral evil is not always so clear cut. In order to understand this point, consider the following example:

Fred comes from a family with a long history of lung cancer and various respiratory ailments. Fred persists, nevertheless, despite warnings like shortness of breath and tightness in the chest, to smoke four packs of cigarettes a day. Before he opens each pack, he carefully notes the warning on the side. Eventually, after many years of chain smoking he contracts lung cancer. But when his friends inquire as to when he might think about giving his fags up, he tells them, "Whatever happens, will happen anyway. When your number is up that's when you go, and not a day before or after that".

Now it should be clear that the disease Fred has contracted is a natural evil. At the very least, one could say that Fred has done nothing to prevent or forestall its occurrence. But because of this, it might

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Bernard Gert, The Moral Rules (New York: Harper and Row, 1970)

also be said that if Fred is a competent moral agent, he is indeed experiencing a moral evil done to himself as well. Through his gross neglect Fred is a victim of his own moral evil.

The above example shows that the distinction between moral evil and natural evil appears to be more a heuristic device than a neat logical distinction. Much of what we consider to be natural evil appears to have indirect human causes. We could eliminate much of the starvation in the world, for example, if the world's resources were allocated differently. Many people still suffer from diseases for which there are now known cures. Sometimes steps can be taken to avoid or forestall natural disasters, but they are not taken. In these instances it is quite difficult to say if it is only a natural evil that has occurred.

This rather fuzzy distinction between moral and natural evil has led thinkers on the problem of evil to concentrate mainly on the problem of moral evil, since it seems to constitute the larger part of the problem. But we must keep in mind that if God possesses both omnipotence and omniscience, in addition to His omnibenevolence, then He is in some way connected to the existence of natural evils, and may, therefore, be morally culpable.

J.S. Mill seems to be pointing to God's moral culpability for natural evils when he says the following:

In sober truth, nearly all the things men have been hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another are nature's everyday performances. Killing, the most criminal act recognized by human laws, nature does once to every being that lives, and in a large proportion of cases after protracted tortures such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposively inflicted on their fellow

living creatures. If by an arbitrary reservation we refuse to account anything murder but what abridges a certain term supposed to be allotted to human life, nature does this to all but a small percentage of lives, and does it in all modes, violent or insidious, in which the worst human beings take the lives of one another. Nature impales men, breaks them as if on a wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first Christian martyrs, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of hideous deaths in reserve such as the ingenious cruelty of a Nabis or a Domitian never surpassed. All of this nature does with the most supercilious disregard both of mercy and of justice ...<sup>42</sup>

We must keep in mind in our discussion of the problem of evil from the perspective of the religions of paradox that if Mill is correct then it seems that all examples of natural evil are also substantiations of moral evil as well. If God is a moral agent and He is responsible for the existence of natural evils, then in a real sense they may be seen as moral evils as well.<sup>43</sup>

One consistent way out of this dilemma is to make a distinction among what David Griffin calls "genuine evils", "apparent evils", and "prima facie evils".<sup>44</sup> By genuine evils we mean pain, death, disability, loss of freedom, loss of opportunity, etc., which, all things considered, the universe would have been better without. Another way to state the definition of a genuine evil is to say that it is an evil for which we

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J.S. Mill, "Nature", Three Essays on Religion 3rd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) pp. 1-2.

43

Brian Davies in his Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), as well as Michael Durant in his The Logical Status of God (London: Macmillan, 1973) suggest that this problem can be overcome by arguing that God is not a moral agent. Neither writer, however, makes it clear how this view can be consistent with the claims that God is also personal and acts in history.

44

David Ray Griffen, God, Power and Evil, pp. 21-27.

cannot give a sufficient reason for its existence.. An event or state of affairs is a genuine evil if its occurrence prevents the existence of some other event or state of affairs which would make the universe better than it is.

Prima facie evils are anything that may be labelled evil at first glance. Some prima facie evils, upon closer reflection, might turn out to be genuine evils. Other prima facie evils, however, may ultimately be seen as only apparently evil.

Apparent evils are those which, when considered from a larger context, are seen as merely apparent since their "evilness" may be viewed as compensated for by the goodness to which they contribute. In the final chapter of this thesis we will once again take up the challenge posed by Mill. It is enough now, however, to simply mention the distinction among genuine evil, apparent evil and prima facie evil.

I must confess that despite the important distinctions we have made in the last several pages in regard to the definitional problems involved in the problem of evil, much of what I have said here, nevertheless, seems too antiseptic, too clean. These distinctions seem not to capture the sense of the wanton cruelty and destruction that are the everyday fare of radio, television and newspaper reports.

Examples of extraordinary cruelty are no less ubiquitous in the history of human culture. Almost three millenia ago, Ashurnasirpal II, King of Assyria, ordered that the hands and feet of the inhabitants of captured villages should be severed. The bleeding bodies were piled up in the town squares so that those who were still alive might suffocate or



bleed to death.<sup>45</sup> As I write this, Syrian soldiers three thousand years later sit across from American marines in Lebanon. The weapons both sides carry make the cutting off of hands and feet seem like a more merciful practice.

The perception of evil is a direct and immediate experience of something which befalls individuals. We experience, each of us, evil done to us, and by empathy, evil to those we love, our friends and neighbours, and even to people we will never meet. It is not difficult to understand the pain suffered by the victims of Lt. Calley's massacres in Mai Lai or the mental anguish depicted so skillfully in William Styron's Sophie's Choice.<sup>46</sup> Voices like these cry over immense distances. That one person, anyone, should suffer unjustly is intolerable. If there were but one example of innocent suffering in the entire world, we would still have the obligation of asking why.

But Solzhenitsyn raises an interesting point about hidden suffering, about the impossibility of ever having just one example of innocent suffering. He tells the story of the eight year old daughter of one of the victims of Stalin's purges. After the father's death the girl lived only another year. During that time, Solzhenitsyn remarks, "She did not once smile". He adds, "When we count up the millions of those who died in the camps, we forget to multiply them by two or three".<sup>47</sup>

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L.E. Doob, Panorama of Evil (London: Greenwood Press, 1978)

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William Styron, Sophie's Choice (New York: Random House, 1979) Sophie Zawistowska is a Polish survivor of Auschwitz. Her story becomes a commentary on the powerfulness of individual freedom as it faces overwhelming evil. At one point in the novel she is given the "choice" by an SS officer of deciding which of her two small children she can save from the gas chamber. Sophie screams, "Ich kann nicht wählen". (I cannot choose.) Then, so as not to lose them both, she gives up her little girl.

47

Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, The Gulag Archipelago (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) p. 431.

One is reminded of Edward Wallant's stirring and disconcerting novel, The Pawnbroker, in which the central character, Sol Nazerman, has lost his wife and two children in the Nazi death camps. Before the war, he was a University Professor, specializing in Western intellectual history. After the war, he operates a pawnshop in East Harlem. His religious world view, which includes his definition of the meaning of suffering, has been totally shattered. Yet, when we count up the dead of the Holocaust, Sol Nazerman's name does not appear. The practical reality of suffering seems to be hidden no less in philosophically sophisticated discussions of the definition of evil, as they are in the statistics concerning dead in Nazi Germany or the Soviet death camps.

The realization of the practical reality of suffering was brought home to me in a painful way when the memorial for the Vietnam veterans was recently erected in Washington, D.C. The monument is a series of interlocking pieces of black marble on which are placed the names of the 56,000 men and women who died in Vietnam. But rather than placing the names in alphabetical order, the designer of the stones chose to put the names in the order in which they died. This makes it extremely difficult to find any particular person in the dozens of panels.

One summer day I travelled to Washington to find on the stones the name of a high school friend who had been killed early in the war. After several hours of looking for the name, I finally found it. After paying my respects, I began to look about me at the family members and friends of those who had fallen in southeast Asia. Often groups of three and four could be seen stroking the indentation in the stone that signified a

particular lost friend or father, husband or son. It is in moments such as this that one realizes the truth of Solzhenitsyn's remark. Each of these names tells us the story of one tragedy, but there are also the three or four hidden stories we do not learn.

Let us now examine carefully what we have garnered from this second chapter. First, after a lengthy discussion we were led to the notion that God's omnipotence involves the ability to do anything that is logically possible and is also consistent with His other attributes. Second, in our analysis of omniscience we ascertained that the best definition of that term is to say if some proposition is true, God knows that proposition is true. Additionally, we have suggested that the proper formulation of God's omnibenevolence is to say that God always avoids evil and does the good. We also demonstrated that the distinction between natural and moral evils, though not a strict logical distinction, is a good heuristic device for understanding the concept of evil. Finally, we made some very brief comments, which will be taken up again in chapters three and five, about the untheoretical character of suffering experienced first hand.

One remaining problem we are faced with in this chapter is whether belief in God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence, as well as belief in the existence of real evil in the world, commits one to a formal logical contradiction. Another way to phrase this question is to ask if one may consistently ascribed to the truth of the following four propositions simultaneously:

- i. God is omnipotent.
- ii. God is omniscient.
- iii. God is omnibenevolent.
- iv. There is evil in the world in both moral and natural forms.

There can be no doubt that the religions of paradox are committed to the truth of all four propositions. If a formal contradiction can be derived from i through iv, then we would be forced to conclude that the paradox is not just apparent, it is genuine. And if this were to turn out to be the case, the best we could hope for would be a god who resembles that proposed by J.S. Mill or found in Plato's Timaeus.

But it should be clear to any student of elementary logic that belief in the truth of propositions i through iv does not involve one in a formal contradiction. This would still be the case even if we were to add

v. God created the world ex nihilo.

J.L. Mackie seems to come to the same conclusion about the logical compatibility of these propositions when he writes:

However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some quasi-logical rules connecting the terms 'good', 'evil' and 'omnipotent'.<sup>48</sup>

Mackie then goes on to offer these additional premises or quasi-logical rules:

- vi. Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.
- vii. There are no limits (other than logical ones) to what an omnipotent, omniscient being can do.

From these two additional premises, as well as i through v, he derives something like the following:

- viii. A good, omnipotent, omniscient being would eliminate evil completely.

and

ix. 'A good, omnipotent, omniscient being exists' and 'evil exists' are logically incompatible.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, if Mackie's analysis is correct, we may see the aptness of the name "religions of paradox". In response to the logical problem Mackie has outlined above, theologians and philosophers of religion have attempted to construct various theodicies. Some attempt to relax the paradox by suggesting alternative definitions of 'good', 'evil', 'omnipotence', etc. But from a logical standpoint, most of these attempts end up as religions of solution or dissolution, depending on whether they attempt to change any of the first three propositions (solution), or they concentrate their attention on the fourth (dissolution). Any theodicy which attempts to resolve the problem by denying any of the four propositions, however, inevitably strays from either the orthodox doctrine of God or the classical view of evil.<sup>50</sup>

In the remainder of this work we shall not be concerned with theodicies which attempt to abandon or modify the theistic attributes so as to avoid the logical problem outlined above. Instead, I shall assume the existence of what Hick has called the traditional belief in God as unique, infinite, uncreated, eternal, personal spirit of absolute goodness and power.<sup>51</sup>

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Ibid., pp. 150-151. Mackie actually uses the formal wording I have employed here in his "Evil and Omnipotence".

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By the "classical view of evil" I mean here a biblical view as opposed to Augustine's notion of privation. This will become much clearer in the following chapter.

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John Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p. 35.

In the next chapter, I shall discuss those theodicies in the Christian tradition which, in various ways, attempt to restate the alleged evil pole of the logical contradiction. Rather than modifying the theistic attributes these theodicies attempt to restate the concept of evil without turning their position into a religion of dissolution. In these reformulations of evil the attempt is made to show that evil, as reformulated, is compatible with the existence of a God who is conceived as possessing the relevant attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence.

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Chapter Three: An Analysis of Traditional Theodicies

A bird sings now;  
Merrily sings he

Of his mate on the bough,  
of his eggs in the tree:

But yonder a hawk  
swings out of the blue,

And the sweet song is finished  
- Is this story true?

And now have mercy,  
on me and on you.

James Stephens

I have been ill and keep ill. I am president of the Diabetic Soc'y and diabetes keeps me in and out, in and out of bed every two hours or so. This exhausts, and this vast return to chaos which is called peace, the infinite meanness of great masses of my fellow creatures, the wickedness of organized religion give me a longing for sleep that will have no awakening. There is a long history of heart failure on my parental side but modern palliatives are very effective holding back that moment of release. Sodium bicarbonate keeps me in a grunting state of protesting endurance. But while I live I have to live and I owe a lot to a decaying civilization which has anyhow kept me alive enough in the spirit of scientific devotion to stimulate my curiosity and make me its debtor.

Forgive this desolation.

H.G. Wells, shortly before his death,  
in a letter to Bertrand Russell.

In this chapter I shall offer a critical analysis of traditional Western theodicies which, in various ways, attempt a restatement of the alleged 'evil' pole of the logical contradiction sketched out in chapter two. Rather than modifying the theistic attributes in order to resolve the problem of evil, these theodicies attempt to restate the concept of

evil. In taking this approach, the proponents of these views can thereby argue that the existence of evil, as reformulated, is compatible with the existence of a God who is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. A fair sampling of these responses can be arranged conveniently into four groups: (1) punishment and warning theodicies; (2) the unreality of evil theodicies; (3) evil is logically necessary theodicies; and (4) teleological theodicies.

In each of these four categories we shall explore a number of variations. It will be the burden of this chapter to show, however, that all of the restatements mentioned are inadequate Christian responses for one reason or another. Many of the theodicies about to be mentioned fail on logical grounds, but I will also suggest that some of these attempts at theodicy fail either because they fall outside the general bounds of the Christian tradition or because they largely ignore the perspective of the victim of suffering. We shall see that most, if not all of the answers about to be mentioned, fail to take the sufferer very seriously. We will recall from our discussion in the first chapter that this is one of the chief conditions necessary for a theologically viable response to suffering. Without this existential element, we have argued, answers to the problem of evil ring hollow or seem arbitrary and forced.

It is, of course, quite difficult to approach the problem with a true understanding of the practical reality of suffering. But without that understanding the task of theodicy cannot properly be undertaken.

Perhaps the best way to begin an analysis of traditional theodicies is to approach the concept of evil through a sympathetic observation of

human suffering. In a real way, this is the only direct link with evil we have. Although we have been clear about what evil is in the previous chapter, it is, nevertheless, best understood, at least for the individual doing the suffering, in an ostensive way. Surely, it is easier for a person to communicate the existential pain and reality of his suffering by having you suffer as well, than it is to have him verbally relate his feelings to you. Perhaps there is a bias in what I am suggesting: the practical reality of suffering can only truly be seen from the perspective of the victims, or at the very least from the perspective of those who are totally and profoundly sympathetic with those victims.

In an often quoted text, Gabriel Marcel has stated the importance of assuming this kind of perspective:

In reflecting upon evil, I tend, almost inevitably, to regard it as a disorder which I view from the outside and of which I seek to discover the causes or secret aims. Why is it that the mechanism functions so defectively? Or is the defect merely apparent and due to a real defect in my vision? In this case the defect is in myself, yet it remains objective in relation to my thought, which discovers it and observes it. But evil which is stated or observed is no longer evil which is suffered: in fact it ceases to be evil. In reality, I can only grasp it as evil in the measure in which it touches me - that is to say, in the measure in which I am involved, as one is involved in a law suit. Being "involved" is the fundamental fact; I cannot leave it out of account except by an unjustifiable fiction, for in doing so, I proceed as though I were God, and a God who is an onlooker at that.<sup>1</sup>

I think Marcel is suggesting something central to the study of theodicies. When the theodacist objectifies the evil he views or reflects upon it in a dispassionate way, he deprives the evil of its 'evil-ness' in relation to the very real suffering of the victim, for whom the evil is

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Gabriel Marcel, The Philosophy of Existence (London: Harvill Press, 1948, pp. 260-261.

experienced as intrinsic and ultimate in the present moment.

In viewing evil from a distance one is bound to form a distorted conception of it. Indeed, if Marcel is correct, one no longer observes evil but an objectification of it. In removing oneself from the evil the theodacist becomes something akin to the pilot of a small plane who wants to understand a certain African tribe by flying over them at 10,000 ft.

In order to make this personal perspective of Marcel's a bit clearer, consider the two following statements:

(a) On October 5, 1942 at Dulmo (in the Ukraine) eight German Jews were exterminated along with 1500 local Jews. They were led to an open air shooting range, where burial pits had been dug. The condemned handed in their clothing and other possessions, were directed to stand in the pits, and were shot.

(b) The people undressed. The mothers undressed the little children without screaming or weeping ... They had reached the point of human suffering where tears no longer flow and all hope has been abandoned ... I heard no complaints, no appeal for mercy. I watched a family of eight persons, a man and a woman both about fifty ... looking at each other with tears in their eyes. The father was holding the hand of a boy about ten years old and speaking to him; the boy was fighting his tears ... The pit was already nearly full; it contained about a thousand bodies. The SS man who did the shooting was sitting on the edge of the pit, smoking a cigarette, with a tommy gun on his knee. The new batch of twenty people, the family of eight, and the baby carried in the arms of the woman with the snow white hair, all completely naked, were directed down steps cut in the clay wall of the pit, and clambered over the heads of the dead and dying. They lay down among them. Some caressed those who were still alive and spoke to them in a low voice. Then came the 2 shots from the SS man who had thrown away his cigarette.

It is clear that in the first statement above we have a concise,

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2.

M. Hay, "Europe and the Jews", Religion From Tolstoy to Camus, ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961) pp. 339ff. The first passage is my own rough objectification of Hay's account.

rather objective account of the facts of a given incident which occurred over forty years ago. This account describes the particulars of the case, but in so doing it contains nothing of the practical reality of the experience. One can read statement (a) with little or no emotion, no real sympathy is required.

In contrast, statement (b) is much more lengthy and detailed. But it is not just this fact that makes us more sympathetic to the second account. More facts could be added to the first account but it is doubtful that this alone would make that description more sympathetic. In the second account we are asked not only to recognise the particulars of the case, but we are also asked to attempt to understand what these human beings are going through in the final moments of their tragic lives. We are asked to enter the scene not as mere spectators but as participants in their suffering.

It is rare in present times to hear sympathetic accounts of suffering. In contemporary Western culture we are beset with news accounts often wedged between situation comedies and advertisements for mouthwash and underarm deodorant. It is little wonder contemporary theodicians have fallen into the trap of objectifying evil.

John Hick, along with a number of other contemporary philosophers of religion and theologians, would surely object to my line of argument. In fact, Hick explicitly asserts that theodicy is the task of the detached observer rather than the victim:

As has often been observed, in the case of human suffering the intellectual problem of evil usually arises in the mind of the spectator rather than that of the sufferer. The sufferer's immediate and absorbing task is to face and cope with evil that is pressing upon him and to maintain his

spiritual existence against the threat of final despair. He does not want or need a theoretical theodicy, but practical grace and courage and hope. We can therefore say, in Marcel's terminology that for him evil is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be encountered and lived through.<sup>3</sup>

Hick does not totally exclude the victim's perspective from consideration, but surely he underestimates the ability of the sufferer to formulate crucial questions in the midst of his encounter with evil. "Practical grace and courage and hope" are never completely divorced from some theoretical context. In fact, it is often in the very context of the agony and suffering that, despite the disorientation and chaos that often occurs in these situations, the problem of evil is most forcefully raised and seriously considered. Indeed, this is precisely one of the reasons why the Book of Job remains so poignant. Job not only has a practical concern about suffering, he also has a theoretical concern. The comforters, on the other hand, see it as a theological conundrum to debate. Here I would probably part company with Marcel in so far as Hick's interpretation of Marcel is correct. I think it is clearly wrong that the mystery of evil cannot be reflected upon at all within the experience of that evil. This is an anti-intellectual claim which seems to dismiss a priori any possibility of theodicy. If this a priori view were the correct one, we certainly would not need Job's friends coming along on three different occasions to discuss the intellectual alternatives.

On the contrary, I'd like to suggest that the search for a Christian

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Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p. 10. Austin Farrer is even more bold in excluding the perspective of the victim: "We are concerned with the theoretical problem only. If what we say is neither comforting nor tactful, we need not mind. Our business is to say, if we can, what is true. So far from beginning with the sufferer and his personal distresses, we will attempt to get the issue in perspective, and sketch the widest possible view." Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) p. 11.

theodicy is not, by definition, impossible, but that theodicians must be careful to first, be logically cogent, and second, be consistent, at least in a broad way, with the major tenets of Christianity, and finally, they must develop a method which captures the reality of evil as it is experienced by the sufferer. Theodicy, I think, cannot be done by using dim objectifications as one's focus of study. Evil remains a part of the sufferer, and this often keeps their theodicies honest. We should expect at least that much from the sympathetic theologian or philosopher of religion.

Perhaps one of the best examples in Western literature of a sufferer reflecting on the problem of evil in the midst of his encounter with that evil can be found in Leo Tolstoy's "The Death of Ivan Illych". It is a harrowing tale which describes, with compelling and grim realism, the decline and death of a legal official, Ivan Illych, who had reached the top of his profession as a public prosecutor. But at a deeper level, Tolstoy gives us the picture of Ivan as an ordinary, mediocre man - a typical member of a professional bourgeoisie. Before his illness, Ivan had spent his legal career objectively viewing other peoples' problems. He had always approached evil and suffering in the lives of others in a cold and legalistic fashion. But now it was his turn. He, Ivan Illych, was the victim. During his slow and painful dying, he saw, to his great horror, that his family, friends and physicians had objectified his suffering.

Ivan Illych went out slowly, seated himself dejectedly in his sledge and drove home. All the way home he kept going over what the doctor had said, trying to translate all those involved, obscure scientific phrases into plain language and find in them an answer to the question, 'Am



I in a bad way - a very bad way - or is it nothing at all'? And it seemed to him that the upshot of all that the doctor had said was that he was in a very bad way ...<sup>4</sup>

Those around him did not truly sympathize with his situation. In the midst of his suffering Ivan realizes the absurdity of viewing disease, loss of opportunity and death from the point of view of an outsider.

In the depths of his heart he knew he was dying but, so far from getting used to the idea, he simply did not or could not grasp it.

The example is a syllogism which he had learned in Kiezewetter's Logic: 'Casius is a man, men are mortal, therefore Casius is mortal', had seemed to him all his life to be true as applied to Casius but certainly not as regards himself. That Casius - man in the abstract - was mortal, was perfectly correct; but he was not Casius, nor man in the abstract: he had always been a creature quite, quite different from all others. He had been little Vanya with a mamma and papa, and Mitya and Volodya, with playthings and the coachman and nurse; and afterwards with Katya and with all the joys and griefs and ecstasies of childhood, boyhood and youth. What did Casius know of the smell of that striped leather ball Vanya had been so fond of? Was it Casius who had kissed his mother's hand like that, and had Casius heard the rustle of her silken skirts? Was it Casius who had rioted like that over the cakes and pastries at the Law School? Had Casius been in love like that? Could Casius preside at sessions like he did?<sup>5</sup>

Finally, from out of the depths of his own suffering he formulates the crucial question of theodicy:

... he no longer controlled himself, but wept like a child. He wept over his helplessness, over his terrible loneliness, over the cruelty of men, over the cruelty of God, over the absence of God.

Why has thou done this? Why didst thou place me here? Why, why dost thou torture me so horribly?<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Leo Tolstoy, "The Death of Ivan Illych", in The Cossacks, Happy Ever and The Death of Ivan Illych (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1982) pp. 127-128.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

It is this spirit of Ivan Illych that is so often lacking in contemporary discussion of theodicy. Barth once said of Leibniz that "at bottom level he hardly had any serious interest (and from a practical standpoint none at all) in the problem of evil". It could be argued, I think, that Albert Camus is essentially making the same claim against his character, Father Paneloux, in The Plague. Dr Rieux, the atheist physician who is revealed as the narrator in the final chapter of the book, and the young priest, are used as paired opposites in the novel. Rieux sees the problem of the plague as a purely medical one. Paneloux in the beginning of the book sees the existence of the disease as an intellectualized theological conundrum. Each of their views becomes tempered by the other's when they are thrown together in witnessing the death of an innocent child. Rieux is, for the first time, confronted by the larger questions, questions that require answers that go beyond his simple technical skill. Paneloux is forced to respond in an existential way to the reality of undeserved suffering.

It is this dual concern for existential understanding and intellectual rigor that is difficult to find in so many contemporary and historical theodicies. In reading much of the literature on the problem of evil one gets the distinct impression that intellectual defences are carried out with little or no reference to the real world, that solutions proffered would be quite useless in any practical situation where a sufferer was asking 'Why'? Would anyone dare, for example, to suggest to a mother whose child had been recently killed in a senseless accident that evil was merely an illusion, a deprivation of good, or some prelude to a future eschatological harmony? Talk which is distantly plausible in the lecture

hall often becomes strangely absurd when brought to the bar of concrete experience. Even from the pulpit we all too often forget that not only must we be intellectually honest, but we must also keep in mind that one of the other important tests of the worth of a theodicy is that it help the sufferer in his encounter with evil. If a theodicy fails this test, it is useless; it has ignored the practical reality of suffering.

Having made these comments about the central importance of the victim in discussions of theodicy, we might do well to look carefully and critically at a variety of restatements of the evil pole of the apparent logical paradox presented in chapter two. In our discussion we will attempt to show that the first three types (punishment and warning, the unreality of evil theodicies, and the evil is necessary theodicies) all suffer from some incurable logical ills, but the fourth type, teleological theodicies, will require a more extensive analysis in terms of how well it conforms to our second and third criterion: <sup>whether</sup> it fits in a broad way in to the Christian form of life, as well as how seriously it takes the individual sufferer.

### I. Punishment and Warning Theodicies

Under this heading we can discuss two distinct but related points of view which find their origins, at least in the Judeo-Christian tradition, in the Torah. These positions might properly be labelled "retributive justice" and the "warning theodicy". In the earliest portions of the Old Testament, where the Hebraic understanding of man's relationship to God is both communal and covenantal, the existence of pain and suffering is most often seen as retribution for sins.<sup>7</sup> This view is most clearly

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<sup>7</sup>  
Cf.: Judges 2:11-15; Deut. 11:13-21; chapter 28; Lev. 23; Num. 12:1-5, for example.

expressed in the Pentateuch, but can also be seen in early prophetic literature as well:

Tell them, 'Happy is the virtuous man,  
for he will feed on the fruit of his deeds;  
woe to the wicked, evil is on him,  
he will be treated as his actions deserve'.<sup>8</sup>

This simple cause and effect explanation of suffering is written very deeply into scripture. It is explicit in the idea of the covenantal relationship in which the contract is inevitably followed by blessings and curses. It reached its height of formulation and theological importance in the Deuteronomic history which even gave a retributive explanation for the fall of the city of Jerusalem to the Babylonians a century later.

He built altars to the whole array of heaven in the two courts of the Temple of Yahweh. He caused his son to pass through the fire. He practiced soothsaying and magic and introduced necromancers and wizards. He did very much more things displeasing to Yahweh, thus provoking his anger ... Then Yahweh spoke through his servants, the prophets, "Since Manassa King of Judah has done these shameful deeds ..., and has led Judah itself into sin with its idols, Yahweh, the God of Israel says this, 'Look, I will bring such disaster as to make the ears of all who hear it tingle ... I will scour Jerusalem as a man scours a dish and, having scoured it, turns it upside down.'<sup>9</sup>

This quotation contains both elements of retributive justice and, quite clearly, an element of warning to be heeded by any reader who might have apostasy planned in the near future.

But even as early as the 8th and 7th century prophets there had been questions raised about the distribution of this supposed deserved

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<sup>8</sup>  
Is. 3:10f.

<sup>9</sup>  
II Kings 21:5, 10-13.

punishment. Indeed, it would seem that Jeremiah raises this question about the distribution of suffering in an anguished way rather than as an intellectual exercise.

You have right on your side, Yahweh,  
When I complain to you.  
But I would like to debate a point of justice with you.  
Why is it that the wicked live so prosperously?  
Why do scoundrels enjoy peace?<sup>10</sup>

By the time of the writing of the Book of Job, we find a sustained attack on this theodicy of deserved punishment. This attack, of course, is placed in the mouth of the victim of suffering, Job.

In his article, "Will You Lie for God?", F.M. Cross describes the developed orthodox theodicy which Job and his comforters debate:

In the national development of Israel's religion, the confessions of this historical faith were elaborated. The Lord of Israel, it was said, will deliver an obedient nation; he will also bring down by plague or defeat a rebellious and proud people. In the circles of Israel's pious and wise, the older doctrines were further simplified and refined. The ancient Lord of Israel's community became rather the God of the pious individual, who prospered the godly in his lifetime and struck down the unrighteous in the midst of his folly. This weal and woe were the unambiguous signs of God's pleasure or wrath, direct evidence of man's integrity or sin.<sup>11</sup>

The orthodox line, Cross continues, is elaborated by Eliphaz, one of Job's friends:

Think now, who that was innocent ever perished, or where were the righteous destroyed?  
As I have observed, those who plow falsehood and sow trouble reap the same,  
By the breath of God they perish, and by the blast of his wrath they are consumed.<sup>12</sup>

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10  
Jer. 12:1.

11  
F.M. Cross, "Will You Lie for God?" Convocation address delivered at the Memorial Church, Harvard University, September 24, 1958, p. 3.

12  
Job 4:7-9.

God sets on high the lowly, and the despondent are lifted  
 in victory.  
 He frustrates the designs of the crafty, so that their hands  
 achieve no success ...  
 He delivers the orphan from violence; the poor from the  
 hands of the strong.  
 So the pauper has hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.<sup>13</sup>

Job, however, counters this punishment and warning theodicy with  
 the perspective of the sufferer:

Look at me and be appalled, and put your hand on (your) mouth.  
 When I call it to mind, I shudder, and chills seize my flesh.  
 Why do the wicked live, reach old age, yea, and wax great  
 in power?  
 Their children are established before them, and their progeny  
 before their eyes.  
 Their houses are free from anxiety, and God's rod (falls)  
 not on them ...  
 They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace go down to  
 Sheol ...  
 When you say 'Where is the house of the prince?' 'Where is  
 the camp of the wicked?'  
 Have you not asked those who travel the roads, and do you not  
 accept their evidence:  
 That the wicked man is spared in the day of calamity, that he  
 is rescued in the day of wrath?<sup>14</sup>

The glib answer set forth by Job's friends does not budge the  
 protagonist. We have been told in 1:1 that Job is "blameless and upright",  
 and nothing the comforters have said will change that.

Professor Cross strongly argues against the popular conception that  
 Job is a patient, orthodox and long suffering individual (an interpretation  
 that is fostered by the fact that the author of the dialogues has  
 utilized the setting of the folk tale before and after the main debates).  
 To see Job in his true light, Cross argues, we must recognize him as a  
 heretic in his own time and place. Job confronts his orthodox comforters,  
 having endured restlessly their pastoral tones, their pious pomposity,

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13  
 Ibid., 5:11, 12, 15, 16.

14  
 Ibid., 21:5-9, 13, 28-30.

their offense at his doubts and their refusal to admit questions, their endless stock of brilliant aphorisms, and observes that they are liars:

Will you tell lies on God's behalf, and speak falsely for him?  
 Will you show him partiality; will you prejudge the case in his favor?  
 Will it go well when he examines you? Can you delude him as you delude a man?  
 Nay, he will surely punish you if you secretly show him partiality.<sup>15</sup>

Albert Camus is also very highly critical of the punishment and warning theodicy in his novel, The Plague. A few weeks after the plague had deeply established itself in the town of Oran, the Jesuit priest,

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15

Ibid., 13:7-10. Brian Hebblethwaite in his recent book, Evil, Suffering and Religion (London: Sheldon Press, 1970) points out that in the history of religions when the idea of suffering as punishment is felt to be inadequate, another explanation often replaces it, the idea of suffering as a divine test or a trial of faith. Certainly this is the case in the Book of Job, for the Elihu speeches follow that of the other comforters. The idea that the good are somehow purged by suffering can also be seen in the case of Jewish martyrs under Syrian rule, and in the early Christian martyrs such as Polycarp in the 2nd century, although in the Christian case the idea of sharing in the suffering of Christ also plays an important role when this theodicy is employed. In the Islamic tradition the idea of suffering as a test acquires a particular importance. The Qur'an makes this explicit: "We shall test your steadfastness with fear and famine, with loss of life and property and crops. Give good news to those who endure with fortitude, who in adversity say: 'We belong to Allah, and to Him shall we return'. On such men will be Allah's blessing and mercy." (ii. 150ff.) In the orthodox Muslim theodicy trials and tests are expected. Considering the emphasis placed on the omnipotence and inscrutability of God, this is not surprising. For the muslim, some kind of theodicy like this is inevitable. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the idea that extreme suffering is intended by God as a test of faith casts grave doubts about the goodness of God. Sometimes it is suggested that if evil is seen as a test, why is it that so many people seem to fail the test. More will be said about this point and its relationship to the theodicy suggested by John Hick later in this chapter. For more on 'evil as a test' in the Islamic tradition Cf. J.A. William's Islam (New York: University Press, 1961) pp. 15ff.; John Bowker's Problems of Suffering in the Religions of the World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970) pp. 99-136; also, Bowker's "Intercession in the Quran and Jewish Tradition", Journal of Semitic Studies XI (1966) pp. 69-82.

Father Paneloux, preaches a sermon which emphasizes the punishment and warning theodicy as the proper answer to why the town had been inundated by the dreaded disease. Paneloux traces the history of the plague in the Old Testament, noting that it served as an instrument used by God to strike down his enemies:

In strict logic what came next did not seem to follow from the dramatic opening. Only as the sermon proceeded did it become apparent to the congregation that, by a skillful oratorical device, Father Paneloux had launched at them, like a giant fisticuff, the gist of the whole discourse. After launching it he went on at once to quote a text from Exodus relating to the plague of Egypt, and said: "The first time this scourge appears in history, it was wielded to strike down the enemies of God. Pharoah set himself up against the divine will, and the plague beat him to his knees. Thus from the dawn of recorded history the scourge of God has humbled the proud of heart and laid low those who hardened themselves against him. Ponder this well, my friends, and fall on your knees.<sup>16</sup>

The plague eliminates the chaff, while at the same time it winnows out the chosen:

If today the plague is in your midst, that is because the hour has struck for taking thought. The just man need have no fear, but the evil doer has good cause to tremble. For plague is the flail of God and the world his threshing floor, and implacably he will thresh out his harvest until the wheat is separated from the chaff ...<sup>17</sup>

Paneloux concedes that to verify deserved punishment is the cause of the plague demands that the wicked only be afflicted. This would affirm, as Job's comforters attempted to do, that the fact of suffering is prima facie evidence of the sufferer's wrong doing. But Paneloux also seems to want to affirm that the judgement and punishment of the

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16

Albert Camus, The Plague, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Modern Library, 1948) p. 87.

17

Ibid.



wicked aids the salvation of those unaffected by the plague, for it works as a constant warning to them. The plague motivates the righteous to continue to conform to God's will. It illuminates and underscores man's impotence and exposes his arrogance and specious self-sufficiency. Consequently, one may be humbly prepared for the necessity and acceptance of God's saving grace.<sup>18</sup>

But shortly after this first sermon an event occurs which radically changes Father Paneloux's view of the appropriateness of the punishment and warning theodicy. He and the physician, Dr Rieux, are present for the death of an innocent child:

They had already seen children die - for many months now death had shown no favoritism - but they had never yet watched a child's agony minute by minute, as they had now been doing since daybreak. Needless to say, the pain inflicted on these innocent victims had always seemed to be what in fact it was: an abominable thing. But hitherto they had felt its abomination in, so to speak, an abstract way; they never had to witness<sup>19</sup> over a long time the death throes of an innocent child.

The death of this innocent child forces the priest to view evil in a way where he is more than a spectator. He comes to see that the boy's death flagrantly contradicts the logic of the first sermon. In the face of this tragedy with the small child, suffering can no longer be seen as the result of deserved punishment. The plague has struck down the guiltless, and any error in discriminating between wheat and chaff must call into question the validity and applicability of the

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18

Ibid., p. 88-90.

19

Ibid., p. 192.

deserved punishment theodicy.<sup>20</sup>

Later in the novel, during the height of the plague, the priest gives a second sermon. In this second attempt at theodicy, Camus has Paneloux change his preaching style, as well as the content of his sermon. The pronoun 'you' dominates the first sermon, clearly because the priest regards himself as a member of the class 'wheat'. In the second sermon, however, after he has witnessed the death of the innocent child, he speaks of 'we', for the neat distinction between wheat and chaff has collapsed. The theodicy Paneloux ultimately employs in the second sermon will be discussed at some length when we discuss teleological theodicies later in this chapter.

In his film, "The Virgin Spring", Ingmar Bergman includes a discussion that is very similar to Paneloux's dilemma in seeing the suffering of the innocent child. In the Bergmanfilm a man discovers the body of his murdered daughter and shouts furiously at the heavens:

You saw it, God. You saw it. The death of an innocent child, and my vengeance. You permitted it and I don't understand you.<sup>21</sup>

It should be clear that the punishment and warning theodicy is an inappropriate and illogical answer to the problem of evil for the

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Ibid., pp. 198ff. It is to the priest's credit that at this point he abandons the punishment and warning theology altogether, considering he might have made a last ditch effort by falling back on Exodus 20:5 "I the Lord Thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generations of them that hate me".

21

Anthony Schillani, Movies and Morals (Notre Dame: Fides Press, 1968) p. 102. Dostoyevski, in the "Rebellion" chapter of the Brothers Karamazov sees the inappropriateness of this answer with respect to innocent children. In that chapter Ivan remarks to Alyosha, "... the second reason I will not speak of grown-up people is that, besides being disgusting and unworthy of love, they have a compensation - they've eaten the apple and know good and evil, and they have become 'like God'. They go on eating it still. But the children haven't eaten anything, and are so far innocent." Book V chapter 4, C. Garnett, trans. (New York: Modern Library, 1950)

religions of paradox, for the innocent suffer right along with the sinners.<sup>22</sup>

(c) The Free Will Defense

A second more philosophically sophisticated form of the punishment and warning theodicy can be found in the writings of St Augustine. In short, Augustine argues that far from being the victims of suffering human beings are actually the perpetrators. Theodicy (the justification of God's ways to man) is not Augustine's concern, rather his attention is focused on anthropodicy (the justification of man's ways to God):

The will which turns from the unchangeable and common good and turns to its own private good or to anything exterior or inferior sins; it turns to its private good when it wills to be governed by its own authority; to what is exterior, when it is eager to know what belongs to others and not itself; inferior things, when it likes bodily pleasures. In these ways a man becomes proud, inquisitive, licentious, and is taken captive by another kind of life which, when compared to the righteous life we have just described, is really death.<sup>23</sup>

In his book, Emile, the great French romantic Jean Jacques Rousseau develops the free will answer to the problem of evil with a simple certitude:

Enquire no longer, then, who is the author of evil. Behold him in yourself. There exists no evil in nature than what you either do or suffer, and you are equally the author of

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McCloskey points out that this kind of answer was advanced to explain the terrible Lisbon earthquake in the late 18th century in which 40,000 people were killed. Voltaire responded to this notion by asking, "Did God in this earthquake select the 40,000 least virtuous of the Portuguese citizens?" (Cf. footnotes to H.J. McCloskey's "Evil and Omnipotence".) Moses Maimonides in his Guide of the Perplexed (London: Friedlander, 1904) offers a similar kind of rebuttal to the punishment and warning theodicy. (Cf. chapter 24.)

23

Augustine, On Free Will II ix 53. Augustine's Early Writings (London: SCM, 1958) p. 135.

both ... Take away everything that is the work of man,  
and all that remains is good.<sup>24</sup>

Although Rousseau's view of evil is tied to a still somewhat optimistic view of human nature, or at least its possibilities,<sup>25</sup> for Augustine, man has his capacity to sin because of the Fall. Adam and Eve were created by God in a state of innocence with the blessing of free will. But the gift was gravely misused. They rebelled against the rule of God and in so doing took upon themselves the responsibility for the origin of evil, both moral and natural. Thus, as Augustine puts it: there are two kinds of evil - "sin and the consequences of sin". The sorrows and sufferings that befall the human race are seen as the punishment merited by sin. Man brought natural evil upon himself, and as a sinner under judgement, he cannot rightly call God into question for not intervening to stop the evils which are the consequence of man's sin. Many simply gets what he deserves in his experience of sin.

This "~~the~~ free will defense" is a mainstay in the history of Christian theodicy. It was popularized and endorsed by Augustine, in the 4th century, and in many ways remains the predominant view in Christian theodicy today. Its influence can easily be traced through the work of Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Charles Journet, Karl Barth, and many others. In our own day, contemporary writers have

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Jean Jacques Rousseau, Emile M. Nugent (trans.) (London: 1763)  
(reprinted 1854) p.12.

25

For a full view of Rousseau's conception of human nature Cf. his Essays on the Origin of Inequality (London: Everyman's Library, 1973).

done much to rehabilitate the free will defense to suit modern sensibilities.<sup>26</sup>

As historically important and pervasive as this Augustinian point of view appears to be, it suffers, nevertheless, from a number of important defects. The most obvious problem with Augustine's answer to the problem of evil is that it accepts as a literal truth the notion that the rest of the human race, countless numbers of people, are justly punishable for all eternity through the sinful deeds of two people. There may be acceptable ways of updating Augustine's view of the Fall so that modern people might be able to reconcile that view of human nature

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Cf.: Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica I 23, ad. 2, 3; I 22, ans. 3 and Summa Contra Gentiles III, I, 10.7; III, 79.2; Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion I, xviii, 1; III xxiii, 6; Luther's On the Bondage of the Will (609-620); Barth's Church Dogmatics vol. III/3; for more modern theological appropriation, cf. Charles Journet's The Meaning of Evil (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1963) and F. Petit's The Problem of Evil (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1958). One of the clearest literary uses of the free will defense with its corresponding notion of the Fall of the human race can be seen in William Golding's novel Lord of the Flies (London: Faber and Faber, 1954). In this book Golding seems consciously to rewrite R.M. Ballantyne's Coral Island, an optimistic and superficial boy's book of South sea adventures against cannibals, pirates and savages. The difference between the two novels resides in the fact that although Golding uses the same characters as Ballantyne, he (Golding) sets out to show that evil arises not from external forces but in the fallen hearts and minds of human beings. Golding in The Writer in His Age remarks, "I am very serious. I believe that man suffers from an appalling ignorance of his own basic fallen nature." (New York: Collier, 1965) p. 5.

with the realities of contemporary anthropology. But whether Augustine would have been willing to allow this revision is doubtful.

Beyond this historical point, there is a second practical concern which raises doubts about the Augustinian free will defense. Augustine, and those who follow him, allow the focus of theodicy to shift too quickly away from the victims of suffering; the practical reality of suffering is simply ignored when the Augustinians move from theodicy to anthropodicy. A third problem is connected to the first. Augustine seems committed to a notion of an historical, temporal Fall, but it is clear that prior to the existence of homo sapiens on this planet the conditions necessary for the experiencing of profound natural evils were already present. In this context, there is no way we can see all evil as proceeding from the temporal Fall. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, there is, I think, a basic and fatal incoherence which lies at the center of this theodicy. It is self-contradictory to say that a creator, at least in the religions of paradox, is not responsible in some sense for the origin of evil. In orthodox thought after the time of Augustine, God was seen to be an omni-responsible deity who fore-ordained evil, though God's omni-responsibility does not relieve man of his own responsibility on a different level for moral evils. The real point is this: the Augustinian approach seems to suggest a kind of self-generating evil. If Adam and Eve were about to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, how did they already seem to know what disobedience was?

A fifth question to be entertained concerning all versions of the

punishment and warning theodicy, as well as the free will defense, is whether God could have made a world such that people had freedom of choice, but always choose the good?

Charles Pierce would have answered this question with a resounding no. He often refers admiringly to a book, Substance and Shadow, by Henry James, Sr., the father of Henry and William. The text contains several comments about this notion of creating a world where everyone chooses the good. Unfortunately, the book is also heavily laden with the rather murky theology of Emmanuel Swedenborg. Consequently, a better idea of the elder James's view of this 'good' world can be found in the following excerpt from one of his letters:

Think of a spiritual existence so wan, so colorless, so miserably dreary and lifeless as this; an existence presided over by a sentimental deity, a deity so narrow-hearted, so brittle-brained, and pretty fingered as to be unable to make god-like men with hands and feet to do their own work and go their own errands, and contents himself therefore, with making spiritual animals with no functions than those of deglutition, digestion, assimilation ... These creatures could have no life. At the most they would barely exist. Life means individuality or character; and individuality and character can never be conferred, can never be communicated by one to another, but must be inwardly wrought out of the diligent and painful subjugation of evil to good in the sphere of one's proper activity. If God made spiritual sacks, merely, which he might fill out with his own breath to all eternity, why then of course evil might have been left out of the creature's experiences. But he abhors sacks, and loves only men made in his own image of heart, head and hand.<sup>27</sup>

Ninian Smart takes a very similar kind of approach to the question of whether God could have made human beings who always freely choose the good:

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Ralph Barton Perry, The Thought and Character of William James (New York: Macmillan, 1935, vol. I pp. 28-29).

None of the usual reasons for calling men good would apply in such a utopia. Consider one of those harmless beings. He is wholly good, you say? Really? Has he been courageous? No, you reply, not exactly, for such creatures do not feel fear. Then he is generous to his friends perhaps? Not precisely you respond, for there is no question of his being ungenerous. Has he resisted temptations? No, not really, for there are no temptations (nothing you could really call temptations ...") 28

From all of this, Smart goes on to conclude:

that the concept of goodness is applied to beings of a certain sort, beings who are liable to temptations, have fears, possess inclinations, tend to assert themselves and so forth; and that if they were immunized from evil they would have to be built in a different way. But it soon becomes apparent that to rebuild them would mean that the ascription of goodness would become unintelligible, for the reasons why men are called good and bad have a connection with human nature as it is empirically discovered to be. Moral utterances are embedded in the cosmic status quo.<sup>29</sup>

Both the criticisms of James, as well as those of Smart seem to miss the point. The question at hand is whether it was logically possible to create a race of human beings who freely chose to always do the good. James and Smart have set about answering the question concerning what the consequences would be once God made such a race of people. But concerning the question at hand, I see nothing logically impossible in the suggestion that God could make a race of people who always freely choose the good. In order to understand why I am taking this position, consider the following example: Since the beginning of the human race there have been a finite number of people who have existed on earth. And in the finite amount of time homo sapiens has been on this planet, they have made a finite number of moral choices. Now

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Ninian Smart, "Omnipotence, Evil and Superman", Philosophy (April - July, 1961) p. 192.

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Ibid., p. 190-191.



let the two sides of a coin represent the two choices for moral good and moral evil. And let each flip of the coin represent one moral choice freely made. It is, of course, logically possible that as long as we have a finite number of sides to the coin, and as long as we make a finite number of flips, the coin could land on the same side every time. It is highly unlikely, but it is still logically possible. If our analogy is a good one, then it is logically possible that there could exist a finite number of moral agents who made a finite number of moral choices, but those choices were always made for the good. There is nothing logically contradictory or inconsistent in this. In both the James and Smart objections to this position it is implied that 'God making beings who always freely choose the good' is incoherent. And this would certainly be true if we were suggesting that God forces men to freely choose the good. But that is not what this position is about. If God forced men to choose one way or the other, they certainly would not be choosing freely. But God could make creatures who had such good characters that although they had the ability to choose evil, they always preferred not to. Kant seems to be discussing this as a perfectly logical possibility when he refers to what he calls the 'holy will'.

J.L. Mackie arrives at the same conclusion by using the following formulation:

If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: There was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always do right.

Clearly his failure to avail himself of this particular possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and wholly good.<sup>30</sup>

Anthony Flew also concurs:

Not only is there no necessary conflict between acting freely and behaving predictably and/or as the result of caused causes; but also Omnipotence might have created only people who would always as a matter of fact freely have chosen to do the right thing.<sup>31</sup>

In orthodox Christianity the character of Jesus has been thought to be both fully human and fully divine. And in the course of his earthly life, it is believed that Jesus never sinned. Now clearly this notion of Jesus' sinlessness is trumpeted among orthodox Christians because it was Jesus the man who did not sin, though he was subject to all the same temptations as the rest of us. If it were true that it was Jesus the God who did not sin, this would be no more interesting than saying that a square did not become a circle. By his very nature, Jesus the God cannot sin. Indeed, what makes the story of Jesus's temptation in the desert so poignant is that as a man Jesus was strong enough in character to stand up to such a giant temptation.

Now if God the father could make one human being who was of such good character that he always freely chooses to do good, he could certainly make two. Indeed, in traditional Catholic theology there is the belief that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also without sin. Now if God could make two people of such good character that they freely choose

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J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", p. 209. This question about how the world might have been rather than how it is is raised by Shakespeare in King Lear when he asks why anyone need be challenged upon the rack of this tough world. (V, iii, 312). Tennyson's poem "The Lotus Eaters" forms a similar query about the world we might have had.

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Anthony Flew, "Are Ninian Smart's Temptations Irresistible", Philosophy, vol. xxxvii, no. 139 January, (1962). p. 58.

not to sin, he could make ten. If he could make ten, he could make millions. If he could make millions, he could make everyone that way. God could have made any finite number of people who have existed or will exist on earth of such good character that they always freely choose the good.

Anthony Flew sums up our conclusion on this free will defense quite well:

If there is no contradiction here then Omnipotence might have made a world inhabited by wholly virtuous people; the free will defense is broken-backed; and we are back again to the original antinomy.<sup>32</sup>

It must be added here that it matters very little to our argument if Jesus or Mary actually did or did not always freely choose the good. All that need be the case is that it is logically possible that throughout either of their earthly lives, they did not sin.<sup>33</sup>

Another way of raising this objection to both the punishment and warning theodicy, as well as the free will defense, is to ask why God did not make Adam with the character of Jesus, the man, or someone as morally good, and Eve with the character of Mary, or someone with a similar moral character. Their descendants could be very different in most of the myriad ways humans differ, but they would have one thing in

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Anthony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom", New Essays in Philosophical Theology (London: SCM Press, 1955) p. 149.

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This point is also made by D.J. Hoitenga in his "Logic and the Problem of Evil", American Philosophical Quarterly vol. iv (1967) pp. 114-126. There he suggests that the traditional Christian doctrine holds that in heaven the blessed will be confirmed in goodness without loss of their freedom of choice. Thus, Hoitenga suggests that it is not clear why God could not have created rational creatures preserved by grace from all sin - as Roman Catholics believe he did in the case of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

common: they would all be of such good moral character that they would always freely choose the good.

Another staunch defense of the free will theodicy can be found in the recent work of Alvin Plantinga,<sup>34</sup> an American philosopher who uses a clever combination of modal arguments and notions of individual 'essence' to help circumvent problems for the free will defense.

Plantinga takes as his point of departure Leibniz's Theodicee. In that work Leibniz suggests that evil in the world is due to the imperfection characteristic of all finite existence. God in His omniscience recognizes that any created world would suffer from some imperfection. In His infinite goodness and knowledge he has chosen the least imperfect of these possible worlds, and by His omnipotence, He has brought it into existence. Thus, Leibniz concludes, this is the best of all possible worlds. His point of view had its severe critics, even in the late 18th century, when, for example, Voltaire in typical ironic spirit asked: "If this is the best of all possible worlds, what must the others be like?"

Plantinga begins his defense of the free will theodicy by suggesting that Leibniz has made what he calls a 'lapse'.<sup>35</sup> Plantinga argues that Leibniz might have followed a more successful route by proposing the notion that there are possible worlds which even an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being is not able to bring about.

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Alvin Plantinga, God, Freedom and Evil (New York: Harper and Row, 1974) and The Nature of Necessity (Oxford University Press, 1974) pp. 173-189.

35

Ibid., pp. 173ff.

Plantinga develops this idea through a number of amusing examples about Maurice choosing oatmeal for breakfast, Paul selling his aardvark, and Curley Smith, the fictitious mayor of Boston who must decide whether to take a bribe in exchange for his dropping opposition to the proposed construction of a new highway.

Suppose if Mr Smith were to be offered the bribe he would reject it. Then it is the case, Plantinga argues, that God could not bring about a possible world in which Mr Smith existed, was offered the bribe, and accepted it. But suppose if Mr Smith were offered the bribe, he would take it. Then it follows, just as in the contrary example, that God could not actualize a possible world in which Smith was offered the bribe and he refused it. In either situation there is at least one possible world which cannot be actualized, even by an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent God. If we think for a moment of the number of possible free choices, it is clear, Plantinga suggests, that there are many possible worlds which God could not bring about.

In the second step to Plantinga's argument he adds to this notion that there are possible worlds which even God could not bring about, a certain view of human essences that suggests people may be so corrupt that in the case of Curley Smith, for example, there is no possible world such that Mr Smith exists and would refuse the bribe were he to be offered it. According to Plantinga, Curley Smith suffers from "transworld depravity".

Now suppose, Plantinga suggests, that transworld depravity is not only true of Curley Smith, it is true of the rest of us as well, indeed, true of any beings God could have created. The conclusion would follow

that "it is possible that God could not have created a world containing moral good but no moral evil".<sup>36</sup>

Although this view would ostensibly account for the existence of moral evil, it says little about why the world contains natural evil. If Plantinga takes the Augustinian line that the natural disasters and hardships of life in the world are the consequence of human sin, we are still left with the thorny problem of why there were natural evils in existence before the advent of human life on this planet. Plantinga responds to this query with the rather ad hoc notion that natural evils exist as a by-product of the sins of the fallen angels.

J.L. Mackie, in his recent book, The Miracle of Theism, poses some further difficulties for Plantinga's view:

But how is it possible that every creaturely essence suffers from trans-world depravity? This possibility would be realized only if God were faced with a limited range of creaturely essences, a limited number of possible people from which he had to make a selection, if he was to create free agents at all. What can be supposed to have presented him with that limited range? As I have argued, it is not logically impossible that even a created persons should always act rightly; the supposed limitation on the range of possible persons is therefore logically contingent. But how can there be logically contingent states of affairs, prior to the creation and existence of any created beings with free will, which an omnipotent being would have to accept and put up with? This suggestion is simply incoherent.<sup>37</sup>

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Alvin Plantinga, God, Freedom and Evil p. 53. Dom Bruno Webb in Why Does God Permit Evil? also argues for an angelic origin to natural evil. (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1941) pp. 33-35.

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J.L. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism, p. 174. For other criticisms of Plantinga's version of the free will defense Robert Richman, "Plantinga, God, and other Minds", Australian Journal of Philosophy Vol. 50 (1972); William Rowe, "Plantinga on Possible Worlds and Evil", Journal of Philosophy Vol. 70 (1973); A.D. Steuer, "Once More on The Free Will Defense", Religious Studies. September issue (1974); and W.J. Wainwright, "Christian Theism and The Free Will Defense", International Journal of the Philosophy of Religion vol. 6 (1975).

I think that Mackie is entirely correct. Plantinga does not show that it is possible that all free beings must suffer from transworld depravity. Indeed, it is odd that considering the fact that Plantinga believes in the existence of angels (which solved for him the problem of natural evil) he did not conceive of the possibility of the sinlessness of Jesus, the man, or Mary, his mother. Both of these logical possibilities seem like excellent counter-examples to the notion that any created human who also had free choice would suffer from transworld depravity.

## II. The Unreality of Evil Theodicies

There are at least three variations of theodicy which may be included under this heading: (a) the amount of evil is insufficient to create a problem; (b) that evil is an illusion; and (c) that evil is a deprivation, a distortion of something intrinsically good. We shall discuss these in order.

### (A) The amount of evil is insufficient to create a problem.

This point of view has been openly advocated by very few serious thinkers. C.S. Lewis adopts a fairly sophisticated presentation of this theodicy, but he is quite the exception.<sup>38</sup> In its more simple forms this

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C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (New York: Macmillan, 1978) pp. 55f. Lewis' argument is based on the view that "there is no such thing as a sum of suffering, for no one suffers it". That is to say, there cannot be more suffering in the universe than the greatest amount suffered by a single person. It is pointless, he suggests, to add together the pains of different individuals, for no one in fact suffers all that pain. Even if Lewis' point that there is no such thing as a sum total of suffering were to be granted, there would still remain the indubitable fact that there are a great many people who suffer. To point out to x that he cannot experience y's pain seems cold comfort to those who often think they are suffering like no one else has. It would perhaps be wiser, however, to deny Lewis' point altogether. x may not suffer y's

answer may lie behind the prevalent eternal optimism which characterizes the spirits of what William James would call the 'healthy minded'. On another level, I would suspect that this theodical formulation is widespread among many sincere and pious believers who have never carefully considered the problem of evil from the perspective of the victim, or perhaps among actual victims of suffering who refuse to ask the theoretical questions about the 'meaning' of their suffering.

The central claim to this theodicy seems to be that the amount of evil in the world, including human suffering, is insufficient to disturb one's belief about God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence. There is not enough evil to warrant the presumptuous act of calling God into account.<sup>39</sup> From a logical point of view this idea is patently false. All that is needed for the problem of evil to arise is one example of moral or natural evil. Given the supposed attributes of God, a single example of evil is sufficient to create a problem. Even if a single example were not enough to create the problem, David Hume lists in his

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pain, nor y that of x. But a world where x and y are both severally suffering may in a perfectly intelligible sense, though not in Lewis' sense, be said to contain more suffering than a world in which x alone suffers.

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Moses Maimonides seems to be arguing a version of this 'presumptuous' argument in his Guide of the Perplexed (chapter 24). Richard Swinburne disagrees on this point regarding whether one example of evil is enough to create the problem of evil. For a full explanation of this disagreement cf. his "The Problem of Evil", chapter 4 of Reason and Religion edited by Stuart Brown (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977). David Griffen does agree with the notion that one single example would be enough. In his introduction to God, Power and Evil he says: "Furthermore, I do not give any account of the kinds of things I would consider genuine evil. There is no necessity that the reader and I agree on which things are genuine evils. All that is necessary is that we both, given our own value judgements believe that at least one thing has happened without which the world would have been better. That genuine evil in this sense has occurred is, of course, incapable of proof. But I also take it to be unnecessary to prove. It is one of those basic assumptions in terms of which we all live our lives, in spite of what we may verbally affirm." pp. 28-29.



Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion a catalogue of woes which should be sufficient to convince any serious thinker that we are beset with more than enough evil to create a problem:

But though these external insults, said Demea, from animals, from men, from all the elements, which assault us from a frightful catalogue of woes, they are nothing in comparison of those which arise within ourselves, from the distempered condition of our mind and body. How many lie under the lingering torment of disease? Hear the pathetic enumeration of the great poet (John Milton).

Intestine stone and ulcer, colic pangs,  
 Demoniac frenzy, moping melancholy,  
 And moon struck madness, pining athrophy,  
 Marasmus, and wide wasting pestilence.  
 Dire was the tossing, deep the groans:  
 Despair tended the sick, bisiest from couch to couch.  
 And over them triumphant Death's dart  
 Shook but delayed to strike, though oft invoked  
 With vows, as their chief good and final hope.

The disorders of the mind, continued Demea, though more secret, are not perhaps less dismal and vexatious. Remorse, shame, anguish, rage, disappointment, anxiety, fear, dejection, despair - tormentors? How many have scarcely ever felt any better sensations? Labor and poverty, so abhorred by everyone, are the certain lot of the far greater number; and those few privileged persons who enjoy ease and opulence never reach contentment of true felicity. All the goods of life united would not make a very happy man, but all the ills united would make a wretch indeed; and anyone of them almost (and who can be free of every one), nay, often the absence of one good (and who can possess them all) is sufficient to render life ineligible.<sup>40</sup>

It may be that Hume is overstating his case for the ubiquity of evil. Nevertheless, his point is still well taken. There is indeed more than enough evil to create a problem for the theist. The human condition, as Thomas Hobbes suggests in the Leviathan, is one that is often "solitary, wolfish, brutish and nasty".

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David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, ed. by N.K. Smith (London: Thomas Nelson, 1947) p. 198.

Hume's awareness of the potentially overwhelming magnitude of evil has been shared by many who have endured the unparalleled atrocities of the 20th century. The realization of the omnipresence of evil has been brought home to our age, perhaps much more clearly than any other. Evil is a positive, real and sometimes dominating force which often threatens us with senseless destruction. It frequently thwarts even the best of human purposes, and thereby calls into question beliefs about an all loving, all knowing, all powerful creator. Most notably, the World War II experiences of the Jews provides us with a constant reminder of the sometimes devastating reality of evil. Man's capacity for inhuman acts can be seen very clearly in the Holocaust; it was there that relations between human beings seemingly reached their all time nadir on the scale of depravity and wanton cruelty. It may well be that people have always exhibited this pernicious hatred that seems to go beyond reason, but in the 20th century we have had the technological skill and resources to demonstrate that hatred far more effectively. It would seem that in the Holocaust we came face to face with evil beyond which nothing greater could be conceived, evil which led some Jewish thinkers to believe that God had lost his morals.<sup>41</sup> There can be no doubt about this matter from the perspective of the victim: the amount of evil does indeed create a problem.

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In a period of ten years, ending in 1945, Nazi Germany was responsible for the deaths of at least six million Jews. In a program whose stated purpose was the annihilation of world Jewry, several important facts are important to recall as we consider the impact of this heinous action. First, Jewishness was determined by a decision made by grandparents in the preceding century to raise their families as Jews. There was no opportunity to disclaim that heritage for the Jews during the reign of the Nazis. Second, the German government went to extraordinary lengths

to hunt down and kill individual Jews, diverting vital military manpower and materials at a time when the war was being lost. Third, although mass murder was not a new phenomenon in the history of the human race, the Holocaust represents the first time that an effort was made to kill off a people for racial-religious reasons with no real clear benefit to the killers. Previous massacres were based on ulterior motives of gain in wealth, power or territory. Comparison with Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Dresden fire bombings or the starvation in the Sahel are inappropriate, for these later events were performed or allowed with the purpose of gaining a strategic advantage. Four, Yiddish culture in eastern and western Europe was virtually eliminated. Not only was total destruction of villages and persons accomplished, but accounts of deathcamp life attest to efforts to wipe out all vestiges of humanity from the prisoners by a combination of brutality, obscenity, and perversion previously unknown. The horror of such magnitude was to raise the possibility of the destruction of Judaism before the destruction of the Jews. Five, the world outside Germany was at least dimly aware of what was happening in the gas chambers and crematoria. Political and religious leaders made little effort to intervene before the end of the war. The silence of the Christian West, as one rabbi has put it, "was deafening".

For Jewish theodical responses to the Holocaust, cf. the following: Emile Fackenheim's God's Presence in History (New York: University Press, 1960), Quest for Past and Future: Essays in Jewish Theology: (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1968). In these two books Fackenheim dismisses the problem as a logical problem. Indeed, he suggests that the Midrash "has a logic of its own". Richard Rubenstein in his After Auschwitz: Beginning of A New Era: (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966) argues that the Holocaust is sufficient evidence that the God of Judaism is dead, as is the notion that the Jews are the chosen people. Also see the following: Elie Wiesel's Night (New York: 1960); Thomas A. Indinopulos, "Art and the Inhuman: A Reflection on the Holocaust", The Christian Century vol. xci no. 35 October 16, 1974; David Horowitz "The Passion of the Jews", Ramparts vol. xiii no. 6 June 1972; Eva Fleishner (ed.) Auschwitz (New York: Ktav, 1977); A. Davies The Crises of Conscience After Auschwitz (London: 1969)

Many of the thinkers mentioned above were present at a gathering of theologians in New York for a symposium on Auschwitz and theodicy. These thinkers tried to answer the question "Where was God when six million Jews were killed, when few prayers, except for death as a relief from suffering, were answered?" The New York Times in an article entitled "In Search of God at Auschwitz", June 9, 1974, p. E-5 gives a fairly accurate account of what went on at that symposium.

- (B) The alleged evil is an illusion. When seen from a larger, or divine perspective, it has a different character.

This statement admits of at least two separate interpretations. The first is quite like the answer given to the problem of evil in the religions of dissolution. You will recall that in those traditions the problem is dissolved by suggesting that the whole world of temporal, changing things is an illusion, and what we call evil belongs only to this phenomenal realm. Therefore, at bottom level, evil is unreal. A variation of this first approach is to say, with the Christian Scientists, that although temporal things are much as we see them, those we call 'evil' are not real.

The other variety of this theodicy has been called the "aesthetic defense". It can be found in the works of Plato, Augustine and chiefly among 18th century optimists. Its adherents maintain although individual instances may be seen as evil, when viewed in a larger context, these evils are apprehended as part of a greater good. Sometimes the example of painting is used to stress this point. Often when artworks are viewed close up or in segments they appear quite ugly. But when seen from a distance, or as a whole, the parts which formerly appeared ugly are seen to fit together in a grand pattern. Each of the individual parts, though some may be ugly, in their own way contribute to the beauty of the painting as a whole.<sup>42</sup>

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As Harnack points out in his History of Dogma (London: Williams and Nergate, 1898) (vol. V, p. 114) this analogy to works of painting is very well established in Western theology. Augustine used this line of argument quite regularly in regard to the problem of evil. "Augustine never tires of realizing the beauty (pulchrum) and fitness (aptum) of creation, of regarding the universe as an ordered work of art, in which the gradations are as admirable as the contrasts. The individual and evil are lost to view in the notion of beauty ... Even hell, the damnation of sinners, is, as an act in the ordination of evils

Alexander Pope seems to hold this position in Epistle I of his

Essay on Man:

Cease, then, nor order imperfection name,  
 Our proper bliss depends on what we blame.  
 Know thy own point: this kind, this due degree  
 Of blindness, weakness, Heav'n bestow on thee.  
 Submit. In this, or any other sphere,  
 Secure to be as blest as thou canst bear:  
 Safe in the hand of one disposing Pow'r,  
 or in the natal or the mortal hour.  
 All nature is but art, unknown to thee;  
 All chance Direction which thou canst not see;  
 All discord, Harmony not understood;  
 All partial evil, universal Good:  
 And spite of pride, inerring Reason's spite  
 One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.<sup>43</sup>

One might begin to criticize the first version of the 'evil is an illusion' theodicy by suggesting that it goes against the Biblical view which clearly posits the existence of real, substantial instances of evil. Beyond this Biblical criticism, however, one may suggest that this

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(ordinatio malorum), an indispensable part of the work of art."  
 Augustine: "We are like people ignorant of painting who complain that the colors are not beautiful everywhere in the picture; but the Artist has laid on the appropriate tint to every spot ..." (Ench. III 2 II).

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Alexander Pope, "Essay on Man" in The Works of Alexander Pope, notes by Whitwell Elwin (London: Murry, 1871-1889). Among modern theologians this argument is often identified with G.H. Joyce's Principles of Natural Theology (London: Longmans Green, 1957) (chapter 17), where he suggests: "Just as the human artist has a view of the beauty of his composition as a whole, not making it his aim to give each several part the highest degree of brilliancy, but the measure of adornment which most contribute to the combined effect, so it is with God." This aesthetic position is also, I think, central to any clear understanding of G.K. Chesterton's enigmatic novel, The Man Who was Thursday (London: Arrowsmith, 1944). Only at the end of the novel, when Sunday's face suddenly expands until it fills the entire sky, and all goes black, do we understand Sunday is God, in whom a final reconciliation of good and evil inscrutably occurs. Still, Giacomo Leopardi, a near contemporary of Pope's, had another point of view:

"Nought is worthy  
 Thine agonies, earth merits not the sighing  
 Mere bitterness and tedium  
 Is life nought else; the world is dust and ashes

... Scorn all, for all is infinitely vain." (Quoted in L.E. Loemker's "Theodicy", in The Dictionary of The History of Ideas vol. iv (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973).

theodicy falls short on at least two other counts: in terms of plain common sense, and on the level of more restrained philosophical discussion.

On the common sense level Dostoyevski has captured in a painfully detailed way the positive and sometimes crushing reality of evil:

"A Bulgarian I met lately", Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by the Turks and Cirassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by their ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them - all sorts of things you can't imagine. People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts, a beast can never be so cruel as man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that's all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took pleasure in torturing children too; cutting the unborn child from the mother's womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother's eyes. Doing it before the mother's eyes is what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They've planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed. The baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out his little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn't it? By the way, Turks are particularly fond of sweet things, they say.<sup>44</sup>

It would be very difficult to read this passage and suggest that the evil depicted there is somehow illusory. Certainly for the victims, it is seen as very real. F.R. Tennant in his Philosophical Theology raises a philosophical objection to this 'evil as an illusion' point of

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F. Dostoyevski, "Rebellion", in Walter Kaufmann (ed.) Religion From Tolstoy to Camus (New York: Harper Brothers, 1961) p. 142ff. In commenting about this section of Dostoyevski and the propensity to view evil as unreal, C.P. Jacks once remarked "For my own part, I would rather live in a world which contained real evils which all men recognized than in another where all men were such imbeciles as to believe in the existence of evil which has no existence at all." Religious Foundations ed. by Rufus Jones (New York: Macmillan, 1923) p. 105.

view:

The empirical theist finds no comfort in the supposition that evil is an illusion of finite temporal experience, an inadequate idea, or an appearance which would dissolve away if we only saw sub specie aeternitatis. For if evil is an illusion, the illusion is evil ... The problem of evil is raised by the world as we find it, and it is not to be found by diverting attention to other-worldly cognition of a world order other than the phenomenal and the temporal.<sup>45</sup>

John Hick echoes this same kind of criticism when he suggests that the 'evil as an illusion' theodicy merely "re-describes the problem". Evil may be an illusion, but we must ask why this illusion seems to cause so much suffering. Evil may be maya, but why is there so much maya? The problem remains just as thorny as it was before the terminology was altered.

H.D. Lewis comes to the same conclusion about the inadequacy of the 'evil is an illusion' theodicy in his Philosophy of Religion:

... These views seem to me to be nonetheless vastly mistaken. Evil is genuine and positive; and I have indicated already some of the main defects in systems which question its reality. The practical effects of treating evil as mere illusion have already been noted. But it must be added in fairness to the religions and cultures which tend to give evil, in the last event, no proper place in the universe, that much in the initial stages of the attitudes they represent involves a profound, almost obsessive, preoccupation with evil. It is the unendurable spectacle of evil in its most distressful and insidious forms that prompts the desperate search for release or oblivion by which mind and heart are alike averted from the reality of evil. This kind of escapism cannot, in my view, be good for either the individual or his society.<sup>46</sup>

Lewis's conclusion, however, seems to have fallen victim to the

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F.R. Tennant, Philosophical Theology vol. II (Cambridge, 1930) p. 181.

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H.D. Lewis, The Philosophy of Religion (London: University Press, 1965) p. 308-309.

genetic fallacy. Since he has done a bit of amateur psychologizing to show the 'origins' of this belief about evil as an illusion, he concludes that the belief is false. But the real problem with this position cannot be found on psychological or anthropological grounds. It is to be found in its logical incoherence.

John Wisdom gives a very good summary of the force of these logical objections:

I will only say briefly that the theory of the unreality of evil now seems to me untenable. Supposing that it could be proved that all that we think evil was in reality good, the fact would still remain that we think it evil. This may be called a delusion of mistake. But a delusion or mistake is a real thing, as real as anything else ... But then, to me at least, it seems certain that a delusion or an error which hid from us the goodness of the universe would itself be evil.<sup>47</sup>

It is true that the 'evil is illusion' theorist could respond to Wisdom by saying that seeing evil as though it were real is just another illusion. But this new illusion could then be pronounced a real evil, since it is now this illusion that actually deceives us about the true nature of reality, and hides the goodness of the universe from us. This could, of course, go on ad infinitum for no matter how many times we call the last evil an illusion, we always leave what is real behind, which eventually in its turn is to be pronounced as evil because it hides from us the way things really are.

The aesthetic version of the "evil is unreal" theodicy can be dismantled on similar logical grounds. If Pope's line about 'disorder' being merely harmony not understood is to be taken literally, the 'partial

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John Wisdom, "God and Evil", Mind vol. 44 (1935) p. 2.



evil' of the following line must, if he is to remain consistent, mean something like 'that which when taken in isolation falsely appears to be evil'. But within the context of the poem, it seems to more naturally mean something like 'that which in isolation really is evil'. Line 12 is, in fact, quite equivocal. It hesitates between two logically incompatible views, that partial evil isn't really evil, since only the 'bigger picture' is real, and that partial evil really is evil, albeit a lesser evil.<sup>48</sup>

(C) The alleged evil is a privation, a distortion of something intrinsically good.

The most detailed exposition of this theodicy is to be found in chapters eleven, twelve and fourteen of Augustine's The City of God, as well as chapters three and four of the Enchiridion. In chapter three of the latter work Augustine explains the nature of evil in the following way:

What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? In animal bodies, for instance, sickness and wounds are nothing but the privation of health. When a cure is effected, the evils which are

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H.J. McCloskey criticizes the aesthetic formulation on grounds suggested by Wisdom: "This kind of argument, if valid, simply shows that some evil may enrich the universe; it tells us nothing about how much evil will enrich this particular universe, and how much will be too much. So, even if valid in principle - and shortly I shall argue that it is not valid - such an argument does not in itself provide a justification for the evil in the universe. It shows simply that the evil in the universe might have a justification." In view of the immense amount of evil the probabilities are against it. McCloskey concludes that unless there are independent arguments in favor of this world's being the best logically possible world, it is probable that some of the evils in it are not logically necessary to a compensating good; it is probable, so McCloskey argues, because there are so many evils. Cf "Evil and Omnipotence", pp. 100ff.

present (i.e. the sickness and the wounds) do not retreat and go elsewhere. Rather, they simply do not exist any more. For such evil is not a substance; the wound or the disease is a defect of the bodily substance which, as a substance, is good.<sup>49</sup>

A modern version of the 'evil is privation' theodicy, which relies heavily on some Augustinian principles, can be found in Errol Harris's The Problem of Evil. In that work Professor Harris suggests that evil

is not, therefore, anything substantial, but is merely the negative aspect of what in its positive being is good. To revert to our examples, disease is the positive reaction of the organism to the effect of another positive influence (on the part of the viruses or bacteria, or the like) which tend to disrupt the organic self-maintenance of its system. Each positive trend is constructive and self-maintaining but they come into conflict. The evil involved is simply the degree to which the superior and more inclusive system fails to preserve its integrity. Evil is no positive entity or process. Similarly, stupidity is failure of insight and confusion of constructive thinking. So far as it is an effort to think and understand it is positive and good; and if it were not these at all it could not become confused nor would there be any attempt to comprehend which could fail. Lastly, if we did not constantly strive to satisfy our desires, did not seek contentment and personal fulfillment, the material of moral action would be altogether lacking and so equally the means and occasion of moral failure. Wickedness is neither more or less than the persistent effort to fulfill oneself in ways which negate the very conditions of fulfillment both of ourselves and of others.<sup>50</sup>

A third example of 'evil as privation' can be seen in the work of the Catholic scholar, Germain Griesez:

Evil thus has a negative character, it is in itself not a positive thing, but a lack of something. Yet not all lack is evil. The person who could murder another is not

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Augustine's Enchiridion iii 11 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1873).

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Errol Harris, The Problem of Evil (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1977) pp. 31-32.

evil for remaining unfulfilled in this respect. Doughnuts are not evil merely because they really do have holes in them. But a person who attacks the foundation of the other goods in another person by killing him does something wrong, because the choice to act in this manner narrows the scope of one's freedom to an arbitrarily selected subset of all the possibilities a human person can wish to further. A hole in one's gas tank, which allows the gasoline to leak out, also is something missing; the lack of integrity of the metal is a privation in this case, since there ought to be metal where the hole is.<sup>51</sup>

What these examples have in common is this: given the basic belief that the created order is good, and that God is the source of creation, a theodicy follows from these two points which holds that evil has no independent, substantial reality. Augustine in the City of God rejects any theodicy which claims that evil is due to the material aspects of the world. Matter is good, God created it as good, therefore, everything created is good in its own way. Evil arises when that which is good is perverted or corrupted in some way. Augustine's chief concern in his privation theory is to show that evil is not something positive, rather, it is a lack of something.<sup>52</sup>

We have already suggested in some detail that any theodicy that does

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Germain Griesez, Beyond the New Theism: A Philosophy of Religion (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976) p. 293. A similar position is also held by M.C. D'Arcy in his The Pain of the World and the Providence of God (London: Longmans Green, 1935)

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When Augustine uses the privatio boni theme to describe evil in passages such as, "When the will abandons the higher and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil - not because that is evil to which it turns but because the turning is perverse", it is clear that he is mounting a strong reaction against the Manichean heresy, to which he had been attached for some ten years prior to his conversion. (cf. On Free Will I, iii, 6 and The City of God XI 22f.).

not view evil as something positive and real runs the danger of not taking the experiences of sufferers very seriously. On an existential level, the level of experience, this theodicy is open to serious question. F.R. Tennant has rightly noted that the theodicy cannot easily argue that evil is a privation, unreal or nonexistent in the sense of being mere deficiency or negation. The privation theory owes its plausibility to the ease with which abstractions can be verbally manipulated. Tennant rejects this theodicy because he thinks it is reductionistic. He concludes:

The fact that evil exists in the world is a primary datum for the empiricist-theist, knowable with much more certainty than is the being of God.<sup>53</sup>

H.J. McCloskey arrives at the same conclusion about the privatio boni defense by taking a much more philosophically rigorous route. He is inclined to admit that certain evils such as blindness and deafness are privations of proper goods. But the question for him becomes one of whether we can easily explain all evils that way. He argues rather forcefully that we cannot.<sup>54</sup> W.I. Wallace, in his Existence of God, expresses a similar point of view on this matter:

It may console the paralytic to be told that paralysis is mere lack of mobility, nothing positive, and that insofar as he is, he is perfect. It is not clear, however, that this kind of comfort is available to the sufferer of malaria. He will reply that his trouble is not that he lacks anything, but rather that he has too much of something, namely, protozoans of the genus Plasmodium. If the theist retorts that evil is nonbeing in the metaphysical not

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F.R. Tennant, Philosophical Theology vol. II p. 181.

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H.J. McCloskey, "Evil and Omnipotence", pp. 100ff.

crudely material sense, it would seem appropriate for the victim to inquire why God saw fit that the finitude of his creatures should take just this form rather than some other. Really the "evil is nonbeing" ploy is a play on words, an unfunny joke. It is a sign of progress both in the philosophical acumen and essential humanness, that little is heard along these lines nowadays.<sup>55</sup>

The belief that evil and pain are mere privations of something good seems hardly a satisfactory theodicy. Admittedly, seen in its best light, however, the privation answer may be saying something fairly profound about evil never being an end in itself - that it often leads to, or is overcome by, the good. But this somewhat more sophisticated notion will be discussed under the teleological theodicies.

### III. Evil is logically necessary

There are at least three versions of theodicy that could be included under the general heading, "evil is necessary". We have already had occasion to discuss one of these, (a) Alvin Plantinga's free will defense, and have made passing references to a second, (b) Leibniz's notion that this is the best of all possible worlds. Both of these positions suggest that we could not have had a world with no evil. For Plantinga, this is because any possible world that God could have made actual would be filled with creatures suffering from transworld depravity. For Leibniz, the sense in which God could not have avoided evil is not simply that it was logically impossible. Rather, it was logically impossible given the fact that this is the best of all possible worlds. Since God is morally responsible for seeking the best, there can be no element in this world which should have been avoided. This argument,

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W.I. Wallace, The Existence of God (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965) pp. 142-143.

it seems to me, is entirely a priori and its defects lie in the inherent inconsistency of the notion of 'the best of all possible worlds'. But enough of a critical nature has been said about both of these positions already.<sup>56</sup>

(C) The contrast theodicy

A third form of the 'evil is logically necessary' type might be labelled 'the contrast theodicy'. Baruch Brody, in his book, Beginning Philosophy, briefly attempts to sum up the sense of this approach:

A perfect world would be a world which we wouldn't recognize and appreciate, because we only recognize and appreciate something like good if we also experience its opposite evil. This is why God has put some evil into the world.<sup>57</sup>

In some versions of the contrast theodicy this claim is made even more strongly in terms of making it a logical necessity. Usually, this stronger version is posed something like this: 'In order for good to exist it is necessary for its opposite, evil, to exist'. Brody's version is somewhat weaker than this second formulation of the contrast theodicy, for he suggests that evil is necessary "in order to recognize and appreciate the good". This distinction is a very important one. The second formulation suggests that without evil, good would not exist, while Brody's version suggests that although good would exist if we didn't have evil, we would not be able to recognize or appreciate it.

Although the second formulation looks like it is saying a good

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For two clear arguments against the coherency of Leibniz's answer to the problem of evil, cf.: M.B. Ahern's The Problem of Evil, pp. 53-63; and James Ross's Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (Toronto: Collier-Macmillan, 1969) pp. 127-130.

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Baruch Brody, Beginning Philosophy (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977) p. 116.

deal more, it is actually based on a not too subtle confusion. The proponents of this view are fond of using the analogy of color. If everything were blue, they suggest, we would not have blue as a concept. By analogy, if we did not have something to contrast with good, then the concept 'good' would not exist. But it should be clear that this is false. If all the items in the world were the same shade of blue, it is quite true that we would not be able to distinguish the blue, but it would not follow that the blue did not exist. We might not be able to recognize the blue, but it would, nevertheless, still be there. The more coherent formulation of the contrast theodicy is that of Brody who suggests that in order to recognize or appreciate the good, we must have its opposite, evil. If all the objects in the world were blue, it is true that we would be hard pressed to recognize and appreciate the blue.

There are two main avenues of criticism we might explore with respect to Brody's version of the argument. The first assumes that what the contrast theodicy asserts is true. It then criticizes the argument on the grounds that there appears to be an immense amount of gratuitous evil in the world. The other avenue of criticism suggests that the premises on which the contrast theodicy is based are false, and thus it is an invalid argument. Let us begin examining the first criticism by entertaining an example.

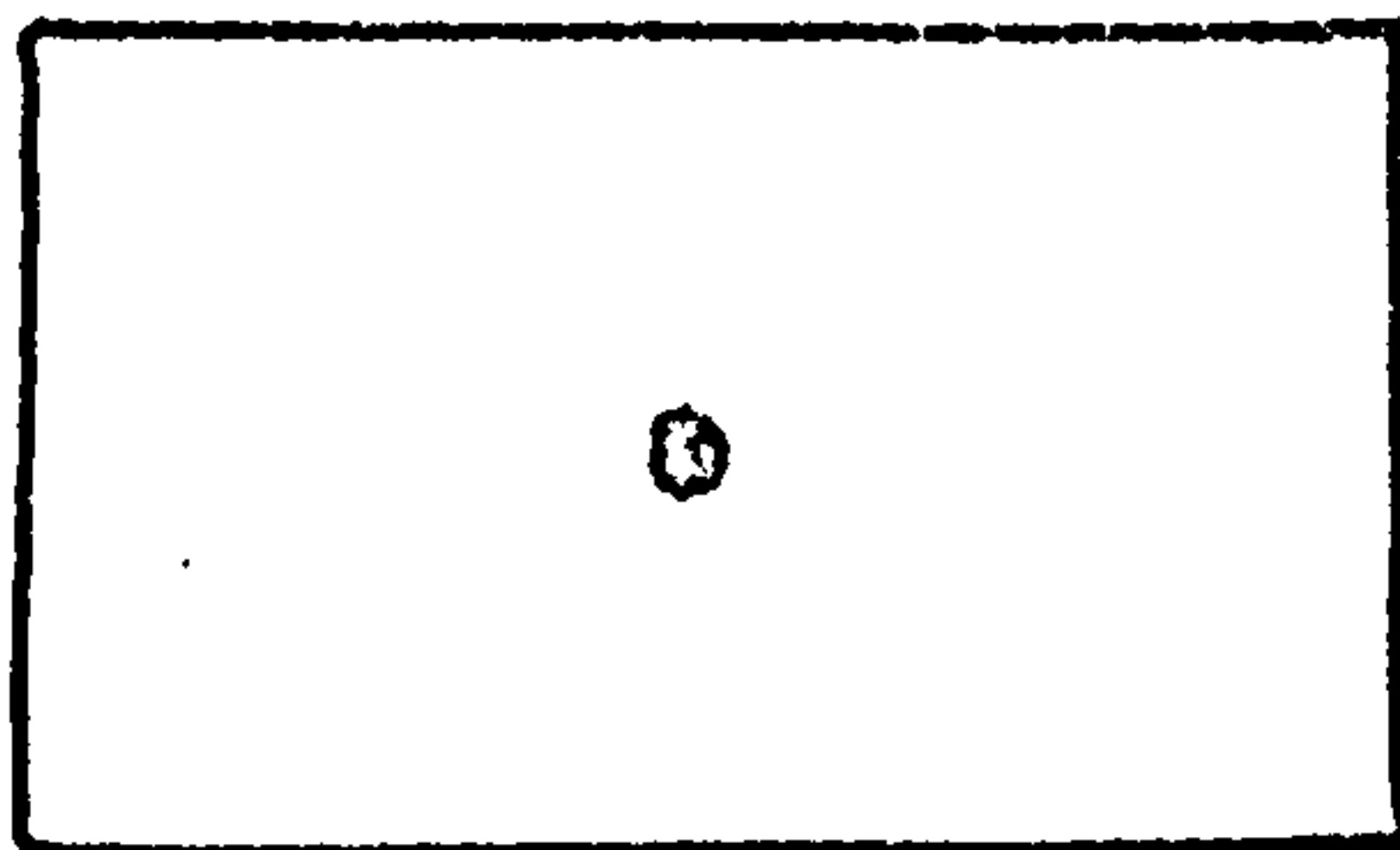
Alvin, a free-lance painter, has been recently hired by the parsimonious paint company to demonstrate their new line of indoor house paints. When applying for the job Alvin was told by his interviewer that the company prides itself on its cost efficiency, and although he

would be required to make demonstrations in homes all over Britain, he must, under no circumstances, waste any paint.

During his very first demonstration, Alvin is immediately beset with a serious problem. Mrs Higgins, his first customer, has suggested that Alvin paint some of her white living room wall with their new "Lagoon Blue", so that she might see the contrast between the new color and what she formerly had. As Alvin begins to paint the wall, the voice of the interviewer reverberates in his ears.

How much of the wall should Alvin paint? Clearly, he should paint enough so that Mrs Higgins, a woman of normal intelligence and vision, can appreciate the contrast between her white wall and the new Lagoon Blue, but not a drop more than is needed to accomplish that task, for Alvin is not to waste any paint.

It is very unlikely that Alvin would have to paint half the wall, or even a quarter or an eighth. Indeed, all that would be required would be something like the following:



The first condition of his employment has been met, for Alvin, Mrs Higgins, and any other observer of normal intelligence and vision, can easily see the difference between the formerly all white wall and the small experimental dab of Lagoon Blue. The second condition has also been met - Alvin has wasted very little, if any, paint.



Now let the Lagoon Blue stand for evil, while the white represents good. God, in our analogy, plays the part of the parsimonious paint Company as well as the painter, for he is responsible for the existence of the world and, if the analogy holds, he certainly would not allow any evil to exist which did not serve the important purpose of helping us distinguish evil from good. The question of course is quite simple: how much evil do we need to understand or appreciate the good? How much do we have? Certainly Dostoyevski and Hume would argue a good deal more than we need.

In the other criticism of the "contrast theodicy" the thesis that "in order to apprehend and appreciate the existence of something, you have to have its opposite", is denied. In order to understand why this premise is not acceptable, we must look for a moment at the orthodox Christian conception of heaven. If the principle which underlies the contrast theodicy is true, how do the souls residing in heaven realize they are experiencing heavenly bliss? Surely it is not because they are having experiences of evil in heaven. One might respond by saying that they remember evil from when they were on earth. But clearly this will not do, for babies who died shortly after birth would have no such experiences. Still, it could be argued, they would know they are in heaven because they could see people on earth suffering. But once again this will not do. If the souls were to watch, for example, the senseless murder of an innocent person, by the very fact that the souls were of the kind of moral character which merited heavenly bliss, they should feel for the victim with appropriate sadness and distress. This would also serve the useful purpose of allowing a contrast between the evil done to

the poor victim and their condition of heavenly bliss. But it would seem that by definition souls in heaven should not feel sorrow, and so we are left with a curious paradox: the souls in paradise cannot know they are experiencing heavenly bliss because they can't experience or apprehend evil in heaven. If they could apprehend or experience evil in heaven, they would not, by definition, be in heaven.

One way out of this paradox is to suggest that the principle on which the contrast theodicy is based is false. Indeed, it seems perfectly plausible to say that the reason souls in heaven know what heavenly bliss amounts to is because they can contrast their condition, not with its opposite, but rather against the vision of God. They could know they are experiencing heavenly bliss by understanding that they are not God. The contrast need not be between opposites, it may be a contrast in degree rather than kind.

Plato seems to be suggesting the same notion in Book nine of the Republic when he talks about the pleasures of taste and smell. These two sensations, Plato notes, seem not to depend for their existence on any prior experience of pain. Thus, the central notion of the contrast theodicy 'in order to understand or apprehend the existence of something you must have its opposite' can be denied, and the argument can be seen as unsound.<sup>58</sup>

#### IV. Teleological Theodicies

There are at least two versions of the teleological theodicy:

(a) the moral quality theodicy; and (b) the theodicy of future harmony.

What these points of view have in common is that they both assert that evil in some way brings about good. They are different from the "evil is necessary" theodicies because the teleological approaches do not suggest that it is necessary that God brings about things the way he has.<sup>59</sup> The "moral quality" approach is so named because it emphasizes the moral qualities which often result from the human encounter with evil. The "future harmony" theodicy gets its name from its controlling belief that in some future harmony to come, a kingdom of God realized, all evils will be seen as actually resulting in good.

Baruch Brody briefly describes a version of the moral quality theodicy:

One of the greatest goods we possess are our moral qualities of courage, mercy and compassion. But these qualities arise and develop out of the confrontation with evil and wrongs. So in order to allow us these prized moral qualities, God had to create a world in which evil exists.<sup>60</sup>

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This is an important point that has not been lost on David Hume. If the world God created was not the only world available to him, Hume suggests that there are at least four ways it might have been improved upon:

- (1) He notes that pain and pleasure are both used to motivate creatures to action and self-preservation. He wonders why in another kind of world they could not just be motivated by pleasure. Hick answers that such an "anaesthetic existence" would fail to provide the stimuli for hunting, agriculture, and the building of civilization and culture.
- (2) Hume wonders why a deity could not occasionally violate general laws of nature in order to produce pleasure and reduce pain in deserved cases. A fleet salutory to society would always meet with good winds.
- (3) Hume wonders if human suffering might not be less if we were endowed with an increase in one single attribute - industriousness. And
- (4) Hume suggests that many natural evils could be eliminated if God's entire work of art did not resemble a work of art crudely unleft by its maker. He talks about the world needing rain, but not understanding how a good, intelligent, powerful God would allow floods. Overall, Hume's criticisms seem to ask questions about the way the world could have been. If He had done these things differently, Hume suggests, the world could contain less suffering. Hick remains unimpressed with Hume's suggestions, (Cf. The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion), but gives insufficient reasons for dismissing Hume's queries.

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Baruch Brody, Beginning Philosophy, p. 116.

Richard Swinburne seems to have a similar perspective in his Existence of God, where he argues that natural evils provide, among other things, an opportunity for people to grow in knowledge and understanding:

If men were to have knowledge of the evil which will result from their actions or negligence, laws of nature must act regularly; and that means that there will be what I call victims of the system ... if men are to have the opportunity to bring about serious evils for themselves or others by actions of negligence, or to prevent their occurrence, and if all knowledge of the future is obtained through normal induction, that is from induction from patterns of similar events in the past - then there will be serious natural evils occurring to animals and man.<sup>61</sup>

Swinburne entertains the possibility that God could have given people this knowledge by just informing them of it, rather than having them experience it. But if this were the case, he argues, no one would fail to believe in God, and thus everyone would be compelled to accept the divine word. Additionally, no one would be in a position to acquire knowledge of the way the world works on their own. Thus, Swinburne concludes:

that a world in which God gave to men verbal knowledge of the consequences of their actions would not be a world in which men had a significant choice of destiny, of what to make of ourselves, and of the world. God would be far too close for them to be able to work things out for themselves. If God is to give man knowledge while at the same time allowing him a genuine choice of destiny, it must be normal inductive knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

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Richard Swinburne, The Existence of God (Oxford, 1979) p. 210.

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Ibid, C.A. Campbell's solution to moral evil is also a good example of this type. Like Hick and Swinburne, Campbell suggests that God has made the world a place for 'soul-making'. Campbell also suggests that the moral qualities cannot be developed unless people are endowed with free will, which, in Campbell's words, "is meaningless if it is not freedom to choose wrongly as well as rightly". He argues that if free will exists, then a world without moral evil is inconceivable. He is, I

John Hick takes up this same point in the 3rd edition of his Philosophy of Religion. He seems to agree about the necessity of God creating human beings at an epistemic distance from himself;

The other consideration is that if men and women had been initially created in the direct presence of God, who is infinite in life and power, goodness and knowledge, they would have had no genuine freedom in relation to their maker. In order to be fully personal and therefore morally free beings, they have accordingly (it is suggested) been created at a distance - not a spatial but an epistemic distance, a distance in the dimension of knowledge ...<sup>63</sup>

Hick also concurs with Swinburne on the preferability of having evil in the world so that human beings may perfect certain moral qualities:

... A world without problems and difficulties, perils and hardships would be morally static. For moral and spiritual growth comes through responses to challenges. Accordingly, a person-making environment cannot be plastic to human wishes but must have its own structure in terms of which men have to learn to live and which they ignore at their peril.<sup>64</sup>

It is clear that Hick is in substantial agreement with Swinburne on the importance of the moral quality theodicy, but he also goes a good deal beyond it. Indeed, he seems to attach to the moral quality answer another point of view, which he feels is intimately related to it and makes it more plausible. He calls this second approach "eschatological

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think, committed to a rather curious argument. On the one hand, he suggests that humans are free, which means that they could do otherwise. On the other hand, he seems to be arguing that it is logically necessary that at some point they choose evil. If it is logically necessary, then they could not have done otherwise. Campbell makes no distinction between necessity de dicto and necessity de re. Cf. On Selfhood and Godhead (New York: Macmillan, 1957) pp. 274-275.

<sup>63</sup> John Hick, The Philosophy of Religion (3rd edition) (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1983) pp. 45-46.

<sup>64</sup> John Hick, Evil and the God of Love p. 291-292.

verification". It is at the heart of what we have labelled the "future harmony" theodicy. He conveys the sense of this second approach through the use of a parable:

Two people are travelling together along a road. One of them believes that it leads to the Celestial City, the other that it leads nowhere, but since it is the only road there is, both must travel it. Neither of them has been this way before; therefore, neither is able to say what they will find around each corner. During their journey they meet with moments of refreshment and delight, and with moments of hardship and danger. All the time one of them thinks about the trip as a pilgrimage to the Celestial City. She interprets the pleasant parts as encouragements and the obstacles as trials of her purpose and lessons in endurance, prepared by the sovereign of that city and designed to make of her a worthy citizen of the place when at last she arrives. The other, however, believes none of this, and sees their journey as an unavoidable and aimless ramble. Since he has no choice in the matter, he enjoys the good and endures the bad. For him there is no Celestial City to be reached, and no all encompassing purpose ordaining their journeys; there is only the road itself and the luck of the road in good weather and in bad.<sup>65</sup>

Hick adds a rather short commentary to his tale:

During the course of the journey, the issue between them is not an experimental one. That is to say, they do not entertain different expectations about the coming details of the road, but only about its ultimate destination. Yet, when they turn the last corner, it will be apparent that one of them has been right all the time and the other wrong. Thus, although the issue between them has not been experimental, it has nevertheless been a real issue. They have not merely felt differently about the road, for one is feeling appropriately and the other inappropriately in relation to the actual state of affairs. The opposed interpretations of the situation have constituted genuinely rival assertions, whose assertion-status has the peculiar characteristic of being guaranteed retrospectively by a future crux.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, Hick sees an important connection between the moral quality theodicy mentioned earlier and its eschatological verification at the

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John Hick, Philosophy of Religion p. 101.

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Ibid.

end of time, or, to use his metaphor, at the end of life's journey. It is at that time, Hick suggests, that it will be clear that the future harmony theodicy has been the proper interpretation of the way things are. At the end, all evils will be seen as actually resulting in good.

M.B. Ahern has suggested that Hick's theodical position can be summed up in six points:

- (1) God's purpose in creating this world was to provide the logically necessary environment in which human persons could respond freely to His infinite love and freely accept a God-centred rather than a self-centred life. Such a world is better than a world without evil, or a world with less evil but with morally determined beings.
- (2) The freedom needed by human beings if they are to respond to God as free persons and not as automata logically supposes an element of unpredictability which makes it impossible for God to ensure that moral evil will never occur.
- (3) Pain and suffering are part of the environment logically necessary for the moral growth of persons by trial and testing.
- (4) The apparently excessive pain and suffering in the world is due partly to its being the necessary condition of certain virtues and partly to the positive value of mystery that challenges faith and trust.
- (5) The joys of life after death will amply compensate for the difficulties of this life and there will be no human being who does not have them.
- (6) The existence of animals which will suffer pain is explained by their being a necessary part of an environment which sets men at a distance from God so that no one is compelled to accept Him: their pain is compensated for by animal good.<sup>67</sup>

Swinburne would most certainly agree that his position includes 1-4 above. Since his position, the moral quality theodicy, is subsumed in Hick's larger teleological perspective, we may effectively criticize them

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M.B. Ahern, The Problem of Evil (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) p. 63.

both by attending to the shortcomings of Hick's approach.

First, from the standpoint of the sufferer Hick's position leaves much to be desired. From a practical point of view, evil cannot be regarded as instrumental to a greater good without losing sight of the evil through a kind of objectification. If we regard all experiences of evil as related to a higher good, it requires the victim to rise above or to transcend the evil, which is precisely what the victims of suffering often cannot do. This point becomes quite clear when we bring the teleological theodicy to the bar of real experience. Something rings hollow when we approach the survivors of Auschwitz with the notion that their suffering has brought about compassion, higher moral values, and rededication to the fight against genocide in other parts of the world. To argue that the purpose of such atrocities is so that certain goods can come out of them seems difficult, if not ridiculous. When this kind of approach is taken, it often seems to subordinate the individual experience of evil to the construction of an all-encompassing theological system that says nothing sincere to the victims of suffering. When the viewpoint of the individual sufferer is kept central, neither later goods nor a future harmony can be allowed to rob the suffering of its reality here and now. It is true that sometimes the sufferer, or someone totally sympathetic with him, may see that a particular evil has led or will lead to some good. This is particularly true in cases of self-sacrifice, where the victim willingly allows himself to be harmed in order to bring about a greater good. But a warrant for broadening these kinds of selected cases seems unclear.

On a philosophical level, there is another more serious problem with



Hick's point of view. If his teleological approach is correct, why does there appear to be so much dysteleological evil, evil which cannot be seen to point to any obvious good. It is here that Hick resorts to such vague higher goods as "better moral character" or "higher awareness of the value of self-sacrifice". But I am not at all sure these 'higher goods' do justice to the evils experienced. I am reminded of one Jewish theologian, reflecting on the Holocaust who noted, "If one tries to hear a redeeming voice at Auschwitz, there is only silence".<sup>68</sup> This also seems to be the case with countless other evils: disastrous earthquakes, senseless accidents, serious birth defects. Even from a coldly dispassionate point of view, it is often very difficult to find even possible good ends for them.

If we could be guaranteed heavenly survival after death in reparation for the past evils we have experienced, the question could still be raised about whether eternal life would really make those evil experiences right. Doubts about the repairable character of survival after death have eloquently been voiced by Dostoyevski in the "rebellion" chapter of the Brothers Karamazov. Here Alyosha and Ivan are discussing the problem of evil. Ivan, who always seems to take the viewpoint of the sufferer, describes the "unanswerably clear case" of suffering children, and explains why he cannot accept that such suffering would in any way be repairable:

I understand, of course, what an upheaval it will be, when everything in heaven and earth blends in one hymn of praise and everything that lives and has lived cries aloud: "Thou art just, O Lord, for Thy ways are revealed". When the

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 Unsigned article in the New York Times, "In Search of God at Auschwitz, June 9, 1974, p. E-5.

mother embraces the fiend who threw her child to the dogs, and all three cry aloud with loud tears, "Thou art just, O Lord". Then, of course, the crown of knowledge will be reached and all will be made clear. But what pulls me up here is that I can't accept the harmony. And while I am here on earth, I make haste to make my own measures. You see, Alyosha, perhaps it may really happen that if I live to see the moment, or rise again to see it, I too, perhaps, may cry aloud with the rest, looking at the mother embracing the child's torturer, "Thou art just, O Lord". But I don't want to cry aloud now. While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself and so renounce the higher harmony all together. It's not worth the tears of that one tortured child who beat itself on the breast with its little fist and prayed in its stinking outhouse, with its unexpiated tears to "dear, kind God". It's not worth it, because those tears are unatoned for. They must be atoned for, or there can be no harmony.<sup>69</sup>

Alyosha then asks how these tears could be atoned for. Ivan responds:

By their being avenged? But what do I care for avenging them? What do I care for a hell for oppressors? What good can hell do since these children have already been tortured? And what comes of harmony, if there is a hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the suffering of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which were necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth was not worth such a price. I don't want the mother to embrace the oppressor who threw her son to the dogs. She dare not forgive him. Let her forgive him for herself, if she will, let her forgive the torturer for the immeasurable suffering of her mother's heart. But the suffering of her tortured child she has no right to forgive; she dare not forgive the torturer, even if the child were to forgive him. And if that is so, if they dare not forgive, what becomes of harmony. From love for humanity I don't want it. I would rather be left with an unavenged suffering and unsatisfied indignation, even if I were wrong. Besides, too high a price is paid for harmony; it's beyond our means to pay so much to enter it. And so I hasten to give back my entrance ticket, and if I am an honest man, I am bound to give it back as soon as possible. And that I am doing. It's not God that I don't accept. Alyosha, only I most respectfully return Him the ticket.<sup>70</sup>

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F. Dostoyevski, "Rebellion", in Kaufman, p. 143.

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Ibid.

I have quoted at length from this section of the Brothers Karamazov because it so forcefully represents the sympathetic point of view one must take in order to approach the reality of evil in a proper way. Rejecting a repaired and "happy world built on injustice and suffering", Ivan sees that if one reflects that evil is altered or repaired by certain circumstances, this thought at once loses sight of the real evil experienced by the sufferer and, in a way, demeans the integrity of the victim of suffering.

But beyond the question of the existential place of the sufferer in the theodicy of John Hick, there are also some logical and empirical confusions which must be cleared up regarding his view of survival.

In developing his view of eschatological verification Hick appears to be committed to three distinct claims: First, that the self exists and continues to have experiences after death. The idea of verification makes little sense, Hick points out, if there are no selves left to do the verifying. Second, he suggests in the spirit of Biblical anthropology and much of modern analytic philosophy that it is unacceptable to conceive of people as disembodied spirits. Thus, he argues for a form of resurrection of the body, rather than immortality of the soul.<sup>71</sup> Third, Hick suggests that these resurrected bodies will live and have experiences in a space totally different in kind from our present, physical space.

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Cf. Lou H. Silberman, "Death in the Hebrew Bible and Apocalyptic Literature", in Perspectives on Death, edited by L.O. Mills (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969) pp. 13-32. Also, Wheeler Robinson's "Hebrew Psychology", in The People and the Book, edited by Arthur S. Peake (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp. 353-382, and my "Against Raising Hope of Raising the Dead", Essence, 1979 3, 51-69.

Some recent critics,<sup>72</sup> Anthony Flew spear-heading the attack, have insisted that Hick's three claims are not false, but rather they are meaningless. These philosophers suggest that the whole notion of the afterlife makes no sense because it is self-contradictory. There may, however, also be a confusion here among the critics. The real issue, if one reads Hick carefully, is not life after death, but rather experiences after death. It is true that there may be a contradiction about being biologically alive while at the same time being biologically dead, but there is nothing obviously contradictory about having experiences in a resurrected body. It is true that this would seem to require an act of omnipotence, but that would appear to be no real obstacle for the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

The key to Hick's view is that he is arguing that the notion of having experience in a resurrected body that exists in a disparate realm of space is an empirically meaningful claim.<sup>73</sup> This is, of course, a

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Cf. The debate of sorts on this question constituted by the two articles on death by Anthony Flew and Donald Mackinnon in New Essays on Philosophical Theology (London: SCM Press, 1955).

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John Hick, "Theology and Falsification", Theology Today, vol. XVII (April, 1960) p. 20. It is of some historical interest to note that when C.H. Dodd in More New Testament Studies (Manchester U.P.: 1968); The Founder of Christianity (London: Collins, 1971); and Interpretation of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) introduced the notion in New Testament Scholarship that the Christian faith is not just a promise about rewards after death but was also realized here and now, MacIntyre and Flew challenged this position by asking the believers in realized eschatology to show the signs of it. Theologians and Biblical scholars had a difficult time in doing so without also having to acknowledge Flew's counter-evidence to Dodd's claim. In some ways it is helpful to view Hick's "eschatological verification" as a response to the challenge of Flew and MacIntyre. Rather than accept their position that theistic statements are unverifiable, Hick suggests they are verified in another realm.

much stronger claim than suggesting that it is free of self-contradiction. Hick's main argument advanced in favor of his thesis is that the assertion 'I am having experiences in a resurrected body in a disparate realm of space' could be verified by someone watching me. Now even if we concede that this is an empirically verifiable proposition we must keep in mind at what time it becomes such. We might grant that it is an empirically meaningful proposition then; the problem, however, seems to be whether it is empirically meaningful now. Indeed, Hick seems to come very close to admitting that this notion is meaningless now in the sense that we cannot now verify some state of affairs that would obtain then.<sup>74</sup> Such experiences cannot be shown to be false, Hick points out, but they can be shown to be true. In other words, if the proposition 'I am having experiences in a resurrected body existing in a disparate space' is false, then I can never verify its falsity for there would be no more 'me'. But if the claim is true, I can verify it by my experiences, and others could verify it the same way I do. But the difficulty still resides in the fact that the verification of these experiences could only be had then, while the problem we are addressing is whether they are meaningful now. As Hick has already suggested, since the verifying experiences could only be had then, presumably we can conclude that the whole matter is meaningless now. As Kai Nielson has suggested, "Hick in effect is trying to pull himself up by his own bootstraps".<sup>75</sup>

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Ibid., pp. 14ff.

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Kai Nielson, "God and Verification Again", Canadian Journal of Theology, Vol. XI, no. 2 (1965) p. 137.

But perhaps there is a way out of this problem for Hick. The criticism we have outlined seems to rest on the verification principle of meaning. Although there have been various formulations of the principle since the publication of A.J. Ayer's Language, Truth and Logic,<sup>76</sup> the following, I think, is a fair rendering of the principle: an assertion is meaningful if and only if some sense observation would be directly or indirectly relevant to its confirmation or disconfirmation. If this really is the foundation for the argument against Hick, he may not be in serious difficulty after all.

One problem which has been discussed in regard to the verification principle is its restriction to sensory data. There may well be other types of experiences which are quite genuine and of real noetic significance but are not sensory experiences. Consider 'remembering', for example. It is generally agreed among philosophers and psychologists alike that remembering is not, strictly speaking, a sense experience, though the object or objects remembered may have originally been apprehended by the senses. Does it make sense to talk about remembering an object and then 'remembering the remembering of an object'? Of course not, unless we want to say that we are restricted solely to our sense experiences.

The experience of having a headache is also not a sense experience, yet it makes good sense to talk about the experience of having a headache. Other problems may exist for the verification principle as well. The principle says nothing about who is to do the verifying, nor when it is to be made. Indeed, one might ask what it is that verifies the verification

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A.J. Ayer, Language, Truth and Logic (London: Victor Gollancz, 1956).

principle. Certainly it is not sense experiences. If we use the verification principle to verify itself, it is a bit like asking a man if he always tells the truth and when he says yes believing him on the strength of his own testimony. If we use some other kind of verification principle, then we are still left with the sticky problem of verifying that principle.

Let us now return to what is at stake here to see what this has to do with Hick's argument. We have suggested that the difficulty with Hick's position is that the experiences that would verify the statement 'I am having experiences in a resurrected body existing in a disparate realm of space' could only be had then, and are not available to us now, from which it would seem to follow that all talk about then is meaningless now. But consider the following example: Suppose after returning from a baseball game I were to say, 'I saw the Baltimore Orioles play', and in anticipation of another game in the future I were to add, 'and I plan on seeing them again in the not too distant future'. Now suppose these comments were made in the presence of a confirmed logical positivist. It seems to me that he would have to object to my statements on the grounds that all such talk about the future was meaningless, since the sense experiences that could confirm it were not available now. Indeed, the very same objection could be made to my reference to the game just past. Now suppose that any statements I made to this person, in an attempt to reply, were thought by him to be inadmissible unless they referred to my immediate sense experience. Indeed, he suggests that I am merely <sup>trying</sup> to pull myself up by my bootstraps.

But if we look at this positivist view very closely, it may have some unwanted side effects. Any statements about the positivist's own mind would be inadmissible since I am not given to myself in sense experiences. Any statements about his own past and future would also be meaningless, including that time in the past when he first happened upon Alfred Ayer's book. Also, statements about others' minds would be just as meaningless, which would put him in the rather bizarre position of trying to refute someone who may not even have a mind, since one does not come to know about another's mind, strictly speaking, through sense experience. If the positivist were then to argue for the meaningfulness of these concepts, we could accuse him of attempting to pull himself up by his own bootstraps.

If we were to grant that eschatological verification is an empirically meaningful concept, we must also say that Hick seems still to be going about his task in the wrong way. The critics insist on verification in this world, and Hick seems to fail to even meet them halfway in resorting to verification beyond the grave. In some ways Hick seems to be willing to do the verification dance, but without paying the verification fiddler.

We must, of course, keep in mind that showing that a concept is meaningful is different from showing what kinds of experiences would confirm or disconfirm it. Hick says this about establishing the truth of eschatological verification:

I shall not spend time in trying to draw a picture of a resurrected existence which would merely prolong the religious ambiguity of our present life. The important question for our purpose is not whether one can conceive



of after life experiences which would verify theism (and in point of fact one can easily conceive of them), but whether one can conceive of afterlife experiences which would serve to verify them.<sup>77</sup>

Hick hopes to find some experiential situation in the next life that would conclusively verify the truth not only of his theodicy, but also of Christian theism in general. But certainly he must tell us now what would show that his view is correct. This failure of Hick to specify when and how his brand of theodicy is to be verified has led to a problem discussed very clearly by J.E. Barnhart:

Unfortunately, Hick's argument can be turned against him. For in the next life one could use Hick's argument to say, "well things seem to support the view of God's loving providence, but the final word is not yet in. By and by we will see that what seems to us to be divine providence is really a mistaken impression rooted in our failure to grasp the entire picture, for in the eschaton that is still to come after heaven, we will actually verify that things are not at all like what they seem to be here in this temporary heaven."<sup>78</sup>

Barnhart points out that if one suggests that this "survival after heaven" view seems a bit too fanciful for us to take seriously, the same charge could be levelled against Hick's initial view of heaven. Hick gives no specific point at which his eschatological view will be known to be the proper description of things. Barnhart argues that this vacillation might leave the residents at heaven in an epistemic quandry as to when the final word is in on eschatological verification.

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John Hick, "Theology and Verification", pp. 25-26.

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J.E. Barnhart, The Study of Religion and its Meaning (The Hague: Mouton, 1977) p. 63.

In an earlier article,<sup>79</sup> Hick does suggest however that the Christian tradition offers two different accounts of verifying experiences after death: the Beatific Vision and/or the experience of Christ in his kingdom. But Hick doubts that these two accounts can be combined as readily as many traditional theologians assume, and he also raises serious doubts about whether the Beatific Vision is meaningful to us now, "for the exposition of it provides little more than the phrase itself for discussion".<sup>80</sup>

Hick seems to have a good deal more confidence in seeing Christ in his kingdom. He suggests that this might point unambiguously to the existence of a loving God. His notion of seeing Jesus in his kingdom appears to involve an experience of the fulfillment of God's purpose for ourselves in conjunction with the experience of communion with God as he revealed himself through Jesus.

It is important to note that this kind of experience, Hick suggests, would not prove his theodicy to be logically necessary and thereby conclusively established, rather he wants to claim that this kind of experience would remove his theodicy from the realm of reasonable doubt.

But once again, this claim is beset with a host of difficulties. First, there is still the very real problem of observing Christ in his kingdom. It is very difficult to nail down exactly what he is talking about when he uses this expression. If it amounts to seeing Jesus in his resurrected body, presiding over all his subjects who were also in

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John Hick, Faith and Knowledge (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1957) pp. 150-163.

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Ibid.

their resurrected bodies, how would this differ epistemically from Jesus' life on earth? Hick suggests that it would be different because the view of the onlookers would be radically different from the view they had on earth, for the truth of theism and the answer to the problem of evil were on earth still in the realm of reasonable doubt.<sup>81</sup> This eschatological view would have to be sufficiently different in kind to make impossible the "faith response" that had been the hallmark of Christians for centuries. But if this were the case, there must also be an admission that we do not know now what kinds of observations could be made in heaven that would confirm Hick's particular brand of theodicy.<sup>82</sup>

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The position taken by John Donne in a sermon preached at St Paul's on Easter day, 1628 is quite like that of Hick's. The text is: "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face, now I know in part, but then I shall know even as also I am known." In his sermon Donne writes: "These two terms in our text, 'nunc' and 'tunc', now in a glass, then face to face, now in part, then in perfection, these two secular terms, of which one designs the whole age of this world from creation to dissolution thereof, for all that is comprehended in this world now, and the other designs the everlastingness of the next world, for that incomprehensibleness is comprehended in the other world then - these two worlds which design two such ages are now met one day, in this day in which we celebrate all resurrection in the root of the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ blest forever."

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Edward Madden and Peter Hare have suggested in their Evil and the Concept of God (Springfield: Charles C. Johnson, 1968) pp. 83-90 and 102-103, a completely different line of criticism from those I have taken here. They argue that Hick has committed three different fallacies in Evil and the God of Love which they label: "all or nothing"; "it could be worse"; and "the slippery slope". The first occurs as a result of the claim that "something is desirable because its complete loss would be far worse than the evil its presence now causes". The second is based on the claim that "something is not bad because it will be followed by all manner of good things". The third fallacy is the result of the mistaken belief that "if God once started eliminating evils of the world he would have no place to stop short of a 'perfect' world in which robots and not men were possible". Other criticisms of John Hick's approach can be found in G.S. Kane, "The Concept of Divine Goodness and The Problem of Evil", Religious Studies Vol. 11 (1975); G.S. Kane's "The Failure of Soul-making Theodicy", International Journal of Philosophy of Religion Vol. 6 (1975); Roland Fucetti, "John Hick" Religious Studies Vol. 2 (1967); and Illyd Trethoworn, "Dr Hick and the Problem of Evil", Journal of Theological Studies Vol. 18 (1967).

There are a number of other points at which Hick's theodicy might also be criticized. One of the most obvious vulnerabilities is his insistence on answering one very large question, why do the righteous suffer?, with an equally substantial question, do we survive death? We could very easily turn his argument around and say that the reason we can be certain of survival after death is that it will finally give us an answer to the problem of evil. In Evil and the God of Love hypotheses are built, one on top of the other, with no real firm basis for speculation.

Hick's parable about the journey seems, in a real way, to be loading the dice. If we call what the two people are experiencing a "journey", then we quite rightly begin to ask questions about where they might be going, and we immediately sympathize with the individual who has some sense of what she is doing. But why should we use the analogy of the journey to begin with. Why not assume that they are out for a walk, with no destination in mind. In this version the one person sees all the events of the walk as enjoyable experiences to be savoured for their own sake, while the other person continues to insist that there must be some overarching reason for all the experiences they are having on their stroll. In this example, it is clear that it is the latter person who has things all wrong, and suffers from an inability to garner various meanings from life depending on the situations that arise.<sup>83</sup>

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The kind of difference to which I am alluding here can be seen by comparing, for example, Leo Tolstoy's Confessions (London: Bradda, 1960) with Albert Camus' treatise on the meaning of life, The Myth of Sisyphus (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1955).

Hick refers in his parable to difficult experiences as "obstacles" and "trials of purpose and lessons of endurance". And it would appear that if we are to take this image seriously, we must conclude that some people, because of extraordinary amounts of suffering, fail their trials. Indeed, this is precisely what is wrong with Swinburne's analysis as well. The adherents to the moral quality theodicy speak as though in each encounter with suffering there is a real possibility of "passing the test" and gaining in genuine moral insight.<sup>84</sup> In reality, this is clearly not always the case. And, more importantly, it is not always the fault of the victims. H.D. Lewis points to this same difficulty with "soul factory" brands of theodicy akin to Hick's.

The trouble with this answer is that there is much suffering which it does not cover, suffering which degrades more than it ennobles, distress and debility which reduces men to a state akin to that of brutes and does little to deepen their character and sensitivity. The same applies to another answer that has much truth in it, namely that suffering and need bring out charity and sympathy. It would certainly be a poor world in which men never had the opportunity to bear one another's burdens, but again there is a surd which

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This position can be found in all of William James' writings about the problem of evil. In Pragmatism (New York: Macmillan, 1946) (3rd ed.), James compares the world to a football game. If the aim of the game were merely to get the ball over the goal line, James suggests, the team "would simply get up on some dark night and place it there". But the aim of course is to get there according to fixed rules. "The aim of God is not merely ... to make men and to save them, but rather to get this done through the sole agency of nature's machinery. Without nature's stupendous laws and counter-forces, man's creation and perfection, we might suppose, would be too insipid achievements for God to have proposed them". James departs from the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of God, however, by suggesting that "one of the conditions of the game" is that human beings have the kind of free will where they are unpredictable, even by God. Consequently, his position may also be seen as another version of the limited God theory.

cannot be brought under this explanation; there is a wide range of ills which seem out of proportion to any benevolence they help display or elicit. There are situations of sudden catastrophe and bereavement where it is perverse and provoking to proffer such consolation.<sup>85</sup>

When pressed on this point about excessive suffering, Hick has the following to say:

Our solution then to this baffling problem of excessive and undeserved punishment is a frank appeal to the positive value of mystery. Such suffering remains unjust and inexplicably haphazard. The mystery is a real mystery, impenetrable to the rationalizing, human mind. It challenges the Christian faith with utterly baffling, alien, destructive meaninglessness.<sup>86</sup>

Yet theodicy and mystery would appear to be antithetical. The purpose of theodicy is, by and large, to show the justice of God through appeals to reason. If the problem collapses into mystery, we have clearly left the arena of reason.

Another major problem with Hick's point of view is that an ambiguity seems to exist in his position as to whether evil is real or not. Hick's theological justification for the disasters and the morally heinous acts of life is to aver that they are 'genuine evils' but contained and overruled by God's ultimate purpose; he insists that they are utterly real, and yet relative to a final good in which "nothing will have been finally and sheerly evil". This ambiguity is engendered by Hick's desire, I think, to escape the answer given by the religions of solution, which would make evil ultimate and beyond God's sovereignty,

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H.D. Lewis, The Philosophy of Religion, p. 312.

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John Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p. 371.

and monism which would ultimately deny the reality of evil altogether. In the end, Hick seems to yield to the latter in order to save God's omnipotence. And to be certain that omnibenevolence will also be preserved, he adds universal salvation after death. "Evil is really evil, really malevolent, and deadly ... and yet in the end it will be defeated and made to serve God's purpose."

In Camus' novel, The Plague, Father Paneloux's second sermon points to the same kind of ambiguity. You will remember that in the first of his homilies, the priest suggested that the plague could be understood as deserved punishment. You will also recall that a crucial event stands between the first and second sermons which changes Father Paneloux's view of theodicy. The event, the death of an innocent child, forces the priest to abandon the retributive justice position.

In the second sermon, the priest introduces a new theodicy. The first sermon had attempted to demonstrate God's justice through the use of a kind of empirical method. The priest took stock of who had sinned and, consequently, who had died. Unfortunately, his equation, with the death of the small child, was shown to be too simplistic a view of the problem. The second sermon might be called a theodicy of last resort. It sounds very reminiscent of what Hick has said about the positive value of mystery. Father Paneloux:

I understand that sort of thing is revolting because it passes our human understanding. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand.<sup>87</sup>

Yet, it is of some interest that the priest does not, in the final analysis, resort to Hick's eschatological verification:

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Albert Camus, The Plague, p. 201.

In other manifestations of life God made things easy for us and, thus far, our religion had no merit. But in this respect he put us, so to speak, with our backs to the wall. Indeed, we all were up against the wall that plague had built around us, and under its lethal shadow we must work out our salvation. He, Father Paneloux, refused to have any recourse to simple devices enabling him to scale that wall. Thus he might easily have assured them that the child's suffering would be compensated for by an eternity of bliss awaiting him. But how could he give that assurance when, to tell the truth, he knew nothing about it? For who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment's human suffering.<sup>88</sup>

At least one other thorny problem with Hick's theodicy remains to be discussed. Hick maintains throughout Evil and the God of Love that moral choices required by God's purposes for creation are, at least in part, unpredictable. In these sections of the book, Hick appears to be suggesting that God cannot know what these human choices will be until after the decisions have been made. Now if this is true, it is difficult to see how God could have known in advance that his purposes for creation will be achieved in the end. M.B. Ahern points to this same problem:

How could God be certain, before creating, that a free response to the good would be made in even one case or at least in enough cases to justify the world's evils. Uncertainty about the good outcome of the world makes it doubtful whether God was justified in creating. The risk seems too great. Furthermore, although he believes all men, no matter how evil in this world will share the blessedness of an afterlife, Hick gives no clear ground for certainty of this. If unforced moral response to God and to good is a supreme value, it is difficult to see how it could be certain, either before creation or after it, and that all men will actually make this response in this life or in the next. For his belief Hick claims not absolute certainty but practical certainty because of God's



power to win people to himself. However, he does not explain how this power of God's is to be reconciled with unforced moral response in every instance.<sup>89</sup>

If Hick's view included foreknowledge of the events of the world the theory would not suffer from these problems. His view of the positive character of suffering might also be better accepted. But he has chosen not to take this route. Richard Swinburne's position does not suffer from these particular problems, for Swinburne argues rather convincingly for God's omniscience, which includes foreknowledge. But Swinburne is not arguing for eschatological verification.

As I have attempted to show, Hick's proposed theodicy suffers from a number of difficulties. He all too often seems to employ the old theological trick, "if you can't refute it, incorporate it into your argument". This is particularly true of his arguments about the positive value of mystery and "eschatological verification". Hick's theodicy in its present form would account for a world twice, five times, even ten times as evil as the present one. Indeed, because he suggests that senseless, irrational evil always has teleological worth, he could account for an almost boundless amount of evil, a kind of hell on earth. Were the world suddenly to turn into a giant Auschwitz, where all suffered in unspeakable agony, but which produced an occasional development of moral character, Hick's theodicy would remain unshaken. It would still be descriptive of the facts. Surely a theodicy which accounts for a world with any degree of evil must be seen as inadequate.

John Hospers seems troubled by this very point, as we can see from the following passage of his An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis:

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M.B. Ahern, The Problem of Evil, p. 64.

It is true that people have to suffer pain in order to recover health, our medical knowledge being what it is, and the laws of nature (particularly of biology in this case) being what they are. But this consideration which does justify a physician in inflicting pain on a patient in order that the patient may recover, applies only to limited beings who can achieve the end no other way. Once we suspect, however, that the physician could achieve the goal without inflicting suffering on his patients, and that he is inflicting it anyway, we call him a cruel and sadistic monster. Now God, unlike the physician, is omnipotent; he could bring about a recovery without making a patient go through the excruciating pain. Why then does he not do this? If it is objected that this would require a miracle and that it would upset the orderliness of nature to continually perform miracles, it can be replied that the laws of nature could have been so set up that no miracle would be required in each case. After all, who is the author of the laws of nature? Why did God set up the causal order in such a way as to require his creatures to die in pain and agony? There is not the excuse in the case of God that there is in the case of the physician who can bring about his patient's recovery only by causing suffering, for God, being omnipotent as well as benevolent, could bring about the recovery without such means; indeed, he could have kept the patient from being sick in the first place. What would we think of a patient who first inflicted his child's leg and then decided to amputate it, although a cure was in his power and the infection was of his own giving to begin with? But this would be precisely the position of an omnipotent God, for being omnipotent, he does not need to use evil means to bring about a good end.<sup>90</sup>

A similar comment can be found in Josiah Royce's The Problem of Job.

In that work, Royce, keeping in mind the perspective of the victims of suffering, makes a pertinent comment on the inadequacy of theodicies which rely on a soul factory interpretation of evil:

This talk of medicinal and disciplinary evil, perfectly fair when applied to our poor fate-bound human surgeons, judges, jailers, or teachers, becomes cruelly and even cynically trivial when applied to explain the ways of God ... I confess, as a layman, that whenever, at a funeral, in the company of

mourners who are immediately facing Job's own personal problem, who ask that terrible and uttermost question of God himself ... and require the direct answer - that whenever, I say, in such a company I have to listen to these half-way answers, to these superficial splashes in the wavelets at the water's edge of sorrow, while the black unfathomed ocean of infinite evil spreads out before our wide open eyes - well, at such times this trivial speech about useful burns and salutary medicines makes me, and I fancy others, simply and wearily heartsick. Some words are due children at school, to peevish patients in the sickroom who need a little temporary quieting. But quite other speech is due to men and women when they are wakened to the higher reason of Job by fierce anguish of our mortal life's ultimate facts. They deserve either our simple silence, or if we are ready to speak, the speech of people who ourselves inquire as Job inquired.<sup>91</sup>

Royce's comments lead us quite naturally to the next chapter, an analysis of the speeches of Yahweh and the repentance of Job. There we will discuss the notion of "seeing God" as an 'answer' to the problem of suffering. Before doing this, however, let us make some final comments about what has been accomplished in this chapter.

We began this chapter by offering a critical analysis of most, if not all, of the major theodicies offered in the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the course of this study, we have delineated four major kinds of answers to the problem of evil: punishment and warning theodicies; "the unreality of evil" theodicies; "evil is logically necessary" theodicies; and, teleological theodicies. In each of these four categories we explored a number of variations. In all of the examples of the first three types, however, we have attempted to show that there is at least one basic logical flaw which renders those answers to the problem of evil invalid. In the fourth type, the teleological theodicies, the inadequacy

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Josiah Royce, "The Problem of Job", in W. Kaufmann's Religion From Tolstoy to Camus, p. 244.

is not to be found on logical grounds, rather, it lies in the fact that these answers seem to pay so little heed to the victims of suffering. Although John Hick's answer to the problem of evil is logically possible, from the standpoint of the victim of suffering, it is not particularly appealing. We have also attempted to show that although there are no logical problems which sound the death knell for Hick's approach there are still a sufficient number of logical difficulties that his position on the problem of evil is often times unclear and ambiguous.

In the following chapter we shall take a close look at the perspective offered by the Book of Job in the hope of laying the groundwork for a response to the problem of evil offered in chapter five that is logically consistent, true to the Christian form of life and at the same time is also sensitive to the needs and the point of view of the victim of suffering.

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Chapter Four: "Seeing God" as an 'Answer' to the Problem of Suffering

"Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?"

"Yes."

"All like ours?"

"I don't know; but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like apples on our stubborn tree, Most of them splendid and sound - a few blighted."

"Which do we live on - a splendid one or a blighted one?"

"A blighted one."

Thomas Hardy Tess of the d'Urbervilles

"Solomon and Job have known best and spoken best of man's misery. The one the most fortunate, the other the most unfortunate of men; the one knowing by experience the emptiness of pleasure; the other the reality of sorrow."

Blaise Pascal Pensees, no. 357

"I have been young, and now am not too old,  
And I have seen the righteous forsaken,  
His health, his honours and his quality taken.  
This is not what we were formerly told."

Edmund Blunden

The Book of Job is perhaps the greatest poetic work produced by the ancient Israelite community, both in terms of its poetic form and its intellectual perceptiveness and honesty. Thomas Carlyle has called it "the most wonderful poem of any age and language; our first, oldest statement of the never-ending problem - man's destiny and God's way with him here on earth ... there is nothing written in the Bible or out of it of equal literary merit".<sup>1</sup> Professor Rowley has referred to the Book of Job as "the supreme literary masterpiece in the Old Testament, and one of

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle, On Heroes (London: The New University Library, 1957) p. 67.

the greatest creations of world literature".<sup>2</sup> Similar sentiments have been expressed by such Jewish philosophers and exegetes as Gersonides and Maimonides, as well as other prominent thinkers of the Middle Ages. In the modern period, the works of disparate artists, thinkers and writers such as Martin Luther, Immanuel Kant, Robert Burton, William Blake, Alfred Tennyson, Carl Jung, Martin Buber, H.G. Wells, Robert Frost and Archibald MacLeish give evidence of the profound influence the Book of Job continues to exercise over the hearts and minds of sensitive people. Yet, despite its almost universal appeal, and the wide range of excellent commentaries available on the book,<sup>3</sup> the work still possesses a number of characteristics which remain enigmatic.<sup>4</sup>

2

H.H. Rowley, Job (London: Thomas Nelson, 1970) p. 6.

3

S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921); S.L. Terrien, Exegetical commentary in "The Interpreter's Bible" vol. 3 (New York: Nashville, Abingdon, 1954); Paul Sanders, Twentieth Century Interpretations of the Book of Job (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968); Robert Gordis, The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978); H.H. Rowley (ed.) Job (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1970); Marvin Pope, The Anchor Bible: Job (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1965); Moses Butlenwieser, The Book of Job (New York: Macmillan, 1922); Morris Jastrow, The Book of Job (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1920) and E. Dhorme, A Commentary on the Book of Job Harold Knight (trans.) (London: Nelson, 1967)

4

There are any number of thorny problems to be associated with the Book of Job. Among them are the following: What is the relationship between Isa. 52:13 to 53:12 and the poetry of Job? In these passages from Isaiah we find the suffering of one individual who may represent a body of faithful prophets or a righteous remnant. Some scholars maintain that the suffering servant poem is dependent on Job, others the reverse; The Hebrew text is probably more ambiguous than any other Biblical book. The Revised Standard Versions' footnotes to Job reflect but a small sampling of the many textual difficulties and uncertainties with which the translator and - interpreter of Job must wrestle: The relationship of the prose sections to the poetry is also a problem that has evoked a very large number of

The author may very well have lived in Judah shortly after the fall of Jerusalem in 586, though the time and authorship of the book are also matters of great debate.<sup>5</sup> The influence of the prophet Jeremiah in chapter three appears to be quite clear,<sup>6</sup> but the poet is most certainly working in the large genre of Wisdom literature.

Some scholars have thought the author to be a non-Israelite,<sup>7</sup> perhaps from Edom, but this view is not widely accepted. The principal reason for the development of this minority position is the lack of direct references in Job to the Covenant with Yahweh, as well as the omission of any mention of the Temple at Jerusalem. These omissions might just as well be understood, however, by taking cognizance of the difficult spiritual situation out of which the poet may be speaking. What is Israel's honest

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conflicting opinions. Cf., for example the difference between T.K. Cheyne's The Prophecies of Isaiah and S. Terrien's Interpreter's Bible, vol. 3; Another interesting problem is the proper place of Job in the Hebrew canon. In some manuscripts Job follows Psalms and Proverbs. In others, it stands between them. In Syrian versions it stands between Deuteronomy and Joshua. Its position varies in Greek and Latin manuscripts as well. There are also a number of other questions concerned with the relation of the Elihu sections of the text to the rest of the comforters.

5

For a good selection of theories on the date and authorship of Job, Cf. H.H. Rowley's From Moses to Qumran (London: Lutterworth Press, 1963) p. 173ff. Rowley discusses dates ranging from the patriarchal age to the second or first centuries B.C. Most recent writers agree, however, that in its original form the book was post-exilic in origin, and the secondary parts of later composition.

6

Cf. Jeremiah 11:18 to 12:6.

7

Cf. Samuel Terrien's Interpreter's Bible vol 3. pp. 884-888 for a full discussion of this possibility. Also, Terrien's Job: Poet of Existence (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958) and Walter Harrelson's Interpreting the Old Testament (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964) pp. 433-436. But this position which is advocated by J.C. Rylaarsdam in Revelation in Jewish Wisdom Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946) and by R.H. Pfeiffer in his Introduction to the Old Testament (New York: Harper and Row, 1948) is not without its difficulties. One of the principle problems is the fact that the Edomites at the time of Israel's fall were unkind neighbors, who in fact helped to contribute to the collapse of the nation of Israel.

hope now that the Temple has been destroyed? Is it possible for the Israelite people to continue to believe in Yahweh's steadfast love at a time like this?<sup>8</sup>

Still, the major questions of the book seem to be couched on the personal level rather than a grand metaphor for the nation as a whole. Indeed, the book can be seen as a continuation of questions raised by Jeremiah regarding the justice of the suffering of the righteous.<sup>9</sup> The poet clearly sets out to deal with such questions. The Book of Job is important for the purposes of this thesis for it raises issues, often in a quite philosophically sophisticated way, about how one should go about asking and perhaps answering the problem of evil. The author takes as his framework an ancient and no doubt popular narrative about a blameless and upright man named Job, whom Yahweh tested and afflicted to see if his faith would endure the adversity. The archaic tale may date to as early as the 9th century,<sup>10</sup> and could also have circulated throughout the ancient Near East. The poet has incorporated the tale as the prologue (chapters 1 and 2) and the epilogue (42:7-17) of the present work, though it is likely that he has reworked this material for his own purposes.

A number of scholars have suggested that the epilogue is intrusive and that it destroys the poetic insights which have immediately preceded

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8

The analogical use of Job as a symbol for Israel is also rather suspect. One of the chief shortcomings of the analogy is that Job is innocent, while Israel is not.

9

Cf. John Bowker's Problems of Suffering in Religions of the World pp. 5-24.

10

Rowley, Job, pp. 21ff.

it in 42:1-6. But it may well be the case that the author, having laid out his poetic conclusion, was nevertheless willing to let the denouement of the older narrative stand. Had he not added the older conclusion, the community was a whole may have done so.<sup>11</sup> Another interpretation, as I shall show later, is that the importance of the epilogue lies not in what is given but how much and in what manner.

It is sometimes argued that the prologue might have been eliminated as well. But the logic of the prologue is quite clear, and its transition to the main body of poetry is quite natural. The prologue is essential to the purposes of the poetry and therefore is an important reworking of the prose narrative. The 'Satan' of the prologue is not the personification of evil to be found in later Judaism. Here he is the tester of man's faith, he is more like a devil's advocate than a devil. This adversary maintains that Job's piety is the direct result of his having been blessed by Yahweh - that God has continually rewarded Job for his good faith. If his prosperity were taken away, Satan argues, Job would curse God. The adversary is permitted to visit various calamities on Job, but through it all, the protagonist holds fast to his faith in the justice of Yahweh. Satan now maintains that if Job himself were smitten with evil, he would surely curse the deity.

The Satan answered the Lord saying,  
 "Skin for skin!  
 All a man has  
 he will give for his life.  
 But put forth your hand  
 and touch his own flesh and bones  
 and he will surely curse you to your face."

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<sup>11</sup>

Ibid.

- Then the Lord said to Satan,  
 "He is in your power  
 but preserve his life."<sup>12</sup>

Job soon contracts a loathsome disease. Earlier he has lost his children and all of his worldly possessions. Job's wife, in the face of these calamities, has had enough. She suggests an alternative to Job:

"Are you still holding fast to you piety?  
 Curse God and die."<sup>13</sup>

But Job is ready, at least for the present, to receive evil from the Lord as well as good. When they hear of Job's misfortunes, three friends come to comfort him, but first they sit stunned with him in silence for seven days and nights:

Then Job's three friends heard all the trouble that had come upon him. And they came, each from his place - Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Noamathite - having arranged together to come to condole with him and comfort him. Now when they caught sight of him from afar, they could not recognize him. So they raised their voices and wept and rent their robes and threw dust over their heads toward the heavens. They sat with him on the ground for seven days and for seven nights, no one saying a word, for they saw his agony was very great.<sup>14</sup>

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12

2:4-6. All quotations from the Book of Job which are used in this chapter, except where otherwise indicated, have come from Robert Gordis's translation.

13

2:9-10.

14

2:11-13. Archibald Macleish in his play, J.B., gives a modern setting to the book. In the first half of the poetic drama, Macleish retells the familiar story. J.B., the Job figure, is a successful businessman. He possesses all the trappings of a successful, upper middle-class life, complete with attractive loving family. Then, one by one, his children begin to die. His business fails. Eventually, his health fails. Finally, the world is almost entirely destroyed by a nuclear bomb.

Three friends come to comfort J.B.: A Marxist, A Freudian psychiatrist and a clergyman. The first assures him that none of his suffering is his

We have learned much earlier from the prose narrative that Job "... was blameless and upright, fearing God and avoiding evil".<sup>15</sup> Clearly, it is Job's present condition, combined with this realization that he is innocent, that creates the problem of suffering for the poet. Eventually the friends become less sympathetic. They begin to maintain Job has sinned, no doubt unwittingly. Eliphaz, the oldest and wisest of the comforters, is the first to speak. He reminds Job how often the protagonist himself has consoled sufferers in the past by recalling a great religious truth:

"Think now, what innocent man was ever destroyed;  
and where were the upright cut off?  
Whenever I have seen those who plow inequity  
and sow trouble - they reap it!  
By the breath of God they are destroyed.  
and by the blast of his wrath they are consumed."<sup>16</sup>

The other friends soon follow suit, and Job in turn protests his innocence. In anguish, he eventually suggests that Yahweh either come to his aid or take his life. He appeals for an umpire or a mediator to adjudicate his case:

"If only there were an arbiter between us  
who could lay hands upon us both,  
who would remove God's rod from me  
so that my dread of Him would not terrify me."<sup>17</sup>

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fault. The fault lies in class societies where capitalism is dominant. The second friend, the psychiatrist, tells J.B. he is not guilty of sin, for there is no sin. Now we have a better understanding of the way the human mind works, we know the notion of choice is really illusory. The clergyman responds to J.B.'s dilemma by falling back on Augustinian original sin. In the end, all three, although certainly part of the contemporary conventional wisdom, are shown by MacLeish to be inadequate responses to the problem of suffering.

15  
1:1-2.

16  
4:7-9.

17  
9:33-35.



A second and third time the friends speak, advancing from gentle suggestion to specific accusation; indeed, by Eliphaz's third speech, Robert Gordis suggests that the first of the comforters has been stripped of his urbanity by Job's continued recalcitrance:

Finding his theory of Divine Justice contradicted by the facts, Eliphaz proceeds to the time-honoured device of adjusting the facts to the theory. Accordingly, he invents a long catalogue of crimes committed by Job, of which we previously have heard nothing. Eliphaz is able to explain these alleged actions of Job on the ground God is so far away from him.<sup>18</sup>

In the words of Eliphaz:

"It is because of your piety that He reproves you and enters into judgement with you?  
In fact, your wickedness is immense,  
for there's no end in your inequities.  
For you have taken pledges even from your kinsmen without reason, and stripped the naked of their clothing.  
No water have you given to the weary,  
And from the hungry you have withheld bread."<sup>19</sup>

But through all of this Job vehemently asserts his righteousness. From the cruel and unyielding dogmatism of his friends, he turns again and again to God, but he receives no answer.

A fourth comforter, Elihu, enters the debate. For the most part, he vainly enlarges on what the other friends have already said, but he also adds a new possibility as to the cause of suffering: that it sometimes comes even to upright men as a discipline, as a warning to prevent them from slipping into apostasy.

"Or a man may be chastened by pain upon his bed,  
by a perpetual strife in his bones,

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18

Gordis, The Book of Job, pp. 238-239.

19

22:4-8.

so that he loathes his bread,  
 and his appetite abhors the daintiest food.  
 His flesh wastes away so that it cannot be seen,  
 and his bones protrude and cannot be looked upon.  
 He himself draws near to the pit  
 and his life approaches the emissaries of Death.  
 But if there be one spokesman for him,  
 one advocate among a thousand  
 to vouch for man's uprightness,  
 God is gracious to him, and He commands,  
 "Free him from descending to the pit;  
 I have found a ransom for him".

Then his flesh becomes fresh as in youth;  
 he returns to the days of his vigor.  
 He then prays to God, and finds favor,  
 and joyfully enters his presence.  
 He recounts to men His goodness,

and proclaims to men, saying,  
 "I sinned and perverted the right,  
 but it was not to my advantage.  
 He has redeemed me from going down to the pit,  
 so that I might see the light of life."<sup>20</sup>

But Job remains unmoved, even by the eloquence of Elihu. Finally,  
 from the majestic voice in the midst of a whirlwind,<sup>21</sup> God replies to  
 Job. He forcefully enumerates the marvels of his creation:

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20

33:19-28.

21

Some scholars (cf. R.A. Watson's The Book of Job (London: Hodder and Stroughton, 1942) and G. Rawlinson's Job (London: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906) pp. 597-598) suggest that Elihu's words in chapter 37 have portended the whirlwind theophany. Storms are a common mode of divine revelation in the Old Testament. 'Whirlwinds' are a severe form of wind and rain storm that is rare in Palestine. (Cf. Ps. 50:3; Nahum 1:3; Zech. 9:14.) What makes this theophany unusual, however, is that they are most often public appearances of God for the sake of the community (e.g., Ex. 3:1-12; 19:9-20). But in these examples, although God is present, he cannot be seen. Job is privileged to experience a private theophany. But it comes out of a whirlwind in the midst of a desert land. This seems to make the notion of 'seeing God' in 42:5 all the more ironic and mysterious. The use of the divine names in the Book may also point to the paradox of seeing God, but still having him inaccessible. 'Yahweh' is scrupulously avoided in the dialogue. There the names 'El', 'Eloah', and 'Shaddai' are used. In the prologue and epilogue 'Yahweh' is used. It is significant that Job avoids using the tetragrammaton, even after he has seen God.

"Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, saying,  
 Who is this that darkens my plan  
 by words without knowledge?  
 Gird up your loins like a man;  
 I will ask you, and you tell Me.  
 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?  
 Tell Me, if you have any understanding.  
 Who marked out its measure, if you know it,  
 who stretched the plumb line upon it?  
 Upon what were the earth's pillars sunk:  
 who laid down its cornerstone,  
 when the morning stars sang together  
 and all the sons of God shouted for joy?  
 Who shut in the sea with doors  
 when it broke forth from the womb whence it came,  
 when I made the clouds its garments  
 and dark clouds its swaddling clothes,  
 prescribing My limit for the Sea,  
 and setting for it bolts and doors,  
 saying, "Thus far shall you come, and no farther,  
 and here shall your proud waves be stayed"?<sup>22</sup>

Robert Gordis points out there is much more than sheer power to be found in God's speeches from the whirlwind. He suggests there are at least two very important implied points:

There are, in addition, two other significant ideas implicit in the Lord's words. In accordance with Semitic rhetorical usage they are not spelled out, but are left to be inferred by the reader. The first is that the universe was not created exclusively for man's use, and therefore, neither it nor its Creator can be judged solely by man's standards and goals. The second is even more significant. The natural world, though it is beyond man's ken, reveals to him its beauty and order. It is therefore reasonable for man to believe that the universe also exhibits a moral order with pattern and meaning, though it is beyond man's power to fully comprehend it. Who then is Job, to reprove God and dispute with Him?<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, Job responds to the marvel of God's creation by confessing that his denial of God's justice was due to ignorance:

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22

38:1-11.

23

Gordis, The Book of Job, p. 435.

Then Job answered the Lord,  
 "I know that you can do all things  
 and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.  
 You have said,  
 "Who is this that hides My plan without knowledge?"  
 Indeed, I have spoken without understanding,  
 of things too wonderful for me which I did not grasp.  
 You have said,  
 "Hear and I will speak;  
 I will ask you, and do you inform Me."  
 I had heard of You by hearsay,  
 but now my own eyes have seen You.  
 Therefore, I abase myself  
 and repent in dust and ashes.<sup>24</sup>

The poet closes the book by adding a few verses to serve as a bridge between the poetry and the conclusion of the traditional prose narrative,<sup>25</sup> which now becomes the epilogue. Earlier, Eliphaz has assured Job that if he repented, God would forgive him and the protagonist would once again be able to intercede for sinners like himself. In a marvelously ironic passage, the Lord now castigates Eliphaz and the other comforters. God suggests that they can only be forgiven through the intercession of Job, who has spoken the truth about Him.

After the Lord had spoken these words to Job, the Lord said to Eliphaz, the Temanite, "My anger is kindled against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken the truth about Me as has My servant Job. Now then, take seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer them as a burnt offering to yourselves. My servant Job must intercede for you, for only to him will I show favor and not expose you to disgrace for not speaking the truth about Me as did my servant Job."<sup>26</sup>

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24

42:1-6.

25

42:7-17.

26

42:7-8b.

In the very end, Job's wealth is restored two-fold, he receives fourteen sons, three beautiful daughters and a happy life of one hundred and forty years.<sup>27</sup>

The final meaning and message of Job, like its composition and textual problems, has elicited a wide variety of responses over the centuries. The chief problem of interpretation arises from the fact that the speeches of Yahweh (chapters 38 to 42) majestically seem to ignore the issues as Job has posed them. The problem for Job is a straightforward one: why do the innocent suffer? But instead of giving a clear answer to that question, God confronts Job with a series of seemingly irrelevant questions destined to convince the protagonist of the paltriness of human knowledge and power. Indeed, some readers of the Book of Job have remarked that Yahweh responds from the whirlwind with a magnificent display of his power, when, in fact, his omnipotence has never seriously been in question. What has been suspect, however, at least from the perspective of Job, is God's goodness and justice, and the deity remains curiously silent about those attributes. We will return shortly to the problem of the Yahweh speeches, but let us first turn for a few moments to some other answers to the problem of Job's suffering which may be found elsewhere in the text.

There are at least three other answers to the problem of suffering suggested in the Book of Job: (a) that suffering is a divine test; (b) that suffering is retribution for past sins; and (c) that suffering is a discipline of warning to the just.

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27

42:11-17.

The first of these answers is suggested most strongly in the prologue. In the first scene of the book Satan is seen as a kind of prosecuting angel in the heavenly court, ironically insisting that Job has remained blameless and upright only because he has been well rewarded:

Is it for nothing that Job has feared God?  
 Have you not safely hedged him in,  
 and his house, and all he owns, on every side?  
 You have blessed the work of his hands  
 and his possessions have increased in the land.  
 But put forth Your hand and touch whatever he owns,  
 and he will surely curse You to Your face!<sup>28</sup>

If we accept this answer to Job's suffering, then the poetic body of the work is seen as the actual testing of Job's metal, first by removing all his worldly goods, and then by inflicting him with a dreaded disease.

But this perspective is clearly inadequate for at least three reasons. First, although Job receives all his worldly goods back in double proportion, the double restitution suggests not that Job has been tested, but rather that he has been unjustly deprived of his possessions, and therefore should be compensated doubly.<sup>29</sup> An interesting point to note is that this is the same penalty exacted as compensation from thieves and negligent trustees as Exodus 22:3, 6, and 8 clearly indicates.

A second good reason for dismissing the test argument as cogent is that Satan never appears in the epilogue and consequently God is never

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28

1:10-11.

29

Robert Gordis, The Book of Job, p. 498.

actually declared the winner of the wager. Nor could it be said that Yahweh in any way collects his bet. It is inconceivable that these elements would have been left out of the narrative if they were germane to the central meaning of the text.

A third point which contradicts this test interpretation of Job's suffering involves a realization of the way the world works outside the Book of Job. If we grant that the text is ostensibly about why the innocent suffer, and we answer this question by suggesting that the blameless are being tested and shall receive their just desserts eventually, then we must reckon with all those individuals throughout history who seem to have hung on stalwartly so that they might endure the test, and yet have not been rewarded. Keep in mind that nowhere in the text is it suggested that the reward might come in some life beyond the grave.<sup>30</sup>

Job's view of death is starkly naturalistic:

For there is hope for a tree -  
 it if be cut down, it can sprout again  
 and its shoots will not fail.  
 If its roots grow old in the earth  
 and its stump dies in the ground,  
 at the mere scent of water it will bud anew  
 and put forth branches like a new plant.

But man grows faint and dies;  
 and breathes his last, and where is he?  
 As water vanishes from a lake,  
 and a river is parched and dries up,

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30

Cf. Lou H. Silberman, "Death in the Hebrew Bible and Apocalyptic Literature", in Perspectives on Death, edited by L.O. Mills (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969) pp. 13-32. Also, R. Martin-Archard, From Death to Life: A Study of the Development of the Doctrine of Resurrection in the Old Testament (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1960).

So man lies down and rises not again;  
till the heavens are no more he will not awake,  
nor will he be roused from his sleep.<sup>31</sup>

The poet refuses to dissolve the problem by taking refuge in a compensation beyond the grave. In this regard, he seems quite close to the sentiments of the author of Ecclesiastes:

Naked from his mother's womb he came, as naked as he came he will depart again; nothing to take with him after all his efforts ... The living know at least that they will die, the dead know nothing; no more reward for them, their memory has passed out of mind. Their loves, their hates, their jealousies, these all have perished, nor will they ever again take part in whatever is done under the sun.<sup>32</sup>

It should be clear that "evil as just punishment" for sins is also a weak interpretation of Job's suffering, given the internal logic of the book. In fact, the work begins by telling us quite unambiguously that Job is "blameless and upright",<sup>33</sup> and this bit of information is provided by the omniscient narrator of the tale. In 29:11-20, we gain an important insight about the logic of Job's former life style:

Every ear that heard me called me blessed,  
and every eye that saw me encouraged me,  
because I delivered the poor man crying out,  
and the fatherless who had none to help them.  
The beggar's blessing came upon me,  
and I brought a song to the widow's heart.  
I put on righteousness and it clothed me;  
justice was my robe and my turban.  
Eyes to the blind was I  
and feet to the lame.

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31  
14:7-12.

32  
Eccles. 5:14; 9:5f. (Revised Standard Version)

33  
Job 1:1.



A father to the poor was I,  
 and I took up the cause of the stranger.  
 I broke the fangs of the evil doer  
 and snatched the prey from his teeth;  
 and I thought, "I shall die in my nest,  
 and shall multiply my days as the phoenix,  
 with my roots open to the water,  
 and the dew all night on my branches,  
 my glory fresh within me,  
 and my bow ever new in my hand".<sup>34</sup>

Job had initially lived with the same retributive perspective as the unbending comforters. But in the grips of his suffering, which is clearly ascribed to God, the problem with that old syllogism becomes painfully clear. Since Job is aware of his innocence, with the same consistency with which his logical friends accuse him, he now must accuse God. To give into the friends would be tantamount to denying reality. Although Elihu does suggest in chapter twenty-two that Job has, in fact, sinned a great deal, Yahweh in chapter forty-two sharply rebukes all of the comforters for not speaking the truth, with the implication being that Job's repeated protestations of innocence have been right all along. If one were to employ the argument from silence, in the absence of any incriminating evidence against Job, God's reply in chapter forty-two may well indicate a divine vindication of the protagonist as well as his argument. Nothing within the logic of the text could be construed as evidence for the truth of the comforters' position. And thus retributive justice for past sins cannot be considered as a tenable answer to Job's question.

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 34

29:11-20.

The third position, that "suffering serves as a discipline or warning to the just", is most clearly indicated by Elihu in chapter thirty-three. There the fourth comforter argues that God often uses evil to chastise even the just, so that they may not take their position for granted. Although Elihu's position may legitimately be seen as a compromise between the rigid friends, and their traditional view of punishment, and Job who from the depths of his own experience cries out that he is blameless, it is, nevertheless, an inadequate point of view. Elihu's position is inadequate because it ignores the facts. At no point in the text could Job be accused of pride or intellectual hubris. Indeed, the artistry with which Job is kept from sounding arrogant and self-righteous as he answers his questioners is impressive.<sup>35</sup> Job is certainly angry, confused, and at times seemingly on the verge of giving up, but he is never proud. Elihu's comments do violence to the facts in much the same way as the suggestions of Job's impropriety. In the final analysis, the real problem with Elihu's position is that there is no good evidence for it. James Wood points out that Job himself comes to the same conclusion:

The fact of his innocence prevented him from accepting any view of his suffering which sought to explain it as punishment for sin, or a corrective of misbehaviour toward God. Because he was conscious of his moral integrity, it was psychologically impossible for him to find peace of mind in a course of behaviour which assumed that he needed to repent for sins he did not commit.<sup>36</sup>

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35

Cf.: 6:24; 7:20; 9:1-3 and 19:4-6.

36

James Wood, Job and the Human Situation (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1966) pp. 108-109.

What is of interest about the three answers discussed here is that the poet dismisses them all, first on logical grounds, but also for existential reasons - they don't seem to take the sufferer seriously enough. It might accurately be said, I think, that the comforters fix on the second criterion of a viable theodicy, that it be true to the Judaic religions form of life, at the expense of ignoring the importance of the first and third.

Another point concerning the Book of Job which is often overlooked but is nevertheless central to an understanding of the text is that the author makes a very clear distinction between natural and moral evils. In chapters one and two, the first and third calamities to befall Job and his family are man-made, while the second and fourth are natural catastrophes.<sup>37</sup> This clear distinction points not only to the philosophical sophistication of the poet, but it also contradicts the belief among some Biblical and Near eastern scholars that the ancient Jews were a "proto-logical people", who tended to be associative rather than logically coherent and relevant.<sup>38</sup> In the Book of Job, the poet seems to be suggesting in a not too subtle way that any answer to the problem of suffering which might follow in the body of his poem must honestly grapple with the reality of both kinds of evils.

We have attempted to show that there are at least three answers to

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37

In 2:13-15, the Sabeans attack Job's oxen and she-asses; in 2:16, a great fire burns his sheep and slaves; the Chaldeans invade and steal camels in 2:17; and in 2:18, wind comes across the desert and knocks down Job's house, destroying his sons and daughters.

38

For a good exposition of this position, Cf. W.F. Albright, From Stone Age to Christianity (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1940).

the problem of evil which the poet himself seems to have thrown open to serious doubt. We must now consider whether any other answer is to be found to the problem of Job's suffering. If a coherent answer could be found in the text, it would be of immense value to a constructive theodicy which would aspire at once to be cognizant of the Biblical tradition, logically sound, and sensitive to the integrity of the individual sufferer.

But first we must take a small diversion. As has been suggested earlier, it is sometimes argued that chapters 38 to 42 should not be considered as part of the original autograph. But as Driver and Gray have noted:

The only ground for questioning this section as a whole lies in the nature of the contents which have appeared to some incapable of reconciliation with the standpoint of the author of the dialogue.<sup>39</sup>

It has not been uncommon for commentators to view the speeches of Yahweh as one spectacular irrelevance to the plot of the book. However, if the general line of thought in the remainder of this chapter is judged to be correct, such doubts about the originality of the speeches from out of the whirlwind will, it is hoped, be seen as considerably less

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39

S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1921). I am aware there are grounds for questioning the originality of 40:6 to 42:1. Driver and Gray themselves consider this second Yahweh speech a later addition, though others strongly disagree with this judgement. At any rate, exclusion of the disputed section from this thesis would do no great harm to the argument. What is important for my purposes is that Yahweh does appear on the scene, and Job does repent. Although Driver and Gray reject the second Yahweh speech, they still retain 42:2-6 as "integral to the book".

forceful, if not completely unjustified.

Regarding the account of the theophany, Marvin Pope observes, "Either the book ends in a magnificent anticlimax, or we must see the highlight in the Divine speeches".<sup>40</sup> As has been suggested earlier, however, on first reading, the Yahweh speeches seem a disappointment, a kind of Divine non sequitor. In the heart of the work, Job has demanded on several occasions to be given an explanation for what he held to be his undeserved suffering. But in chapter 38 to 42 no direct answer is given to Job's complaint. Rather, Job himself is put under questioning: "Who is this that darkens My plans by words without knowledge?"<sup>41</sup> In an overwhelmingly stunning rhetorical blast, Yahweh depicts the divine creative power and glory in such a way that Job's rebellion ceases. The same Job who has so defiantly called Yahweh into account soon recants and repents in dust and ashes.

What has happened to Job to produce such a profound change of heart? We must now return to our original question: Is there an answer to the problem of suffering to be found in the Book of Job? In order to attempt to answer that query our attention must focus on the Yahweh speeches.

In 42:5, Job "sees" God. Before the theophany, Job had only heard of Yahweh through the intellectual speculation and traditional dogma of his friends. Now, he "sees" Yahweh for himself. In this immediate

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40

Marvin Pope, The Anchor Bible: Job, p. lxxx.

41

38:2 (Anchor Bible).

experience with Yahweh, Job seems to find an 'answer', though it is clearly not the type of answer he had been expecting in the dialogue.<sup>42</sup> Job is overwhelmed by Yahweh's creative power and glory, and consequently, comes to see his own suffering in a new light. In Nahum Glatzer's selection<sup>43</sup> of modern commentaries (Judaic, Christian, and generally philosophical) on the Book of Job, an impressive number of writers understand Job's "seeing God" as the key to his apparent change of heart, though they go on to interpret his repentance in a number of vastly differing ways. Consider the following examples:

(1) Job has appealed to God to appear, and is prepared "as a prince to enter his presence" (31:37), bearing a convincing statement of his case with him. In answer to this challenge God does not answer, and presents himself in all his creative majesty. At once Job forgets his case, and ceases to be urged by his problems. In the presence of God these things vanish away, and only God is left.<sup>44</sup>

(2) What is God's answer? It is powerful, at once crushing and uplifting, and, as far as it goes, of eternal validity: it is God Himself. This means that God does not involve Himself with arguments for and against His dominion, but lets Himself be seen. His answer consists in manifesting His greatness in powerful speech and creative deeds. This, rather than the arguments of God's defenders, causes Job to grow silent and beg God's forgiveness.<sup>45</sup>

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42

Cf. 23:3. There Job comments that he if only knew where to find God, and if Job had the right arguments in his mouth, then Yahweh would answer him.

43

Nahum N. Glatzen (ed.), The Dimensions of Job (New York: Schocken Books, 1969)

44

W.O.E. Oesterley and T.H. Robinson, "The Three Stages of the Book", in Glatzer, pp. 214-217.

45

Leonhard Ragaz, "God Himself is the Answer", in Glatzer, pp. 128-131.

(3) It is the vision of God that has released him from his problem. His suffering is as mysterious as ever, but, plain or mysterious, why should it vex him any longer? He has seen God, and has entered into rest.<sup>46</sup>

(4) God offers Himself to the sufferer, who, in the depth of his despair, keeps to God with his refractory complaint; He offers Himself to him as an answer.<sup>47</sup>

(5) It is often asked why he became convinced by, and what it is that he became convinced of; but the answer is surely that whereas there had been brought before him the wonders of creation, what he saw was the far greater wonder, the wonder of the Creator. He does not say: "Mine eyes seeth behemoth and leviathan". He says: "Mine eyes seeth Thee".<sup>48</sup>

(6) For if the rebellious hero here becomes a joyous confessor, and recognizes the divine omnipotence and voluntaristic purposefulness of God, this is not entirely due to the effect of the arguments of chapters 38f. on his reason, but is partly the result of his experience of the divine reality.<sup>49</sup>

(7) He has pictured Job as finding the solution to his problem, not in a reasoned explanation or a theology, but in a religious experience ... His hero, Job, finds his satisfaction in a first hand experience of God.<sup>50</sup>

Other authors might be quoted here, but, the point, I think, has already been made: large number of commentators suggest that Job's "seeing God" was crucial in bringing about his repentance. But we must now probe a little more deeply into just how the theophany provoked this change of heart.

One avenue we might follow is to examine the kind of religious

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Arthur Peacocke, "Job's Victory", in Glatzer, pp. 197-205.

47

Martin Buber, "A God who Hides His Face", in Glatzer, pp. 56-65.

48

Leo Roth, "Job and Jonah", in Glatzer, pp. 71-74.

49

Emil Kraepling, "A Theodicy - and More", in Glatzer, pp. 205-214.

50

G.A. Barton, "The Book of Job: Seeing God", The Journal of Biblical Literature, vol. 30 (1911).

encounter the poet is attempting to depict in the Yahweh speeches. As R.A.F. MacKenzie has observed, we must consider the presence of a third dialogue in the book. In addition to the conversations between Job and his friends, and the dialogue between Job and God, there is also to be considered the dialogue of the author with his readers.<sup>51</sup> It is this third dialogue, MacKenzie claims, which provoked the composition and inclusion of the Yahweh speeches. Beyond merely affirming that an encounter between Job and Yahweh happened, the author attempts to depict the inner dynamics of Job's profound religious experience. The poet tries to convey

not merely that the theophany occurred but the effect it had upon Job. And that can best be done by means of God's self-expression in word. As the other characters have expressed and revealed themselves in speech, so must the divine arbiter. Hence, the need for the Yahweh speeches.<sup>52</sup>

But if Yahweh is to speak, what is He to say? MacKenzie speculates:

He might simply tell the story of Satan's challenge and its acceptance; or might contribute yet another analysis of the function of suffering in human life. But ... either of these would be quite unsuited to the function that the speech must fulfill. It must be some form of self-revelation, which will at least remotely symbolize the impact on the human soul of an immediate encounter with God ... It must at the same time convey the overwhelming Otherness of God and his transcendence with respect to the man who is before Him.<sup>53</sup>

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R.A.F. MacKenzie, "The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job", Biblica 40 (1959), p. 438.

52

Ibid., p. 440.

53

Ibid., p. 441.



For MacKenzie, the divine speeches of chapters 38-42 are a poetic expression of Job's "seeing God". It is a "sense impression of what the experienced presence of God is like".<sup>54</sup> In the Yahweh speeches, the poet attempts to interpret and display the significance of the theophany for Job, though "mystery cannot be made clear in human language and concepts".<sup>55</sup>

MacKenzie contends that the poet succeeded brilliantly in his portrayal of the divine-human encounter. For him, the two little syllables Mi zeh ("who is this ...") at the very beginning of the speeches from the whirlwind represents the "most shattering question that was ever posed",<sup>56</sup> a question which sets the tone of the whole theophany section of the text and provides a basis for Job's radical change of heart. MacKenzie believes the message of the theophany is abundantly clear:

God is God, and Job is a creature - the experience of that simple but fundamental fact is the primary effect of this encounter. The remorseless piling-up of the subsequent questions, each one reducing poor Job further into his state of debasement, indicates to us the penetration of this truth into his inmost being.<sup>57</sup>

Another commentator, the German Protestant theologian and historian of religions, Rudolph Otto, sees a religious encounter with God underlying the Yahweh speeches. In his The Idea of the Holy,<sup>58</sup> Otto

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54

Ibid., p. 443.

55

Ibid.

56

Ibid., p. 442.

57

Ibid.

58

Rudolph Otto, The Idea of the Holy, John Harvey (trans.) (London: Oxford University Press, 1950).

describes how the "holy" or "numinous unnamed something" at the heart of religious experience "transcends the ethical, moral sphere and focuses on the awful, the mysterious, the tremendum, the majestic, the wholly other".<sup>59</sup> For Otto, chapters 38 to 42 of the Book of Job are a goldmine of expressions of the numinous:

In the 38th chapter of Job we have the element of the mysterious displayed in rare purity and completeness, and this chapter may well rank among the most remarkable in the history of religion. Job has been reasoning with his friends against Elohim (God), and, - as far as concerns them - he has been obviously in the right. They are compelled to be dumb before him. And then Elohim appears to conduct his own defense in person. And he conducts it to such an effect that Job avows himself to be overpowered - not merely silenced by superior strength.<sup>60</sup>

Otto continues by suggesting that Job is presented with a theodicy which goes beyond the rational ideas and solutions of the dialogue's comforters; here Job encounters a resolution to the problem of suffering which relies on "the sheer absolute wondrousness that transcends thought, on the mysterium, presented in its pure, nonrational form".<sup>61</sup> The accounts of the eagle, ostrich, wild ass, wild ox, behemoth and leviathan, all of these glorious examples from nature

express in masterly fashion the downright stupendousness, the wellnigh demonic and wholly incomprehensible character of the eternal, creative power; how incalculable and "wholly other", it mocks all conceiving but yet stirs the mind to its depths, fascinates and overbrims the heart.<sup>62</sup>

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59

Ibid., pp. 5-7.

60

Rudolph Otto, "The Element of the Mysterious", in Glatzer, pp. 225-226.

61

Ibid., pp. 226-227.

62

Ibid., p. 228.

Driver and Gray makes a similar observation when they comment:

The first speech of Yahweh transcends all other descriptions of the wonders of creation or the greatness of the Creator, which are to be found either in the Bible or elsewhere.<sup>63</sup>

To use the language of Otto, this absolutely mysterious and frightening numen acts to fascinate Job in his encounter with God; it acts to overpower him in such a way that he repents and recants in dust and ashes.

As helpful as these accounts may be, they still leave us in the dark as to what particulars were involved in Job's "seeing God". What is it exactly that led him to re-evaluate his stance of protest? Can the motivation for Job's repentance be explained further. If it cannot, this 'answer' would seem barely to help any more than the old cliché "God's ways are not man's ways". Indeed, that sort of answer, at least at first blush, would not seem to take the individual sufferer very seriously. So we must ask: is there anything else that motivates Job's repentance? Is there anything that might be helpful in constructing a theodicy that aims at taking the victims of evil seriously? To simply say, "Job saw God, and that answered his question about undeserved suffering", will not do. It seems to beg the question. We must ask further: Why did seeing God benefit Job?

George Dennis O'Brien attempts to answer this as well as related questions in his article, "Prolegomena to a Dissolution to the Problem of Suffering". Here he argues, as we have in earlier chapters, that

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S.R. Driver and G.B. Gray, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Book of Job p. 261.

the problem of suffering only arises when we hold "at once to the notion of an all good, all powerful Creator of the world, and this world, as we experience it, full of travail. If we change the notion of God (or the world) in certain ways the dilemma simply vanishes."<sup>64</sup> O'Brien does not, however, mention the attribute of 'omniscience', which we have shown must also be included to generate the problem of evil as it is posed for the religions of paradox.

Quoting Anthony Flew with approval, O'Brien claims that the problem of evil cannot cast doubt on the notion of an omnipotent, and benevolent God "for anyone who adopts any variant of the position that infinite creative power is its own sufficient justification, or leaves no room for justification".<sup>65</sup> O'Brien observes that Thomas Hobbes successfully accomplishes a dissolution to the problem of suffering by holding that power is self-justifying. And though we may disagree in the end with Hobbes's position, we have much to learn from his unsentimental treatment of Job's repentance. Hobbes wrote:

And Job, how earnestly does he expostulate with God, for the many afflictions that he suffered, notwithstanding his righteousness. The question in the case of Job is decided by God himself, not from arguments derived from Job's sin, but His own power.<sup>66</sup>

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64

George D. O'Brien "Prolegomena To A Dissolution To The Problem of Suffering", Harvard Theological Review vol. 57 (1964) p. 304.

65

Ibid., p. 303.

66

Ibid.

O'Brien claims that here Hobbes "can still maintain that God is all powerful and good, but he conceives of the relationship between power and goodness in such a way that the supposed antinomy of God's power and goodness cannot arise";<sup>67</sup> here there is a "transformation of the frame of reference in such a manner that questions of justification in the ordinary sense cannot be raised at all".<sup>68</sup> O'Brien labels this movement in Hobbes a "transfer from a formal to an existential frame of reference",<sup>69</sup> a common shift which takes place when an overriding concern for an existential relation displaces the need for formal explanations. This shift operates, as follows, in Hobbes's view of Job's repentance:

We begin with a 'formal' situation - a question of justification is asked, and it is expected that grounds or reasons for God's actions will be forthcoming. But what happens is that the voice from the whirlwind transforms it into an existential situation in which the relation between the questioner and the question becomes paramount. The 'formal' problem of justification is set aside because of the overriding situation between man and God. The shift is from question and answer to questioner and questioned ... What occurs in this dialogue? Surely Job's question is not answered at all; rather, God simply asserts that He is, after all, God, and as the result of this 'answer' Job repents in dust and ashes. If some sort of radical shift in the framework is not involved, then the story is simply pointless, because Job never gets an answer. Yet he repents.<sup>70</sup>

An exactly analogous frame of reference which shifts from the formal to the existential occurs, O'Brien suggests, in the case of a military situation where a soldier asks the General why he should obey the

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67

Ibid., p. 304.

68

Ibid.

69

Ibid., p. 305.

70

Ibid., pp. 305ff.

latter's orders. Very often in such a situation the soldier would accept as an answer a shift in the frame of reference to the existential: "Because I, the General, say so, that's why".<sup>71</sup> Here the existential relationship of the General to the soldier displaces any formal concern about the justification of the command. Job, like the soldier, is enlightened by "seeing God", in the sense that he discovers he has been asking all the wrong questions. Once he discovers the overriding reality of the existential relation between God and himself O'Brien believes, the problem of suffering is transformed. As O'Brien suggests, "Once we realize that it is God who acts and man who receives, there is no real question of justifying God's acts or condemning Him for His injustice to Job".<sup>72</sup> The blank assertion that "God is God" rules out any independent standard of justification by which the deity might be questioned. "The answer to Job, then, is to remind him that he is in the ruler-ruled relation which he cannot escape."<sup>73</sup>

Although I would agree with O'Brien on the point that the context of Job's encounter with God changes from a formal one to an existential one, I would part company with him on the reasons he suggests bring about the change. I am not entirely convinced O'Brien's position is sufficiently different from that of Hobbes. O'Brien mentions God's other attributes but he still seems to base his view on Hobbes' claim that power gives the right to command. His choice of a military metaphor

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71

Ibid., p. 306.

72

Ibid., p. 308.

73

Ibid., p. 310.

to describe the relation between God and Job is an indication of just how seriously he takes Hobbes' view of the self-justifying nature of power.

In order to see clearly the difference between my position and that of O'Brien's, as well as how they both differ from a third point of view, we must consider three possible interpretations of Job's repentance: (a) Job bows to Yahweh's power, but his submission is carried out 'tongue-in-cheek"; (b) Job sincerely repents when he perceives Yahweh's power to be self-justifying; and (c) Job sincerely repents because of the realization of Yahweh's power but also for a number of other relevant reasons. Let us first consider possibility (a).

David Robertson's interpretation of Job's repentance is a good example of (a). In his article, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study", Robertson attempts to demonstrate that "irony pervades the entire book, and indeed, provides the key to a consistent and adequate reading of God's speeches from the storm".<sup>74</sup>

For Robertson, Job's repentance is more a "rolling with the punches" than a heartfelt change of position. He bases his position on Job's propensities in the dialogue of the speeches of Yahweh and Job's response to those speeches. Already in the ninth chapter, Robertson argues, Job foresees that God "would not come to listen

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David Robertson, "The Book of Job: A Literary Study", Soundings vol. 56 (1973) p. 446.

patiently to Job's charges; he would come in a tornado, toss Job about, and scare him out of his wits".<sup>75</sup>

If I summoned and he answered,  
I do not believe he would heed me.  
He would crush me with a tempest  
And multiply my wounds without cause.<sup>76</sup>

Robertson also suggests that Job predicts his own "tongue-in-cheek" confession. Again, as early as chapter nine Job sees that it will be necessary to calm God's wrath with a phony repentance:

No good can withstand his wrath,  
Rahab's troops cringe beneath him.  
The less could I refute him,  
Or match words with him.  
Though innocent I could not reply;  
.....  
I would have to beg for mercy.  
Though guiltless, my mouth would declare me guilty.<sup>77</sup>

By his insincere confession of guilt, Job wins the renewed favor of Yahweh, but at the expense of deceiving God and making him the object of an ironic joke. Robertson sees the author or Job offering an antidote to perennial maladies such as man's fear of fate, destiny and the unknown. He points out that the poet attempts to cure fear

by means of its opposite, ridicule of the subject feared. We do not fear that which we feel beneath us in dignity; rather we scorn it ... While God may be more powerful than we are, he is beneath us on the scales that measure love, justice and wisdom. So we know of him what we know of all tyrants, that while they may torture us and finally kill us, they cannot destroy our personal integrity.<sup>78</sup>

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75

Ibid., p. 462.

76

Ibid., p. 466.

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Ibid., p. 468 (Robertson's translation).

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Ibid., p. 446.



While I am inclined to agree Robertson has provided a consistent reading of the Book of Job, I remain unpersuaded that his is the most adequate interpretation of Job's change of heart. Robertson may find a good deal more irony in the book than is actually there. He admits that his essay is a "child of its age, the ironic age".<sup>79</sup> He invites us to consider his argument, unorthodox as it is, because "we need to take a variety of critical approaches to the Book of Job in order to better understand its truly remarkable scope and profundity".<sup>80</sup>

In the final analysis, however, I must agree with Edwin Good who, in responding to Robertson, suggests that he finally "tells us that both of its principal subjects are frauds - even righteous frauds",<sup>81</sup> which, I might add, are usually the worst kind. I would hold that it is more faithful to the text to see Job's repentance as a sincere change of heart, but we are still left with two competing views of why that repentance comes about.

We must now consider (b) Job sincerely repents because of the realization that Yahweh's power is self-justifying. We have already observed that this is the position suggested by Hobbes, and in a more subtle fashion by O'Brien. It is also a view expressed by Gilbert Murray, who sees Job's God as a deity who has no real duties toward men; Job cannot complain of injustice because God owes Job nothing:

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79

Ibid., p. 447.

80

Ibid.

81

E.M. Good, "Job and the Literary Task: A Response", Soundings vol. 56 (1973) p. 479.

If God's rule conflicts with human morality, that is because human morality is such a limited thing, not valid beyond particular regions of time and space. It is impertinence in man to expect God to be righteous.<sup>82</sup>

Murray understands Yahweh's answer out of the whirlwind as a "long insistence on the puny and ephemeral nature of Job".<sup>83</sup> The story culminates in the central argument: "Wilt thou disannul my judgement? Wilt thou condemn me, that thou mayest be righteous? Hast thou an arm like God, or canst thou thunder with a voice like him"?<sup>84</sup>

Yahweh's only answer to Job's complaint, Murray claims, is a reassertion of his divine power:

God does not show, or even say, that he is righteous by human standards of righteousness; what he does assert is that he is, in Nietzsche's phrase, Jenseits von Gut und Bose (Beyond Good and Evil), and that the puny standards by which man judges right and wrong do not apply to the power that rules the universe.<sup>85</sup>

Murray concludes his essay by contrasting Job with the ancient Greek philosophers:

If Plato or Aristotle had been present at this discussion I think they would have felt as explosive as Elihu the Buzite, but on different grounds. They would have pointed out that Jehovah was not answering the real question at all. No one had doubted his power, it was his justice they had questioned; and his only answer had been to reassert his power again and again in a storm of magnificent rhetoric, and demand how a worm like Job dares to ask any questions at all.<sup>86</sup>

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Gilbert Murray, "Beyond Good and Evil", in Glatzer, p. 196.

83

Ibid.

84

Ibid.

85

Ibid.

86

Ibid.

Murray suggests that the "oriental" Job, unlike the Greeks, was "accustomed to the rule of a despot or patriarch, and cared most for obedience to the supreme power; such power was in Job's view completely self-justifying".<sup>87</sup> Although this may well be true for the time and place in which Job was written, we must still ask whether this view of power is something that is still viable for 20th century seekers for an answer to the problem of evil. If Murray's view is all that can be said about Job's repentance, it seems to help contemporary people very little, for our doctrine of God bears little resemblance to an "oriental despot".

A somewhat more profound view of (b) is given in Peter Geach's God and the Soul. In the chapter entitled, "The Moral Law and the Law of God", Geach raises the interesting question concerning whether it makes sense, given that there is an almighty God, to defy him. Geach clearly answers this question in the negative. He suggests that the world's "whole raison d'etre is to effect God's good pleasure".<sup>88</sup> Considering this, Geach argues, it is "insane" to set out to defy God:

For Prometheus to defy Zeus made sense because Zeus had not made Prometheus and had only limited power over him. A defiance of an almighty God is insane: it is like trying to cheat a man to whom your whole business is mortgaged and who you know is well aware of your attempts to cheat him, or again, as the prophet said, it is as if a stick tried to beat or an axe to cut the very hand that was wielding it.<sup>89</sup>

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Ibid.

88

Peter Geach, God and the Soul (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969).

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Ibid., p. 127.

Geach believes that because God is "the supreme power, wholly different from earthly powers", his might is self-justifying and worthy of worship:

This reasoning will not convince everybody; people may still say that it makes sense, given that there is a God, to defy him, but this is only so because, as Pritchard said, you can no more make a man think than you can make a horse drink. A moral philosopher once said to me: "I don't think that I am morally obliged to obey God unless God is good". I asked him how he understood the proposition that 'God is good'. He replied. "Well, I have no considered view of how it should be analyzed; but provisionally I'd say it meant something like this: God is the sort of God whom I'd choose to be God if it were up to me to make the choice." I fear that he has never understood why I found the answer funny.<sup>90</sup>

Geach seems content to leave his argument on more or less an intuitive level: when one fully realizes what the almighty power of God means, one simply cannot hold that defying God is a good option.

But we must raise a question in regard to Geach's view, and the view of Hobbes as well. Exactly what is the guarantee that benevolence and justice are tied up with the self-justifying power of God? We have shown earlier that it is logically possible to be omnipotent, but demonic. Are we to submit to God on the basis of his power alone? Geach's straw man moral philosopher is clumsily expressing an important point. On worshipping God for his power alone are we not, as J.S. Mill so forcefully put it, "bowing down to a gigantic image of something not fit for us to imitate"?

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Ibid.

Interpretations (a) and (b) of Job's repentance may not be as far apart from each other as they initially appear. In a real way there is a decision made in both points of view that one horn of the Euthyphro dilemma must be saved at what seems like the expense of the other. Position (a) opts for the side that says ethical principles are independent of the will of God and that these values can and should be used in measuring even His conduct. In this regard, Robertson's position is very much like Dostoyevski's Ivan Karamazov. In Interpretation (b), on the other hand, its proponents come very close to making the suggestion that God is worthy of worship no matter what. Thus, the believers of this second view settle for the pole of the Euthyphro dilemma that insists that goodness is good just because God says so. Geach's affinity with that horn of the dilemma can be seen in his rather curt reply to the moral philosopher. Murray's preference for that side of the problem can be ascertained in his remark that God is beyond good and evil. But the notion that we somehow need to choose one pole or the other of the Euthyphro dilemma, as we have shown in chapter two, rests on a mistake.

We could agree with Robertson that the ascertaining of what is good usually precedes any claims we may have about the will of God. Indeed, one of the main tests available to us concerning whether a revelation is genuine or spurious is a test of the moral goodness of what is willed. We would usually not be inclined to call something good, in a moral sense, unless it fulfilled our criteria for a moral good.

However, if one does not wish to make the morally good completely

dependent upon the knowledge of God's will, neither is it advisable to make it superior to the will of the divine or even an independent entity.

We have already identified in chapter two a coherent avenue of escape from this conundrum. One way to reiterate what Mackie has suggested there is to say that the problem dissolves as a logical dilemma if we identify the will of God with the realm of values which constitute the goodness of things. This, divine will, Mackie argues, is also cognizant of what constitutes the most appropriate non-morally good life and reveals it to us through a set of prescriptions designed to have us follow that life. Thus, Mackie argues, there is a descriptive as well as prescriptive element to his proposal. W.G. Maclagan attempts a similar resolution of the problem when he comments:

The moral experience is one index of what we mean when we speak of God. Thus we do not have a prior conception of God, which must subsequently be brought in some sort of relation with our notion of the realm of values so that either they depend upon him or he is conditioned by them. Rather, it is by starting with and developing a notion of values that we come to gain some idea of part of what is meant by the term 'God'.<sup>91</sup>

In addition to the major criticism discussed above which covers both interpretations (a) and (b) of Job's repentance, some further remarks might also be made regarding their individual inadequacies as proper views of why Job repents.

One particular problem with Robertson is he seems to want to

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W.G. Maclagan, The Theological Frontiers of Ethics (London: Allen and Unwin, 1961) p. 90.

have it both ways. On the one hand, he tells us that he is an "ironic child of his age", and age which, presumably, contains a modern conception of God, even if it is one these "ironic" people decide to reject. Yet, in his essay he constructs an archaic, cardboard characterization of God, one much older even than the Book of Job itself. This divine figure of Robertson's lacks enough knowledge of others, not to mention self-knowledge, to be able to see through the calculated "repentance" of Job. Robertson measures an archaic conception of God by modern ethical standards and seems oddly surprised by the results.

Position (b) suffers from another important problem if it is to be regarded as a proper interpretation of Job's repentance: it is not true to the text. Murray suggests that suddenly in the speeches out of the whirlwind Job becomes aware of the awesome power of God. But it is clear that on numerous occasions before the Yahweh speeches Job is fully aware of God's power, and his own powerless against it. Consider, for example, this passage from chapter twelve:

Behold, He destroys and it cannot be rebuilt,  
 He imprisons a man and he is not released.  
 He shuts up the waters and they dry up,  
 or He sends them forth and they overwhelm the earth.  
 With Him are strength and sound counsel;  
 The misled and the misleaders - are all His.  
 He drives counselors mad,  
 and of judges he makes fools.  
 He opens the belt of kings  
 and removes the girdle from their loins.  
 He drives priests into madness  
 and temple votaries into confusion.<sup>92</sup>

It should be apparent that as early as chapter twelve Job is quite clear about the power of God. I would venture to say that if the Yahweh speeches were not intended to show Job something more than the display of Yahweh's power, there would be no real reason for the change of heart. Why should another display of Yahweh's strength break down Job's integrity at the end, when all hope for vindication of his life seems lost?<sup>93</sup>

Job's "seeing God" must involve something more than witnessing a display of sheer power. It must involve something new, something which helps to make proper sense of theophany. In order to see what that something might be, we must return to formulation (c) of Job's repentance: (c) Job sincerely repents because of the realization of Yahweh's awesome power but also for a number of other relevant reasons.

What we need to get clear about here are the other relevant reasons which might be sufficiently important to cause Job's change of perspective. As I have said before, I think that O'Brien is essentially right about a shift taking place where, because of the Yahweh speeches, the context of the God-Job encounter moves from a formal one to an existential one. I believe, however, that O'Brien is wrong on two points. First, it is not just power that changes Job's mind, it is omnipotence in consort with God's other attributes. Second, O'Brien's choice of a military metaphor to describe the new relation between God and

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For further criticisms of Geach's position, cf. D.Z. Phillips, Death and Immortality (London: Macmillan, 1970) particularly chapter 2.



- Job obscures more than it enlightens. A more appropriate metaphor, I would suggest, for understanding the God-Job encounter is the relation between parent and child. Let us now return to this first point so that we may more fully develop interpretation (c) of Job's repentance.

In chapter two of this thesis I suggested that it is important to understand each of the divine attributes: omnipotence, omniscience, omnibenevolence, and creator of the universe, within the context of each other. One cannot adequately be discussed without understanding its relationship to the others. The author of Job seems to make this same point. Consider again, for example, the opening lines of the speeches from the whirlwind:

Where were you when I laid the earth's foundations?  
 Tell me, if you know and understand.  
 Who settled its dimensions? Surely you should know.  
 Who stretched his measuring-line over it?  
 On what do its supporting pillars rest?  
 Who set its corner-stone in place,  
 when the morning stars sang together  
 and all the sons of God shouted aloud?  
 Who watched over the birth of the sea,  
 when it burst in flood from the womb? -  
 when I wrapped it in a blanket of cloud  
 and cradled it in a fog.  
 when I established its bounds,  
 fixing its doors and bars in place,  
 and said, "Thus far shall you come and no farther,  
 and here shall your surging waves halt".  
 In all your life have you called up the dawn  
 or shown the morning its place?  
 Have you taught it to grasp the fringes of the earth  
 and shake the dog-star from its place;  
 to bring up the horizon in relief as clay under a seal,  
 until all things stand out like the folds of a cloak  
 when the light of the Dog-star is dimmed  
 and the stars of the Navigator's Line go out one by one?<sup>94</sup>

In these original queries God is not just displaying his power, He is challenging Job's comprehension of the original governing structure of the universe. In addition to displaying His creative genius, God is also making a specific comparison of His divine intelligence with that of Job's. In doing so He leads Job back to the primordial scene to experience the original mystery of the cosmos.

If Job were the first man endowed with wisdom, where was he when the rest of the heavenly council was celebrating the founding of the earth? Was he absent that day? Does he know how it was controlled by the creator? Can he summons the dawn to shed light on the mystery?

In the Lord's second speech, attention is given to divine justice. Earlier, in 9:19-24, Job accuses God of all but ignoring the evil done to Job; In 40:6-14 God addresses the problem directly. He does not accuse Job of lying about his innocence but rather of violating God's integrity. Job has mistakenly assumed that he had a proper perspective on the larger teleological context of God's justice. The Lord reminds Job that it is not necessary to condemn the divine in order to affirm one's own integrity.

One of the realizations Job makes, then, which may have much to do with his change of heart, is the discovery that the various attributes which go into the making of any meager description of God cannot properly be separated.

The other element in Job's repentance involves the point I have made about the inappropriateness of O'Brien's military metaphor. In Job's encounter with God in chapters 38-42, he comes to "see" two things that the military metaphor does not capture. The first of these is that

God is the creator and sustainer of Job in much the same way a good, intelligent and effective parent is the creator and sustainer of his/her child.

A child, of course, is ordinarily thought to have an obligation to obey his parents. Indeed, a child who makes no effort to please a benevolent, wise and effective parent who has created and nurtured him is normally thought to be behaving reprehensively. The child's obligations to the parent are fulfilled by conforming to the wishes of the parent, provided those wishes are in the child's best interest.<sup>95</sup>

If all of this is correct, then we might rightly say that Job is under a similar moral obligation to obey God. In the midst of listening to the whirlwind speeches, he suddenly realizes this obligation. For unlike the parent-child relation where the older the child becomes the less the parent is responsible, in the case of the God-Job relation the sustenance is permanent.

Another element that may go into the making of Job's change of heart is connected to the point made above. In addition to Job perceiving that God is the creator and sustainer of himself, He is also the creator and sustainer of the entire universe. He brought it in to existence and continually keeps it in existence through His will, so that in a real way God could be said to be the legitimate owner of the universe. The owner of any property, of course, under normal circumstances has the

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For a similar point of view, cf. Richard Swinburne, The Coherence of Theism, pp. 183ff., and Baruch Brody's "Morality and Religion Reconsidered", in Readings in the Philosophy of Religion B. Rody (ed.), Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1974.

right to tell those to whom he has loaned it what they are allowed to do with that property. Thus, God has a legitimate right to tell Job how he should conduct his life. Indeed, this view that God is the creator, sustainer, and therefore the owner of His creation is continually reiterated throughout the divine speeches of Job, as well as the rest of scripture.

If we understand these two points about Job's obligation to God in light of Job's change of heart, it becomes clear that the context shifts from a formal to an existential relation, not merely because the Lord's display of sheer power, but also because God has created and sustained Job, as well as the world around him.

Still, one might raise an objection here that there are clearly lots of morally corrupt parents and pernicious landlords. Given the facts of the story of Job could we not say that although Job had a prima facie duty to be obedient and long-suffering in respect to God, that obligation was abrogated by the moral degradation in which he was forced to live.

In order to meet this objection we must recall that God's power cannot be understood as being independent of His other attributes. Divine omnipotence can only be fully comprehended in consort with God's nature as the omniscient and benevolent creator of the universe. The suggestion that Job is under no moral obligation to obey and respect God because He is like an ethically corrupt parent does not work, for unlike even the best of earthly parents, by His very nature God cannot be morally corrupt.

Thus, Job's repentance is related, I believe, to his profound realization that this all good, all powerful and all knowing God has created and sustained him as well as the world around him, and it is this realization that changes the context of the God-Job encounter from a formal relation to an existential one.

Job is not left with the particulars of a philosophical theodicy. In the end, what he does have is trust that God does have a telological view by which evil will be overcome. Thus, in our final analysis of Job it can be said that he settles for a position that is logically coherent, true to his religious form of life, and takes the individual sufferer most seriously.

With this realization of what Job has learned firmly in mind I shall discuss in the final chapter the framework of a viable Christian theodicy which goes beyond the Book of Job.

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Chapter Five: Prolegomena to a Christian Theodicy

If there were no obscurity, man would not feel his corruption, and if there were no light, man would not hope for a remedy. Thus, it is not only just, but useful to us that God is hidden in part and discovered in part, for to man it is dangerous to know God without knowing his own misery as it is to know his misery without knowing God.

Blaise Pascal

Despair over the earthly or over something earthly is really a despair about the eternal and over oneself, in so far as it is a despair, for this is the formula for all despair. But the despairer ... did not observe what was happening behind him, so to speak; he thinks he is in despair over something earthly and constantly talks about what he is in despair over, and yet he is in despair about the eternal.

Soren Kierkegaard

Man, the scientists say, is an animal that thinks. They are wrong. Man is an animal that loves. It is in man's love that God exists and triumphs: in man's love that life is beautiful; in man's love that the world's justice is resolved. To hold together in one thought those terrible opposites of good and evil which struggle in the world is to be capable of life, and only love will hold them so. Our labor always, like Job's labor, is to learn through suffering to love ... to love even that which let us suffer.

Program notes to Archibald MacLeish's J.B. Yale  
Drama School (1958)

I.

In chapter three we attempted to make a distinction between theodicies prohibited by reason and those allowed by reason. We have discovered in the first group we find the Punishment and Warning Theodicies: retributive justice and the free will defense; The Unreality of Evil Theodicies: the amount of evil is insufficient to create a problem, evil is an illusion, and evil is privation of good; and the Evil is Logically



Necessary Theodicies: certain versions of the free will defense and the contrast perspective. Because of one or more logical flaws, all of these responses fail as logically consistent answers to the problem of evil.

Those theodicies which are allowed by reason include both the Classical Hindu and Hinayana Buddhist versions of monism, the dualistic responses to the problem of evil offered by Plato, Zoroastrianism, process thought, and limited God theories such as that offered by J.S. Mill and the various possibilities suggested by David Hume in the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.<sup>1</sup> We have also seen that despite some logical problems, John Hick's version of the teleological theodicies can be numbered among those responses to the problem of evil that are allowed by reason. All of the members of this second group are logically consistent and therefore possible candidates for the job of answering the question: "Why does evil exist?".

As we have mentioned earlier, however, logical consistency is not the only criterion by which theodicies might be measured. In addition to the first criterion, it has also been suggested that any viable theodicy must be true, at least in a broad way, to the form of life out of which it arises or out of which an answer is sought. And thirdly, we have suggested that any workable response to the problem of evil must take the individual sufferer seriously.

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David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, parts X and XI. Cf. also part V where Hume suggests "this world, for all (we know) is very faulty and imperfect, compared to superior standard; and was only the first rude essay of some infant deity, who afterwards abandoned it ..." p. 194.

If we examine carefully those theodicies which have already passed our first test of logical consistency, we find that the monistic faiths, Classical Hinduism and Hinayana Buddhism, fail on both the second and third criteria. The purpose of this entire discussion has been to discover if there is some answer or group of answers within the Christian form of life, that might respond adequately to the problem of evil. Both of these monistic responses deny some the basic ontological presuppositions on which the Christian faith is based. Indeed, it would be logically impossible to call oneself a member of the Christian tradition while still adhering to either of these positions. Because the basic metaphysical presuppositions on which those monistic faiths are built are so radically different from those of Christianity, they cannot be considered as viable responses in the Christian tradition. In a curious way, because of the same metaphysical presuppositions, Classical Hinduism and Hinayana Buddhism also seem to fail the third criterion. Since both traditions would have us believe that at bottom level individual personalities, as well as evil itself, do not really exist, there seems to be a fundamental denial of the importance of the individual sufferer.

The dualistic responses would seem to do well in meeting the third criterion. The writings of J.S. Mill and Hartshorne, as well as the ethical dialogues of Plato give ample evidence of a genuine concern for the plight of the individual sufferer. None of these dualistic approaches, however, seem as effective in meeting the second criterion. All of the limited God theorists, Plato, Zoroastrianism and the process thought of Charles Hartshorne deny at least one of the traditional attributes of God discussed in chapter two. For Plato, Zoroastrianism

and J.S. Mill, God is not omnipotent. The same can be said for the process thought of Hartshorne if we construe omnipotence as the ability to do anything that is logically possible. Additionally, it could be argued that God does not create the world ex nihilo in any of these dualistic points of view. It might be said that each of these responses denies at least one aspect that seems to be fundamental to the classical Christian conception of God.

Upon closer examination, even the theodicy of John Hick seems to fail the second criterion. On one level we might simply say that his position is not an adequate Christian response because he holds a view of omniscience that is radically different from the classical position that God knows all true propositions. This point, perhaps, could be argued. Nevertheless, on a more fundamental level, it may also be said that Hick fails to give sufficient weight to the person of Christ in his theodicy. Quite simple, the crucifixion and atonement seem to serve no central role in his answer to the problem of evil. The same criticisms might seem also to apply to the Book of Job. But since Job was written several hundred years before the advent of Christianity, it might more sensibly be said that the Book of Job meets our criteria for viable Judaic response to the problem of evil but it is, as I shall soon show, still incomplete as a Christian theodicy.

Still, we may have managed to tether ourselves in a kind of double-bind. On the one hand, it would seem to be the case that the only theodicies which meet our first criterion of logical consistency are those that appear doomed by the second or third tests. On the other hand, if Mackie is correct, any theodicy which adheres to the belief in

the traditional attributes of God, as well as the reality of evil, seems to be prohibited by reason.

But let us return at this point to the work of J.L. Mackie in the hope of showing that he may have overstated his case when he suggests, in effect, that all Christians answers to the problem of evil, which adhere to the classical conception of God, are prohibited by reason. If Mackie is correct then there can be no logically consistent theodicy in the Christian tradition.

In chapter two we presented J.L. Mackie's case for viewing the problem of evil as a logical problem, that is, as a "problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs". According to Mackie, the Judeo-Christian theologian must (but cannot consistently) hold to the following theistic set of beliefs:

- i. God is omnipotent.
- ii. God is omniscient.
- iii. God is omnibenevolent.
- iv. There is evil in the world.

Mackie states the problem quite clearly in his recent book, The Miracle of Theism:

According to traditional theism, there is a God who is both omnipotent (and omniscient) and wholly good, and yet there is evil in the world. How can this be? It is true that there is no explicit contradiction between the statement that there is an omnipotent and wholly good God and that there is evil. But if we add the at least initially plausible premises that good is opposed to evil in such a way that a being who is wholly good eliminates evil as far as he can, and there are no limits to what an omnipotent being could do, then we do have a contradiction. A wholly good omnipotent being would either eliminate evil completely, if there really are evils, or, there cannot be such a being.

The problem of evil in the sense I am using the phrase is essentially a logical problem: it sets the theist the

clear task of clarifying and if possible reconciling the several beliefs which he holds. It is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further discoveries, nor a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or action. And the problem in this sense signally does not arise for those who view the world differently from traditional theism.<sup>2</sup>

Alasdair MacIntyre explains the two possible ways of resolving the logical problem of evil as Mackie has posed it:

With an argument that seems to involve us in a contradiction, two courses are open to us. We can scrutinize the meaning of the terms employed in the argument more carefully, and ask whether we have not perhaps made a mistake in supposing a contradiction to arise. Or we can accept the fact that a contradiction does arise and avoid it by abandoning one of those statements, the joint affirmation of which leads to the contradiction.<sup>3</sup>

Traditional Christian theism is, of course, committed to the truth of all propositions i. through iv. Consequently, MacIntyre's second suggestion is out of the question. If the groundwork for an answer to the problem of evil is to be laid, it is the truth of MacIntyre's first course that must be established.

If we keep Mackie's phrasing of the dilemma before us, we will recall his admission that "the contradiction does not arise immediately" among the terms 'evil', 'omnipotent', 'omnibenevolent' and 'omniscient'. Rather, some "quasi-logical rules" or "additional principles" are needed to demonstrate the contradiction. Earlier, in chapter two, we added a fifth premise (v. God created the world ex nihilo) to see if that would

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J.L. Mackie, The Miracle of Theism, pp. 150-151.

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Alasdair MacIntyre, Difficulties in Christian Belief (London: SCM Press, 1959) p. 17.

produce the logical inconsistency. We saw that it did not. Consequently, we added Mackie's additional principles as premises vi. and vii.

- vi. Good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.
- vii. There are no limits (other than logical ones) to what an omnipotent and omniscient being can do.

From these two "at least initially plausible" premises, Mackie derives something like the following:

- viii. An omnibenevolent, omnipotent and omniscient being would eliminate evil completely.

and

- ix. 'An omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient being exists' and 'evil exists' are logically incompatible.

If Mackie's conclusion (ix.) follows from his premises (i. through viii.) then it would also follow that any answer to the problem of evil which accepted the traditional attributes of God would be logically inconsistent and therefore prohibited by reason. In charging that such a contradiction exists Mackie has attempted to show that all of the initial premises (i. through iv.) cannot be true at the same time, under any circumstances. He has added premises vi. through viii. to support his charge of inconsistency.

It must be admitted that if premises vi. and vii. are true, then viii. and ix. follow quite nicely and, indeed, we would be faced with a logical contradiction. Certainly vii. is true, at least by virtue of Mackie's definition of omnipotence. For the moment, then, let us grant him the truth of vii. But why should we assume that vi. is true?

If vi. is true, what kind of truth is it? Certainly it is not a necessary truth, for no inherent contradiction would arise from its denial. If it is not a necessary truth, it must be a contingent truth.

But if it is a contingent truth, then it is possible that it is not true at all. If it were the case that vi. is not true at all, then the truth of viii. and ix. would collapse, for their supposed truth rests on the prior truth of each of the premises i. through vii.

The question essentially becomes one of what sort of evidence we can give for and against the truth of vii.? Mackie must argue that the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of the truth of vii. But the critic of Mackie's formulation might attempt to show that certain counter-evidence might be brought forth which would contradict the notion that 'good is opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can'.

Suppose, for example, there was some greater good to be achieved in a particular situation by the endurance of a certain amount of pain. Indeed, suppose it were the case that this greater good could only be accomplished through the endurance of this very real pain. We would then have a case where good was not opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil.<sup>4</sup> This is certainly a logically possible situation.<sup>5</sup> Mackie has not shown why this could not be the actual descriptive account of the attitudes and actions of God. Indeed, it may

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For a more detailed version of this objection see James Ross's Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Macmillan, 1969) pp. 120-123.

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Another way to put this objection is to say that Mackie insists what is needed to falsify the claim that an all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing God exists is one example of absolute, utterly useless evil which cannot be overcome. But it is not clear that we can give such an example. One might suggest that Mackie would have to disprove the existence of God in order to prove that any instance of evil is absolute; hence, Mackie's appeal is circular, presupposing what it intends to prove.

well be the sort of view that Job finally settles on. What we are suggesting here is "at least initially plausible" and would give us a new look to premise vi.

vi (b). Good is not necessarily opposed to evil in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can.

If we add our new premise vi (b). to the truth of Mackie's vii., we get something like the following:

vii. There are no limits, other than logical ones, to what an omnipotent being can do.

viii (b). An omnibenevolent, omnipotent, omniscient being would not necessarily eliminate evil completely.

and

ix (b). 'An omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omniscient being exists' and 'evil exists' are not logically incompatible.

One way to show what we have done in the above argument is to recall our remarks regarding the distinction between "genuine evil", "apparent evil" and "prima facie evil". As we have suggested earlier, it may be the case that all prima facie evil is actually genuine evil. It is also logically possible that some prima facie evil is genuine and some is merely apparent. Both of these conclusions would follow from Mackie's argument. But there is also still a third logically possible state of affairs in which all prima facie evil is actually only apparent. The key point to understand here is that all three of these situations is a logically possible state of affairs and therefore allowed by reason. It could be the case that Mackie is correct, but there is nothing logically necessary about his formulation of premise vi. nor about his conclusion in ix.



Another way to phrase the same point is to look at Christianity as a religion of prima facie paradox. The prima facie paradox may indeed, as Mackie has suggested, be actual, but it is also logically possible that it is merely apparent. John Wisdom makes a helpful remark which comes close to the heart of this issue:

One might have expected that in the sphere of religion everyone would have learned by now to move carefully and neither at once to accept nor hastily reject what sounds bewildering. But no, even here we find a tendency to reject strange statements with impatience, to turn from them as absurd or unprovable or to write them down as metaphor - deceptive, or at best, merely picturesque. Only a few months ago someone came to me troubled about the old but bewildering statement that Christ was both God and man. He asked those who taught him theology how this could be true. Their answers had not satisfied him. I was not able to tell him what the doctrine means. But I did remind him that though some statements which seem contradictory are self-contradictory, others are not, that indeed some of the most preposterous statements ever made have turned out to convey the most tremendous discoveries.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to understand two features of Wisdom's comment. First, that the prima facie religious paradoxes or contradictions may indeed turn out to be genuine self-contradictions, though there is also the possibility that they will later be seen as merely apparent. And second, it is only those that turn out to be merely apparent which may be illuminating or "tremendous discoveries".

Some commentators on the work of Professor Wisdom seem to miss this second point and in the process make him out to be something akin to a

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John Wisdom, "Paradox and Discovery", in Paradox and Discovery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 124. Later, we shall argue that the incarnation is, in fact, an excellent example of a religious paradox that is merely apparent.

believer in Tertullian's dictum: I believe because it is absurd.

T.F. Torrance, for example, makes the following observation about Wisdom's view as applied to Christian theology.

The task of a living and constructive theology is to discover and work out the interior logic of our knowledge of God, but in the nature of the case it will not be able to avoid constant tension between the material logic thrusts upon it from the side of the redeeming operations of God in Christ, and the logico-verbal atoms of our thought and speech that are already schematized to this world, for the Truth of God as it is in Christ breaks through all our linguistic and logical forms.<sup>7</sup>

But if we examine again the words of Wisdom's which occasioned this remark, we can see that in Wisdom's view the fruitful paradoxes are those that turn out to not be self-contradictory. Torrance seems to be saying just the opposite and, in so doing, relegates language about God to the same class as language about round squares and married bachelors.

Wisdom's point is quite relevant for our discussion of Mackie's argument, for it at least points to the possibility that Mackie has overstated his case. In a similar vein, Nelson Pike has attempted to show that the believer need not be cowed by an appeal to Mackie's construction of the supposed logical contradiction. Pike challenges those of the Mackie-Flew persuasion to prove the falsity of a claim like: "A good God could have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil to exist". Pike suggests that just as a child may not be old enough to understand why his mother causes him so much pain in curing him of a certain sickness, and yet the mother has morally sufficient reasons for doing so, so a limited human being may not understand what

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T.F. Torrance, Theological Science (London: Oxford University, 1969) p. 279.

a perfect God's sufficient reasons could be for allowing evil.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this is precisely the position the author of Job seems to be suggesting.

M.B. Ahern arrives at a similar conclusion about the argument proposed by Mackie, as well as incompatibility arguments in general which attempt to argue that any answer in the Judeo-Christian tradition which adheres to the traditional attributes of God must be prohibited by reason:

There are two general conclusions from this study: (1) Apart from positive proofs of God's existence, it cannot be shown that the world's evil is logically compatible with the existence of a wholly good, omnipotent and omniscient being, or that the conditions for incompatibility are in fact met. (2) It cannot be shown that the world's evil is logically incompatible with God's existence, or that the conditions for compatibility are not in fact met.<sup>9</sup>

Ahern continues by arguing although it cannot be shown there is a logical connection between evil and the non-existence of God, it may be possible to show there is a synthetically necessary connection between them:

We saw that such a connection cannot be made by means of the principles used by Epicurus, Augustine, Hume and others. Perhaps it can be established by other principles, e.g. a good being always prevents suffering to innocent children. It might be argued that such principles are synthetically a priori and necessarily true. Strictly speaking, this view does not come within the scope of the present study. It involves questions about the notion of synthetically a priori principles which could only be discussed in a separate study. But since in the chapter on the general problem no fewer than eight principles about goodness

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Nelson Pike, God and Evil, p. 102. Pike also points out in "Hume and Evil", Philosophical Review (1963), reprinted in God and Evil, that Hume overlooks the possibility that God permits evil for a good and justifying purpose.

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M.B. Ahern, The Problem of Evil (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) p.78.

could be proposed as synthetically apriori were held to be false it seems reasonable to believe that satisfactory principles will probably not be found. The question here is noted as a possible non-theist position which the study has not discussed. The study has dealt with problems about logical compatibility raised for theism by evil and claimed that none of them can be shown to be decisive.<sup>10</sup>

This indefinite conclusion has real significance for our study.

Far from containing air-tight solutions to the problem of evil, Christian revelation may very well leave the problem shrouded in mystery as we have seen in chapters 38-42 of Job. If this indefinite conclusion is the best honest Christians can do, it lays open the possibility the evils of this world may be merely apparent. Any teleological theodicy that suggests in the end the prima facie paradox of evil may be shown to be merely apparent would therefore appear to be a candidate of the class of the responses to the problem of evil which are allowed by reason. If one or more of these theodicies at the same time appears to be true, at least in a broad way, to the Christian form of life, then it would appear we have one or more Christian theodicies that are both logically sound and religiously acceptable. If it could be demonstrated one or more of these theodicies was also quite sensitive to the needs and perspective of the individual sufferer, then the task of this thesis would be complete. In the remainder of this chapter I shall attempt to sketch the bare framework of a response to the problem of evil that may well meet these three conditions.

## II.

One way to begin our discussion of a viable Christian response to

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Ibid., pp. 78-79.

the problem of evil is to recall two of the principal flaws in the theodicy developed by John Hick in his Evil and the God of Love. The first of these was that Hick's view of omniscience does not allow for God's knowing future contingent human actions. In chapter two we have demonstrated that by understanding the distinction between necessity de dicto and necessity de re it can be shown that God's knowledge of future free human choices is not logically contradictory. By taking this view of omniscience we may make an important step in developing a teleological theodicy that is true to the conception of God as conceived in classical Christian theism.

We have suggested that the other deficiency in Hick's point of view occurs at a more fundamental level - he seems to deny any central role to Christ in the formulation of his answer to the problem of evil.

Some might suggest the reason Hick spends so little time discussing the role Christ should play in any distinctively Christian response to the problem of evil is that it is clear from the outset any doctrine of the incarnation rests on a number of murky and logically contradictory claims. Consequently, any theodicy which uses as its centrepiece the dual natures of Jesus fails to meet our first criterion for a viable theodicy - logical consistency.<sup>11</sup> These critics might argue further Hick has wisely avoided any central references to the person of

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Cf.: Maurice Wiles' "Christianity Without Incarnation"; Michael Goulder's "Jesus, the Man of Universal Destiny"; Leslie Houlden's "The Creed of Experience"; and Don Cupitt's "The Christ of Christendom", all in The Myth of God Incarnate (London: SCM Press, 1977).

Christ in his theodicy precisely so his position might be numbered among those that are allowed by reason.

There is at least ample circumstantial evidence to be found in The Myth of God Incarnate<sup>12</sup> for the view Hick has very carefully left out any reference to Jesus in Evil and the God of Love because he thinks any traditional view of the incarnation is self-contradictory. Indeed, in the former work Hick argues the orthodox doctrine of Jesus' nature has no clear content and therefore no non-metaphorical interpretation. Hick suggests to say that the historical Jesus was also God is to utter a contradiction as devoid of meaning as to say that a circle is also a square.<sup>13</sup>

If Hick is correct, any answer to the problem of evil that relies heavily on the person of Christ would contain some central elements that were not only prima facie paradoxical, but were genuinely paradoxical and therefore logically incoherent.

I think, however, Hick's perspective is profoundly mistaken for at least two important reasons. First, in a real way Hick throws out the proverbial baby with the bath water. By removing the person of Christ from his theodicy, he ceases to hold a distinctively Christian point of view. Indeed, he has abandoned the Christian form of life altogether. Second, I think it can be successfully argued the doctrine of the incarnation is not a logically inconsistent or incoherent doctrine. In fact, it may well be the one doctrine that gives a special kind of

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Ibid., pp. ix-xi and 167-185.

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Ibid., p. 178f.

coherence to the problem of evil as it is expressed in the Christian form of life. In order to make this claim, however, we must first show the doctrine of the incarnation is a belief that is not prohibited by reason.

In order to develop a satisfactory response to Hick's doubts about the classical conception of the incarnation, we must engage in two different but related tasks: we must get clear, as best we can, on what it means in philosophical terms to say that something is an x, where x is a member of a certain class. Additionally, we must also discern, at least in a broad way, the clearest interpretation of what it means to say that "Jesus was fully human and fully divine". The first task can be completed, I think, in a fairly straight forward manner. Something is an x if and only if that thing possess all the essential properties of x. We mean by an essential property of x one that must be present in order to call that thing an x.<sup>14</sup>

If we keep this analysis of the identity of members of a class in the backs of our minds for a moment, we may proceed in an attempt to answer the question regarding the proper interpretation of "Jesus was fully human and fully divine". Let us begin then with a philosophical interpretation of this phrase:

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I do not mean to minimize the complicated debate on the problem of identity. Often this problem has been answered by fairly abstruse metaphysical concepts such as 'eternal forms', 'substances', and 'essences'. I do not wish to become embroiled in these debates and suggest this simple analysis.

(a) Jesus possessed all the characteristics of men, while at the same time having all the characteristics of God.<sup>15</sup>

(a) will not do as a proper interpretation of "Jesus was fully human and fully divine", for there is clearly a difference between kinds of attributes, be they predicated of man or God. Some men are tall and some are short. Some humans are bald, while others have full heads of hair. It is clear that Jesus could not possess all the characteristics of men, for that would require him to be simultaneously tall and short, bald and hairy, etc.

To solve this problem we might suggest another formulation of what it means to say that Jesus was fully human and fully divine.

(b) Jesus had all the essential attributes of God while at the same time possessing all the indispensable properties of a man.

We have seen an essential property or attribute of x is one that must be present in order to call that thing an x. Now the questions arises: can a being who possesses the essential attributes of God simultaneously possess the essential attributes of human beings? Another way to phrase this question is to ask if a being who is omniscient, omnipotent, omnibenevolent and creator of the universe can at the same time be limited in knowledge, power, etc.?

At first blush it would appear the answer to this question is no.

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Many if not all of the insights for my approach to the philosophical problem of the incarnation have come from chapter 8 of Stephen T. Davis' The Logic and Nature of God (London: Macmillan, 1983).



The Jesus of the New Testament, for example, seems at times to be lacking in knowledge.<sup>16</sup> As MacIntyre has pointed out, when faced with a prima facie paradox two routes are open to us. We can either say that Jesus Christ in some sense had both sets of properties, and thereby reduce discussions of the nature of Jesus to arguments about matters akin to round squares, or we can take what is sometimes referred to as a kenotic approach to the incarnation, and thereby argue that the paradox is merely apparent. In this second point of view it is readily admitted Jesus did not have properties like omniscience, omnipotence, or any other divine attributes inconsistent with being a human being. But at the same time he continued to possess those divine attributes which were consistent with his humanity, and was also capable of regaining in his ascension those essential properties given up. This perspective brings us to a third formulation of the notion that Jesus is fully human and fully divine:

(c) Jesus was in possession of certain essential divine attributes, as well as certain human attributes and there was no logical contradiction between them.

At first this seems like an initially plausible interpretation, but it also suffers from a major flaw. Formulation (c) would be satisfied even if Jesus only possessed say, the attribute of omniscience, but at the same time was deficient in all other divine properties. If this were a proper description of the nature of Jesus he would seem to be inferior, for example, to the God of J.S. Mill. We must once again, therefore, amend the definition of fully human and fully divine to look like this:

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Mark 5:30; 13; 32.

(d) Jesus was in possession of certain divine attributes as well as certain human attributes, and there was no logical contradiction between them. The divine properties were sufficient to make him God, while the human properties were sufficient to make him a man.

But perhaps this new formulation still leaves us with a major difficulty. How could Jesus be truly God if he lacked some essential attribute(s) of the divine. Earlier, we have seen, for example, the Jesus depicted in the New Testament appears not to have been omniscient. In order to answer this difficulty we must make a distinction between what Stephen Davis calls "Jesus simpliciter" and "Jesus as truly God".<sup>17</sup> It would be false to say Jesus had all the divine attributes or was God simpliciter. But the traditional conception of the incarnation does not necessarily imply this.<sup>18</sup> What it does insist, however, is Jesus Christ was truly human and truly God. Another way to put this is to say that during the earthly life of Jesus, he was God as best as he could be revealed in human form.

There are certain things he could not have done unless he were God (forgive sins, for example). And, there were also clearly things he could not have done without a "truly human" nature (die on the cross, worry in the Garden of Gethsemane). But at the same time it is clear that only one person forgave sins and died on the cross.

This brings us to our major response to Hick's suggestion about the incoherence of any traditional doctrine of the incarnation. In

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Stephen Davis, The Logic and Nature of God, p. 128.

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By the traditional conception I mean the formulation of the doctrine brought forth at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D.

the same way that a skilled cricket batsman could choose to play a match from his weaker side of the wicket, so too an omnipotent being could choose to temporarily limit his power so he might truly become human. The same can be said, it seems to me, about omniscience. An omniscient being could choose not to know the truth of certain propositions or a whole range of propositions for that matter.

But another objection might once again be raised at this point. One might grant that an omnipotent being could choose not to exercise his power, but how is it that an omniscient being could abandon the knowledge of the truth of certain propositions, without ceasing to be omniscient? Can a being who is potentially omniscient choose not to know something? At first, this seems like a very peculiar idea, but I see no logical problems with an omniscient being giving up some of his knowledge. In order to understand this is a logical possibility, consider the following example. Suppose person A were to ask person B what the 148th digit of pi happens to be. B, who is quite a good mathematician, nevertheless, finds the question trivial and unimportant. Consequently, he responds to A by saying, "I know what to do in order to discern the answer, but at this point I do not know it, nor do I wish to".

We might say about person B that in a curious kind of way he could both be said to know what the 148th digit of pi is, and at the same time to not know it. The sense in which he does not know it is clear, for if he were told to answer yes or no to the question his response would clearly be no. Yet, at the same time his answer does not do justice to the fact B could know the answer any time he liked.

In a roughly analogous way, the same could be said about Jesus: He was omniscient in the sense that he could have exercised his knowledge of all true propositions at any time, but freely chose to live as a human being without that knowledge. At the same time, there is also a sense in which Jesus could still be said to be omniscient, since in freely choosing to limit his knowledge he still had the potential for omniscience. The first sense of omniscience is sufficient for Jesus to have retained his human nature, while the second sense was sufficient to make him divine.<sup>19</sup>

Still, the notion of kenotic incarnation is not without its critics. Don Cupitt, Maurice Wiles and John Hick, among others, are all highly critical of this approach. Cupitt seems to argue on the basis of three points. First, "kenosis is not a theory designed to account for the facts, but rather about how one can go on believing in the incarnation in a time when the old arguments have broken down".<sup>20</sup> Second, kenosis leads to anthropomorphisms. And third, kenosis leads to an incoherent "triple consciousness in the incarnate Lord".<sup>21</sup>

I find the first of Cupitt's criticisms puzzling for at least three reasons. First, even if Cupitt were correct about the motivation of Christian apologists, and I think he is not,<sup>22</sup> the origin of their

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A similar argument can be given, I think, for the other major attributes.

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Incarnation and Myth, p. 43.

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Ibid., p. 45.

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Cupitt is, I think, mistaken when he implies that the 'invention' of the notion of kenosis has come along recently as a stop-gap measure for giving some meager credibility to a crumbling doctrine of the incarnation. As early as Irenaeus' Against Heresies (iii, II, 3) there

argument would say nothing about the truth or falsity of it, unless Cupitt can show that the genetic fallacy is no longer a fallacy.

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is a suggestion of the possibility that Jesus' divine attributes may have been "quiescent" or "sleeping" during the temptation, crucifixion and death of Jesus. Cyril of Alexandria in Quod Unus Sit Christus (viii, I, 319) formulates a similar possibility when he offers that the Logos "willed to permit human experience to prevail over him". Similar, though admittedly cryptic, remarks may also be found in Gregory of Nyssa's Oratio Catechetica Magna, (XXIV). On the continent, various thinkers in the 19th century Lutheran tradition such as Thomasius in Christi Person und Werk (1853), Godet in his Gospel of St John and Dorner in The Doctrine of the Person of Christ (1861) had suggested by mid-century that Jesus may have depotentiated himself by abandoning his divine attributes for a while. In England, the 19th century congregational divine, A.M. Fairbairn in his Christ in Modern Theology (pp. 470-478) developed a distinction between the "physical" and "ethical" attributes of God, providing the way for subsequent kenotic theorists such as Charles Gore, Frank Weston, H.R. MacKintosh and P.T. Forsyth. Perhaps A.M. Ramsay in From Gore to Temple sums up best the emergence of the kenosis doctrine of the incarnation when he says "that doctrine has sprung from the consideration of the historical data of our Lord's life considered side by side with the belief in His deity. On the one hand the Gospels depict Jesus Christ as living a genuinely human life: He advances in knowledge. He learns, He asks questions as needing to know the answer. He shows ignorance (cf. Mark 13:32). On the other hand, the church worships Him as divine, and reads in the Gospels of His perfect revelation of the Father. How were Christian teachers to express the two aspects of the Incarnation, without allowing the one to override the other. It was one thing to assert the dogma of a perfect Godhead and perfect Manhood coexisting in the one Person. What was more difficult was to teach about the incarnate life without making the humanity seem unreal or the deity seem to be ousted by the human limitations. Inevitably, the problem may be more keenly felt in the modern church with its concern for history than it had been in the ancient church with the concentration upon the framework of dogmatic definition." (London: Longmans Green, 1959), pp. 31-32.

A second reason I find Cupitt's first objection a bit odd is that the way the objection is raised displays a kind of ambiguity in regard to what counts as a "fact". Certainly, we must count Jesus as being a man born in Palestine during the first century as a fact, but are we also to count Jesus' performance of miracles as facts or might we not be better off to see miracles in Wisdom's terms as a certain connecting technique of the facts? A third peculiarity of Cupitt's first criticism is that he seems to be selective in reading the New Testament text. Any ambiguous passages, which might be counted in favor of kenosis are ignored. Consider this example from Phillipians 2:5-8:

His state was divine,  
 yet he did not cling  
 to his equality with God  
 but emptied himself  
 to assume the condition of a slave,  
 and became as men are,  
 he was humbler yet,  
 even to accepting death,  
 death on a cross.<sup>23</sup>

Certainly this passage should not be used as a definitive proof text for kenosis. Nevertheless, it can be used as credible evidence in its support, but Cupitt seems curiously to ignore this and other New Testament passages.

Cupitt's other two objections to kenotic interpretations of the incarnation have been dealt with rather effectively by Brian Hebblethwaite in "The Logical Coherence of the Doctrine of Incarnation".<sup>24</sup> About

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The Jerusalem Bible (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1968).

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in Incarnation and Myth, pp. 60-62.

Cupitt's charge that kenotic theories lead to anthropomorphisms

Hebblethwaite says the following:

These (Cupitt's) objections fail because they themselves depend wholly on what we can imagine anthropomorphically. I notice that anthropomorphisms come from critics who themselves, at least in considering their opponents' views, think only anthropomorphically.<sup>25</sup>

Concerning the criticism kenosis leads to an incoherent triple consciousness for the son of God, Hebblethwaite comments:

It is a travesty to suggest that for kenotic Christology, divinity is predicated of Jesus' humanity. This is certainly to confuse the natures. We predicate divinity of Jesus, because we believe his humanity to be the vehicle and expression of the eternal son. There is no conversion of the Godhead into flesh. To think this is to operate with some crude picture of two kinds of stuff.

Nor is there any reason to postulate three consciousnesses, where God incarnate is concerned. Indeed, it is hard to take such playing around with theological concepts seriously. All we need is Jesus' own sense of filial dependence on the one hand, and God's awareness of his (God's) own acts through incarnation on the other.<sup>26</sup>

Maurice Wiles' criticisms of kenosis are directed primarily at Hebblethwaite's version of the theory. Although Wiles proposes several different lines of attack, one of the most interesting of his objections to Hebblethwaite's view can be found in the following passage:

But Hebblethwaite's argument can be turned on its head, and I am genuinely uncertain which way up it functions better. For if it is logically conceivable (as Hebblethwaite's view of the incarnation insists that it is) for God to be actually identified with a human person without in any way taking away from the full and genuine humanity of that human person, it follows that

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Ibid., p. 61.

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Ibid., p. 60.

God does not, in fact, draw near to us as individual men and women or share our suffering as directly as he apparently could.<sup>27</sup>

Wiles seems to be suggesting that if Hebblethwaite's view of the incarnation is true (and not merely allowed by reason) it would have the unwanted consequence of putting Jesus in a position of not sharing in our suffering as directly as he might have. Although Wiles' point is correct, I'm not sure why this should count as a criticism against Hebblethwaite's view in particular on the concept of kenotic incarnation in general. One might agree with Wiles while at the same time pointing out Jesus had temporarily given up his divine ability to sympathize with us all by taking on his own human suffering as an individual man. It could be said that Jesus had voluntarily given up divine sympathy in favor of a very real human empathy. One might argue that this is not an unwanted consequence by any means.

John Hick's criticisms of kenosis are many and varied. Most of them can be summed up, however, in his claim that if kenosis

is to be put forward as an answer to our problems, it needs to be expounded and discussed at first hand. If there is a viable understanding of incarnation here, let someone lay it on the table.<sup>28</sup>

Although Hick's call for discussion is commendable, we must keep in mind He seems already to have made up his mind about any but the most mythological accounts of the incarnation:

I have suggested that the incarnation motif should in fact be understood as a basic metaphor. If this is right, then the centuries long attempt of

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27

Ibid., pp. 7-8.

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Ibid., p. 50.



Christian orthodoxy to turn the metaphor into metaphysics was a cul-de-sac ...<sup>29</sup>

Later, he concludes:

... the idea of divine incarnation is a basic metaphor, functioning as a religious myth, and that it is a category mistake to try to specify it as a hypothesis of theological science.<sup>30</sup>

Despite an initial Kierkegaardian remark that I must confess to being unable to understand what the expression "theological science" might mean, two general remarks might be made concerning Hick's view of the viability of any orthodox interpretation of the incarnation. The first of these is that he appears to have decided in some kind of apriori way against the possibility of any non-mythological view of the incarnation, be it kenosis or otherwise. And second, anyone who suggests a non-mythological account of the incarnation in Hick's view is making an error by trying to specify the position as a hypothesis of "theological science". I think that Hick is, quite simply, mistaken on both of these points.<sup>31</sup>

I have already suggested in a very general way an interpretation of the expression "Jesus is fully human and fully divine" which I believe is not logically incoherent, nor is it metaphorical. More specifically, I have also suggested that this particular kenotic view of the

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Ibid., pp. 48-49.

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Ibid., p. 49.

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It is of some interest that when Hick does specifically criticize kenotic accounts of the incarnation he concentrates on older versions such as that of Frank Weston in The One Christ (London: Longmans, 1907) and H.R. MacKintosh's The Doctrine of the Person of Christ (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1912).

incarnation is one that is allowed by reason. I will have more to say about this view of kenosis in the following section. Additionally, I will argue in the last part of this chapter that religious assertions like "Jesus is fully human and fully divine" are more than just expressive or evocative utterances, though, as we shall see, they do not function with the same logical status as scientific hypotheses. For the moment, however, let us return to our original chore in this chapter: the amending of John Hick's teleological theodicy. What we have done in the last several pages is to attempt to show that there is nothing logically contradictory about the phrase "Jesus was fully human and fully divine". We may now use this traditional Christological doctrine, with its newer kenotic twist, as the centerpiece for constructing a distinctively Christian response to the problem of evil that at the same time takes the pain of the individual sufferer seriously.

In summarising the second section of this final chapter we might once again call to mind Wisdom's observation that sometimes prima facie paradoxes turn out to be merely apparent, and it is those apparent paradoxes which may be theologically illuminating or "tremendous discoveries". We have suggested Job's "discovery" may have been the possibility of a larger teleological framework in which to view his suffering. In the classical doctrine of the incarnation, as well, we may have one of these "tremendous discoveries". This is by no means a necessary conclusion, but certainly one that is allowed by reason. Let us now, in the third part of this chapter, return to the person of Christ, with an emphasis on his kenotic incarnation, as the foundation of our proposed theodicy.

## III.

In an article entitled, "The Problem of Suffering: A Dialogue", which appeared in the Expository Times, Cyril Rodd makes a remark about the special attitude of the reflective Christian toward the problem of evil: "As a Christian I cannot consider the problem without turning to Jesus".<sup>32</sup>

In his Church Dogmatics IV/1, Karl Barth observes:

What God is and what it is to be divine is something we have to learn where God has revealed Himself and His nature, the essence of the divine. And if He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ as the God who does this, it is not for us to be wiser than He and to say that it is in contradiction with the divine essence. We have to be ready to be taught by Him that we have been too small and perverted in our thinking about Him within the framework of a false idea.<sup>33</sup>

The same spirit is expressed in this passage from The Christian

Life:

As we search for a knowledge of God in the world that is unequivocally achieved both objectively on God's side and subjectively on man's, as we look for a point where his name might be clearly and distinctly hallowed on both sides in and for the world, we can think only of the one Jesus Christ. In him the knowledge of God in the world does not lack either the definitiveness of the objective element, as in the case of the attestation by the Church and Christians, or that of the subjective element, as in the case of the hidden glory of God in his creation. In him the circle closes which elsewhere is disturbingly open on one side or the other.<sup>34</sup>

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Cyril Rodd, "The Problem of Suffering: A Dialogue", Expository Times, (August, 1972) p. 342.

33

Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/1 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1956) p. 60.

34

Karl Barth, The Christian Life (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1981) p. 123.

Although God would have been capable of revealing himself through a dead dog if he wished, the message which the Christian form of life is obligated to proclaim is that God has revealed himself in the person of Jesus Christ. In a real way, in Christ the adherents to Christianity "see God". Consequently, we must attend very carefully to what God has done in Christ in order to answer the question: *Qualis sit Deus?* (What kind of God is this?)

Barth's point of departure is the particular revelation of God in Christ. He sees as "untenably corrupt and pagan" any conferring of general conceptions (such as "absolute in contrast to all that is relative, exalted in contrast to all that is lowly") to God.

Rather, we must learn "to correct our notions of the being of God, to reconstitute them in the light of the fact that he has done this".<sup>35</sup> If we assume Barth's general Christological point of departure we can see in returning to Mackie's premise vii. (There are no limits, other than logical ones, to what an omnipotent being can do.) that this is an inadequate definition of omnipotence for the believing Christian. For Barth, God reveals himself, through Christ, to be a victim of suffering. By following this line of reasoning, Barth broadens our conception of evil to include a distinctively theological element. This added dimension revolutionizes the existential relation between God and humankind, thereby recasting the question of theodicy.

Barth suggests we must reevaluate the meaning of "omnipotence" in

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Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics IV/1 p. 186.

light of the story of Christ, where God has allegedly chosen to reveal himself. If this approach is not used when discussing Christian responses to suffering then we run the risk of denying one of the major tenets of the Christian form of life. Barth seems to understand this point quite clearly when he makes the following remark in The Doctrine of the Word of God:

Theology follows the language of the Church, as far as in its questions as to the correctness of the Church's procedures therein, it measures it, not by a standard foreign to it, but by her very own source and object.<sup>36</sup>

No theologian has reflected more extensively on the relation between the person of Jesus Christ and the concept of God's omnipotence than the 20th century kenoticist, P.T. Forsyth. In his book, The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, Forsyth makes a strong appeal for a kenotic conception of the incarnation as well as what he calls a "moralisation of dogma" in light of the revelation of God in Christ. Seeing Jesus Christ as "holy love" (which is God's essence), Forsyth describes how the divine attribute of omnipotence comes to be moralised:

... God is not God physically but morally, not by power but by love. That is the Christian revelation. The nature of the Godhead is Holy Love. There lies the region, the nature and the norm of his omnipotence. It is no arbitrary or casual omnipotence, which puts out power just for the sake of doing it or showing it. It can do, not everything conceivable to freakish fancy, but everything that is prescribed by Holy Love. To a physical omnipotence it is indifferent. Such being its nature its object with humanity is a kingdom of holy love.<sup>37</sup>

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Karl Barth, The Doctrine of the Word of God (translated by G.T. Thompson) (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clarke, 1936) p. 2.

37

P.T. Forsyth, The Person and the Place of Jesus Christ (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1909) p. 313.

This divine love is revealed to us through the person of Jesus Christ whose love

is not a love which might itself be finite, only with a miraculous physical omnipresence; but it is an almighty love in the sense that it is capable of limiting itself, and, while an end, becoming also a means, to an extent adequate to all love's infinite ends. This renouncing, self-retracting act of the son's will, this reduction of Himself from the supreme end to the supreme means for the soul, is no negation of His nature; it is the opposite, it is the last assertion of His nature as love. It is no negation of His freedom; it is rather the freest energy of His whole will. He never willed something so mightily and freely as the subjective, the renunciation of self-will to the holy requirement of God. It is the concentrated omnipotence of love, and not of mere power, that underlies His earthly existence.<sup>38</sup>

In much the same way we have argued in part two of this chapter, Forsyth suggests that the divine qualities of omniscience and omnipotence were present in Christ, but "He consented not to know, and was mighty not to do". The action of the divine attributes in Christ "was at once reduced, concentrated, intensified within the conditions of the saving work".<sup>39</sup>

Forsyth continues:

The divine qualities were kept, but only in the mode that salvation made necessary. Jesus did not know everything actually, empirically, but only what was needed for the work. But as that is the central final work in human

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Ibid., pp. 313-314.

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Ibid., A.D. Lindsay makes a similar remark in his posthumously published Selected Addresses (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1957). On pp. 67ff. he makes ample use of Kierkegaard: "If we rightly consider omnipotence, then clearly it must have the quality of so taking itself back in this very manifestation of all its powerfulness that the results of this act of the omnipotence can be independent. It is only a miserable and worldly picture of the dialectic of power to say that it becomes greater as it can compel and make things dependent. Socrates knew better: the art of using power is to make free."

nature, the knowledge required for it contains the promise and potency of all knowledge. And, as to the exercise of power, he did what God alone could do in forgiving human sin, a salvation which is a nucleus and germ of all worthy power beside. His knowledge, his power, his presence were all adjusted to his vocation. His vocation was not to apply or exhibit omnipotence, but to effect the will of infinite love, and master all that set itself against that. All that divine vocation was only possible to one who had a divine position. The world's redeemer must be the son of God.<sup>40</sup>

In his essay, "The Manhood of Jesus in the New Testament", C.F.D. Moule stands with those who express an even more radical conception of kenosis. Indeed, he goes well beyond the kenotic point of view of Forsyth who he says

explain(s) the human limitations suffered by the divine Son of God in terms of deliberate act of self-emptying, as though the pre-existent Son of God voluntarily emptied himself of divine perogatives for a time, in order to share to the full the human lot, and resumed his full capacities only after the death on the cross.<sup>41</sup>

Citing the passage in Philippians which I quoted earlier, Moule suggests that Paul points to a "divine paradox which stands every human scale of values on its head", he observes:

I agree with those who interpret harpagmos not, concretely, as "something worth snatching", but, abstractly, as "the act of snatching" (i.e., virtually "acquisitiveness"), and who render the phrase in which it occurs in some such way as: "Jesus did not reckon that equality with God meant snatching: on the contrary, he emptied himself ..."  
This would mean that, whereas ordinary human valuation reckons that God-likeness means having your own way, getting what you want, Jesus saw God-likeness essentially as giving and spending oneself out.<sup>42</sup>

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Forsyth, The Person and Place of Jesus Christ p. 319.

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C.F.D. Moule, "The Manhood of Jesus in the New Testament", Christ, Faith and History, edited by S.W. Sykes and J.P. Clayton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. 96.

42

Ibid., p. 97.

For Moule, it was because Jesus was in the form of God he "recognized equality with God as a matter not of getting but of giving". In this context, "kenosis actually is plenosis"; which means the human limitations of Jesus are seen as a positive expression of his divinity rather than as a curtailment of it.

Kenosis is understood by Moule not just as a negative emptying out but also as a positive fulfilling. He thinks this may teach us something terribly profound about the divine attribute of omnipotence.

Moule notes

It is easily forgotten that the omnipotence of a personal God is exhibited (to quote the collect) 'most chiefly in showing mercy and pity'.<sup>43</sup>

Following Forsyth and Moule, Geddes MacGregor in his book, He Who Lets Us Be, argues for a new vision of God as essentially self-emptying and thus self-fulfilling. MacGregor sees the idea of kenotic power as the most profound and useful insight in the history of Christian thought. He emphasizes the omnipotence of God is not properly to be conceived as the ability of an unrestrained or unfettered deity to do anything and everything. For MacGregor, such a definition of the theistic attributes makes God "seem like an oriental despot twenty feet tall".<sup>44</sup> Rather, he says, divine omnipotence should be understood as it is revealed in Christ, as the creative power of self-sacrificing and self-emptying love.

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. Ibid., p. 98.

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Geddes MacGregor, He Who Lets Us Be (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) p. 72. MacGregor also provides a valuable critical historical survey of the concept "omnipotence" in this text.



MacGregor criticizes philosophers of religion such as Mackie and Flew whose positions indicate an

uncritical acceptance of the traditional way of formulating the character of divine omnipotence as though it were the infinite exercise of a super-sultanic power, and of a radical failure to take seriously enough the theological proposition that God is love.<sup>45</sup>

In his Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought, MacGregor makes the same point:

The modern philosophers who try their hand at restating the old objections with which the problem of evil confronts theism, use as their model what theologians aver about the nature of God and his relation to nature. They do it so properly, of course, since the problems with which they purport to deal arise only in a theological context. They do not usually take into account, however, the whole theological context. It would be pointless apart from the context, preferring to confine themselves rather to certain doctrinal propositions that may be accounted the most easily manageable for logical treatment. In the case of the forms of the argument put forth by Flew and Mackie, the neglect of the rest of the theological picture to which the propositions belong is so conspicuous as to make theologians wonder how they could rest content with a model that is distorted and diminished, a caricature that ludicrously traduces the theological situation in which the problem arises.<sup>46</sup>

Wittgenstein had had much to say on this matter of framing pictures that might be of relevance here. He suggests the disagreement between a philosopher (such as Mackie or Flew) and a theologian (such as Forsyth or MacGregor) on religious issues is not a matter of discovering empirical facts. The disagreement is much more fundamental. What it comes down to is the use of different kinds of pictures - or in some

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Ibid.

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MacGregor, Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought, pp. 167-168.

cases, where the believer uses a certain picture and the unbeliever does not.<sup>47</sup> MacGregor is suggesting Flew and Mackie are willing to accept only a small part of the Christian picture.

John Wisdom is another philosopher who holds the position that disagreements concerning religious matters usually do not involve empirical facts, but rather the picturing of the facts. Wisdom quotes a passage from J.P. Marquand's novel, H.M. Pulham, Esquire, to illustrate how it is possible to have all the items of a pattern and to still miss the pattern. A man confides to a friend that "Kay and I are pretty happy, We've always been happy". But when the skeptical friend challenges this remark, the first man offers an explanation that although he and Kay have had their skirmishes during the marriage, the sum total of the facts of their lives "adds up" to happiness.

Wisdom is quick to point out it is not at all a question of addition, as if one could sit down and tally up a balance sheet. Rather, he suggests, it is a matter of interpreting the marriage or seeing the marriage in a certain way.

Wisdom offers a second example which will make this point about picturing the world a bit clearer. Two friends are engaged in a discussion about a particular character in a story they both have read. One says, "Really, she hated him", but the second protests, "She didn't, she loved him". Both friends have read the entire book. They begin to

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lectures on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), particularly his discussion of the last judgement.

trade information back and forth in case the other has missed a critical point in the story. But alas, they have both read it very carefully. At this point, Wisdom asks a question about what their dispute really involves. The disagreement cannot be about the facts of the story, since they are in full accord as to the actual episodes depicted in the book. The dispute, Wisdom argues, is about their different interpretations or "picture preferences" regarding the facts.<sup>48</sup>

A third example is offered by Wisdom which has become the source of much theological discussion over the last forty years. Two people return to their "long neglected garden". Seeing a number of flowers still growing, one concludes that a gardener has tended the plot in their absence. Concentrating on numerous weeds also growing in the garden, the other concludes the gardener does not exist. After a lengthy investigation, they fail to detect the presence of the gardener. Still, the first person holds fast to his view that the gardener exists, only now his conclusion is that the gardener is invinsible.

At this point in the story Wisdom makes a very perceptive remark. He suggests, as I think Wittgenstein would have been inclined to do,<sup>49</sup> that the two are no longer in disagreement about the facts. Each agrees as to which organic items in the garden can properly be referred to as flowers and which should be called weeds. There is no disagreement

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John Wisdom, "Gods" Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society volume XLV (1944-45) pp. 188ff. Also see Wisdom's Philosophy and Psychoanalysis (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953) pp. 149-159.

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Cf. Donald Hudson's A Philosophical Approach to Religion (London: Macmillan, 1974) particularly chapter 6.

about the facts of the case. Their difference of opinion concerning the presence of the invisible gardener is due, not to a dispute over the facts, but rather to their different picture preferences. Let us label the picture preference of the first person the "garden story". This will be quite instructive when looking at what Anthony Flew has to say in the retelling of Wisdom's tale.

In Flew's version of the story the two people are turned into "explorers who come upon a jungle clearing".<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, Flew still has the first explorer view the clearing, discover the flowers, and proclaim that "some gardener must tend this plot". And, once again, after a series of experiments fail to confirm the assertions of the first, he moves to speak of an invisible gardener. At this point, Flew asks an important question: "What remains of the original assertion?"<sup>51</sup>

But perhaps an even more fundamental question can be raised. Flew's version is perhaps better referred to as the "jungle story". After looking at both versions of the tale, one might ask: how is it that two philosophers start out to tell a story about the same mix of flowers and weeds and one sees the picture of a garden, while the other prefers to see it as a jungle clearing? The answer to this question can be quite illuminating concerning the ways in which different people may view the problem of evil. Some, like Anthony Flew, begin by picturing the world as a series of natural events fraught with blind pain, disease, misfortune, etc. Forsyth and MacGregor, however,

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Anthony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom", pp. 149f.

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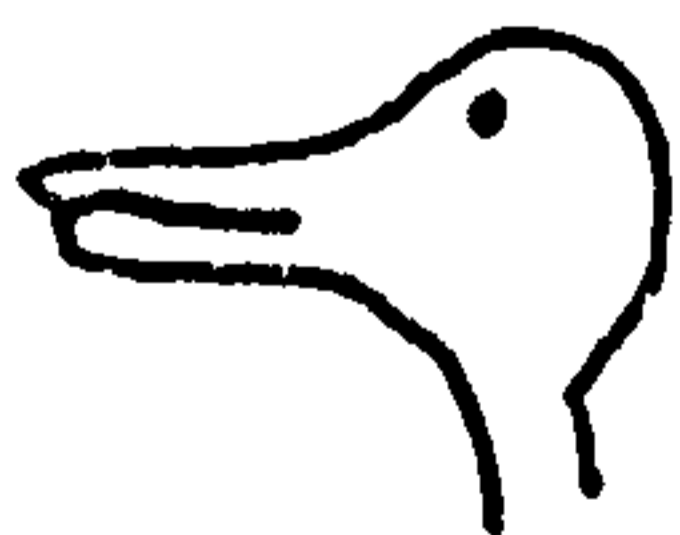
Ibid.

begin by picturing the world containing these evils as coming into existence by the creative power of God. All three men would agree, I think, as to what events and situations in the world count as prima facie evils. Their disagreement arises when they begin to discuss the ultimate meaning of that prima facie evil. Flew, of course, would suggest that the prima facie evil in reality is actual evil, while Forsyth and MacGregor would insist that it is merely apparent. Clearly, their dispute is not about the "facts" of the world, it has to do with the interpretation of the world as a whole, a picturing of the world which goes beyond or lies behind the facts.

It is important to understand in these examples of Wisdom's he is not advocating religious belief. What he is suggesting is that given ambiguous "facts" different picture preferences are possible.

Wittgenstein's use of the duck-rabbit example is designed for the same purpose. Because the facts may be read in more than one way, we may come to the picture illustrated below<sup>52</sup> with the notion of "seeing" a duck. Indeed, if we come with that notion, then a duck will appear before our eyes. Conversely, we will find a rabbit if we are ready to see a rabbit. With a genuinely ambiguous picture like the duck-rabbit, we simply "see it as" one or the other. In order to change to the other perspective, Donald Hudson argues,<sup>53</sup> a certain kind of

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Cf. The Philosophical Investigations part II, section xi.

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Donald Hudson, A Philosophical Approach to Religion, pp. 148-150.

conversion must take place, though the "facts" of the picture do not change. What can be said about the duck-rabbit can also be said about the garden-jungle clearing, and, it seems to me, by extension to picturing the world as a whole. We may either come to picture the world as created by an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God, or, in the case of Flew and Mackie, as a closed physical system which had no beginning and perhaps no end.

Although Wisdom is not advocating religious belief, what he does recommend, is that

We must not forthwith assume that there is no right and wrong about it (picture references), no rationality or irrationality, no appropriateness or inappropriateness, no procedure which tends to settle it, nor even that this procedure is in no sense a discovery of new facts.<sup>54</sup>

Indeed, the kind of "connecting technique" suggested by Wisdom has been used in discussions of works of art for some time. There are, for example, many different interpretations of Shakespeare's "Hamlet". Some argue that the young Hamlet is hopelessly mad throughout most of the play, others that he has crafted his craziness in order to catch his father's murderers. No new lines may be added to the play to decide the dispute. It can only be arbitrated by making reference to what is already there. The best interpretations of the play, Wisdom would most surely suggest, are those that do the best job of connecting the known facts. It would be absurd and unreasonable, for example, to argue that Hamlet should be played as a comedy or a farce. For much the same

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John Wisdom, "Gods", p. 197.

reasons, it would be ludicrous to propose that the duck-rabbit picture was in fact a profile depiction of Ronald Reagan's head. Preferred connections, in Wisdom's view, are those that best accommodate the available evidence.<sup>55</sup>

One way to appreciate this point about the logical consistency of picture preferences or "preferred connections" is to say it is simply another way of referring to our first criterion of a viable Christian theodicy. Does a particular "picture" present a logically consistent view? Do all of its parts fit in an organic whole? How does it answer challenges to internal consistency?<sup>56</sup>

If we return to our discussion of the concept of God's omnipotence within the context of the Christian picturing of things, the importance of this digression should be clear. Anthony Flew in his "Theology and Falsification", insists on his particular picturing of the concept of omnipotence, indeed, of his picturing of the world as a whole. In the process, he ignores the possibility suggested by Wisdom in the beginning of this chapter that certain concepts used in the religions of paradox may be only apparently contradictory. We might also criticize Flew on the front suggested by MacGregor. He seems to be unable to see the larger Christian form of life in which the classical attributes of God

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This is one of the major points that sets Wisdom's view off as different from R.M. Hare's "bliks". Cf. The latter's contribution to "Theology and Falsification" in Flew and MacIntyre's New Essays in Philosophical Theology.

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These criteria do not push one in the direction of coherence theories of truth I shall try to show in the final section of this chapter.

find their home. Flew fixes on those elements of the theological problem of evil which are most amenable to logical analysis, but at the same time neglects some of the logical possibilities - possibilities which are fundamental to any Christian answer to the problem of evil.

So far in this final chapter we have attempted to accomplish a number of tasks. First, we have tried to show none of the theodicies we have analyzed thus far has been able to pass at the bar of our three criteria for a viable Christian response to the problem of evil. Along the way, we also proposed that Mackie has overstated his case when he argues in effect all answers to the problem of evil which adhere to the traditional Christian conception of God are prohibited by reason. After making these remarks about Mackie, we then went on to show John Hick's teleological theodicy might become a viable Christian response to the problem of evil if we were to adjust his conception of omniscience, as well as making a central place for the person of Christ in his teleological answer.

Next, we attempted to show that Hick's reticence in discussing the role Christ might play in Christian theodicy is probably couched in his belief that any non-mythological account of the incarnation is logically contradictory. By entertaining various non-metaphorical formulations of what it means to say that Jesus is "fully human and fully divine", and finally settling on one which we have shown is allowed by reason, we have attempted to demonstrate that Hick is incorrect about the possibility of a coherent doctrine of the incarnation.

As we have seen, the view shown to be one that is allowed by reason is associated with a family of approaches to the doctrine of the



incarnation which are often called "kenotic". After entertaining various criticisms of kenosis offered by Hick, Wiles and Cupitt, we further explicated the notion of kenosis with insights provided by Barth, Forsyth, Moule and MacGregor.

A comment of MacGregor's led us to a discussion of the notion of "picturing" facts. With the help of Wittgenstein and Wisdom we have suggested the difference between philosophers such as Flew and Mackie and theologians like Forsyth or MacGregor is not in terms of "facts", but, in Wisdom's words, different "connecting techniques".

In the section which is to follow we must continue our task of constructing a viable Christian theodicy. This will be done by first making some remarks regarding our third criterion, the requirement that any viable Christian theodicy must take the individual sufferer seriously. We will be concerned with showing how the story of Christ might serve to confirm the importance of understanding the practical reality of suffering. Additionally, we will also more fully explicate the particulars of the teleological Christian theodicy we are proposing.

Finally, in the last section of this thesis we will attempt to grapple with a host of questions related to why we should believe this theodicy in particular or the message of the Christian faith in general. What justification can be given for holding religious assertions? The answer to this question is clearly related to a number of vexing issues about foundational principles, the logical status of religious propositions, and the rationality of religious beliefs.

#### IV.

We have made some very general remarks about a Christo-centric

answer to the problem of evil which is both logically consistent and true, in a broad way, to the Christian form of life. For the next several pages, we must now make some remarks concerning just how the story of Christ might confirm what has already been said in previous chapters about the importance of understanding the practical reality of suffering. Once again, in order to do this, we must return to the person of Jesus Christ in whom God himself became a victim of suffering.

It would be difficult to think of anyone who has reflected more profoundly on the problem of evil in the context of the New Testament than D.M. MacKinnon. In his Borderlands of Theology, he openly criticizes the "convention of Christian practice" which allows the Gospel narratives about Jesus to be read

as if they were oriented toward a happy ending, as if the resurrection faith which gave them birth was powerful to obliterate memory of the sombre events which they describe.<sup>57</sup>

MacKinnon acknowledges that the Gospels are expressions of the Easter faith, but he also lingers on the practical reality of suffering which is so evident in the Gospel accounts of the life and death of Jesus. On the Gethsemane narratives, for example, MacKinnon says the following:

If I am honest, I think that I must say that I should cease to believe altogether unless I believed that Jesus had indeed prayed that the hour might pass from him, had indeed been left alone to face the reality of absolute failure. It is fashionable nowadays to speak of Christ as victor, as if the agony and the disillusion, the sheer monstrous reality of physical and spiritual suffering

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D.M. MacKinnon, Borderlands of Theology (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippencott, 1968) p. 101.

which he bore were a kind of charade. The idiom of a superficial cosmic optimism, often expressing itself ritually in patterns of liturgical symbolism, is currently fashionable, as if a world that knows, as ours does, extremities of terror as well as hope, could be consoled by a remote metaphysical chatter. But the Gospels, including that of John which does not chronicle the episode of Gethsemane, recall our imaginations to a figure prostrate on the earth, afraid and desolate, bidding men and women see in him the ground of all creation.<sup>58</sup>

Even in the fourth gospel, MacKinnon reports, Jesus is properly seen as a victim of suffering. Before the author of John "reminds his readers that the Word through whom all things take their origin became flesh he insists that the word so came among his own he was rejected".

MacKinnon:

Yet behind the language of the prologue something more can be discerned, something whose appeal is universal, even if the appeal is grounded in the author's appraisal of the One concerning whom he writes. In these verses the reader finds himself raised to a level that is beyond optimism and pessimism, as one usually understands those two contrasted attitudes. The author is sure that the ground of the world is itself good; he is sure of this because he identifies the ground with what men have heard and seen in Jesus; yet, Jesus was rejected, and his glory was most fully revealed when he was lifted up from the earth upon a Roman gallows.<sup>59</sup>

MacKinnon sees in the incarnation that God in Christ takes on a "contingency so sheer and unequivocal that inevitably at all levels we shrink from it, preferring necessary absolutes whether abstract values, or institutions, or even spiritual experiences".<sup>60</sup> But the realization that there is no escape from contingency with Christ is

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Ibid., p. 92.

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Ibid., p. 90.

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Ibid., p. 81.

especially evident in the "supremely revealing and supremely authoritative moment in human history" when the son of God, the ultimate victim of suffering, cries upon the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" In this cry of dereliction

It was made plain that the Son of God's acceptance of the ultimate triviality and failure of human existence, whose depths at the moment he finally plumbed, the whole language of perplexity, uncertainty, bewilderment, hopelessness and pain, even of God-forsakenness, was laid hold of and given a sense by the very God himself and converted into the way of his reconciling the world unto himself.<sup>61</sup>

We will talk more about this reconciliation in a moment; What is important now, however, is to attend to a subtle point made by Professor MacKinnon. If Jesus was the son of God, and if sub specie aeterni and sub specie crucis are in some sense the same perspective, then the rejection and crucifixion of Jesus can only be "evil itself".

MacKinnon agrees with Barth in seeing the figure of Judas Iscariot "as where the problem of evil is raised with archetypal and definitive seriousness", for there is God's actual engagement with the issue. For MacKinnon, the problem of evil, in its ultimate sense, must not be seen "apart from, but in terms of, the betrayal and rejection of Christ".<sup>62</sup>

What is one to say about this "evil itself" of which God in Christ becomes the victim? Certainly this evil was no mere illusion, deprivation of good, nor deserved punishment for sin. The agony and passion of Christ was not deleted by a later interpretation, right or wrong, that his

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Ibid.

62

Ibid., p. 67.

suffering and death was an occasion, indeed the occasion for good. In the Gospel accounts, as MacKinnon so skillfully points out, the evil and the good of Christ's fate are simply juxtaposed:

There is no solution offered ... of the riddle of Iscariot through whose agency the son of man goes his appointed way. It were good for him that he had not been born. The problem is stated; it is left unresolved, and we are presented with the likeness of the one who bore its ultimate burden, and bore it to the end, refusing the trick of bloodless victory to which the scoffers, who invited him to descend from the cross, were surely inviting him.<sup>63</sup>

Finally, we see in the account of Christ's death that even the Father's sympathy with the son as he cried out those last words from the cross could not alter the dreadful reality of Christ's suffering. In an analogous kind of way, perhaps the same can be said about our suffering as well. What can also be said, without contradiction, about our suffering, is that through the person of Christ we have more than a sympathetic response to our plight, we have in him a real, human empathetic attitude to our suffering. In the crucifixion of Christ the plight of the individual sufferer is understood most poignantly.

But it must also be emphasized that in Christ's suffering we see not only the practical reality of evil in all its graphic horror, we may also perceive a widening of its reference. Earlier in this thesis we saw that Hick defines evil as that "which we dislike, shun and avoid". But if the story of God suffering in Christ is accepted as true, a new dimension or context to the practical reality of evil must be understood:

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Ibid., pp. 92-93.

ultimate evil must be that which opposes God and his will. That which is an affront to God is that which is finally evil. If we comprehend this point on an existential level one is led directly to the concept of sin, a distinctively theological concept which defines people as out of relationship with God. Sin cuts people off from the revolutionizing existential relationship between God and human kind accomplished in Jesus Christ.

Earlier, in our remarks about Job in chapter four, we discussed the existential relationship which is produced by an awareness of the ontological gulf between God and humankind that radically alters the context of doing theodicy. Here we shall examine how, given the notion that God and people are reconciled in Christ, the task of justifying God cannot be seen apart from the work of Christ. We shall use some insights gained from P.T. Forsyth's The Justification of God to help us accomplish that task.<sup>64</sup>

No theologian, past or present, has taken the perspective of the victim of suffering as seriously as Forsyth. He writes during the height of the great war as a person who has "witnessed the lid coming off hell". But while he affirms evil's "bloody and tortured stream", he clings fast to an interpretation of the saving work of Christ and discovers that only at the cross can an adequate theodicy be constructed. In The Justification of God Forsyth develops a theodicy that he hopes will not only be helpful to the Church at large, but also to suffering soldiers in the trenches.

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P.T. Forsyth, The Justification of God (London: Latimer House, 1948).

Forsyth sees the war as "making at least one contribution to human salvation - it is sin's apocalypse".<sup>65</sup> The war came as such a shock because people had forgotten the heinous acts of which people are capable. John Hick in discussing Forsyth's theodicy, suggests that he "brought teleological theodicy back to reality, both divine and human".<sup>66</sup> In Forsyth's view, the evolutionary perspective that tended to view mankind as continually developing and advancing in knowledge, goodness and spirituality, had led to a gross underestimation of humankind's capacity to do evil. A kind of evolutionary optimism, Forsyth believed, has also led to an inadequate conception of God. Forsyth suggests that in the period immediately preceding the war the divine was seen as "a tender God, in no sense judge, ... an attractive God, more kindly than holy, more lovely than good".<sup>67</sup> He argues that the evil of that particular war had begun to correct these misconceptions and force a new context for theodicy:

What is it that would justify God to you? You have grown up in an age that has not yet got over the delight of having discovered in evolution the key to creation. You saw the long expanding series broadening to the perfect day. You saw it foreshortened in the long perspective, peak rising on peak, each successfully catching the ascending sun. The dark valley, antres vast, and deserts horrible, you did not see. They were crumpled in the tract of time, and folded away from sight. The roaring rivers and thunders, the convulsions and voices, the awful conflicts latent in nature's ascent and man's - you could pass these over in the sweep of your glance ... But now you have been

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Ibid., p. 19.

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Hick, Evil and the God of Love, p. 249.

67

Forsyth, Justification of God, p. 35.

flung into one of those awful valleys. You taste what it has cost, thousands of times over, to pass from range to range of those illuminated heights. You are in bloody, monstrous and deadly dark ... Every aesthetic view is blotted out by human wickedness and suffering. The air is as red as the rains of hell. The rocks you stood on fall on you ...<sup>68</sup>

In the sixty years since Forsyth's death, we have seen German death camps, Stalin's purges, the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, tragic wars in Korea and Vietnam, and other heinous acts of people done to people too numerous to mention. His suggestion about the need for a new context for understanding the problem of evil is today clearly just as appropriate:

We are bidden to recognize that God's demand on man takes the lead of man's demand on God. And both are overruled by God's demand on God. God's meeting his own demands. And we learn unwillingly that only God's justification of man gives the secret of man's justification of God ... In a word, there is but one theodicy, and it is evangelical.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast to the discredited evolutionary optimism, Forsyth sees Christianity finding its hopes not in the order of this world:

The world's convulsions, therefore, need not destroy it. Rather, it rose from the sharpest cries, the greatest war, the deadliest death, and the deepest grave the world ever knew - in Christ's cross.<sup>70</sup>

In this context a

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68  
Ibid., p. 159.

69  
Ibid., p. vi.

70  
Ibid., p. 57.



religious and theological theodicy in our only refuge ... The only vindicator of God is God. And his own theodicy is the cross of his son Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Forsyth further elaborates the dynamics of his theodicy:

The world does not ask the question as it is put by the Church. The Church, starting from the Holy One, asks how man shall be just with that God, and she owes her existence to the answer in Christ's cross and Gospel. But the world, with its egoist start, asks how God shall be just with man. The one brings man to God's bar, the other brings God to man's. Christ deals with both. The first question he answers with God's free justification of man, the second question he makes us recast. He does not bring God to man's bar but to God's own, since there is none greater. He brings God's providence to the bar of God's own promise. His own Gospel. He attunes it to God's own conscience, His own nature; he embodies the self-justification of God.<sup>72</sup>

Forsyth insists that the only possible kind of theodicy in the Christian tradition is "an adequate atonement".<sup>73</sup> For him the justification of God is not a philosophical, nor even a systematic, answer. It is a religious one, and, above all, a practical one. God thought it best not to put thought about the problem of evil on a new line, but rather to place "the thinker in a new life".<sup>74</sup>

The final theodicy is in no discovered system, no revealed plan, but in effective redemption. It is not in the grasp of ideas, nor in the adjustment of events, but in the destruction of guilt and taking away the sin of the world ... It is not really an

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71  
Ibid., p. vi.

72  
Ibid., p. 130.

73  
Ibid., p. 167.

74  
Ibid., p. 139.

answer to a riddle but a victory in a battle ... We do not see the answer; we trust the Answerer, and measure by Him. We do not gain the victory; we are united with the victor.<sup>75</sup>

Forsyth argues very forcefully that the Christian experience places the believer in a new perspective, a new picture of the world, if you will, wherein one's own suffering comes to be seen as less than ultimate given God's own suffering in Christ. The context of theodicy is radically shifted as the center is altered from the justification of God to the existential relation between God and humankind, radically altered through Christ's victory over sin and evil.

It is of interest that Forsyth goes on to develop a teleological theodicy, which, we have attempted to show earlier in this chapter, is one of the few members of the class of responses to the problem of evil that are allowed by reason. Forsyth suggests that "all things will work together for the good". But his teleological response is not based on a shallow optimism about world history. It must be grounded in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ, evil cannot be seen as an occasion for good. Forsyth's position differs from Hick's in a radical way. Hick believes that any discussion of the incarnation of Christ must be undertaken with the realization in mind that all such references are metaphorical, while Forsyth literally makes the dual natures of Jesus the centerpiece for the construction of his response to the problem of evil. The importance of Christ as the focal point in Christian

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Ibid., p. 53.

theodicy is also clearly expressed by D.M. MacKinnon. Indeed, MacKinnon suggests that the notion of a teleological answer to the problem of evil, at least within the Christian form of life, cannot be understood any other way:

Such concepts as reconciliation, and the overcoming of evil by good, are to be interpreted in terms of the opus operatum of the ministry of Jesus, and not vice-versa.<sup>76</sup>

Oliver Quick is another writer who insists that teleological theodicy is impotent outside the context of the cross. He says:

All attempts to deal with the problem of evil, which are not grounded upon the power of the self-sacrifice of love, inevitably leave the evil unredeemed in the end. The Gospel of the cross enables us to see very dimly, as in a mirror, how all this mixed good and evil of our space and time may by its passing away be instrumental to fulfilling the goodness of an eternal world which is already in some partial sense expressed and embodied within it.<sup>77</sup>

Forsyth sees the divine destiny of the world as "not simply revealed in Christ, but secured in him". In the final analysis, he argues for a salvation where all souls might "come to the fulness and quality of the universal and eternal Christ".<sup>78</sup> For Forsyth, the redemptive possibilities go beyond death until all are brought in - "the worst and most intractable lost - since freedom may not be forced".<sup>79</sup> As Forsyth comments, "there is eternity to do it in".<sup>80</sup>

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D.M. MacKinnon, Borderlands of Theology, p. 70.

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Oliver Quick, The Christian Sacraments (London: Nisbet and Co., 1927) p. 82.

78

P.T. Forsyth, The Justification of God, p. 166.

79

Ibid.

80

Ibid.

Still, it is quite possible that the victim of suffering might wish to raise some objections concerning Forsyth's point of view. The sufferer might ask why God did not create people without free will, or, perhaps as Mackie has suggested, as agents who always freely choose the good? If God possesses the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnibenevolence, why should there be evil at all? Forsyth begins to respond by pointing out

It is easy to set up an expectation and call on God to comply. It is so easy to frame some high priori way, and pitch our demand accordingly, as to what God would do. It is not so easy to ask what God has done, penetrate it, and accept His own account of His way of doing it.<sup>81</sup>

Again Forsyth observes:

We create difficulties for ourselves, I say, by our wrong start, by expectations formed at other sources than God's own account of His profound and supreme way.<sup>82</sup>

The victim of suffering might still be tempted, like Dostoyevski's Ivan Karamazov, to "stumble at the cost" of the future order. But Forsyth was not unaware of this kind of criticism. Indeed, he raises the sufferer's complaint in a series of interrogatories:

Why such a dreadful and ineffable suffering along the whole course, suffering both of those taken and those left? Why does it cost so much at every stage ...?<sup>83</sup>

To answer these questions, Forsyth once again brings us back to the cross of Christ. He contrasts the suffering of man with the deeper pain

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81

Ibid., p. 163-164.

82

Ibid., p. 168.

83

Ibid.

provoked by God's conquest of evil in Christ. Forsyth seems to be replying on behalf of the divine, but he insists that ultimately it is also the perspective of the sufferer which merits his attention:

Do you stumble at the cost? It has cost me more than you - Me who sees and feels it all more than you who feel it but as atoms might. "Groanings and moanings, none of it I lose". Yea, it has cost me more than if the price paid were all mankind. For it cost me my only and beloved son to justify my name of righteousness, and to realize the destiny of my creatures in holy love. And all mankind is not so great and dear to me as he. Nor is its suffering the enormity in a moral world that his cross is. I am no spectator in the course of things, and no spectator on the result. I spared my own son. We carried the load that crushes you. It bowed him to the ground. On the third day he rose with a new creation in his hand, and a regenerate world, and all things working together for good to love and holy purpose in love. And what he did I did.<sup>84</sup>

But the skeptic might still ask about the specifics by which all of this will be accomplished. Forsyth has doubts that we can know what the exact contours of God's plan for salvation might be:

This you know not now ... Be still and know that I am God whose mercy is as his majesty, and his omnipotence is chiefly in forgiving and redeeming, and settling all souls in worship of the temple of a new heaven and earth full of holiness. In that day the anguish will be forgotten for joy that a new humanity is born into the world.<sup>85</sup>

It is important to notice that Forsyth insists that the suffering of this world will be "forgotten for joy", not repaired. "Heaven does not laugh loud but it laughs last - when all the world will laugh in its

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Ibid., p. 169.

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Ibid., p. 215.

light."<sup>86</sup> Forsyth is also careful not to couch his point of view in the language of verification, eschatological or otherwise. He is content to make a suggestion: because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

The evil world will not win at last, it failed to win at the only time it ever could. It is a vanquished world where men play their devilries. Christ has overcome it. It can make tribulation, but desolation it can never make.<sup>87</sup>

All of the criticisms of Forsyth's kenotic theodicy we have mentioned in the last few pages has been voiced from the standpoint of the religious skeptic. But there had also arisen among his theological contemporaries a number of objections to his point of view which also deserve some discussion.

Some of the clearest and what many suggest are the most significant criticisms of Forsyth come from William Temple in his Christus Veritas.<sup>88</sup> In that work, Temple, who for many years was the Bishop of Manchester, seems to stress at least two major objections to Forsyth's kenotic position. The first of these can be seen in the following quotation:

The difficulties are intolerable. What was happening to the rest of the universe during the period of our Lord's earthly life? To say that the infant Jesus was from his cradle exercising providential government over it all is certainly monstrous; but to deny this,

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86

Ibid., p. 232.

87

Ibid., p. 169.

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William Temple, Christus Veritas (London: Longmans, 1924). Other criticisms of kenotic doctrines can be found in D.M. Baillie, God Was in Christ (London: Faber and Faber, 1948) pp. 94-98; E.L. Mascall, Theology and the Gospel of Christ (London: SPCK, 1978); and in various places in C.R. Fairweather and F.W. Beare, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians (London: A. and C. Black, 1959) particularly their comments on 2:5-8.

and to say that the Creative Word was so self-emptied as to have no being except in the Infant Jesus, is to assert that for a certain period the world was let loose from the control of the creative Word, and 'apart from Him' very nearly everything happened that happened at all during those thirty odd years, both on this planet, and throughout the immensities of space.<sup>89</sup>

The second of his criticisms follows the passage cited above.

Temple suggests that the idea of kenosis makes the period of Jesus' earthly life look like an episode in the life of the Word. But since the Word is eternal there can be no episodes in his life.<sup>90</sup> Because of these two major shortcomings, Temple suggests an alternative view of the incarnation:

All these difficulties are avoided if we suppose that God the Son did most truly live the life recorded in the Gospel, but added to this the other work of God.<sup>91</sup> There are indications that this is the Johannine view.

Earlier in chapter two we have suggested that God, in fact, is in time, but a time which stretches eternally in both directions. Thus, it makes perfectly good sense to speak of "episodes in the life of the word". Additionally, in the first of these criticisms Temple seems to ignore the possibility that the "providential government" of the universe during the time Jesus was on earth was being carried on quite adequately by the Father and the Spirit. In order to hold this view, of course, we would have to be able to show that the concept of the trinity is such that

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Ibid., pp. 142-143.

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Ibid., p. 143.

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Ibid.

three distinct persons in one God is not a logically contradictory notion. Although I will not argue that position here, I will mention that W.L. Power in his article, "Symbolic Logic and the Doctrine of the Trinity", has, I think, demonstrated satisfactorily that the prima facie paradox of the trinity may be only apparent.<sup>92</sup>

Temple's second objection also would only seem to hold for a position that sees God as "timeless" or "outside of time". Since I have argued earlier that the proper interpretation of God's eternity is "infinite duration in time" this criticism does not hold for my view. Forsyth's view of God's relation to time is not clearly spelled out, and consequently Temple may be entirely correct in his second criticism of Forsyth. But we need not hold Forsyth's view of God's relation to time and thus can escape Temple's second objection.

It must also be added at this point that the alternative view of the incarnation suggested by Temple may present us with its own set of difficulties. Quick has pointed out, for example, that the "addition" of human experiences to the life of the divine Word itself may imply the addition of its own peculiar set of limitations.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, it might also be argued that Temple's view does succumb to one of Cupitt's criticisms - that it involves a doctrine of two consciousnesses. Ironically, this problem could be solved if the kenotic principle were

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W.L. Power, "Symbolic Logic and the Doctrine of the Trinity", The Iliff Review vol. XXXII no. 1 (Winter, 1975).

93

Oliver Quick, Doctrines of the Creed, pp. 136-139.



applied.

One final kind of negative comment about the kenotic theodicy of Forsyth might be voiced from those of the Mackie and Flew persuasion or indeed even from the believing theist. These critics might concede, after some argument, that the position we have been describing here is a logically possible state of affairs. But they might still ask why we should believe it. The answer to this important question is bound up, I think, with a host of other questions about the logical status of foundation principles, the rationality of religious beliefs, and more particularly about the justification of religious assertions like those expressed by Forsyth about the problem of evil. In the remaining portion of this chapter we will attempt to answer these questions through the use of some insights once again provided by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his On Certainty, as well as some observations suggested by John Wisdom.

V.

Since the time of Augustine, and probably much earlier, there has existed a certain ubiquitous view about the logical status of religious propositions. It has been popular among believers and nonbelievers alike to view religious assertions as empirical hypotheses. Since the time of Hume and Kant, and their arguments against the philosophical proofs, it has been thought by most philosophers that it is wise to confine religious assertions to matters of belief, since we are not now in a position to know if they are true. In this widely held view, religious assertions like those made by Forsyth regarding the problem of evil look like "hypotheses" - uncertain statements whose truth or falsity might be known in principle, if not in practice, by the gathering together of

some set of relevant facts. As this view goes, until the facts are in we cannot ascertain the truth of any given religious proposition, and so it must remain a hypothesis.

In this view, the only real difference between religious propositions and other kinds of beliefs is that it seems so difficult to gather together the right set of facts so that our religious hypotheses might be upgraded to the level of truth. Treating religious propositions as hypotheses gives us the image of someone who waits by his mailbox for a report from the committee studying the Shroud of Turin, so that his religious hypotheses might finally be confirmed. Certainly, John Hick has committed himself to the "hypotheses view", albeit a sophisticated version, by suggesting his criterion of eschatological verification.

There are, nevertheless, two major problems with the notion of religious propositions as hypotheses. First, many faithful practitioners of Christianity show little tentativeness in their adherence to religious teachings, despite how difficult it might be to justify these assertions on empirical grounds. And second, the role religious assertions play in the thought and lives of believers, as well as the believers facility for connecting the facts, may be more germane to questions about their credibility than any other kind of criteria that could be applied.

What I shall argue here, with the help of some insights from Wittgenstein, is that the major propositions on which Forsyth's theodicy are built need not be construed as hypotheses at all. Indeed, it is probably much closer to their use to refer to them as "'truths' to live by" or "foundational principles". These kinds of 'truths' tend to prove themselves in their use, not by being tested by some empirical method.

If this could be established then it would seem that the regulative function of religious assertions might be their most distinctive logical feature, though I will not suggest that religious assertions have no objective referents. However, it may well be that the power of a certain body of beliefs to change a person's life may have more to do with the resolution of doubt than the proportioning of belief to the available evidence.

The real trouble arises for a view like Forsyth's when we realise that in order to conform to a particular body of religious assertions we must first have a prior belief that the body of religious assertions is true. In a real way, the practical use these beliefs acquire as "'truths' to live by" doesn't solve the problem of their truth status, it only confounds it. This sometimes makes the tendency to view religious assertions as hypotheses very captivating. Most people, including a good many philosophers and theologians, are attracted to the notion that religious assertions must first "prove" themselves as truth claims before they may properly be labelled as "truths to live by". They must have a logical status like every other truth claim, or so these people argue. And it is precisely at this point that we shall introduce Wittgenstein.

In his book, On Certainty<sup>94</sup>, Wittgenstein suggests that some beliefs lie so deeply engrained in our thinking that it would make little sense to doubt them. They neither need nor allow the kind of justification we

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1977)  
On Certainty is indexed by Manorie Clay in Philosophical Investigations  
 vol. 2 (1979) pp. 66-84.

ordinarily require of hypotheses which are offered as truth claims. Wittgenstein suggests that reasonable people, nevertheless, take these kinds of beliefs, which he calls "certainties", for granted. They have this status, not because they have been empirically verified, but because with these assertions believing and behaving come together. The reasonableness of certainties is not a function of evidence, rather it is because thinking and acting in the world entail conforming to these certainties.<sup>95</sup>

Before discussing what relevance Wittgenstein's On Certainty may have for religious assertions like those of Forsyth's, we must make a distinction between different kinds of certainties - a distinction which Wittgenstein himself does not seem to make. We might label the first kind of certainty "paradigmatic" and the second "foundational". Examples of paradigmatic certainties are 'I have two hands', or 'My name is Stephen Vicchio'. These propositions have the status of certainties by virtue of the role they play in a particular language game or set of language games to which we seem to adhere. This role can be understood as having two separate but related elements. First, Wittgenstein believed, if a paradigmatic certainty were to turn out to be false, it would have such repercussions throughout the language game or set of language games, that the survival of that language game or set of language games would be

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Ibid., 246, 341-344.

put in question.<sup>96</sup> And second, if the context in which that paradigmatic certainty is placed were to change, it could, with very little trouble to the language game as a whole, cease to be a certainty.

Thus, if in ordinary circumstances G.E. Moore stands before an audience of philosophers and declares, while looking at his wiggling fingers, that he has two hands, it would most assuredly count as what we have called a paradigmatic certainty. The falsity of the proposition 'G.E. Moore has two hands', given the context mentioned above, would prove to be problematical for a whole network of propositions related to it such that the whole language game in which it was placed might be called into question.

But consider what happens if we change the context to the morning following a terrible automobile accident in which G.E. Moore has been involved. Now, when visiting Professor Moore in his hospital room we might very well look down at his bandaged limbs and say, "I wonder if G.E. Moore has two hands". Clearly the change of context also changes the proposition 'G.E. Moore has two hands' from a paradigmatic certainty to an empirical proposition whose truth is now in doubt.

The other kind of certainty, what I have labelled "foundational" certainties, can be characterized by propositions like "There are physical objects", and "the earth has existed in the past". This type differs from the paradigmatic certainties in that the first type are

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This distinction, in slightly different form, has been raised by Professor C. Wright of the St Andrews' University Department of Logic and Metaphysics, in his spring, 1984 seminar on On Certainty. It can also be found in T. Morawetz's Wittgenstein and Knowledge: The Importance of 'On Certainty' (Amherst: University of Mass. Press, 1978) pp. 12-13.

indubitable statements within the language game, whereas the second type specify the formal conditions of the language game being played at all. Foundational certainties, then, are distinct from paradigmatic certainties because the latter are context dependent and therefore contingently true, while the former are held to be the case regardless of any context within that particular language game in which they may be placed.

One could perhaps argue that the denial of one or more of the paradigmatic certainties would not throw the language game "entirely off the rails" as Wittgenstein puts it. Language games and forms of life may be more flexible than Wittgenstein's account in On Certainty seems to suppose. But the denial of any of the foundational certainties must bring the language game to a halt. Since foundational certainties express the formal presuppositions of the language game, if any of them are denied, the underpinning of the language game itself comes apart.

In the case of paradigmatic certainties, a change in context or the development of new empirical evidence might count against their believability, and thus their status as certainties. This can never occur, however, in regard to foundational certainties, for first, they can never be construed as empirical hypotheses, no matter what the change of context might be, and second, they are the foundations on which any judgement within the language game is based.<sup>97</sup>

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This distinction between paradigmatic and foundational certainties can perhaps best be seen in a somewhat cryptic remark in section 99 of On Certainty: "And the bank of that river consists partly of hard rock, subject to no alteration, or only to an imperceptible one, partly of sand, which is now in one place now in another gets washed away or deposited".

With all this said, we must add Wittgenstein was probably not thinking about religious propositions when he made his remarks about certainties. The kinds of beliefs he had in mind were things about which all but the dyed in the wool skeptic would agree. Yet, his observations about certainties may contribute more to the understanding of the problem of criteria for truth in religion than any of his other works, including his lectures on aesthetics and religious belief.<sup>98</sup> The general problem of the rationality of religious belief, as well as the larger problem about foundational principles, and the more specific answer to the question concerning why we should hold Forsyth's religious assertions as "'truths' to live by" become clearer when we apply a certain interpretation to On Certainty.<sup>99</sup>

We must begin the explication of this interpretation by admitting that religious assertions are not paradigmatic nor foundational certainties, at least not the kind to which Wittgenstein refers. But religious assertions may, nevertheless, share a great deal with certainties. One of the chief similarities between a number of religious assertions and Wittgensteinian foundational certainties is that they both may reasonably be held without being justified on prior empirical grounds. This interpretation of On Certainty opens up the possibility that reasonable

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966).

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This interpretation of On Certainty has many affinities with that found in John Whittaker's Matters of Faith and Matters of Principle (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1981) though Whittaker's view seems much closer to the noncognitive position of our former teacher Paul Holmer than does my own.

faith may have little or nothing to do with the defense of empirical hypotheses, for most important religious assertions, like Wittgenstein's foundational certainties, are not hypotheses to be tested.

A second way that specific religious assertions may be analogous to foundational certainties is that in both we find the connection between believing and behaving to be so inextricably bound together that one's understanding of the way the world works depends on the prior acceptance of these beliefs. In both religious foundation principles and foundational certainties learning a certain form of life which is based on these principles or certainties is always logically and temporally prior to any claims of doubt.

Throughout much of On Certainty, Wittgenstein's purpose is to discuss philosophical skepticism.<sup>100</sup> In brief, he thought any thorough-going version of skepticism was really a type of philosophical confusion. Instead of answering the skeptics' arguments, he treated their doubts as spurious and unfounded because they raised questions about foundational certainties, or fundamental beliefs without which human beings could not function. He never claims in On Certainty, however, to be able to give a logical or empirical refutation of skepticism, nor that he could furnish proofs for all his fundamental beliefs.<sup>101</sup>

Wittgenstein believed that the purely philosophical doubts, like those raised in Descartes' Meditations, for example, are idle doubts, doubts which cannot and should not be taken seriously. Of course, on first blush religious doubts appear to be appreciably different because

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, On Certainty, 37ff.

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Ibid., 240f.



they do not appear to be idle.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, there is a third way in which many religious propositions are akin to Wittgensteinian foundational certainties. The religious believer is confronted by the doubts of the atheist or agnostic in the same way the ordinary believer is confronted with the doubts of the philosophical skeptic. Indeed, from a purely rational and empirical standpoint, the ordinary believer finds himself at a loss to provide logically compelling arguments against the philosophical skeptic. Similarly, the religious believer in a position such as Forsyth's may be hard pressed, in a post-Kantian age, to respond in a convincing way to the assaults of the nonbeliever. In both situations, the believer must readily admit that the skeptical position is a logically possible one.

It is clear that Wittgenstein held that evidential grounds are not perpetually needed to justify all reasonable beliefs. The possibility of doubt, it must be admitted, will never go away, as long as empirical grounds are needed to justify foundational certainties.

Wittgenstein hints that the proper way to respond to the philosophical skeptic is to show that doubts are sometimes completely out of place. In order to do that the believer in ordinary certainties must show that the demand for empirical proof cannot apply to all claims of fact, and that the room for reasonable doubt diminishes the closer we get to those certainties which are the foundations of our judgements.<sup>103</sup>

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But when the religious person has doubts he does not disagree about the facts of the world, rather he doubts the metaphysical principles on which the Christian view of the world is built. The disagreement is about picturing the world as a whole, not about the individual parts of the world.

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Ibid., 128-131.

Wittgenstein set out to show in On Certainty that all assertions about truth are not hypotheses, and that certainties belong to a different logical category than hypotheses. He accomplishes this task by making a distinction between certainty and knowledge.<sup>104</sup> Unlike knowledge, paradigmatic and foundational certainties are questionable in principle, though it would seem exceedingly odd to do so in practice. We can question certainties, but this is only because we can formulate the truth of their opposites without forming a logical contradiction. The mere fact we can formulate the denial of certainties without contradiction, however, does not provide reasons for doubting them.

We can say, with Bishop Berkeley, 'I wonder if the physical world exists', but this is only because we can formulate the negation of the certainty 'the physical world exists' without a logical contradiction. But the mere fact that we can formulate the denial of this foundational certainty does not provide us with reasons for doubting it.

Wittgenstein's conclusion in On Certainty is that different truth claims sometimes have different logical statuses. Since the truth of foundational certainties is required as a condition for the possibility of judging other truth claims, they occupy a kind of axiomatic status.

The analogy we have been implicitly building should now be made more explicit. In the Christian form of life specific religious propositions serve as the "foundational principles" on which that particular form of life is built. That Jesus is fully human and fully divine, that the atonement was necessary for our salvation, that Jesus was a vehicle for that atonement, are all religious assertions which within

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Ibid., 308f.

the Christian form of life have a status of "foundational principles". Without these prior beliefs, the Christian faith would make no sense. But we must be careful to notice that none of the religious assertions mentioned are empirical propositions, for their truths do not rest on some set of empirical facts to be discovered in the world. The Christian form of life provides the context in which these certainties are to be viewed.

The importance all this has for our discussion of the problem of evil should now be clear. We have suggested that our teleological theodicy is somehow bound up with the incarnation and atonement of Jesus Christ. These are certainly not empirical propositions. But they are foundational principles on which the Christian faith is based.

Since we have shown earlier that Forsyth's kenotic theodicy is one that is allowed by reason, and since it is within the Christian form of life that these assertions about the problem of evil are to be understood, the notion that all will be well because of the saving act of Jesus Christ takes on the status of a kind of foundational principle, one on which many other assertions about the Christian form of life are based. Moreover, these foundational principles go into the making of a form of life whose picturing of the world is one that is allowed by reason.

Of course, it is true that our position is not exempt from doubt, but the assertions on which it is based nevertheless take on the status of foundational principles when viewed as part of the Christian form of life. In that set of language games, compelling evidence should no more

be expected than it should for foundational certainties.<sup>105</sup> Like foundational certainties, foundational religious beliefs play a governing role in the thinking of the adherents to that particular form of life. Thinking and acting become intermingled. The difficult task of justifying religious beliefs on empirical grounds often seems destined to failure which puts the believer in the position of looking as though he or she has been defeated, when, in fact, the "defeat" may be a function of the difference in logical statuses between empirical propositions and foundational religious principles.

To some it may begin to look like we have been arguing for a kind of relativism by taking this line of Wittgenstein's. Roger Trigg in his work, Reason and Commitment, for example, takes Wittgenstein and several of his followers to task for holding what he thinks is a relativistic view of truth:

One popular form of relativism apparently manages to avoid the slide into total objectivism by making reasoning as well as truth relative to groups or societies. Proponents of this view are usually very reluctant to be called relativists. Nevertheless, once it is stressed that the different cultures have different concepts, and that their members see the world differently, it is no very great step to saying that there is no right way of seeing the world and that it is pure arrogance to assume one's own society's understanding of things is the correct one. It thus becomes impossible to judge other cultures at all, since to do so we would have to rely on our own society's understanding of things being the correct one. It thus becomes impossible to judge other cultures at all,

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Norman Malcolm relates an incident in Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Memoir (London: Oxford University Press, 1958) which may illustrate that Wittgenstein could have believed the analogy between certainties and foundational religious principles. "When I once quoted him a remark of Kierkegaard's to this effect: 'How can it be that Christ does not exist, since I know he has saved me?' Wittgenstein exclaimed: 'You see, it isn't a question of proving anything!'"

since to do so we have to rely on our own conception of what really is the case, and this is to beg the question of what is really right. What we are left with are separate ways of thinking about the world, or a particular part of it. There can be no neutral way of describing the world, against which every conceptual scheme can be measured. It is obvious that we can only describe the world by means of some conceptual scheme, and so it is not logically possible to step outside of every conceptual system ... The result is that we are left apparently imprisoned within our own system, unable to pass judgements on other systems without using our own. This is fine if it enables us to think of reality as it is, while other systems give a false picture. Since, however, the adherents to each system are liable to think that their's sets the standard of truth, an obvious compromise is to say that there is no such thing as truth when conceptual systems are being compared. Each system sets its own standards of truth, but they are not the kinds of things which themselves can be true or false. Such a position seems to be a paradigm case of relativism.<sup>106</sup>

Trigg continues by citing Peter Winch as one of the major perpetrators of this Wittgensteinian relativism:

Winch fails to separate 'reality' from language, so that language actually seems to determine what is real. Even an objectivist, of course, would admit that there is a link between a language and what is regarded as real. A language expresses a community's beliefs about reality. The objectivist, however, would still wish to insist that 'reality' exists apart from people's beliefs, and that their beliefs could be mistaken. An essential function of the language, he would maintain, is to concern itself with what actually is the case. Its business is to communicate truth. Winch will have none of this. He says 'reality is not what gives language sense. What is real and what is unreal shows itself in the sense that language has. Further, both the distinction between the real and the unreal and the concept of agreement with reality themselves belong to our language'. It follows that different languages cannot be thought of as different attempts to describe the same reality. 'Reality'

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Roger Trigg, Reason and Commitment (Cambridge: University Press, 1973) p. 6.

is made relative to a language and if different languages portray 'the world' differently, then there must be different worlds. If one accepts this conclusion, one is remorselessly driven to unpalatable consequences. The result of granting that 'the world' or 'reality' cannot be conceived as independent of all conceptual schemes is that there is no reason to suppose that what the peoples of very different communities see as the world is similar in any way.<sup>107</sup>

It must be kept in mind in analyzing what Trigg has said that he begins by agreeing that it is impossible to argue outside of all conceptual frameworks in order to decide between or among them. There is no ideal observer status, at least not for human beings. Trigg is also in agreement that there is a close link between language and what is thought of as reality.

But it also must be said that Trigg does not seem to fully understand Winch's position. Nowhere is his article about Evans-Pritchard's work on the Azandes does Winch suggest either implicitly or explicitly that language describes reality. Rather, the speakers of a natural language express their beliefs about reality in that language. It is the beliefs, not the language, that can be true or false.

For Winch, and for Wittgenstein as well, different cultures have different concepts, and there is no neutral way of comparing them. But nowhere do either Winch or Wittgenstein suggest that the people of these different cultures also have different worlds. Trigg seems to confuse these two points. In Wisdom's terms, we might suggest that different cultures have different connecting techniques for making sense of the

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Ibid., p. 15.

same world. Still, Trigg offers a rather detailed argument in support of the view that "different concepts mean different worlds":

If the members of different societies live in different worlds and do not merely have varying and conflicting beliefs about the same reality, there will not necessarily be any point of contact between the concepts of one society and those of another. If different societies are dealing with the same world, it is possible in principle to examine how differently they describe the same things. All that is necessary is to see what members of the respective societies say when confronted with a specified situation, such as a cat or a mat. The words in one group can be regarded as a translations of the words of the other. If the assumption concerning the objectivity of what they describe is removed, there can be no justification for comparing what they say, because they may be talking about very different things. In these circumstances instead of their concepts determine the composition. Different concepts, therefore, mean a different world, so that what the world is like is relative to a conceptual scheme and the language of the system.<sup>108</sup>

In this passage Trigg uses the words "reality" and "world" as though they are interchangeable. Both are used in a very comprehensive way. He does not refer to different aspects of the world or the different sorts of things and situations that go into the making of the world. Trigg's comment contains the naive assumption that all aspects of reality or parts of the world are made of the same stuff. But he fails to see that there are criteria for distinguishing between different senses of what is "real". For example, one may walk by a department store window and say that the mannequin is not a real person. We can also point to an acquaintance and say, because of a lack of self knowledge on the part

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Ibid., p. 14f.

of that person, that he or she is not a real person. Here we clearly have two different criteria for real and unreal because they are different aspects of the world or different kinds of situations that go into the making of the "world".

Wittgenstein does use the term weltbild (usually translated as world picture), but he is not using it in the simplistic way Trigg uses 'reality' or 'world'. For Wittgenstein, this world picture is one that comes together through the conflation of a huge complex of different but overlapping beliefs systems. They overlap in the sense that a belief system about what a person feels is different from but related to the belief system about how a person looks, for example. In these two systems of belief we use two different sets of concepts and these concepts are not subject to the same rules. Still, with all of that said, it is clear that Wittgenstein believed that talking about different concepts is not tantamount to "different worlds".

Trigg seems intent on concentrating on those examples in which it is supposed that different concepts are used to talk about the same thing, where "the same thing" does not mean different aspects of the same thing but the same aspect. It is in these cases where he speaks about the assumption of objectivity in relation to what is described. If this assumption is removed, Trigg argues, there can be no way of comparing what the two groups of people have to say. Although it could be pointed out that Trigg seems to have a rather peculiar notion of what counts as a thing, in that he seems not to realize that what counts as a thing is always decided in some quite specific context, in a way it could also be said that Trigg is correct. If the concepts of two cultures are



radically different, there may not be enough shared notions for communication between them to be easy.

But the real violence Trigg seems to do to the Wittgensteinian position is that the former implies that in the latter's position there is no way of showing that any beliefs are false. Certainly, Wittgenstein does not make this claim. Indeed, any belief that has the logical status of an empirical hypothesis can, at least in principle, be shown to be false. Someone who thinks that the world is flat, to use one of Trigg's favorite examples, can be shown to be incorrect very easily. There are all sorts of empirical pieces of evidence for suggesting this position is in error.

But we must recall that the logical status of Forsyth's religious assertions about the problem of evil are closer in form to Wittgensteinian foundational certainties than they are to empirical hypotheses. Therefore, it is inappropriate to use empirical criteria to determine the truth or falsity of these claims. Indeed, it is impossible to ascertain their truth in this way, for, as Wisdom has suggested, the supposed truth of these propositions goes beyond the 'facts' of the world.

D.Z. Phillips attempts to make this same point when he suggests that a religious question like "What kind of reality is divine reality?" is not like the hypothetical question, "Is this physical object real?" Rather, the religious question is more like the foundational certainty, "What kind of reality is the reality of physical objects?"

I suggest that more can be gained if one compares the question, "What kind of reality is divine reality?" not with the question, "Is this physical object real or not?" but with the different question, "What kind of reality is the reality of physical objects?" To ask whether physical objects are real is not like asking whether this

appearance is real or not where often one can find out. I can find out whether unicorns are real or not, but how can I find out whether the physical world is real or not. The latter question is not about the possibility of carrying out an investigation. It is a question of whether it is possible to speak of truth and falsity in the physical world; a question prior to that of determining the truth or falsity of any particular matter of fact. Similarly, the question about the reality of the divine is a question about the possibility of sense and nonsense, truth and falsity in religion. When God's existence is constructed as a matter of fact, it is taken for granted that the concept God is at home within the conceptual framework of the reality of the physical world. It is as if we said 'We know where the assertions of God's existence belongs, we understand what kind of assertion it is; all we need to do now is determine its truth or falsity'. But to ask a question about the reality of God is to ask a question about a kind of reality, not about the reality of this or that, in much the same way as asking about the reality of physical objects is not to ask about the reality of this or that physical object.<sup>109</sup>

At this point in our discussion we must attempt to avoid a possible misunderstanding the use of this Phillips' quotation might engender. My position is closer to John Wisdom's use of Wittgenstein than it is to the position of Phillips'. Wisdom wrote nothing about On Certainty.<sup>110</sup> Nevertheless, I think he would agree with Phillips claim that a religious question like "What kind of reality is divine reality?" is more like the question "What kind of reality is the reality of physical objects?" rather than "Is this particular thing real?" Wisdom would be in agreement with Phillips on this point, I think, because he would also say

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D.Z. Phillips, "Philosophy, Theology and the Reality of God", Philosophical Quarterly, vol. 13 (1963).

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It is clear that Phillips example comes directly from section 20 of On Certainty: "'Doubting the existence of the material world', does not mean for example doubting the existence of a planet which later observation proved to exist".

that religious propositions are not empirical propositions, not experimental hypotheses to be proved. For Wisdom, in the case of experimental hypotheses further evidence should always be relevant and may make a difference to what can reasonably be believed. In the case of religious assertions, however, there is no further evidence to be collected. It is a matter rather of how most reasonably to construe or connect the evidence. Wisdom points out that religious apologists have nothing to tell us when it comes to what the facts are, except what is already known.

At the same time, Wisdom would probably profoundly disagree with Phillips on a number of very important points. He would not admit, for example, that religious propositions have their own "sense", though he would say that often religious language is metaphorical or sometimes initially paradoxical. All religious propositions, Wisdom would suggest, from any form-of-life, must pass the initial test of logical consistency and intelligibility. It is true that one form-of-life's religious propositions may be difficult to understand by those in another form of life, but this is no warrant for believing in round squares.

In reading Death and Immortality<sup>111</sup> one wonders whether Phillips case for religious language does not turn out to be a subtle denial of what it is usually thought, particularly by those who are religious, to be about. In a real way Phillips seems to have given up any attempt to defend theism except in terms of social function and meaning. Wisdom, unlike Phillips, would argue that although religious assertions are not

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D.Z. Phillips, Death and Immortality (London: Macmillan, 1970).

empirical hypotheses, they may, nevertheless, refer to realities that exist independently of the language games in which these entities are mentioned. Phillips would deny that the concept 'God' refers to something which is there independently of whether people believe in him or not. He also holds a similar position about the soul:

To say of someone 'He'd sell his sould for money' is a perfectly natural remark. It in no way entails any philosophical theory about the duality of human nature. The remark is a moral observation about a person, one that expresses the degraded state that person is in. A man's soul, in this context, refers to his integrity, to the complex of practices and beliefs which acting with integrity would cover for that person. Might not talk about immortality of the soul play a similar role?<sup>112</sup>

Later, in the same work, Phillips answers his rhetorical question:

... questions about the immortality of the soul are seen to be not questions concerning the extent of a man's life, and in particular concerning whether that life can extend beyond the grave, but questions concerning the kind of life a man is living.<sup>113</sup>

Certainly, Phillips suggested use of the term 'soul' is a proper one given the context he has supplied, but that is not the only context in which the world soul is used. Indeed, when the devout believer says, "I believe in the life of the world to come", he is most frequently voicing a belief that he will survive death.

In contrast to Phillips, Wisdom would hold that although religious propositions are not empirical hypotheses, they may, nevertheless, have cognitive significance. His position, in a real way, closes the gap

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112

Ibid., p. 43.

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Ibid., p. 49.

between the cognitive and noncognitive functions of religious language. Wisdom proposes that religious language may contribute to cognitive inquiry while at the same time not being subject to the rules of verification. In some ways, his position is not unlike some of the insights of Immanuel Kant. Kant grants that religious language, even within the domain of pure theoretical reason, has certain heuristic functions which are similar, I believe, to the function of Wisdom's connecting technique. Imagining God as a cosmic Designer can give shape and direction to the framing of our observations. Kant admitted that God concepts can never be cognitively justified, but he did believe, nevertheless, that the term 'God' and 'immortality' actually refer to something.<sup>114</sup>

Nevertheless, even with these caveats, Phillips still has something important here to tell us. Because the question "What kind of reality is divine reality?" is much more like the foundational certainty, "Physical objects exist" than it is like the hypothesis "unicorns exist", justification for holding that there is a divine reality should not be required in the same way it is for empirical hypotheses. The reality of physical objects is one of Wittgenstein's certainties. It is a foundational principle on which other assertions about the world are based. In an analogous way, positing the existence of God is a foundational principle, a principle on which many of our other religious assertions are based. One should not be required to justify this religious

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Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason Kant Selections edited by T.M. Greene (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1929) pp. 242ff. and 260-262.

assertion on empirical grounds because it functions with a different logical status than do hypothetical assertions about which we usually have or ask for proof.

The import this point has for our study should be apparent. When Forsyth makes religious assertions about the problem of evil he is making a set of claims which are based largely on a number of foundational principles on which the Christian form of life is based. He has taken as his starting point certain nonempirical propositions about the saving work of Jesus Christ and his central role in Christian theodicy.

Having assumed this Christological perspective, I have attempted in this chapter to show that P.T. Forsyth's answer to the problem of evil is one that is allowed by reason, as well as one that is firmly rooted within the Christian form of life. It is true that critics might still respond by suggesting that I have reneged on my original promise to keep the victim of suffering central in my response to the problem of evil. Some might suggest that by resorting to Forsyth's teleological perspective I have ceased to give justice to the pain of the sufferer.

It may be the case that outside the context of an existential relation with God it would only be rational and correct to claim that the experience of suffering is so real that it cannot be seen as an occasion for good, and that no amount of divine suffering can change the original terror of evil. But within the existential relation, the picturing of the world is quite different. Here the crushing reality of evil is not disputed, indeed it is confirmed. But at the same time, the attributes of God come to be realized within the context of "seeing God". This process occurs in different ways, both in Job's encounter with Yahweh and

with the Christian's encounter with Christ. When Job "sees God", as we have shown in chapter four, the problem of evil radically changes in focus. He suddenly understands the foundational principles on which his faith is based.

A similar alteration of the context for theodicy occurs in the case of the Christian's personal relation to God in Christ. For the Christian, it is in Jesus that one "sees God". In the context of this existential relation, the sufferer comes to see the son of God's victory over death as not diminishing the horror of evil, but rather confirming it in a most graphic way.

That God had to die on the cross becomes for the Christian the problem of evil, and this realization totally recasts the way in which the victim approaches theodicy. God's transformation of judgement into mercy in the cross of Christ allows the Christian sufferer to see evil as an occasion for good, but only on the basis of the work of Christ. God conquered evil in Christ, but this does not diminish its reality here and now. Rather, it gives the sufferer who is in Christ the power to transform his experience of evil into an occasion of good and to see in a future order the possibility of a respite from evil, not a repairing of it.<sup>115</sup>

It might still be asked why God chooses to do things in this way? Why must we "accept the ticket?" The answer, very plainly, is that the experience of "seeing God leads the victim, not in the direction of a

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The well known eschatological statement of Mother Julian's captures this quiet optimism: "But all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well". (Quoted in Hick's Evil and the God of Love, p. 264.)

theoretical theodicy which answers all our questions about natural and moral evil, but rather sets the sufferer in a new life and provides the basis for a practical response to the problem of evil. As Forsyth puts it, the Christian theodicy he is advocating is "not really an answer to a riddle but a victory in a battle".<sup>116</sup>

This is where the Christian response to evil goes well beyond the Book of Job. Job could only go his way with the realization of the ontological gulf between himself and God and the trust in a teleological answer; the Christian receives the Good News that God has reconciled the two in Christ. In Christ, the sufferer finds a firm position from which to take a stand against evil. Participating in the suffering of Christ, the victim can partake in the victory of the ultimate victim over the powers of sin, evil and suffering. Rather than being paralyzed by the experience of evil, the victim, in Christ, is able to share in the practical struggle against it. As Oliver Quick puts it, "Our Lord's victorious self-sacrifice was not achieved in order to make our own unnecessary, but to make it possible."<sup>117</sup> Indeed, if the Christian believes that God "empties himself" in Christ, he has the comforting assurance, as C.S. Lewis has expressed it, that "in self-giving, if anywhere, we touch a rhythm not only of all creation but of all being".<sup>118</sup>

Austin Farrer gives a good description of how the victim of suffering who continues to abide in the Christian existential relation with God may respond to the problem of evil with the acceptance of his

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P.T. Forsyth, The Justification of God, p. 211.

117

Oliver Quick, Doctrines of the Creed, p. 212.

118

C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (London: Collins, 1940) p. 40.



practical calling in the world:

An overmastering sense of human ills can be taken as the world's invitation to deny her Maker, or it may be taken as God's invitation to succor His world. Which is it to be? Those who take the practical alternative become more closely acquainted with misery than the onlookers; but they feel the grain of existence, and the movement of the purposes of God. They do not argue, they love; and what is loved is always known as good. The more we love the more we feel the evils besetting or corrupting the objects of love. But the more we feel the force of the besetting harms, the more certain we feel of the value residing in what they attack; and in resisting them we are identified with the action of God, whose mercy is over our flesh.<sup>119</sup>

In the final analysis, more than any carefully reasoned theodicy, we must come to the realization that it is the figure of Christ, the God become man, who enables us to endure and indeed to transcend suffering. At the heart of the Christian message we must find a God who identifies himself so thoroughly with his creatures that he becomes one of them.

It is true that the particulars of Forsyth's theodicy are not entirely clear. But we must trust that at bottom level the prima facie Christian paradox of evil is merely apparent. In the final analysis, we must trust as one of the Magi does in a Dorothy Sayers play:

I do not mind being ignorant and unhappy -  
All I ask is the assurance that I am not alone,  
Some courage, some comfort against the burden of fear and pain.

If He is beside me, bearing the weight of His own creation,  
If I may hear his voice among the voices of the vanquished,  
If I may feel his hand touch mine in the darkness,  
If I may look upon the hidden face of God  
and read in the eyes of God  
that He is acquainted with grief.<sup>120</sup>

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119

Austin Farrer, Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited (New York: Doubleday, 1961) pp. 164ff.

120

As quoted in John Kenner's Suffering and Death: Two Theological Breaking Points (New York: Macmillan, 1968) p. 315.

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Go on til you come to the end: then stop.

Lewis Carroll  
The King of Hearts  
Alice in Wonderland

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