

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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ABSTRACT

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To many, the most powerful objection to belief in God is the existence of evil. The problem of evil has been traditionally posed in the form of a dilemma: If God is perfectly good, he must wish to abolish evil; and if he is all-powerful, he must be able to abolish evil. But evil exists; therefore God cannot be both omnipotent and perfectly good. This thesis provides a philosophical analysis of the problem of evil and its many putative solutions.

Because certain traditional attributes of God are vague and not particularly relevant to the problem of evil, a stipulative definition of "God" is proposed at the outset. This stipulative definition, which I refer to as "the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God", is analysed and discussed in Chapter II. Preceding this, however, I deal with what I believe to be four distinct types of evil--metaphysical, physical, psychological, and moral--and attempt to state the necessary and sufficient conditions of all but one of these, viz., moral evil.

Employing these two analyses, I proceed to explicate the problem of evil qua problem, i.e., an attempt is made to answer the question, "Why, exactly, is the existence of evil a problem for the theist?" Briefly, I conclude that just as we would not expect a morally good person to permit suffering, so too we should find the existence of evil to be prima facie evidence against the thesis that there exists an omnipotent, omniscient,

perfectly good being who is responsible for what happens in the world. I then argue that if evil is indeed prima facie evidence against the existence of God, then it is incumbent on the theist to provide what Nelson Pike calls "a morally sufficient reason" for God's allowing evil.

Chapter III deals with the debate concerning the cognitivity of religious utterances. Here I examine the views of John Wisdom and Antony Flew and demonstrate that their arguments against the meaningfulness of religious utterances are inconclusive. If my criticisms of Flew and Wisdom are sound, then, as I point out, I have safeguarded myself against the charge that I am dealing with a meaningless or pseudo-problem.

The next section of this thesis is concerned with an analysis and evaluation of three putative solutions to the problem of evil. The first two putative solutions attempt to resolve the problem of evil by pointing out the imperfections and limitations of man and contrasting them with God's perfect attributes, viz., his superior judgment and his superior moral character. Treating them individually, I conclude that neither provides a justification for God's permitting the existence of evil. I then argue that any putative solution of this type is doomed to fail since the problem of evil must be solved from "the human point of view". Hence, any putative solution which makes reference to the mysterious ways of God merely re-emphasizes, rather than resolves, the problem of evil. And finally, I examine the contention that evil is a necessary counterpart of good. This putative solution, I maintain, is based on a weak analogy, and so will not serve as a morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil.

Chapter V deals with "the free-will defence"--the most important, and

probably the most convincing, of all proposed theodicies. After setting forth this theistic defence in some detail, I examine the arguments of one of its critics, Antony Flew. Flew claims that evil is not necessary in any world populated by wholly good men who always freely choose the good: God, he contends, could have constructed men with dispositions towards all virtues, so that if a particular evil was present, then such individuals would respond by manifesting the appropriate virtue. In Flew's hypostatized world, however, it would simply be the case that such situations would never arise.

J.L. Mackie claims that if there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one occasion, then there cannot be any logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. After expanding Mackie's "argument", I attempt to show that his conclusion is unjustified as it stands, and so must be reargued. The final section of this chapter deals with Ninian Smart's claim that the thesis that God might have created men wholly good is unconvincing. Briefly, he argues that the onus of the description of any utopia where men always freely choose the good is on the sceptic. If one simply affirms the possibility of such a universe, then, says Smart, our conception of such a utopia is empty and meaningless, and cannot serve as part of an anti-theistic argument. In evaluating Smart's argument, I point out that if he is right, then he has unwittingly provided the sceptic with an a priori disproof of the existence of God; for if the notion of a morally good person is unintelligible unless applied to imperfect beings, then how is it intelligible when applied to God?

Chapter VI deals with Nelson Pike's claim that it does not follow that a perfectly good being would prevent evil if he could. Pike maintains

that it is certainly not obvious that the statements "God exists" and "Evil exists" are logically incompatible. There might be, he claims, a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing evil. That is, evil might be a logically necessary component in the best of all possible worlds. In evaluating this theodicy, I first of all argue against the thesis that "God exists" and "Evil exists" might be logically compatible statements. Secondly, after conceding that these two statements might not be incompatible, I attempt to show that this possibility provides no justification for theism. I claim that given that evil is prima facie evidence against the existence of God, then it is incumbent on the theist to provide a particular morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil and not simply to affirm its possibility.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

Although it is relatively clear as to what is the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of God, it is extremely difficult to specify a more general theistic conception of God. As Ferm advises:

If the reader has some doubt as to the vagueness of the god concept, let him read a book such as My Idea of God, edited by John Fort Newton. He will there find Jew and Christian, Catholic and Protestant, Modernist and Fundamentalist, Christian Scientist, Quaker, Ethical Culturist, Humanist, Empiricist, and Mystic--leaders in contemporary religious thought --speaking of God as if in a confusion of tongues.¹

One contributor to My Idea of God thinks of God as "the spirit whose energy produced the world...and by whose will is directed the eternal procession of life." Another thinks of God as Spirit, and according to him this Spirit is "the Source or Ground of all that we call mind or reason in the universe." Still another contributor states that his idea of God is "the real but invisible influence of good men and women."

In the light of this disagreement it would seem that a lexical or reportive definition of the theistic conception of God is not possible. Therefore, in the discussion that follows, I shall stipulate by the word "God" an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who is responsible for what happens in the world. In view of the fact that this stipulative defini-

¹Vergilius Ferm, First Chapters in Religious Philosophy (New York: Round Table Press, 1937), p. 53 n.

tion coincides to a considerable degree with the traditional Judeo-Christian conception of God, it shall hereafter be referred to as "the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God". It differs from the former in that it asserts that God is responsible for what happens in the world, rather than making the stronger claim that he created the world or that he sustains it; it does not affirm or deny that God is both transcendent and immanent, but implies that God could act within the universe (if he so desired) because of his omnipotence, and it does not affirm or deny God as causa sui, i.e., as a self-caused being. As I have said, although this is a stipulative definition, it does correspond rather closely with the dominant Western conception of God. The notions of creation, causa sui, and a transcendent and immanent being are omitted because of their vagueness and the narrowness they impose on the definition of "God". Each of these notions is also not particularly relevant to the problem of evil.

II

Philosophical writing since Anselm has been continually marked with attempts to establish the existence of God, and with rejoinders to such attempts. The former were regarded by theologians as harmless, though important, efforts to establish what was obviously known by all. Few attempts were made to prove the non-existence of God and so in a sense, the debate was one-sided. This characteristic of religious philosophy can probably be attributed to the fact that, in former times, atheists and agnostics were well advised, for reasons of personal safety, to avoid open expression of their views. Thus most criticisms of the theistic arguments have been only indirect; they have been aimed at particular arguments rather than at the

propriety of any specific conception of God. If a given argument failed to establish its conclusion, viz., "God exists", it was concluded only that his existence could not be established in this particular way. Some contemporary philosophers, however, have turned to the other side of the theological coin, and the thesis that God's existence can be disproved has recently been argued for. J.N. Findlay, for example, maintains that if we conceive of God as "the adequate object of religious attitudes", then it can be shown that there is no God.² This line of attack is certainly an unusual one; rather than await a theistic proof which they might criticize, these philosophers have attempted to show that all such arguments are necessarily unsound by proving that God does not exist.

III

Although Findlay's line of attack is an unusual one, it is not new. Theologians prior to the twentieth century have been bothered by another atheistic thorn--the problem of evil. Evil has remained a problem to all philosophers and theologians who have held a conception of God similar to, or identical with, the modified Judeo-Christian conception. Some philosophers and theologians have ignored the problem of evil; others, such as Plotinus, John Stuart Mill, and Edgar Brightman, have abandoned the traditional conception in the face of the existence of evil. They have adopted what they consider to be the only conception which is compatible with the existence of evil--God as a finite (not omnipotent, but nevertheless per-

² J.N. Findlay, "Can God's Existence be Disproved?" in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, eds., Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: The Macmillan Company and London: The Student Christian Movement Press, 1955), pp. 47-56.

fectly good) being. Many who found themselves unable to accept any conception of God other than the traditional or modified Judeo-Christian conception, have swelled the ranks of the atheists or have joined the agnostics. They have accepted the existence of evil as either justifying disbelief in the existence of God or as casting significant doubt on the thesis that he exists. Nevertheless, some philosophers and theologians have refused to make such significant concessions in the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God, and therefore have tried to show that the existence of evil is compatible with this particular conception. This thesis will be concerned only with their attempts to save the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God from revision.

IV

This thesis will proceed along the following lines. First, I will present a rather uncomplicated statement of the problem itself. Following this, there will be an analysis of the problem, i.e., an attempt will be made to answer the question "Why, exactly, is the existence of evil a problem for the theist?". This will involve a discussion of the different types of evil, a brief look at the linguistic behaviour of the word "evil", and an analysis of those concepts supposedly applicable to God. Thirdly, I hope to reply to the suggestion that the problem of evil is a meaningless or pseudo-problem by arguing against the contention that religious utterances are cognitively meaningless. A major portion of the thesis will then be devoted to a consideration of the adequacy of some attempted solutions to the problem. This section will deal with both traditional and contemporary attempts to solve the problem. And finally, I will examine

the present status of the problem of evil, i.e., the acceptability of the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God in terms of the adequacy of these putative solutions to the problem.

CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM STATED

I

G.J. Ducasse gives a broad outline of the traditional problem of evil. He says it is this:

If men and all other things in the world were created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and infinitely good God, then, because omniscient, he knew ab initio that there would be evil in the kind of world he was creating; because omnipotent, he could have prevented this evil and indeed could eliminate it even now; and, because perfectly good, he would not have willed to create the kind of world in which evil would exist, and he would not now allow it to persist. Yet evil is rampant on earth.³

There are five assumptions implicit in this formulation of the problem of evil:

- (1) God is omnipotent.
- (2) God is omniscient.
- (3) God is perfectly good.
- (4) God created the world.
- (5) Evil exists in the world.

We need not, however, include (4) as a necessary premise in the argument: even if the world is co-eternal with God, the problem of evil still arises if it is claimed that God is responsible for what happens in the world, i.e., because of his omnipotence he could eliminate or at least diminish the evil that exists in the world. Hence, we can substitute "God is responsible for what happens in the world" for (4). Employing these five

³ G.J. Ducasse, A Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion (New York: The Ronald Press, 1953), p. 352.

assumptions, the problem of evil can be restated in the form of a deductive argument. The first premise would be: "If there is a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and responsible for what happens in the world, then there is no time at which evil exists in the universe." The second premise is: "Evils have existed, and do exist now in the universe." From these premises the following conclusion is drawn: "It is not the case that there is a being who is omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and responsible for what happens in the world." If one accepts this conclusion, then one is ipso facto committed to saying that God (as defined on page one) does not exist.

II

Philosophers and theologians have been discussing the problem of evil for at least a thousand years. Evidently, there has not been any substantial agreement as to the meaning of the key terms involved or any agreement as to the matters of fact relating to the problem. How would one go about clarifying these terms and establishing the relevant facts? As regards clarification of the terms, common usage would seem to be only of limited help, for, although the ordinary man often uses the term "evil", he rarely if ever employs the terms "omnipotent", "omniscient", or "perfectly good". Nor does appealing to the beliefs of the ordinary person help much, for he has not considered such related problems as the compatibility of divine knowledge and free-will (He probably has no beliefs at all about such matters.). Therefore, any analysis of these terms and beliefs relating to the subject matter of the problem will have to be primarily restricted to the common usage of the ordinary philosopher and theologian. With this consideration in mind, let us examine

each of the propositions out of which the problem of evil arises.

III

First, consider "Evil exists". The class of things to which the term "evil" applies, i.e., its denotation, is traditionally sub-divided into three types, metaphysical, physical, and moral--a division classic since Leibniz. This division will be adopted with one addition--psychological evil.

The notion of metaphysical evil is strictly a philosophical one and solely attributable to Leibniz. Only one thing has metaphysical evil --the world. Leibniz maintains that not only is this world metaphysically evil, but also that evil is an unavoidable condition of any world at all. Only God is perfect and so "the mere existence of the universe is sufficient to damn it."⁴ Any world created by God or chance, or if not created, at least a world for which God is responsible, cannot be self-sufficient and hence is limited and imperfect in this metaphysical sense. Metaphysical evil is distinguished from the other types of evil in that (a) no pain or mental anguish, in either a physiological or psychological sense, is involved (although the world is said to "suffer" from its imperfection) and (b) sentient beings are not directly involved.

C.J. Ducasse argues that

Evidently, "metaphysical evil" is not really the name of another category of evil...; it is only the name of the explanation Leibniz offers for the fact that evil, of whatever kind, exists notwithstanding the goodness of God, and notwithstanding God's power to create any possible world.⁵

⁴ B.A.G. Fuller, The Problem of Evil in Plotinus (Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), p. 3.

⁵ C.J. Ducasse, op. cit., p. 58.

It seems to me that Ducasse has mistakenly characterized Leibniz's position. What Leibniz is claiming, I believe, is that metaphysical evil is a first-order rather than a second-order evil, i.e., both physical and moral evil are dependent for their existence on metaphysical evil.⁶ Ducasse seems to assume that because Leibniz agrees that metaphysical evil is in some sense prior to the other two types of evil, that he is offering the former as an explanation or justification of the latter. Yet metaphysical evil, according to Leibniz, is like the other two types of evil in that it has a source of its existence which lies outside itself:

Now since God made all positive reality which is not eternal, he would have made the source of evil (imperfection), if that did not lie rather in the possibility of things or forms, which God did not make, since he is not the author of His own understanding.⁷

Leibniz seems to be suggesting here that God, in creating anything, was necessarily bound to create something imperfect, and metaphysical evil refers to the fact that the universe is imperfect. The source or explanation of this limitation, however, is the supposed logical impossibility of the creation of a perfect universe. This principle, and not metaphysical evil, is Leibniz's explanation for the existence of all evil. It is, as it were, the final cause or justification for the existence of all evil, whereas metaphysical evil is more analogous to the efficient cause of physical and moral evil.

⁶ For example, we might trace the cause of an action that is considered to be morally wrong back to some existing imperfection, e.g., imperfection in our judgement.

⁷ G.W. Leibniz, Theodicy, Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil, 380, p. 353; G., 6, 341.

IV

Some of those things which have traditionally been classified as physical evils can be grouped together in separate categories. First, there are those diseases contracted by humans and animals during their lives, e.g., cancer, polio, tuberculosis, and leprosy. Secondly, there are those deformities and deficiencies occurring at birth or during one's life, e.g., loss of limbs, deformed limbs, low intelligence, insanity, deafness and blindness.⁸ Thirdly, there are natural calamities such as droughts, fires, floods, tornadoes, avalanches, and earthquakes. (The members of this category have no necessary connection with sentient beings and their welfare; hence, they can be considered to be evils only when they do in fact cause harm to sentient beings.) Fourthly, there are such things as cold, hunger, thirst, exhaustion and burns--stresses upon the body. And fifthly, there are physical evils stemming from the animal kingdom, e.g., animals preying on humans or other animals, or destroying crops.

In virtue of what do these evils fall under the classification "physical evil"? First, they all involve sentient beings. Secondly, most of them seem to involve the experience of pain by these sentient

⁸ C. J. Ducasse does not include poor judgement, errors due to ignorance, or defective perception as physical evils, rather he calls them "intellectual evils". He characterizes them as evils which prevent a person from dealing effectively with many of the situations that he faces. This category, in referring only to humans, is incomplete, and is not necessary as a separate category of evil. First, animals as well as humans suffer from many of these "intellectual evils". Secondly, these instances of evil have causes similar to the other physical evils listed above, and so they do not require separate categorization; they are merely a sub-species of physical evil.

beings. However, the question now arises, "Is the experience of pain by these sentient beings a necessary criterion for the existence of physical evil?" Some philosophers, e.g., G.J. Ducasse, maintain that it is; others, like H.J. McCloskey, contend that the experience of pain is only a sufficient condition for the existence of physical evil. The latter, after presenting a list of physical evils similar to the one presented here, asserts that "most of these contribute towards increasing human pain and suffering but not all physical evils are reducible simply to pain."⁹ Although he is not very explicit concerning this claim, McCloskey seems to have in mind such physical evils as insanity, low intelligence, missing limbs, and certain diseases. These are often similar in that they deprive man (and animals) of what might be called "positive happiness",¹⁰ although they do not cause any pain to those individuals whom they affect. Thus a mental defective may not suffer pain merely because he has a low intelligence; others, who are aware of his handicap, may provide for his every need. Nevertheless, it might be claimed that low intelligence limits the scope of those things which he can enjoy to the exclusion of art, literature, conversation and independence, etc. This sort of consideration forces us to reformulate our second condition and now characterize a physical evil as something which either causes pain to a sentient being or deprives him of positive happiness. And finally, we add a third condition, viz., the

⁹ H.J. McCloskey, "God and Evil", in God and Evil, ed. Nelson Pike (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 63.

¹⁰ Unfortunately, this obviously vague phrase must be left in its present state until the last chapter. Nevertheless, I believe that this will not hamper a clear statement of the problem of evil.

pain or deprivation of positive happiness must not be traceable to the thoughts or actions of human beings. Therefore, the three necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of physical evil are:

- (1) The existence of sentient beings.
- (2) The experience of pain by or the deprivation of happiness from these sentient beings.
- (3) The pain or deprivation of happiness is not traceable to the thoughts or actions of human beings.

V

Ducasse, in his classification of the types of evil, deviates from the traditional bifurcation between moral and physical evil in maintaining that "psychological evil" constitutes a separate category of evil:

They include the sufferings due to unrequited love, to separation from, or the death of, the beloved; to anxiety, fear, frustration, loneliness; and to other unhappy psychological states not traceable to causes in or accidents to the body of the suffering person, nor to vices in him or wickedness in others.¹¹

Is a separate category necessary for these instances of evil? First of all, consider that the causes of the above instances of "psychological evil" differ from those of metaphysical and physical evil. Secondly, pain, in a physiological sense, does not seem to be necessary for the existence of psychological evil, although mental anguish, in a psychological sense, does appear necessary. In view of these two considerations, I shall consider psychological evil to be a separate category of evil. From Ducasse's list we can abstract the following conditions as being both necessary and sufficient for the existence of psy-

¹¹ Ducasse, op. cit., pp. 356-58.

chological evil:

- (1) The existence of sentient beings.
- (2) The experience of mental anguish by these sentient beings.
- (3) The mental anguish which occurs is not traceable to causes in or accidents to the body of the suffering person, not to immoral actions of himself or others.

VI

Moral evil differs from metaphysical, physical and psychological evil in that "evil" is here predicated of moral agents, their dispositions, motives, thoughts, feelings, and actions rather than floods, diseases, or the world. Although animals may be involved in particular instances of moral evil, they cannot initiate such evil, but only suffer as a result of it. Moral evil, as regards sentient beings, can be attributed only to human agents who are aware of the difference between what is morally permissible and what is morally prohibited. There is fairly general agreement as to what moral evil is: "Moral evil is simply immorality--evils such as cowardice, selfishness, envy, greed, deceit, cruelty, callousness, and the larger scale evils such as wars and the atrocities they involve."¹² The Catholic Encyclopaedia contends that "by moral evil are understood the deviation of the human volition from the prescriptions of the moral order and the action which results from that deviation."¹³ And finally, the Webster's New International Dictionary defines "evil" as "moral badness or offense; wrong-doing;

¹² McCloskey, op. cit., p. 65.

¹³ The Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909), p. 649.

wickedness."¹⁴

The formulation of the necessary and sufficient conditions for the existence of moral evil is much more difficult than was the case in the three previous categories of evil, and the reason for this difficulty is this: if moral evil is identical with immorality, then in stating the necessary and sufficient conditions of the former one would ipso facto be stating the necessary and sufficient conditions of the latter. Anyone at all familiar with contemporary writing in moral theory is well aware of the problems involved in completing the latter task--hence the difficulty in listing the correct criteria of the former. Therefore, the following criteria are suggested as being only necessary for the existence of moral evil:¹⁵

- (1) The existence of sentient beings.
- (2) The experience of suffering¹⁶ by or the deprivation of happiness from these sentient beings.
- (3) The suffering or deprivation of happiness is intentionally caused by one or more moral agents.¹⁷

¹⁴ Webster's New International Dictionary, Second Edition (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam Co., 1952), p. 886.

¹⁵ The criteria given here refer only to actions that are considered to be morally evil.

¹⁶ The term "suffering" is here used to refer to both pain and mental anguish.

¹⁷ This aspect of our third condition, viz., pain or deprivation of happiness being intentionally caused, distinguishes moral evil from any suffering or deprivation of happiness caused accidentally. The latter occasions of evil would be subsumed under "psychological evil".

VII

In calling a plague "a physical evil" we imply that sentient beings experienced pain or were deprived of happiness as a result of the plague and that the cause of the pain or deprivation was strictly physical in nature. The suffering or deprivation of happiness are not in themselves physically bad or evil as opposed to being morally evil; they are, however, caused by a physical agent rather than a moral agent. Similarly, in saying that torturing babies is a moral evil, we are simply asserting that torturing babies is an evil and is caused by a moral agent. The suffering or deprivation of happiness which results from the intentional action of a moral agent may be qualitatively and quantitatively the same as the suffering or deprivation of happiness caused by an earthquake, yet one is referred to as a "moral evil" and the other as a "physical evil". "Physical" and "moral", therefore, are not used in any way to evaluate either state of affairs; they simply refer to the particular cause of the suffering or the deprivation of happiness. Hence, the traditional classification of the kinds of evil is made on the basis of the different causes of evil.

VIII

The claim that God is omnipotent or all-powerful allows for two possible interpretations. First, we might regard God's power as being unrestricted to the point where he is able to do anything that he wills. On this interpretation of God's omnipotence he would be able to do that which is logically impossible. Thus he would have the power to construct

something which was both round and square, or make something which was both red and green all over, or even make two plus two equal five.

A second interpretation of God's omnipotence implies that he can do anything except that which is logically impossible. Thus he would be able to destroy the universe, or reverse the law of gravity or any other physical law. On this interpretation of God's omnipotence what is claimed is that God has power not only within Nature but also over it. Therefore, he would not be restricted by any nomic necessity, but only by logical necessity.

To most philosophers the first interpretation of God's omnipotence is unintelligible and, although some theologians maintain that God is omnipotent in this sense, the majority of the latter adhere only to the second interpretation. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, agreed that God's power was limited by the "intrinsically impossible". Therefore, when I hereafter refer to the expression "God's omnipotence", I shall mean "the power to do anything except that which is logically impossible".

IX

In claiming that God is omniscient most theologians imply that he knows everything--everything about the past, present, and the future. It might be asked: "Does he really, being perfect, know what imperfection means and what it stands for? And further, if he is sinless, can he know what sin means?"¹⁸ These "difficulties" are easily overcome:

¹⁸ Peter A. Bertocci, Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. 326.

surely there is no logical contradiction in claiming that a sinless person could know what "sin" means, at least no more of a contradiction than claiming that a person, bald from birth, could know what "having hair" means? The assumption behind these "difficulties" is the empiricist doctrine that the development of certain particular concepts is dependent on a person's having particular sorts of experience. This doctrine may in fact be correct, but if so it is surely only a contingent truth. Since God, however, is restricted only by the logically impossible, it would certainly be within his power to acquire a particular concept without having any particular sort of experience. Even so, those critics who claim that the existence of evil presents itself as a problem for the theist who holds the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God are willing to ignore any possible difficulties inherent in the conception of an omniscient being. They feel that the existence of evil will force the theist to abandon the conception of God as an omniscient being, or at least necessitate his deleting some other attribute from the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God. Therefore, rather than assessing the claim that anyone could be omniscient, let us grant this contention, and then see whether omniscience is possible in the face of the existence of evil.

X

As the question "What is meant in saying that God is good?" plays an integral part in one of the proposed solutions to the problem of evil, I do not propose to give a complete analysis of this sentence at this time. Suffice to say here that, in claiming that God is perfectly

good, theologians imply either that his goodness differs merely in degree from human goodness, i.e., it can be properly characterized infinite goodness, or that God's goodness differs in kind from human goodness. The problem of evil, however, will be stated under the presupposition that God's goodness differs only in degree from human goodness; in the next chapter it will be shown that the claim that God's goodness differs in kind from human goodness is not a live option for the theist.

XI

Lastly, let us examine the fifth proposition involved in our statement of the problem of evil, the claim that God is responsible for what happens in the world. This proposition does not beg any important questions by assigning final blame to God for the existence of evil in the universe; its purpose is simply to distinguish the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God from the Aristotelian one. Aristotle claimed that God, once He created the universe, left it to function and survive on its own. The modified Judeo-Christian conception of God, on the other hand, implies that God is concerned with what happens in the world and, because omnipotent, could prevent the existence of evil. The claim that he would prevent its existence is, of course, related only to the fourth proposition of our statement of the problem.

This concludes our rather brief analysis of the five propositions involved in the statement of the problem of evil. Given this analysis we can now state, with more precision than was possible earlier, exactly how the problem of evil arises.

XII

Suppose that we are told that a certain individual, let us call him "John", is a paradigm case of a morally good person. Suppose also that, the next day, we see John walking down the street. He does not notice us. We, however, notice that he comes upon a young boy who has fallen off his bicycle and is bleeding profusely. Apparently, John's reaction to this situation is to ignore the screams of the child and continue on his way. The question now arises, "How does this situation reflect on the claim regarding John's moral stature?" Here there are two possible answers. First, this information might lead us to deny the original contention that John really is a morally good person. We might conjecture that John's previous public actions were merely a facade designed to win the approval of others. Regarding this specific situation, it might be suggested that John did not help the suffering child, even though he believed it to be the right thing to do, because he also believed (wrongly, of course) that no one would know of his action.

A second possibility, however, is that we might not accept the claim that John did, in fact, ignore the child's plight. That is, we might plausibly maintain that there was a "morally sufficient reason"¹⁹ for John's action. It might be suggested, implausibly of course, that

¹⁹ I borrow this terminology from Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil", in Pike, ed., op. cit. Pike says: "To say that there is a morally sufficient reason for his action is simply to say that there is a circumstance or condition which, when known, renders blame (though, of course, not responsibility) for the action inappropriate" (p. 88.).

John did not realize that the child was hurt. If this were the case, we might excuse John on the ground of ignorance. Secondly, it might be contended that the situation in question was not completely under his control, that he was under the influence of some external force, e.g., he may have been under the influence of drugs, or have been hypnotized, or have been sleepwalking. If this were the case, we might not blame him on the ground that he did not have voluntary control over his body. Thirdly, it is possible that John was on his way to see his dying mother and, although he realized that the child was suffering, he felt that his duty to be at his mother's bedside took precedence over his prima facie obligation to help the child. Here the morally sufficient reason for his action would be that he believed that he was doing the right thing, i.e., his intentions were morally good.

The conclusion to be drawn from this hypothetical situation is this: We must adopt one of these two alternative answers to the question, "How does this situation affect our original judgement that John is a morally good person?" Once again, the two alternatives are (1) discounting the original thesis or (2) offering a particular morally sufficient reason for John's action. And to say that we must adopt one of these two alternatives is to say that we cannot (1) maintain that this situation has no relevance to the claim that John is a morally good person or (2) claim that this situation in any way confirms the hypothesis that he is a morally good person. Certainly, we may later excuse or justify his action when we discover his actual motives, but as these are presently unknown, we must regard his action as counting against the claim that he

is a morally good person.

The analogy between the story of John and the suffering child and the situation in the universe regarding the existence of evil is quite close. As we have briefly argued earlier, it does not seem to be open to dispute that because the child's screams were unheeded by John that this constitutes prima facie evidence against the proposal that John is a morally good person. That is, we would not expect a morally good person--all other things being equal--to allow any sentient being to suffer needlessly. Similarly, it is generally agreed that the existence of evil constitutes prima facie evidence against the hypothesis that God exists. That is, we would not expect a being who was omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, and responsible for what happens in the universe to allow evil to exist.²⁰ To support this latter claim let me refer to philosophers and theologians who have commented on it.

H.J. McCloskey claims that "there is a clear prima facie case that God and evil are incompatible"²¹ i.e., "evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other."²² J.L. Mackie, who does not include our third and fifth propositions in his

²⁰ I think that it is obvious that this claim is important, for if a theist refuses to accept the thesis that evil constitutes at least prima facie evidence against the existence of God, then it goes without saying that for him there is no problem of evil, and hence no solution is required.

²¹ McCloskey, op. cit., p. 66.

²² Ibid., p. 61.

formulation of the problem of evil, nevertheless maintains that "there seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them are true, the third would be false."²³ Mackie also points out that "... all three (propositions) are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three."²⁴ John Wisdom makes this same point in a slightly different way: "There is no judgment about the good whose truth we are more certain of than the judgment that what is painful or sinful cannot be perfectly good."²⁵ P.H.D. d'Holbach states his version of the problem of evil as one of the "confused and contradictory ideas of theology":

When perverse and negligent governments produce and multiply misery, sterility, depopulation, and ravages, in my country, where is the goodness of God to it? When terrible revolutions, deluges, earthquakes, overthrow a great part of the globe which I inhabit, where is the goodness of this God; where is the beautiful order which his wisdom has introduced in the universe? How shall we be able to discern his beneficent providence, when everything appears to announce that he is sporting with the human species?²⁶

²³ J.L. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", in Pike, ed., op. cit., p. 47.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ John Wisdom, "God and Evil", Mind, Vol. 44 (1935), p. 1.

²⁶ P.H.D. d'Holbach, The System of Nature, Vol. 3, Chapter VII in Religious Belief and Philosophical Thought, ed. William Alston (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World Inc., 1963), p. 260.

is a morally good person.

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²¹ McCloskey, op. cit., p. 66.

²² Ibid., p. 61.

F.R. Tennant voices this same objection in this way:

And before theistic faith, however sanguinly it may be entertained by individual believers, can be redeemed from subjectivity and be pronounced to be reasonable from the point of view of common or objective "knowledge", a solution of the problem of evil must be found. It is as incumbent upon empirically reached theism as upon theology of the a priori kind to provide a theodicy, or to afford grounds for a belief equivalent to the rationalistically derived assertion that this is the best possible world.²⁷

And finally, John James, in his biblical approach to the problem of evil agrees that "the prevalence of evil furnishes a prima facie case against the belief in the goodness and omnipotence of God, and so our faith must stand its trial."²⁸ He cites as a case for the prosecution a passage from Browning's "Mihrab Shah":

Wherefore should any evil hap to man-
From ache of flesh to agony of soul-
Since God's All-Mercy mates All-Potency?
Nay, why permits He evil to himself-
Man's sin accounted such? Suppose a world
Purged of all pain, with fit inhabitant-
Man pure of evil in thought, word and deed-
Were it not well? Then, wherefore otherwise?
Too good result? But He is wholly good!
Hard to effect? Ay, were He impotent!

Regarding our story of John and the suffering child, we have contended that the fact that John did not help the child reflects his character in one of two ways. First, his action could be construed as evidence against the hypothesis that he is a morally good person. This particular

²⁷ F.R. Tennant, Philosophical Theology, Vol. 2, Ch. VII, in Alston ed., op. cit., p. 245.

²⁸ John James, Why Evil? (Hammondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1960), Ch. IV.

inference, however, obviously does not in any way imply anything about the existence or non-existence of John; it simply denies a particular claim regarding the moral aspect of his character. Yet in the case of God and the existence of evil, if we analogously deny that God is perfectly good because he allows evil to exist, then there is an important implication regarding his existence. To deny that God is perfectly good is, in effect, to deny that God exists, for God is perfectly good by definition. No doubt most theists do not regard the existence of evil as implying this conclusion; they adopt the second alternative and offer a defence of God's action analogous to that which was earlier suggested for John. That is, most theists claim that in the case of God and the existence of evil that there is a morally sufficient reason for his action. The adoption of this second alternative, however, has one very important implication, viz., it implies that evil really is a problem for the theist. For if evil did not present itself as a problem for the theist, why would a morally sufficient reason for God's action be needed at all? The fact that theologians from the time of St. Augustine to the twentieth century have attempted to provide solutions to the problem of evil shows conclusively that they all, either implicitly or explicitly, agree that evil constitutes prima facie evidence against the existence of God.

Finally, it should be apparent that the problem of evil is a much more serious problem for the theist than the problem of defending John's moral stature. Unlike John, God is obviously not a mortal being. Hence, many of the morally sufficient reasons which were plausible in John's case are not so with regard to God's action. God, for example, cannot be excused for allowing evil on the ground that he was ignorant as to how it might effect

man, for he is, by definition, omniscient. Nor can he be excused on the ground that he is unable to remove evil because he is, once again by definition, omnipotent. Hence the theist must seek other morally sufficient reasons in order to avoid assigning blame to God for allowing evil to exist. These reasons, which I now propose to examine, constitute the many proposed solutions to the problem of evil.

CHAPTER III

THE COGNITIVITY OF RELIGIOUS UTTERANCES

I. THE PROBLEM OF EVIL--A PSEUDO-PROBLEM?

Before proceeding with a survey of some of the proposed solutions to the problem of evil, we should consider a possible objection to the approach that has been taken in our discussion of the problem. We have seen that the problem of evil is a problem only in conjunction with certain religious doctrines, viz., the belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who is responsible for what happens in the world. Or, to be more precise, the problem of evil essentially involves two sentences, "God exists" and "Evil exists" and their prima facie incompatibility. Now an objector might take issue with any further discussion of the incompatibility of these two sentences on the ground that we have not, as yet, established that these sentences are cognitively meaningful, i.e., that they are either true or false. He might contend that one or both of these sentences are devoid of cognitive meaning and have only emotive meaning.²⁹ If this is the case, i.e., if one or both of these sentences are in fact devoid of truth-value, then it becomes unclear what it means to say that these sentences are in conflict or incompatible. That is, one wonders what sort of problem the problem of evil could be if some of those sentences involved in its formulation were cognitively meaningless. In this chapter

²⁹ The emotive meaning of an utterance is that aspect of its meaning which expresses, rather than describes, an attitude or emotion of the speaker. Exclamations such as "alas" or "hurrah" are words which have only emotive meaning.

we will be concerned only with the contention that "God exists" is cognitively meaningless, as it is the cognitivity of this utterance, rather than that of "Evil exists", which has occupied the attention of contemporary philosophers and theologians.

This sort of objection requires us to establish what types of meaning the utterance "God exists" has before we proceed with a discussion of the attempted solutions to the problem of evil. It also leads us to the more general question of the semantical status of religious utterances as a whole, and here there are four avenues open to the inquiring philosopher. He may claim that all religious utterances are cognitively meaningful but have no other meaning; that they are cognitively meaningful and have some other type of meaning; that they are devoid of cognitive meaning but possess some other type of meaning; and finally, that they are devoid of both cognitive meaning and any other type of meaning. We will be concerned with only the third and fourth possibilities here.

Most philosophers and theologians prior to the twentieth century simply assumed that all sentences expressing religious dogma had cognitive meaning and, further, that such sentences could be verified by empirical means since they entailed empirical statements. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, presented five arguments designed to show that the sentence "God exists" is true. These arguments today stand as the paradigm case of religious sentences which appeal to observation. Anselm, and later Descartes and Leibniz, though they did not appeal to observation to establish the existence of God, were nevertheless cognitivists regarding the semantical status of religious utterances. They claimed that once we understood

the meaning of the word "God" we would see that the assertion that he exists is a necessary truth. Even Hume, in attempting to show that the argument from design did not constitute adequate grounds for belief in God, assumed that the issue between the theist and the atheist was a cognitive one.

Although Hume did not challenge the assumption that the sentence "God exists" is cognitively meaningful, his empiricism was to influence future philosophers and their more radical views regarding the semantical status of religious utterances. A.J. Ayer and the logical positivists, who admitted that their doctrines were the logical outcomes of the empiricism of Berkeley and Hume, shocked the philosophical and theological world by maintaining that all religious utterances are cognitively meaningless. They claimed that all religious utterances are a sub-class of metaphysical utterances and as such are neither true nor false because they cannot be confirmed or disconfirmed by empirical methods. Although the logical positivists did not deal specifically with the problem of evil, it is certain that they would have considered it to be a pseudo-problem, contending that if it is cognitively meaningless to assert that God exists, it follows that it would also be cognitively meaningless to assert that the existence of God is or is not compatible with the existence of evil.

Although the views of the logical positivists have been subject to much criticism, their basic principle--that a factual assertion is one which can be confirmed or disconfirmed by empirical methods--has recently been employed by some British philosophers to reopen the question of the cognitivity of religious utterances. As their views on this matter obviously have important repercussions for any discussion of the problem of evil, I will first pause to examine the controversy regarding the cognitivity of

religious utterances and then return to the problem of evil itself.

II. JOHN WISDOM AND "GODS"

John Wisdom, in his widely acclaimed paper "Gods"³⁰, launches a discussion concerning the cognitive or noncognitive character of religious language. In explaining the nature of the dispute between the theist and the atheist, Wisdom points out that "the existence of God is not an experimental issue in the way it was"³¹, and he assumes, therefore, that metaphysical arguments for the existence of God will not play any part in the discussion. What will be under discussion will be a more sophisticated theistic belief in God or gods, and in order to focus the field of attention more clearly Wisdom tells us that the belief in a life after death will play no part in his investigation. Thus the aim of the study will be "to consider the differences between atheists and theists in so far as these differences are not a matter of a belief in a future life."³²

Eliminating any consideration of life after death, what are the differences between the atheists and theists? Is it what the theists are people who have retained their primitive childish superstitions when such immaturities should have been shed, or is it that the atheists are afflicted by what Wittgenstein called "aspect-blindness"? Wisdom considers the analogy

30 John Wisdom, "Gods", in Logic and Language, First Series, ed. Antony Flew (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1951), pp. 186-206.

31 Ibid., p. 194.

32 Ibid., p. 195.

between the belief in God and a child's belief that his deceased father now rests in another world. This child, says Wisdom, may believe that his dead father sees and hears him all the time; and when he does something wrong he may feel separated from his father until he repents his wrongdoing. Possibly the child also believes that when he himself dies he will rejoin his father in this other world. Nevertheless, insists Wisdom, this is not all of what makes the difference between a child who believes that his father lives in another world and one who does not. Nor is it, mutatis mutandis, the only difference between one who believes in God and one who does not. According to Wisdom,

This difference may still be described as belief in another world, only this belief is not a matter of one expecting one thing rather than another here or hereafter, it is not a matter of a world to come but of a world that is now, though beyond our senses.³³

Wisdom contends that in order to comprehend the logic of belief in God we must examine the logic of belief in animal and human minds, i.e., the question of the reasonableness of belief in divine minds is intimately related to the question of there being any facts in nature which support our claims about human minds. And so, according to Wisdom, the problem of the existence of God can be resolved into three parts. First, there is the question, "Is there ever any behaviour which gives reason to believe in any sort of mind?"³⁴ Secondly, we may ask, "Are there other mind-patterns in nature besides the human and animal patterns which we can all easily detect, and are these other mind-patterns super-human?"³⁵ However, Wisdom

³³ Ibid., p. 196.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 197.

³⁵ Ibid.

sible", he concludes, "to have before one's eyes all the items of a pattern and still to miss the pattern."³⁸ Indeed, it may well be that the pattern is the most important fact in the total situation, providing the clue to the understanding of all else; to miss the pattern is to miss the meaning of the whole and, therefore, "the difference as to there being any gods is in part a difference as to what is so and therefore as to the facts, but not in the simple way which first occurred to us."³⁹

Wisdom now suggests that we "approach these same points by a different road."⁴⁰ Here he employs a parable designed to illustrate how belief in God "may start by being experimental and gradually become something quite different...."⁴¹

Two people return to their long neglected garden and find among the weeds a few old plants surprisingly vigorous. One says to the other, "It must be that a gardener has been coming and doing something about these plants." Upon inquiry they find that no neighbour has ever seen anyone at work in their garden. The first man says to the other, "He must have worked while people slept." The other says, "No, someone would have heard him and besides, anyone who cared about the plants would have kept down the weeds." The first man says, "Look at the way these are arranged. There is purpose and a feeling for beauty here. I believe that someone comes, someone invisible to human eyes. I believe that the more carefully we look the more we shall find confirmation of this." They examine the garden ever so carefully and sometimes they come upon new things suggesting the contrary and even that a malicious person has been at work. Besides examining

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid. p. 200.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

the garden carefully, they also study what happens to gardens left without attention. Consequently, when after all this one says, "I still believe a gardener comes" while the other says "I don't" their different words now reflect no difference as to what they have found in the garden, no difference as to what they would find if they looked further and no difference about how fast untended gardens fall into disorder. At this stage, in this context, the gardener hypothesis has ceased to be experimental, the difference between one who accepts it and one who rejects it is not now a matter of one expecting something that the other doesn't expect. What is the difference between them? The one says, "A gardener comes unseen and unheard. He is manifested only in his works with which we are all familiar", the other says, "There is no gardener" and with this difference about what they say about the gardener goes a difference in how they feel towards the garden, in spite of the fact that neither expects anything that the other does not expect.⁴²

Having concluded that there is no experiential difference between the views of the two disputants, i.e., there are no possible further empirical tests which would cast doubt on either "hypothesis" (in the opinion of either disputant), Wisdom asks:

If the whole difference between the two is that one calls the garden by one name and feels one way towards it, while the other calls it by another name and feels another way towards it, is it any longer appropriate to ask "Which is right?" or "Which is reasonable?"⁴³

What implications for the question of the cognitivity of religious utterances does Wisdom's parable have? Wisdom might be interpreted as claiming that the difference between the theist and the atheist is this: If the theist were asked to compile a list of those things that he believed

⁴² Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 201.

to be real he would no doubt include tables, chairs, apples, flowers, animals, people, etc.; if the atheist were making up his list, he would compile exactly the same list as that of the theist. Once having compiled their respective lists, however, the atheist and the theist would differ in that each would then adopt a different attitude or feeling toward the sum total of items on his list. The theist would say "God exists", this being the conventionally accepted way of expressing his particular attitude toward reality as a whole, while the atheist would say "God does not exist" as the conventional accepted way of expressing his differing attitude. Thus Wisdom is maintaining that neither of the rival "hypotheses" is, even in principle, verifiable because no cognitive claim is being made; there is no disagreement about the experiencable facts the resolution of which would determine whether the theist or atheist was right. Both disputants see the same world, but they adopt a different attitude towards what they see and express their differing attitudes by adopting what seem to be contradictory hypotheses.

Wisdom makes it quite explicit in his parable that the two disputants agree as to what the facts are. Thus their dispute, if it continues, is certainly not one about the facts, for this aspect of the dispute has already been resolved. What remains in the dispute has a more personal quality attached to it, viz., that of committing oneself to a particular attitude toward these accepted facts. And this attitude, according to Wisdom, is not itself another fact nor stateable as another fact. Once we notice that this is now the focal point of the "disagreement" we can see that any cognitive elements which were once present have now been superseded by emotive elements relating solely to attitudes and feelings. This

situation, says Wisdom, is similar to the situation where two people see the same picture and one says it is beautiful while the other maintains that it is ugly. In both cases, says Wisdom, what seem to be contradictory claims are only reflections of different feelings and indicate no difference in cognitive meaning:

The difference as to whether a God exists involves our feelings more than most scientific disputes and in this respect is more like a difference as to whether there is beauty in a thing.⁴⁴

If Wisdom is interpreted as claiming that all religious utterances are cognitively meaningless, then there are several things which he says which seem to be inconsistent with this interpretation. For example:

And if we say as we did at the beginning that when a difference as to the existence of God is not one as to future happenings then it is not experimental and therefore not as to the facts, we must not forthwith assume that there is no right or wrong about it, 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.⁴⁵

And, in reply to the suggestion that if there is no experiential difference between the views of the two disputants then it is no longer appropriate to ask "Which is right?" or "Which is reasonable?", Wisdom says, "And yet surely such questions are appropriate when one person says to the other "You still think the world's a garden and not a wilderness and that the gardener has not foresaken it".⁴⁶ The tone of these statements at least casts doubt

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 205.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 201.

on whether or not Wisdom wanted to deny the cognitivity of religious utterances. Nevertheless, the important question is not whether Wisdom was or was not denying this thesis, but whether or not this conclusion (which most commentators have claimed Wisdom was in fact drawing) follows from his parable.

What can be said in rebuttal to Wisdom's thesis? First, it seems that Wisdom mistakenly identifies the notions of an utterance being true or false and its being capable of being proven true or false. He nowhere offers any evidence in support of his contention that an utterance must satisfy the latter condition before it can meet the former and, quite frankly, I see no prima facie reasons for accepting the claim that it must. In fact, there seems to be other candidates which are cognitively meaningful and yet do not appear to be capable of being proven either true or false. Mathematics offers many such candidates.⁴⁷ For example: some prime numbers can be written in the form $1 + n^2$ for some natural number n . Thus $5 = 1 + 2^2$ and $17 = 1 + 4^2$. The question now arises, "Is there an end to such primes?" Unfortunately, no mathematician has as yet answered this question. Consider a second example: the question "If n is a natural number, is there a prime between n^2 and $(n + 1)^2$?" is but another mathematical problem which is unsolved as yet. And finally, the work of Gödel is particularly relevant to the question of cognitivity and verification. In 1931 Gödel shattered the mystical belief that, given any definite unsolved problem in mathematics, its solution must follow by a definite number of purely logical processes. He proved that in any consistent mathematical system rich enough to include

⁴⁷ These examples are taken from Mathematics: The Man Made Universe by Sherman K. Stein (San Francisco: W.H. Frieman & Co., 1963).

number theory, there is an assertion within that system that is true, yet is not provable within that system. What are the implications of this "incompleteness theorem"?

It suggests that there may be questions whose answers we will never know, no matter what new techniques of proof we may someday discover, or how far we go outside the structure in which the question was originally phrased...Though every probable statement is true, it may not that every true statement is provable. The true and the provable may not coincide.⁴⁸

Wisdom has presented a dispute between the theist and atheist in which neither is willing to allow the possibility of there being any further evidence which would verify the other's "hypothesis". What does a dispute of this sort suggest--that the two different "hypotheses" are cognitively meaningless? No, this conclusion does not follow at all. It is certainly a non sequiter to claim that because each disputant is not willing to allow that his opponents "hypothesis" could ever be verified by future observation, that no such evidence exists. Surely, if the two disputants were one day to discover that all the flowers in the garden had withered away, would this not constitute evidence against the hypothesis of a watchful gardener? Or, on the other hand, what if all the weeds in the garden were suddenly replaced by beautiful flowers--would this not be evidence in favour of the gardener hypothesis? And even if it were the case that no additional evidence did exist, it is a non sequiter to assume that the existing evidence cannot or does not favour either of the two disputants. Hence, the reluctance on the part of these individuals to accept any further

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 276-77.

evidence may be simply irrelevant with respect to the cognitivity of their respective utterances.

I conclude this discussion of Wisdom's "Gods" by stating that I believe that Wisdom fails to demonstrate that religious utterances lack cognitivity; he may have reopened the question of the cognitivity of religious utterances, but he certainly has not settled it.

III. ANTONY FLEW AND "THEOLOGY AND FALSIFICATION"⁴⁹

Flew begins with a parable developed from Wisdom's "Gods". As the two parables are quite similar, however, Flew's will not be reproduced here; it is Flew's interpretation of the parable and the conclusions he draws which differ from Wisdom's and therefore merit special attention.

Taking the position of the sceptic, Flew asks, "Just how does what you (theist) call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even no gardener at all?⁵⁰ and he replies,

In this parable we can see how what starts as an assertion that something exists or that there is some analogy between certain complexes of phenomena, may be reduced step by step to an altogether different status, to an expression perhaps of a "picture preference"⁵¹A fine brash hypothesis may thus be killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications."⁵²

⁴⁹ Antony Flew, "Theology and Falsification", in New Essays in Philosophical Theology, eds., Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (New York: The Macmillan Company and London: The Student Christian Movement Press, 1955), pp. 96-99.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 96.

⁵¹ Cf. John Wisdom, "Other Minds", Mind, Vol. 49, No. 193, 1940.

⁵² Flew, op. cit., p. 97.

Theological utterances, says Flew, have perished in just this way. Such sentences as "God has a plan", "God created the world", and "God loves us like a father loves his children", which appear to be genuine assertions, soon are qualified to the point where they lose all cognitive content.

Flew now proceeds to consider the semantical status of religious utterances by examining the nature of assertions in general. He says:

Now to assert that such and such is the case is necessarily equivalent to denying that such and such is not the case. Suppose that we are in doubt as to what someone who gives vent to an utterance is asserting, or suppose, more radically, we are sceptical as to whether he is really asserting anything at all, one way of trying to understand (or perhaps it will be to expose) his utterance is to attempt to find out what he would regard as counting against, or being incompatible with, its truth. For if the utterance is indeed an assertion, it will necessarily be equivalent to the denial of the negation of that assertion. And anything which would count against the assertion, or which would induce the speaker to withdraw it and admit that he had been mistaken, must be part of (or the whole of) the meaning of the negation of that assertion. And to know the meaning of the negation of an assertion, is as near as makes no matter, to know the meaning of that assertion.⁵³

Flew concludes that because there is no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which religious people would accept as constituting a disproof of God's existence, the putative assertion "God exists" is cognitively meaningless. Thus with Flew, the debate concerning the cognitivity of religious utterances has shifted from the idea of verifiability as the test of cognitivity to the complementary idea of falsifiability. Flew's argument seems more persuasive than that of Wisdom or the logical

⁵³ Ibid., p. 98.

positivists in that he is claiming that all religious utterances violate a logical condition rather than a controversial epistemological one (the verification criterion of meaning).

Flew's argument is certainly not as straightforward as it might appear; there are several things he says which seem to me to be either ambiguous or false. First, I take the statement "To assert that such and such is the case is necessarily equivalent (italics mine) to denying that such and such is not the case"⁵⁴ to mean that, on logical grounds, any statement is equivalent to the negation of its negation. That is, any statement and the denial of its denial (negation of its negation) come out a tautology under truth table analysis. Beginning with this syntactical analysis of all assertions, one might expect any other general statements which Flew makes about assertions to be of the same type, i.e., syntactical in nature. However, this does not seem to be the case. For example, Flew goes on to say that if we are in doubt as to whether someone is really asserting something, "one way of trying to understand (or perhaps it will be to expose) his utterance is to find out what he would regard as counting against, or being incompatible with, its truth."⁵⁵ It is not altogether clear what this means. "Trying to understand (or perhaps it will be to expose)" an utterance looks like trying to find out what it means, or whether it means anything, i.e., a question of the semantical status of the utterance; attempting to find out what the speaker "would regard as counting against its truth" looks more like trying to find out what statements he would regard as being incompatible with the truth of his original asser-

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

tion, i.e., a question of the logical status of the utterance. A third possibility, which Flew does not consider, of trying to understand a person's utterance is to ask him on what grounds he wants to assert it, i.e., a question of the epistemic status of the utterance. The question now arises, "On what basis is Flew criticising religious utterances--as not fulfilling some logical prerequisite of all genuine assertions, or a semantical prerequisite, or an epistemic prerequisite, or even some combination of these three?" Flew is certainly not explicit here, and this tends to obscure the direction and force of his argument.

Nevertheless, let us proceed to what seems to be the core of Flew's argument against religious utterances. He argues as follows:

And anything which would count against the assertion or⁵⁶ which would induce the speaker to withdraw it and admit that it had been mistaken, must be part of (or the whole of) the meaning of the negation of that assertion.⁵⁷

Because religious people are unwilling to allow anything whatsoever as constituting evidence against such utterances as "God exists" and "God loves us like a father loves his children", the negations of these utterances must be devoid of cognitive meaning. And if this is so, because "to know the meaning of the negation of an assertion, is as far as makes no matter, to

⁵⁶ It is not clear whether Flew is here making two distinct claims as to what constitutes part or whole of the meaning of the negation of an assertion or merely rewording one claim. I shall assume that he is doing the former and therefore argue against what appear to be two distinct contentions. However, even if he is simply making the one point here, my second criticism will, I believe, be sufficient to refute it.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

know the meaning of that assertion",⁵⁸ the religious putative assertions themselves must be cognitively meaningless.

The above argument rests on one or two (depending on one's interpretation) assumptions. Each, I will maintain, is patently false. First, consider Flew's contention that anything (italics mine) which would induce a speaker to admit that his utterance had been mistaken must be part of (or for whole of) the meaning of the negation of that utterance. Suppose that a communist, who was originally a theist, was brainwashed into believing that God does not exist on the ground that Lenin said so. Would the statements "Whatever Lenin said is true" and "Lenin said, 'God does not exist!'" be part of the meaning of "God does not exist"? Obviously not, and yet this is the position Flew is committed to if he wishes to maintain that anything which would induce a speaker to admit that his utterance had been mistaken must be part of (or the whole of) the meaning of the negation of that assertion.

Secondly, consider Flew's claim that anything which would count against (italics mine) an assertion must be part of the meaning of the negation of that assertion. This is surely false. Flew would no doubt agree that the fact that a particular object appears to be blue counts against or is evidence against the thesis that the object is red. However, the statement "This object appears blue" is not part of or the whole of the meaning of "This is not red"; otherwise it would be logically impossible for a non-red object to fail to appear blue. Granting the validity of these two counterexamples, it would appear that the crux of Flew's argument against

58 Ibid.

the cognitivity of religious utterances is unsound.

It seems to me that there are several other possible rejoinders open to the religious cognitivist. First, he might suggest that Flew subject the utterance "It is not the case that God exists" to his test for cognitive meaning. Flew would have to say that this putative assertion is cognitively meaningful if and only if the theist would regard some evidence as counting against or being incompatible with its truth. But here the theist is only too willing to oblige. There are many examples of evidence that disconfirm this utterance which he would be willing to endorse, e.g., miracles, the moral law, purpose and order in the universe, our sense of contingency, religious experience, etc. If this is the case, would Flew not be compelled to admit that the utterance "It is not the case that God exists" is a genuine statement? And if this utterance is a genuine statement, does it not follow that "God exists" is also a genuine statement?⁵³

Secondly, if Flew wants to maintain that any "hypothesis" which is not falsifiable in principle is cognitively meaningless, then there seem to be obvious counterexamples to this claim. For example, the hypothesis "There are three consecutive sevens in the decimal determination of π " may one day be verified, but it can never be falsified.⁶⁰ Flew might reply

⁵⁹ If "It is not the case that God exists" passes Flew's requirements for genuineness, then "God exists" must also be an actual rather than just a putative assertion. For if the former utterance is cognitively meaningful it is surely not due solely to the meaning of the logical operator "it is not the case that"; therefore, the only other constituent of the utterance, viz., "God exists", must be cognitively meaningful.

⁶⁰ This example is from John Hick, Philosophy of Religion (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963, p. 100.

that this is a mathematical utterance and as such differs drastically from religious utterances, i.e., mathematical utterances are supposedly analytic, whereas religious sentences are not. This reply is not a telling one, however, for even if we accept it, there are other counterexamples which support our contention. For example, the utterance "There exists a blue dog" is obviously a non-analytic utterance which, given an infinite number of objects in the universe, may one day be verified, but it can never be falsified, even if false. It would not seem to be too presumptuous to assume that Flew would not want to deny that this is a cognitively meaningful utterance.

Thirdly, there is an ambiguity in the notion of not-being-a-real-assertion as Flew puts it. It is not clear whether his objection to religious putative assertions is that what they say cannot be either verified or falsified, or that they are meaningless, i.e., don't really say anything. He seems to want to make both these objections, and the second, illegitimately, on the basis of the first. But these two things ought to be kept distinct. We need ask: "Are religious putative assertions meaningful, i.e., are they either true or false?" and, "Are they verifiable or falsifiable?"

Fourthly, it would appear that Flew is guilty of committing the same type of error that Wisdom does. If a theist were to take the stand that Flew attributes to all theists, viz., refusing to admit that there is any evidence which would count against the God-hypothesis, it does not follow that "God exists" is not a genuine assertion. What does follow is that anyone who takes this stand is not being rational, and the irrationality of a particular person or group of persons does not constitute good grounds for claiming that their putative assertions are neither true nor false. To make this

point slightly differently, we may ask, "In what way are the beliefs and attitudes of religious individuals a reflection on the cognitivity of religious utterances?" There are certainly many agnostics who are willing to admit that there is evidence both for and against the God-hypothesis: must we say, as Flew surely must on his analysis, that in this instance the utterance "God exists" is cognitively meaningful, whereas when uttered by the theist it is not? Surely in both cases the utterance is either cognitively meaningful or it is not, although according to Flew its meaningfulness would change as the position adopted by its speaker changed. Flew's error here seems to be in confusing the acceptability of disconfirming evidence with the acceptance of such evidence by the theist (to be more precise, the refusal to accept such evidence).

The issue between the theist and the atheist is an epistemological one, viz., given the present evidence, which view is reasonable and which is not? If the theist or the atheist refuses to accept the reasonable view then all we can do is find analogous situations in which he would consider a position such as his to be irrational. If he still refuses to change his stand, claiming that this is a special case, then there is nothing more that we can do. But to reiterate, the stand taken by the theist, atheist, or agnostic with regard to the falsifiability of religious utterances is completely irrelevant to the question of their cognitivity.

Having examined the arguments of two recent critics of the cognitivity of religious utterances, and having shown their arguments to be inconclusive, we can now return to the problem of evil relatively free from the fear that Flew or Wisdom has demonstrated that we are concerning ourselves with a meaningless problem.

CHAPTER IV

SOME PROPOSED SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

The problem of evil, qua problem, arises in the following way: From premises which seem to be true, one can validly infer that God is not omnipotent, or not omniscient, or not perfectly good, or not responsible for what happens in the world. That is, most theologians accept the existence of evil as constituting prima facie evidence against the existence of God. They also accept the premise that evil exists in the world. From the truth of these two premises one can validly conclude that God, as defined earlier, does not exist. These theists, while agreeing that the existence of evil is prima facie evidence against the existence of God, nevertheless maintain that the existence of evil is not actually evidence against his existence. Their attempts to show that the existence of evil is not actually evidence against the existence of God may be characterized as being attempts to provide morally sufficient reasons for the existence of evil. I now propose to examine a number of these putative solutions.

I. "EVIL IS MERELY THE PRIVATION OF GOOD"

This putative solution has been alternatively expressed in the claims that evil exists only through negation or that evil is not positive in nature. It has been held by such notable thinkers as St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Augustine, and Maimonides.

It might be suggested that referring to all evil as "privation" increases the number of evils in the world, rather than solving the problem of the existence of evil. That is, it might be contended that all contingent

things possess some privation or other, and that each of these privations is, therefore, an evil. In this way, one could conclude that a stone's inability to see would be an evil as would be its inability to swim, eat, drink, think, etc. This criticism rests, unfortunately, on a confusion of the meaning of the phrase "lack of", and the intended technical sense of the phrase "privation of" employed in this attempted solution to the problem of evil. In calling evil a "privation" neither Aquinas, Augustine, or Maimonides mean by this word what is normally meant by the phrase "lack of". The lack of a particular property in a thing does not imply that this property ever existed or was possessed by that thing. The privation of a particular property, however, does imply that this property was, at one time or another, present in that thing. Thus it not suggested that man's inability to fly is an evil. God has not given man the ability to fly, and so it is not an evil that the latter cannot do so. Evil, therefore, is to be regarded as a privation of a particular property, rather than the mere lack of it. It is the corruption of a God-given property, and where the God-given property was initially absent, evil cannot occur. That is, evil is regarded as disorder, and where no original order existed, evil cannot exist.

From this distinction between the phrases "lack of" and "privation of" the argument proceeds to show that God cannot be held directly responsible for the existence of evil. The argument proceeds as follows:

- (1) God created all things.
- (2) All things that exist, considered only in so far as they exist, are good.
- (3) Evil is the privation of good.
- (4) Therefore, God did not create, and so is not directly responsible for, the existence of evil.

One could attack this "solution" in a number of ways, especially by

questioning the truth (or should I say meaningfulness) of the second premise. For example, the traditional distinction between instrumental and intrinsic good would seem to cast doubt on its plausibility. That is, it has been maintained that such things as money and gold are worthless in themselves. Their value, supposedly, is derived from the fact that they enable one to acquire other things, e.g., pleasure and knowledge, which are valuable or good in themselves. Bearing this distinction in mind, and noting that each of the above intrinsic goods is necessarily connected with the existence of sentient beings, what sense does it make to say that anything whatsoever, considered only in so far as it exists, is good?

One particular criticism of this "solution" to the problem of evil seems to be decisive in weakening the force of its conclusion. It purports to show that we can grant the truth of the conclusion of the above argument and still maintain that the original problem remains unsolved. Consider this rejoinder: The notion of disorder, i.e., evil, implies original order. Hence, if disorder is introduced where there was order originally, there must be a cause for this particular change in an existing state of affairs. That is, there must be a cause of the disorder, a cause of the evil. Theists would agree that, even if God did not create evil, he did create the efficient causes of evil. And if this is so, then it is appropriate to assign blame to God for the existence of evil; for even if God created only what was good, and so is not directly responsible for the existence of evil, it must nonetheless be admitted that he did create, and is therefore directly responsible for, the existence of those things which are the efficient causes of evil. For example, God must be held directly responsible for the existence of an earthquake which, even if it is good only in so far as

it exists, nevertheless causes thousands of deaths. Granting this responsibility, we may now ask the following questions: "Why then does (did) God not remove these efficient causes of evil, and, in so doing, remove evil?" and "Why did he create those things which he knew would cause evil in the world?"⁶¹ The obvious appropriateness of these questions shows that this "solution" is effective only in taking the theist from the frying pan to the fire, i.e., it restates, rather than resolves, the problem of evil.

II. EVIL--THE HUMAN POINT OF VIEW?

Although there are many species of this solution, they all have one thing in common, viz., they claim that the problem of evil disappears or is resolved when the imperfections and limitations of man are considered. In this section I will examine two such claims and point out, in each case, why I believe them to be fallacious solutions. Following this will be a brief section in which I propose to show that any putative solution of this type is inevitably doomed to fail.

A. "EVIL IS AN ILLUSION"

Although this solution does not presently enjoy a wide acceptance, it is still held by contemporary Christian Science. It has been alternatively expressed in the claims that evil is unreal or that evil is simply an error of human judgement. Unfortunately, there is an ambiguity in these statements, i.e., this putative solution admits of two possible, though not equally plau-

⁶¹ Obviously, the theist cannot reply to these questions by claiming that God is or was not omnipotent or omniscient.

sible, interpretations. First, it may be taken as asserting that one of the purported necessary conditions for the existence of evil, viz., pain and/or the deprivation of happiness, denotes a null class. Secondly, it may be interpreted as asserting that while pain and/or the deprivation of happiness is real, we are mistaken in calling such things evils, i.e., some defect in our cognition has led us to mistakenly regard these things as evils.

The obvious reply to the latter interpretation is this: if man's regarding pain and/or the deprivation of happiness as evils is simply an error of human judgement, then error or illusion are themselves evils. This rejoinder can be made more explicit in terms of our original formulation of the problem of evil qua problem. That is, we can ask any proponent of this "solution": "Would you expect a being who was omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good to populate a world (for which he was responsible) with illusions and errors of judgement, rather than with veridical experiences?" Prima facie, the answer would appear to be "No". Therefore, rather than offering itself as an adequate solution to the problem of evil, this putative solution merely restates the problem in terms of the problem of illusion. C.J. Ducasse formulates this rejoinder in a clear and concise manner:

Hence what this purported refutation of the existence of evil really does is only to mention one particular kind of evil--namely, illusion, error, delusion, false belief--and to assert that all evil is of this special kind.⁶²

Turning now to both the first and second interpretations of this putative solution, it is quite obvious that each interpretation is completely inconsistent with the unmitigated realism of the Bible. Regarding the first

⁶² Ducasse, op. cit., p. 362.

interpretation, numerous passages in the Bible obviously contradict the claim that pain and/or the deprivation of happiness denote a null class. Nowhere is there an attempt to regard suffering as an illusion or in any way unreal. In fact, the Bible ceaselessly records innumerable instances of human pain and sorrow. The Book of Job serves as an excellent example of this point. Here the Bible records that, due to the hand of Satan, Job's servants were killed, his sheep burned, his camels stolen, his son's and daughters killed, and his body covered with painful boils. There is little doubt that each of these incidents was real, both to Job who experienced them and to Satan who effected them. Job's own words are illustrative of this point:

He teareth me in his wrath, who hateth me:
 He gnasheth upon me with his teeth; mine
 enemy sharpeneth his eyes upon me. They
 have gaped upon me with their mouth; they
 have smitten me upon the cheek reproach-
 fully; they have gathered themselves against
 me. God hath delivered me to the ungodly,
 and turned me over into the hands of the
 wicked. I was at ease, but he hath bro-
 ken me asunder: he hath also taken me by
 my neck, and shaken me to pieces, and set
 me up for his mark. His archers compass
 me round about, he cleaveth my reins asunder,
 and doth not spare; he poureth out my gall
 upon the ground. He breaketh me with breach
 upon breach, he runneth upon me like a giant.⁶³

Furthermore, (in reply to the second interpretation), the Bible refers explicitly to the positive experiences of Job as "evils": "Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that was come upon him, they came every one from his own place...." In fact, the history of evil in the world (according to the Bible) is climaxed by the crucifixion of Christ, and there is little doubt that all Christians would not regard this event, and the suffer-

⁶³ Job 16: 9-13.

ing it involved, as illusory or unreal. And so, "there is little doubt then that for biblical faith, evil is unambiguously evil, and stands in direct opposition to God's will."⁶⁴

B. "GOD'S GOODNESS DIFFERS FROM HUMAN GOODNESS"

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.⁶⁵

Certainly the most controversial, at least in terms of interpretation, of the attributes of God is his divine or perfect goodness. The problem here is that there seems to be no substantial agreement as to whether God's goodness differs in kind or merely in degree from human goodness. Most theologians accept the view that God's omnipotence and omniscience differ only in degree from human capabilities of power and knowledge. Regarding his goodness, however, there is no such agreement. And, although there seems to be little difficulty in interpreting the statement "God's goodness differs in degree from human goodness",⁶⁶ further complications arise when we come to consider the possible interpretations of the statement "God's goodness differs in kind from human goodness". For example, this statement may be taken as implying that God's standards of goodness differ from human standards of goodness. A second possible interpretation is this: when we say "God is good" we mean something entirely different from what we mean when we say "human beings

⁶⁴ Hick, op. cit., p. 40.

⁶⁵ Issaiah 55-9.

⁶⁶ Mill, for example, insists that God's goodness must be an attribute which corresponds in quality, though not in degree, with human goodness.

are good". In this section, however, we will be concerned only with the former interpretation, the one subscribed to by A.E. Taylor, H.L. Mansel, F.H. Bradley, and possibly Spinoza. These individuals talk of a divine or super moral sphere and maintain--as a morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil--that what seems to us good may not be good in God's eyes, and what seems to us evil may not be evil.⁶⁷

This interpretation of God's goodness does not automatically rule out the possibility of our continuing to call him "good". However, an important mystery still remains, viz., what is it that God regards as good, what sorts of acts does he consider to be morally permissible? This putative solution provides no answer to these questions; in fact, it seems to take refuge in our inability to answer them. But, if it is in this respect that God's goodness differs from human goodness, then in saying his standards of right and wrong differ in kind from ours, aren't we really saying "they are we know not what"? And if this is so, then as C.L. Lewis points out, "an utterly unknown quality in God cannot give us moral grounds for loving or obeying him".⁶⁸ That is, if we are not sure that God feels about evil as we do, why should we trouble ourselves to worship him? If his standards of right and wrong are of a totally different quality from those which we respect and praise, then how can we be certain that he is a proper object of veneration?

⁶⁷ This solution is similar to, if not identical with, solution IA. However, as the emphasis here, as opposed to the latter solution, is on God's standards of right and wrong (and not our faulty cognition), this solution will receive individual treatment.

⁶⁸ C.L. Lewis, The Problem of Pain (London: The Centenary Press, 1940), p. 125.

H.D. Aiken, by a somewhat similar line of reasoning, attempts to force the theist to admit that God's goodness differs only in degree from human goodness:

Every moral person is liable to moral praise and blame. In fact, anyone to whom moral responsibility is claimed is ipso facto subject to moral praise and blame as a "good" or "bad" person, since such praise or blame is equivalent to the assertion that he has fulfilled or failed in his responsibilities as a person. Anyone who acquits himself of his moral responsibility thereby deserves to be praised as a good person, and anyone who fails to do so deserves to be censured as a bad person. Should it be argued that a certain person is not, in principle, subject to moral criticism, this would amount to saying that he cannot be charged with moral responsibilities. By the same token, to remove the individual altogether from the sphere of possible moral reprobation is so far to cease to regard him as a moral agent and hence as a moral personality.⁶⁹

Aiken appears to be suggesting that those who talk of a super or divine moral sphere and maintain, therefore, that God's goodness differs in kind from ours and that he is therefore exempt from moral blame for permitting the existence of evil are, by the same token, exempting God from any possible moral praise. Hence, the conclusion that would seem to follow from Aiken's argument is that if God is to be considered an adequate object of worship, then it cannot be contended that his goodness differs in kind, rather than in degree, from human goodness.

C.L. Lewis, nevertheless, maintains that the morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil is related to the notion of God's goodness. He contends that the escape from the problem of evil lies in observing what happens, in human relations, when a man of inferior moral standards enters the society

⁶⁹ H.D. Aiken, Reason and Conduct (New York: Knopf, 1962), p. 183.

of those who are better and wiser than he and gradually learns to accept their standards.⁷⁰ Lewis admits that God's idea of goodness differs from ours; nevertheless, he reassures us that we need have no fear that God's moral standards constitute a complete reversal of ours. He maintains that "once the relevant differences between the divine ethics and ours appears to us, we will not, in fact, be in any doubt that the change demanded of us is in the direction we already call 'better'".⁷⁰

Lewis is certainly not clear as to whether these "relevant differences" are differences in degree or in kind. If they are differences in kind, then Lewis' solution to the problem of evil is not an adequate one for, as he himself admits, unknown qualities in God can never demand praise or worship. Hence, if this is Lewis' position regarding God's goodness, then he must admit that it is solely on grounds of faith, rather than reason, that he "knows" that these relevant differences are in the direction we would call "better". Suppose, however, that Lewis is contending that God's goodness differs only in degree from human goodness. If this be the case, then it is still difficult to see how Lewis has provided a morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil. If we would not excuse a mortal being for causing pain (unless, of course, there was a morally sufficient reason for his action), then it is equally, if not more, difficult to understand why we would excuse a being whose goodness differed from ours merely in degree for allowing evil to exist in the world. Hence, Lewis is still left searching for a morally

⁷⁰ I suggest here, only as a possibility, that Lewis is confusing the notions of a moral code and a moral standard. Surely, it is still a moot point as to whether or not different societies accept different moral standards (though, no doubt, they do have different moral codes).

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 27.

sufficient reason for God's actions.

As we have said before, each of these attempted solutions claims to solve the problem of evil by pointing out the imperfections and limitations of man and contrasting them with God's perfect attributes, e.g., his superior judgment and his superior moral character. Although we are not told in exactly what way God's attributes differ from ours, we are, nevertheless, reassured that we would consider them as being superior to ours. In effect, then, each of these putative solutions to the problem of evil maintains that the resolution of the problem lies in a recognition of the mysterious ways of God, i.e., the characteristic of being wholly-other supposedly provides a solution to the problem.

I have shown, I believe, why each of these putative solutions fails to provide an adequate answer for the existence of evil in the world. Yet, there is a more general criticism of them which entails that any putative solution of this type is also doomed to fail.

Rather than providing an acceptable solution to the problem of evil, any attempted solution which points to the human point of view merely re-emphasizes the fact that evil is a problem for the theist. That is, one does not account for the existence of evil by claiming that "many and mysterious are the ways of God"; it is precisely because God's ways regarding the existence of evil are so mysterious that evil presents itself as a problem to the theist. Hence, the problem of evil originates in, rather than is solved by, the mysterious workings of God.

To say that evil is a problem only from the human point of view is in no way to resolve the issue. It is in no way reassuring to be told that there is no problem from God's point of view. The problem of evil is a problem only

from the human point of view and, therefore, must be resolved from the human point of view. Any suffering person who is told that God, in his superior intelligence, does not see evil as a problem, could quite appropriately ask why God did not create man so that he too could share God's point of view regarding the presence of evil. As F.R. Tennant points out: if no evil would confront timeless vision, i.e., if we saw sub specie aeternitatis, then it is an evil that we do see sub specie temporis. Hence, given the fact that we do see sub specie temporis, the only meaningful solution to the problem of evil must be one from the human point of view.

III. "EVIL IS A NECESSARY COUNTERPART OF GOOD"

In order to elucidate the claim that good cannot exist without evil, an analogy of colour is often used. It is argued that just as redness can exist only if non-redness also exists, so good can occur only if evil also exists. Because this claim is made in the form of an analogy three questions are pertinent to its adequacy as a solution. First, "Is the analogy a strong one?" Secondly, "Is the underlying principle of the analogy a sound one?" And thirdly, "Has the theist examined all the consequences of this analogy?"

A.

It appears to me that there are several possible relevant dissimilarities in this analogy. First, "red" and "non-red" are descriptive terms, whereas "good" and "evil" are normative terms. Hence, it is prima facie doubtful whether any conclusions drawn from the example of colours would also be applicable to the normative terms. The theist must show, and there is no evidence that he has done so, that this dissimilarity is not, in fact, a

relevant one. Secondly, it must be shown that "good" and "evil" stand for logically opposite properties as it is claimed that "red" and "non-red" do.

H.J. McCloskey claims that the former are not, in fact, logically opposite:

Can it seriously be maintained that if an individual were born crippled and deformed and never in his life experienced pleasure, that he could never experience pain, not even if he were severely injured? It is true that it might not be distinguished by a special name and called 'pain', but the state we now describe as painful would nonetheless be possible in the total absence of pleasure. So too the converse would apply.⁷²

B.

J.L. Mackie, focusing on the other half of the analogy, attempts to show that the principle underlying the entire analogy is simply mistaken:

There is still doubt of the correctness of the metaphysical principle that a quality must have an opposite: I suggest that it is not really impossible that everything should be, say red, that the truth is merely that if everything were red we should not notice redness, and so we should have no word 'red'; we observe and give names to qualities only if they have opposites.⁷³

Although I believe that Mackie's contention is correct, it is not difficult to imagine any theist replying to it by slightly modifying his metaphysical principle. He could grant Mackie's claim that good or red could exist per se in any world. However, he would quickly point out that such a state of affairs would not likely be considered the best of all possible worlds due to the fact

⁷² McCloskey, op. cit., pp. 67-68. McCloskey is here assuming that pain is a necessary condition for the existence of physical evil, a contention that we argued for earlier.

⁷³ Mackie, op. cit., pp. 51-52.

that we would not be aware of goodness in Mackie's hypothetical world, just as we would not notice redness in any world where non-redness did not exist. Hence, the theist would maintain that a better world would surely be one in which there was some contrast with good, viz., evil.

C.

Although the proponent of this solution, by a slight modification of the principle underlying the analogy, appears to have found an adequate reply to the criticisms of Mackie and McCloskey he has, nevertheless, committed himself to some undesirable implications of his position. Granted that the analogy is a good one, i.e., some counterpart to good is necessary in this world, he is now forced to admit that a new problem of evil exists, viz., the problem of surd or excess evil. That is, we can admit that just as some non-red is necessary to contrast red in order that we be aware of the latter, so some evil is necessary in order to facilitate awareness of the good in the world. However, just as a speck of non-red will serve to contrast red, so a "speck of evil" is all that is needed to contrast the good in the universe. Hence, the theist is still faced with a problem of evil in that he must now find a morally sufficient reason for the existence of all evil over and above the speck needed for contrast.

D.

Originally, the theist's underlying metaphysical principle in this putative solution was that "every quality must have a real opposite". The criticisms of Mackie and McCloskey appear to force the theist to reformulate this. A sounder principle, I maintain, is that "a quality must have a real

opposite in order that we be aware of that quality". Granting the theist this new principle, it would appear that he has found a morally sufficient reason for the existence of at least some evil in the universe. Yet this is a concession that we need not make to the theist: we can imagine a world in which there is no evil and yet we are still aware of the existence of good. To expand this point, let us return to the theist's analogy of colour. Here it is claimed that we would not notice the presence of red if some non-red things did not exist. This assertion, I maintain, is inconsistent with psychological fact. Psychologists tell us that we can distinguish any particular colour in three different ways:⁷⁴

- i) brightness--as the physical intensity, i.e., the amount of physical energy present in the light, increases the patch of light appears brighter.
- ii) hue--as the wavelength of the patch is varied, the hue of the patch changes from red, through orange, yellow, green, blue, and indigo to violet.
- iii) saturation--if a single wavelength of light is used, the hue appears strong and saturated. As other wavelengths are added, it will become diluted, grayer, and less saturated.

Consider now a world in which everything was red. The distinctions of brightness, hue, and saturation would allow us to have the word "red" in our language because we would be able to notice red in three different ways. Analogously, I maintain that it is possible for everything in the world to be good and yet we be aware of the existence of good. Just as there are different types of red, there are different goods; pleasure is often said to be a good, knowledge is often considered to be a good, etc. Therefore, if there are different species of good, then it is possible for there to be a universe

⁷⁴ Julian E. Hochberg, Perception (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1964), p. 60.

completely devoid of evil in which these different goods were nonetheless recognizable. And even if we grant the theist that awareness of evil is necessary for awareness of good, an all-powerful God could have upset contingencies concerning how we come to be aware of things, guaranteeing that we have (inately) the concept of evil and are aware of good in this world. Therefore, we need not grant the theist his claim that the existence of evil is a necessary counterpart of the existence of good; and if this is so, then the theist is once again forced to provide a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing any evil whatsoever to exist in the universe.

CHAPTER V

THE FREE-WILL THEODICY

Perhaps the most important and most convincing of the many proposed solutions to the problem of moral evil is "the free-will defence"--the claim that moral evil is necessary given the fact that God has chosen to endow man with free-will. The following account of this defence is taken from those versions of the free-will solution presented by John James,⁷⁵ Antony Flew,⁷⁶ Ninian Smart,⁷⁷ H.J. McCloskey,⁷⁸ and J.L. Mackie.⁷⁹

I. UNVEILING THE ARGUMENT

The argument runs as follows. First, reference is made to God's omnipotence, and here it is conceded that even God cannot do what is logically impossible, i.e.,

If you make up a self-contradictory, a nonsense, sentence it won't miraculously become sense just because you have put the word "God" as its subject.⁸⁰

Secondly, it is further conceded that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being would if possible, i.e., if logically possible, create a universe

⁷⁵ James, op. cit., chapter IV.

⁷⁶ Antony Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom", in Flew and MacIntyre, eds., op. cit., pp. 144-46.

⁷⁷ Ninian Smart, Philosophers and Religious Truth (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1964), p. 171.

⁷⁸ McCloskey, op. cit., p. 78.

⁷⁹ Mackie, op. cit., p. 55.

⁸⁰ Flew, op. cit., p. 145.

in which men would always as a matter of fact freely choose the good. The third premise, however, informs us that the creation of such a universe does, in fact involve a logical impossibility; for in order to guarantee that the inhabitants of this utopia would always choose the good, God would have to predetermine their actual choices, so as to rule out the possibility of their ever doing evil. But, it is argued, along with this predetermination, there would be a corresponding loss of freedom of choice. That is to say, the inhabitants of this hypostatized world would really be automata or machines, always doing good because they were constructed in such a way as to be incapable of doing evil. Given the logical impossibility then of all man's actions being both morally good and freely done, what other choices of universes are open to God? Here it is suggested that the only plausible alternatives open to a perfectly good, omniscient, omnipotent being are: either he could create a universe in which men have free-will, and this (according to the third premise) implies the possibility of their doing evil as well as good, or he could create a universe populated with "righteous automata", beings who would always choose the good because they were predestined to do so. The final premise asserts that because the former state of affairs is more desirable than the latter, God chose the former. Conclusion: Because the exercise of free-will necessarily implies the possibility of doing evil, the evil that exists in the universe is to be traced to man's misuse of his free-will, and not to any shortcoming on the part of God.

The last premise in this argument is somewhat ambiguous, i.e., it is not clear on what grounds the theist wants to assert that a world in which men exercise their free-will is more desirable than a world in which men are innocent automata acting rightly in a wholly determined way. Is it because free-will itself is so desirable and valuable so as to outweigh any

possible evil that might result from its misuse, or is it because free-will makes possible the existence of certain goods which would otherwise be absent in a deterministic universe? The answer to these questions is certainly not made explicit; however, both possibilities will be investigated.

The free-will defence is a powerful one and has satisfied many theists, and, until two decades ago, it remained relatively unchallenged. Recently, however, Antony Flew and J.L. Mackie have contested its soundness. I now propose to examine their arguments against the free-will defence.

II. FLEW'S CHALLENGE OF THE FREE-WILL DEFENCE

In "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom"⁸¹ Antony Flew presents a statement of the free-will defence which is somewhat similar to the one given above. He does, however, elaborate on the final premise of the argument, suggesting that one move that the theist might make is to point out that certain goods, viz., certain virtues, logically presuppose not only beings with freedom of choice who might possibly do evil, but also the actual occurrence of these evils.⁸² Thus the theist might claim that what Flew calls the "second-order goods" of sympathetic action and feeling logically could not occur unless the "first-order evils" of suffering and misfortune also existed. And, he might add, such moral goods as forgiveness presuppose the actual existence of some lower-order evil to be forgiven, e.g., a second-order moral evil such as callousness. This would then make forgiveness a third-order good. The theist would then conclude that, given that there are certain goods which logically

81 Flew, op. cit., pp. 144-169.

82 Although Flew suggests this move as a possible addition to the free-will defence, he later devotes considerable space to assailing it.

presuppose the possibility of correlative evils, and others, which logically presuppose the actuality of certain evils, it would not make sense to suggest that God could have chosen to achieve these goods without both the possibility and actuality of evil.

Flew then proceeds to mention briefly a number of counter-arguments to the free-will defence. He admits, though, that these counter-attacks do not have "the simple seemingly decisive force of the original dilemma",⁸³ and can, with sufficient ingenuity, themselves be countered. Therefore, he decides to consider the core of the free-will defence--the claim that there is a logical contradiction in asserting that God could have created a world inhabited by people who always as a matter of fact freely choose the good. Flew believes that if he can show that there is no such contradiction, then the free-will defence will have been refuted and the theist will be left facing the original dilemma of the existence of evil.

A.

The first phase of Flew's counter-attack consists in analysing the phrases "acting freely" and "being free to choose". He takes, as a paradigm case of acting freely, the marriage of two normal people, where there "is no question of the parties "having to get married", and no parental pressure on either of them...."⁸⁴ Flew emphasizes that to say "X was free to marry Y" and "Y was free to marry X" is not to say that either person's actions or choices were uncaused or in principle unpredictable, but only that X and Y knew the

⁸³ Ibid., p. 147.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 149.

alternatives open to them and chose as they did without being under any external pressure to do so. Flew, as a matter of fact, regards the prediction of a person's actions and choices, even up to one hundred per cent accuracy, as being completely irrelevant to questions concerning his freedom of choice, "much less a decisive proof of the manifest fact that sometimes he has complete, sometimes restricted, and sometimes no freedom."⁸⁵ Thus Flew contends that to say a person could have helped doing something is to say that, if he had chosen to do otherwise, he would have been able to do so; it is not to say that what he did was not determined by some particular cause or was, in principle, unpredictable.

Flew then anticipates the following criticism: "Such uses of the phrases "acting freely" and "could have done otherwise" are really 'loose' or 'incorrect!.'" His reply to this charge is to point out that these are "paradigm cases of what these phrases actually mean";⁸⁶ they are not compound descriptive expressions which can and have been given sense independently and which like "the first man on Mars" might or might not have found an application. Flew concludes that if his analysis of these phrases is correct, then there is no contradiction in saying that a particular action or choice was: both free and could have been helped; and predictable and explicable in terms of caused causes. He then adds the following reductio ad absurdum: scientists, he says, cannot tell us that there is no such thing as acting freely; for if they are correct, then it is hard to see what meaning these expressions have and how, if at all, they could ever be taught, understood, or correctly

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 150

⁸⁶ Ibid.

employed.

B.

The second phase of Flew's argument is to insist that, if there is no contradiction in saying that someone could have acted freely and yet behaved predictably and/or as a result of caused causes, then it is logically possible that God could have created people who would always as a matter of fact freely choose the right. And, says Flew, if this contention is correct, then the fourth premise of the free-will defence, viz., the claim that certain higher-order goods logically presuppose the occurrence of lower-order evils, can also be challenged. His initial challenge of this premise, however, is made without reference to his preceding arguments. First, he notes that the sceptic could point out that not all those higher-order goods which logically presuppose (at least the appearance of) their lower-order evils necessarily require for their display the actual occurrence of the evils in question. For example, one could exercise forgiveness if one only mistakenly thought that another had done him harm. And secondly, Flew points out that such virtues as honesty and kindness are not necessarily related to any antecedent evils.

Flew regards the above objections as being only minor ones. His major criticism of the fourth premise of the free-will defence is this: if it is logically possible for God to have created a world inhabited by wholly good beings, then such a world is also possible without the exis-

tence of those evils necessary for the actual exercise of those virtues⁸⁸ which cannot be exercised without the actual occurrence of the evil logically required to call them forth. How is this possible?

Omnipotence could have created creatures who he could have been sure would respond to the appropriate challenge by a willing exercise of virtue; without these creatures having to acquire this character by any actual exercise of fortitude.⁸⁹

To elaborate on Flew's argument. First, an omniscient God could have foreknowledge of how his creatures would respond in any hypothetical situation. Secondly, as Flew has already argued, God's foreknowledge would not endanger the freedom of choice of his creatures. Therefore, an omnipotent God could have constructed people with dispositions towards all virtues, so that if any particular evil was present, then such individuals would respond by manifesting the appropriate virtue, i.e., he could have constructed people who would always as a matter of fact freely choose the right. Conclusion: given this knowledge and power, and given the fact that the inhabitants of Flew's hypostatized world would be no less virtuous than people who inhabited a world where they had to face existent evils, God should have no reservations about populating a world with wholly good people without introducing any actual evils to test their virtue. Both groups, for example, would respond to another's injury with kindness (if such a

⁸⁸ Of course, there need not be any such virtues. God could have been guaranteed the manifestation of any second-order good, i.e., any virtue which supposedly requires for its existence, the prior existence of some lower-order evil, simply by seeing to it that we only mistakenly believed the lower-order evil to exist.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 155.

situation arose in their presence). In Flew's hypostatized world, however, it would simply be the case that such situations would never arise. Thus Flew, by appealing to the principle that to possess a virtue does not necessarily imply manifesting it, believes that he has shown evil to be unnecessary in any world created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly benevolent God.

III. J.L. MACKIE AND "Evil and Omnipotence"⁸⁹

Mackie sets out the free-will defence in the following way. The problem of evil, he says, is supposedly solved by ascribing evil, not to God, but to the independent actions of human beings who have been endowed by God with free-will. Thus first-order evil (e.g., pain) is justified as being a logically necessary component in second-order good (e.g., sympathy) while moral or second-order evil (e.g., cruelty) "is not justified, but is so ascribed to human beings that God cannot be held responsible for it."⁹⁰

One of the assumptions implicit in this proposed solution, says Mackie, is the thesis that it is better that men should possess free-will, and sometimes err, than that they should be determined in their actions and choices, be they always morally right.

Freedom, that is to say, is now treated as a third-order good, and as being more valuable than second-order goods (such as sympathy and heroism) would be if they were deterministically produced, and it is being assumed that second-order evils, such as cruelty, are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom, just as pain is a logical precondition of sympathy.⁹¹

⁸⁹ J.L. Mackie, op. cit., pp. 46-60.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 56.

Mackie then challenges the assumption that second-order evils, e.g., cruelty, are logically necessary accompaniments of freedom. His criticism is somewhat similar to Flew's.

If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one, or on several occasions, there cannot be a logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. God was not, then, faced with a choice between making innocent automata and making beings who, in acting freely, would sometimes go wrong: there was open to him the obviously better possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right. Clearly his failure to avail himself of this possibility is inconsistent with his being both omnipotent and omniscient.⁹²

Mackie's criticism of the free-will defence may be interpreted in the following way. Consider this pair of propositions:

- 1) Human beings have free-will.
- 2) Human beings cannot commit moral evil.

These two propositions are obviously incompatible, for the possession of free-will entails that a person can, i.e., is able, to commit moral evil. Mackie, however, is not opting for the compatibility of the above propositions. But now consider this second pair of propositions.

- 3) Human beings have free-will.
- 4) Human beings commit no moral evil.

Here it is not so obvious that this set is an inconsistent one. We may concede that the possession of free-will makes it probable that human beings will commit moral evil, but the important question is "Does free-will entail this?". Mackie proposes that it does not, i.e., it is logically possible for God to have created a world populated with free human beings in which

⁹² Ibid.

no moral evil in fact occurs.

Mackie's contention that it is logically possible for God to have created wholly good people who are free struck me, at least initially, as being a rather plausible one. And yet, he nowhere offered any evidence in support of it. However, in trying to aid Mackie's cause by supplying such evidence myself, I found myself coming to disagree with him. The following comments will, I hope, show how this happened.

Mackie's thesis may be represented as an instantiation of the more general thesis (to be referred to hereafter as "Thesis A") that, if it is logically possible that this has characteristics Y and Z, then it is logically possible that everything has characteristics Y and Z (italics mine). Symbolically, Thesis A may be represented as follows: $P(Y_a \cdot Z_a) \supset P(x) (Y_x \cdot Z_x)$. Now compare this assertion with a second, rather different thesis (to be referred to hereafter as "Thesis B"): If it is logically possible that this has characteristics Y and Z, then for any thing you might wish to consider, it is logically possible that it has characteristics Y and Z. Representing Thesis B symbolically: $P(Y_a \cdot Z_a) \supset (x) P(Y_x \cdot Z_x)$.

If Mackie wishes to claim that Thesis B is a logical truth, then I would agree with him. However, it seems to me that Mackie illegitimately employs Thesis B as the basis for his contention that Thesis A is also a logical truth. To elaborate: consider this concrete example of Thesis B. If it is logically possible that this person is the only person in this room, then it follows that for any person you might wish to consider, it is logically possible that he is the only one in this room. Now suppose that we are dealing with a universe of discourse containing just three individuals--a, b, and c. Assuming that Thesis B is a logical truth, and

conceding that it is logically possible that a person is the only person in this room, then it follows that (1) it is logically possible that a is the only person in this room and (2) it is logically possible that b is the only person in this room and (3) it is logically possible that c is the only person in this room. Representing this symbolically: $P(O_a) \supset P(O_a) \cdot P(O_b) \cdot P(O_c)$. What does not follow from this initial concession, however, is that it is possible for all three persons to be the only person in this room, i.e., that it is possible for a, b, and c to be the only person in this room. Symbolically: $P(O_a) \not\supset P(O_a) \cdot O_b \cdot O_c$. Considering each person distributively then, it is possible for each to possess the characteristic of being the only person in this room. But, it is not possible for these three persons, considered collectively, to simultaneously share the characteristic of being the only person in this room.

Mackie, then, is at most justified in claiming that given the possibility of one freely done, morally good action, then it follows that for any action you might wish to consider the individual concerned chose freely and did what was morally good. But to reiterate, he cannot justifiably claim that given the possibility of one freely done, morally good action, then it follows that it is logically possible for all actions to possess these two characteristics. Symbolically:

- $$\begin{aligned} (1) & P(F_a \cdot G_a) \supset (x) P(F_x \cdot G_x) \\ (1') & P(F_a \cdot G_a) \supset P(F_y \cdot G_y) \cdot P(F_z \cdot G_z) \cdot P(F_s \cdot G_s) \\ (2) & P(F_a \cdot G_a) \not\supset P[(x) (F_x \cdot G_x)] \\ (2') & P(F_a \cdot G_a) \not\supset P[(F_y \cdot G_y) \cdot (F_z \cdot G_z) \cdot (F_s \cdot G_s)] \end{aligned}$$

To anticipate the following rejoinder by Mackie:

Your counterexample is radically different than the case I was considering. You have traded on a

characteristic unique to singular terms, viz., purporting to refer to exactly one individual. You make use of this unusual characteristic to rule out the possibility of the expression ("the only one in this room") used in your counterexample referring to more than one person at one time. My argument, however, makes no use of singular terms; in fact, the case I was considering revolves around two expressions, viz., "freely done" and "morally good", which are obviously not singular terms. Your counterexample, therefore, is irrelevant to the soundness of my thesis.

This possible line of attack will not save Mackie. Once again, consider the core of his "argument".

If there is no logical impossibility in a man's freely choosing the good on one or on several occasions, there cannot be any logical impossibility in his freely choosing the good on every occasion. (*italics mine*)⁹³

If the word "cannot" in the above quotation is intended by Mackie to suggest logical entailment, then it is certainly a moot point as to whether his thesis is a logical truth. Why is this so? One reason is that we have shown that the general thesis, viz., Thesis A, of which Mackie's is an instantiation, is definitely not a logical truth. In fact, it is unnecessary to interpret Mackie as employing the logical use of "cannot"; for by providing a counterexample to Thesis A, we have shown it to be not only logically false, but also materially false. Mackie, then, must demonstrate that given the particular predicates "freely done" and "morally good", his proposal regarding their universal compativity becomes a special case of Thesis A, and so is not affected by the counterexample. But, the reader will note, Mackie must argue for this position; he cannot simply affirm it.

93 Ibid.

IV. NINIAN SMART AND "Omnipotence, Evil and Supermen"⁹⁴

Ninian Smart, for reasons different than those expressed above, finds the thesis that God could have created men wholly good to be intuitively unconvincing. He proposes to examine the arguments of Flew and Mackie to uncover the roots of his intuitive suspicion.

Smart begins by distinguishing two distinct assertions within Flew and Mackie's arguments against the free-will defence. The first he entitles "the Compatibility Thesis", i.e., the argument that casual determinism (i.e., the claim that all human actions are the results of prior causes) is compatible with free-will. The second assertion, which Smart labels the "Utopia Thesis", is the thesis that God could have created men wholly good. This second assertion, says Smart, is the basis of the inference that God cannot be both omnipotent and perfectly good, since men are not in fact wholly good.

In his discussion, Smart intends to concentrate solely on the Utopia Thesis and, assuming the soundness of the Compatibility Thesis, he hopes to show that the former does not follow from the latter. Briefly, his argument is as follows. By means of "a piece of anthropological fiction"⁹⁵ he tries to show that the concept "good", which he believes is necessarily tied with other concepts such as "temptation", "courage", "generosity", etc., is inapplicable to men who are built wholly good. First, he considers a universe like ours except that its inhabitants are supposedly wholly good. Here he tries to show that it

⁹⁴ Ninian Smart, "Omnipotence, Evil and Supermen", in Pike, ed., op. cit., p. 103-112.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

is unclear whether the "men" in such a universe are to be called wholly good or even good, and that it is unclear whether they should be called men.⁹⁶

Secondly, his fiction takes him to a consideration of the possibility of utopian universes quite unlike ours, and here he attempts to prove that there are even stronger reasons for saying that these things are unclear. He concludes that there is no assignable content to the thesis that God could have created men wholly good, and so it becomes unclear that such a universe would be superior to ours.

I

Smart points out that answers to the question "Why do you say that he is a good man?" come in the form of particular reasons such as "He was heroic in resisting temptation", or "He was courageous on the face of difficulties", or "He was generous to his friends", etc.⁹⁷ Therefore, he concludes, the concept good normally connects with concepts such as generosity, courage, etc. Smart then proceeds to give a more detailed analysis of these latter concepts, beginning with temptation.

On the ground that temptations have been empirically discovered to affect conduct, Smart maintains that it is relevant to consider them when appraising character. And, he adds, unless we were constructed in a particular way, there would be no temptations for us to resist or succumb to. This, he says, implies that, in order to ensure that people would be wholly good, God would have to construct them differently, i.e., so that they were

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹⁷ These examples are Smart's.

never tempted or only tempted to a negligible extent. (Smart admits the possibility of, and later considers, (1) God's arranging the universe so that through a lucky combination of circumstances men might never sin, and (2) God's frequent intervention to keep men on the straight and narrow path.)

Similar remarks, says Smart, apply to the concepts or courage and generosity. Thus to be sure that people would never display cowardice men would have to be constructed so that they never would panic or wilt; and to ensure that no one would ever place self-interest over generosity to others his psychological and physiological make-up would have to be radically different than we now know it to be. What about cases of generosity not involving sacrifice, e.g., where a person has so much money that it makes no psychological difference whether he gives away a certain sum or not, but he does it out of sympathy? Smart maintains that this instance of nonsacrificial generosity could be called generosity in that all virtues are dispositions, and such an act exhibits a disposition whose basic exercise involves sacrifice. Nevertheless, he adds, without occasions for the basic exercise of this disposition it is obscure as to what could be meant by calling the nonbasic instances of generosity instances of generosity.

Smart concludes that the above analysis indicates that the concept goodness is in fact applied to a particular sort of person, viz., one who is liable to be tempted, possesses certain inclinations, fears, etc., and that if such individuals were to be "immunized from evil" they would have to be constructed differently. However, to rebuild them, says Smart, would entail that the concept goodness (as we now know it) would become unintelligible, simple because the reasons we give for calling a person morally

good or bad are empirically connected with human nature as we now know it.

"Moral utterance is embedded in the cosmic status quo."⁹⁸

II

This second stage in Smart's reply to Flew and Mackie consists in showing that the putative assertion "God might have created men wholly good" is without intelligible content even in the light of the fact that God was not bound by synthetic necessities when creating men. He at once admits that this putative assertion appears to have intelligible content because we think that we can imagine such a situation, but he intends to demonstrate its emptiness by performing just these experiments in the imagination.

Smart then anticipates the following objection: It is illegitimate to maintain that if men are, for example, never to panic, then they must be built in a certain way since God is not bound by causal necessities. This sort of criticism, Smart replies, misses the point of his procedure, for his argument is based on the following dilemma. Either the possibility that God might have created men who never do what is morally wrong becomes intelligible in an imagined universe--in which case Smart maintains that it is not at all obvious that we would call such "men" wholly good, or one refuses to assign a clear meaning to this possibility by postulating an unimaginable alternative universe--in which case it is even more doubtful that such a possibility has any intelligible content.

Smart's anthropological fiction is divided into two parts. First, he considers a possible universe which is governed by physical laws relati-

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

vely similar to those found in this universe. He calls this a "cosmomorphic universe". Second, he examines "non-cosmomorphic universes", i.e., ones which are radically different from ours. I shall refer to these two possible universes as "Utopia 1" and "Utopia 2" respectively.

UTOPIA 1

Smart's description of this utopia follows in line with his earlier remarks about those concepts normally connected with goodness. He begins by pointing out that in this universe, although people's objects of interest might differ, they would be built so that no one would ever be seriously tempted to steal, cheat, lie, or harm another. For example, people would be so built that one and only one woman would attract any one man and conversely. Regarding property, Smart suggests that God might have created man so that he would arrive in the world with an automatic supply of necessities and comforts, and he might have a built-in mechanism to ensure that the possessions of others were mysteriously distasteful. And, in response to any dangers that might confront him, man would be so equipped⁹⁹ that he would never panic, and therefore never be liable to harm others. And so on.

Smart then argues that the usual reasons for calling men good would not apply to the inhabitants of Utopia 1. Consider, he says, one of these individuals. Why would we want to say that he was wholly good? Has he been courageous? No, for these creatures feel no fear. Has he been generous to his friends? No, for there is no question of him not being generous. Has

⁹⁹ Smart admits that Utopia 1 is not described with much scientific precision, but he promises to say more on this later.

he resisted temptations? No, not really, for in Utopia there are no temptations (at least nothing you could really call temptations). Is he wholly good because he never harms anyone? No, because it is causally impossible for him to do so. Then, insists Smart, why call him good at all?¹⁰⁰ Thus, with reference to the inhabitants of Utopia 1, one cannot give the usual reasons for calling people good. And, adds Smart, it will not do simply to insist that these beings are good; anyone who makes this claim must realize that "the positive moves are up to him".¹⁰¹

The traveller from Jupiter who tells us that unicorns are to be found there, though queer unicorns for they possess neither horns nor feet, leaves us at a justifiable loss.¹⁰²

Finally, Smart notes what he believes to be the obvious difficulty in properly referring to the inhabitants of Utopia 1 as "men". He suggests calling them "sapient", and at the same time admits that the theist must reply to the question, "Why did God create men rather than sapient?". He promises to return to this question later.

UTOPIA 1_a

In Utopia 1_a everyone would be consistently lucky with regard to virtue and vice. Adolph Hitler, for example, would never in fact commit evil. He might hate all Jews, but his impulses would luckily never overwhelm him. Whenever he was at the point of succumbing to some temptation, his attention would be distracted.

¹⁰⁰ Smart seems to overlook Flew's reply to this question, i.e., Flew claims that we could still call these individuals good simply because they have the right dispositions (c.f., p. 68.).

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 109.

¹⁰² Ibid.

This type of Utopia, says Smart, is more like a dream than a fantasy. Imagine this analogous situation: because it is often the case that the sun does not shine, let us imagine a world in which it never shines, a world where it is always overcast. Smart admits that it does not appear to be self-contradictory to assert "The sky might always be overcast", but, he asks, "What would a cosmomorphic universe have to be like for this to happen?" Obviously, causal (meteorological) laws would have to be different from those in our universe. Returning to the analogy, a cosmomorphic universe in which circumstances always combined in favour of virtue would similarly have to be set up differently than the universe as we now know it. Hence, Smart concludes, Utopia 1_a is either a version of Utopia 1 or it is "a mere dream masquerading as an alternative universe."¹⁰³

UTOPIA 1_b

This, the last candidate in Smart's list of cosmomorphic universes, is characterized by him as being one in which men are wholly virtuous because of frequent miraculous interventions by God. What would such a world be like? Smart hypostatizes the following situation. Suppose that in this utopia there is a particular type of action, type A, which is determined by causal factors C. Further suppose that on some occasions type A actions are morally wrong ones. Now in order to ensure that men refrain from such actions in these situations God would have to prevent causal factors C from having type A effects. How might he effect this? Smart immediately rules

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 110.

out the possibility of God's introducing another empirical factor in this situation, "for ex hypothesi the non-occurrence of the type A action is due to miraculous intervention."¹⁰⁴ He then suggests that in this situation we either have to count rightness or wrongness as empirical differences in order to formulate a causal law here or we must admit that no strict causal laws of human behaviour could be formulated in this universe. The former alternative, says Smart, is "baffling and unacceptable", while the latter is not compatible with sceptic's original endorsement of determinism; and so Smart concludes that this type of universe will not provide any support for the Utopia thesis.

UTOPIA 2

Smart now considers the possibility of a non-cosmomorphic universe. If such a universe is utterly unlike ours, then our conception of what "men" (sapient) in this world would be like is necessarily imprecise. And if this is so, says Smart, then it is even more unclear as to what would be meant in calling such beings good. He concludes that we must be completely agnostic about this type of "utopia" and its possible superiority to our own universe. And, he adds, it is also unclear as to whether the inhabitants of Utopia 1 would be superior to ourselves.

III

Smart now returns to consider the complaint that his anthropological fiction has not been worked out with any scientific expertize. His reply is

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

to point out that no one (to his knowledge) with the necessary background in physiology, psychology, and biology has worked out a coherent, plausible anthropology and, until someone does this, it remains obscure what a deterministic, cosmomorphic utopia would amount to. That is, the determinist can make sense out of the possibility of a cosmomorphic utopia only if he assumes that wholly good men have a causal difference from men as we now know them, and so he must imagine some change in the constitution of his personality.

But we have no assurance that some unspecified causal change would leave men more or less human and yet produce the consequence of complete goodness. Hence the change has to be specified.¹⁰⁵

IV

Mackie has attempted to prove that, given the possibility of one freely done, morally good action, there cannot be any contradiction in asserting the possibility of a universe inhabited by wholly good men. We have shown that his conclusion is too strong; he is at most justified in claiming that there might not be such a contradiction. Smart, on the other hand, tries to put the onus of the description of Utopia on the sceptic by arguing that the latter must show that there is in fact no such contradiction; otherwise the notion of a cosmomorphic or non-cosmomorphic utopia is an empty or meaningless one, and therefore cannot serve as part of an anti-theistic argument.

V. FLEW'S REPLY TO SMART

Both Flew and Mackie are unwilling to allow Smart's science fiction

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 112.

stand as the last word on the free-will defence. Briefly then, let us look at their rejoinders.

Flew¹⁰⁶ charges Smart with committing an ignoratio elenchi. He claims that Smart misdirects his energy in considering the three possible utopias that he does, and "never even notices what is surely the most obvious case."¹⁰⁷ "The most obvious case", according to Flew, is the suggestion which he actually made in "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom", viz., "that omnipotence might so arrange his creation that all men in fact would always freely choose the right...people who, no matter what the temptations, always would choose the right...logically could have been produced...."¹⁰⁸ Flew humbly admits the possibility of considerations which might urged against this thesis, but since Smart has failed to offer any, he concludes that there is no case for him to meet. He does, however, attempt to speculate on the source of Smart's "grotesque feat of psychic blindness".¹⁰⁹

First, Flew turns to Smart's remarks on miracles. Here he criticizes Smart's assumption that in any world where resistance to powerful temptations was the rule and not, as it seems to be in our world, the exception it must be "in principle impossible to formulated strict causal laws of human behaviour".¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Antony Flew, "Are Ninian Smart's Temptations Irrestible?", in Philosophy, Vol. 37, No. 139 (1962), pp. 58-60.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁰⁸ Flew, "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom", p. 155.

¹⁰⁹ Flew, "Are Ninian Smart's Temptations Irresistable?", p. 58.

¹¹⁰ Smart, op. cit., p. 110.

This, says Flew is an unwarranted assumption since (1) people in this world do in fact often overcome enormously powerful temptations and (2) Smart does assume the truth of determinism. This being so, says Flew, it is not at all obvious that it must be in principle impossible to formulate the required psychological, physiological, and biological laws.

Flew finds a second clue in Smart's treatment of Utopia 1_b. Smart, as we have noted earlier, characterizes and criticizes this possible universe in the following way. Causal factors C usually give rise to actions of empirical type A. In some circumstances these type of actions are morally wrong, and so in these cases C will not have type A effects. How can we explain this deviation? Smart rules out the possibility of introducing some additional empirical factor, for ex hypothesi the non-occurrence of type-A action is due to miraculous intervention. The only remaining alternatives, contends Smart, are to count rightness and wrongness as empirical factors or to assume that no causal laws of human behaviour can be formulated here. The latter alternative is incompatible with determinism and the former Smart rejects as being baffling and unacceptable. Flew replies that there is no need to be baffled by the former alternative. He agrees that a moral vocabulary cannot be subsumed under a "truly scientific psychology"; but since moral epithets cannot be distinguished by reference solely to their non-empirical and purely moral characteristics, it may be quite possible to formulate the required psychological laws "in terms of those empirical differences upon which the moral distinctions must be grounded."¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Flew, "Are Ninian Smart's Temptations Irresistible?", p. 59.

Flew's third suggestion as to the source of Smart's "psychic blindness" is related to Smart's remarks on the concept goodness. The latter maintains that this concept is applied to a particular sort of person, viz., one who is liable to be tempted, possess certain inclinations, fears, etc., and if these individuals were to be immunized from evil they would have to be constructed differently. Flew agrees with Smart on this point and attempts to meet the latter's challenge to specify the change required. What is wanted, he says, is more strength of character and a stronger sense of duty. And, he adds, there is no reason why these changes should make us any the less men of the sort which Smart characterizes.

Flew suggests that Smart has been misled by the ambiguity of such dispositional terms as tend, inclined, liable, etc. For example, there is a sense in which a tendency to produce something is a cause which, operating under no impediment, would in fact produce it; and another sense in which to speak of "a tendency towards X" is to say that that result may reasonably be expected to occur. Given this ambiguity, says Flew, there is no contradiction in asserting that while people's natural inclinations are toward bad behaviour, in a utopia they always in fact do what they ought to do: assuming that the phrase "naturally inclined" is employed in a sense parallel to the first sense of "tendency".

I now propose to have a brief look at Smart's¹¹² re-reply to Flew, and then to turn to Mackie's rejoinder to Smart.

112 Ninian Smart, "Probably", in *Philosophy*, Vol 37, No. 139 (1962).

VI. SMART'S REJOINDER TO FLEW

Smart sees the chief point in Flew's reply as being this. God could have achieved a utopia, i.e., made men perfectly good, not by altering their inclinations, but by giving them more strength of character and a stronger sense of duty. This move by Flew, says Smart, will not add any content to the sceptic's conception of a utopia. It fails to do so for the following reasons. The notions of sense of duty and strength of character are necessarily related to such concepts as courage and generosity, and involved in this relation is the idea that men have to learn to behave well. To suppose that these character traits could be built in by God, i.e., could be innate qualities, is unrealistic, for, says Smart, "they would have to be (almost magically) most flexible instincts."¹¹³ Secondly, suppose (as Flew would have it) that all temptations, however strong, were always overcome. If this were the case, says Smart, then either struggles are necessary or they are not. If they are not necessary, then what sense does it make to talk of "temptations" in this utopia? And if they are necessary, it would seem that they are a rather odd variety of struggles, seeing that they are always overcome. For if men were so constituted that there were a psychologically significant chance of failure, then some men at some time would be empirically certain to succumb to their temptations. And finally, Smart points out that his fictional Utopia 1 (which, of course, he rejected as a possible candidate for utopia) was at least intelligible. Flew, however, cannot (as yet) say the same of his utopia, and since (as Smart claims to have shown in his first

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 60.

article) logical possibility is not enough, it does not appear so far evident that God might have created men wholly good.

VII. MACKIE'S REJOINDER TO SMART

The final shift in this series of move and counter-move by the theist and sceptic is left to J.L. Mackie.¹¹⁴ Mackie begins by acknowledging Smart's ingenuity in shifting the onus of description of utopia onto the critics of theism and supposedly forcing them to give content to the notion of a world inhabited by wholly good men if they wish to use this concept as part of an anti-theistic argument. Nevertheless, he is quick to reply that "all such references to our ignorance or the emptiness of our terms miss the critics' point."¹¹⁵ The critics, he says, are merely questioning the coherence of the traditional theistic view; they are not suggesting any new positive theological doctrines. Hence, the critic is under no obligation to define goodness. In fact, adds Smart, the theist can take his pick here, i.e., he can adopt whatever interpretation of goodness he prefers. The only stipulation regarding this enterprise is that he must consistently adhere to this one interpretation. And, once having adopted a particular interpretation of the concept goodness, the real question the theist must face is, "Is God's being what the theist calls wholly good, omnipotent, etc., compatible with the existence, which he recognises, of what he calls evil?"

One particular way (Mackie's way) of asking whether the existence of

¹¹⁴ J.L. Mackie, "Theism and Utopia", in *Philosophy*, Vol. 37, No. 140 (1962).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

a God who is wholly good, omnipotent, etc., is to inquire as to whether it is logically possible that God might have made men such that they always freely choose the good. And if this is possible, then, as Mackie argued earlier, men's choosing the bad is not a necessary concomitant of their being free, and so the existence of evil cannot be justified by reference to the superior value of free-will.

Mackie then attempts to reinforce his challenge of Smart's contention that the onus of description lies with the critic. He insists that any content that must be given to the phrase "freely choose the good" must be supplied by Smart or any other theist who wishes to maintain that the existence of evil is required by human free-will. In particular, says Mackie, the theist must decide whether a man who is never tempted to do wrong is or is not freely choosing the good in a more valuable way than one who experiences temptations but always overcomes them.

If the theist opts for the former utopia, says Mackie, then he is committed to thinking of a world in which men always freely choose the good "by direct inclination".¹¹⁶ Admittedly, such a world would be radically different from our own, but, Mackie insists, it is nonetheless conceivable, i.e., logically possible. And this is the only concession that the critic requires for his argument. Furthermore, the theist cannot dismiss this utopia on the ground that in such a world there would be no evil to contrast with good, and therefore nothing we could really call "good" at all, for then he would be reverting to a different "solution" to the problem of evil, and one which

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

Mackie believes he has successfully refuted elsewhere.¹¹⁷

Suppose, however, the theist adopts the latter view. He might be inclined to say that being tempted towards evil actions is a second-order evil and is logically necessary for the existence of such third-order goods as courage and generosity. And, he might add, because of the superior value of these third-order goods, God was compelled by logical necessity to allow the existence of second-order evils. This putative solution, says Mackie, is also not acceptable, for the problem of evil would again be raised by the existence of third-order evils such as cowardice and greed. The critic would now complain, "Why did God not make men such that, although tempted, they would always resist temptation?" Mackie points out that Smart never considers this possibility in Utopias l_a and l_b . He suggests that Smart might feel that resisting temptation is a concept inconsistent with the determinism he is there assuming. But, replies Mackie, if he adopts this position, then he is not taking determinism seriously, for this concept refers to an actual experience of which determinists must give some account.

According to Mackie then, the theist is free to interpret the notion "man's freely choosing the good" as he pleases. He must, however, give it some content; "he cannot consistently say that it is empty".¹¹⁸ And once the theist has given meaning to this notion, the critic will then claim that with this interpretation, whatever it may be, that it is logically possible that God could have made men such that they would always freely choose the

¹¹⁷ Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", pp. 203-205.

¹¹⁸ Mackie, "Theism and Utopia", p. 155.

good. And so, Mackie concludes, "there cannot be any difficulty for the critic about giving this phrase an interpretation".¹¹⁹

Mackie may be correct in his contention that the onus of description of utopia lies not with the critic of theism. If so, then Smart's anthropological fiction is all for naught, and the theist is left facing the reconciliation of the existence of evil with God's omnipotence, benevolence, etc. Nevertheless, the theist's position is not as hopeless as Mackie would have us believe. As we have pointed out earlier, Mackie does not establish the thesis that the possibility of one freely done, morally good action entails the possibility of all such actions. At most, he can be said to prove that one freely done, morally good action might entail the possibility of a utopia inhabited by wholly good men.

Although the theist may be safe from Mackie's frying pan, he must now face the fire of the following dilemma. Either Mackie is correct, in which case the existence of free-will does not provide a morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil, or Mackie has not proven his case, in which case Smart's view, viz., that we do not know whether the utopian universe which it is supposed God would have created if he had been perfectly good, omnipotent, and omniscient is possible, and if possible, better than the one we now inhabit, amounts to an a priori disproof of the existence of God. To elaborate on this second alternative.

Smart maintains that the notion of a morally good individual is unintelligible unless applies to imperfect beings. An inhabitant of utopia,

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

he maintains, is not obviously either wholly "good" or a "man". His conclusion is that the term "morally good", as applied to men, could have no meaning in a Utopian world which God supposedly ought to have created.

Smart, however, fails to recognize the obvious implication of his position. If "good" is without content unless applied to imperfect beings, i.e., men as we now know them, then how is it intelligible when applied to God? Certainly God is not faced with temptations to do evil or confronted with personal conflicts between self-interest and generosity; yet he is supposedly wholly good. By asserting that the notion of a wholly good man is unintelligible, the theist would seem to be ruling out the possibility of a perfectly good God.¹²⁰

An analogous dilemma for the theist has been suggested by Mackie. He focuses on the theistic notion of a life after death and claims that if this is intelligible, then the notion of a wholly good man must also be intelligible:

I should have thought, indeed, that the concept of a state of affairs in which men were wholly good, that is, of a Kingdom of God on Earth, was an orthodox theistic one, and if that concept is empty or unintelligible, so much the worse for theism. If the theists tell us that God will eventually bring this utopia into being, the critics can hardly be blamed for wondering why he has gone such a long way round about it, and it is a curious defence of theism to say that the critics have not made this concept clear.¹²¹

One further point. Theists would no doubt agree that God has freedom

¹²⁰ And, as we have argued earlier, the theist cannot take refuge behind the assertion that God's goodness is totally unlike human goodness.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 154.

of the will and is morally good. Now if these two predicates are compatible when applied to God, why shouldn't they also be compatible when applied to men?

In conclusion, it would seem that if the theist is to find a morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil, he must look elsewhere than the free-will defence (or slip between the horns of the preceding dilemmas).

CHAPTER VI

PIKE'S THEODICY

I

Nelson Pike, in "Hume on Evil",¹²² proposes to re-examine the question "Why is the existence of evil a problem for the theist?" The standard reply (which Pike insists Hume was the first to formulate clearly) is the contention that "God exists" and "There occur instances of suffering" are logically incompatible statements. Mill, McTaggart, Stace, Flew, Aiken, Mackie, Ducasse, and McCloskey are but a few of the more contemporary philosophers who, Pike claims, have adopted this Humean position regarding the problem of evil. Stace, for example, comments:

(Assuming that "good" and "powerful" are used in theology as they are used in ordinary discourse), we have to say that Hume was right. The charge has never been answered and never will be. The simultaneous attribution of all-power and all-goodness to the Creator of the whole world is logically incompatible with the existence of pain and evil in the world, for which reason the conception of a finite God, who is not all-powerful... has become popular in some quarters.¹²³

Pike formulates Hume's (Philo's) argument as follows:

- (1) The world contains instances of suffering.
- (2) God exists--and is omnipotent and omniscient.
- (3) God exists--and is perfectly good.

These three statements, according to Hume constitute an "inconsistent triad",¹²⁴ i.e., one may opt for any two of them, but not for all three. Of course, the

¹²² Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil", in Pike ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 85-102.

¹²³ W.T. Stace, Time and Eternity (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 56.

¹²⁴ David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, edited by Henry D. Aiken, (New York: Hafner Publishing Co., 1957), pp. 66-67.

following interpretation must be placed on the second and third statements of this triad in order that the set be properly classified as "inconsistent". First, to say of God that he is omnipotent and omniscient, is to say that he could prevent suffering if he wanted to. And secondly, (according to Hume), to say God is good (employing "good" here in the same manner as it is employed in ordinary discourse) is to assert that he would prevent suffering if he could. Given this interpretation then, if one wishes to assert propositions (2) and (3), Philo would maintain that he is also committed to denying the truth of proposition (1). Or, if one affirms (1) and (2), then he must deny the truth of (3). And finally, affirmation of propositions (1) and (3) involves a denial of proposition (2).

Pike maintains that the above argument is deficient. Its deficiency, he claims, centres on the assumption that a perfectly good being would prevent suffering if he could. He then asks the reader to consider the following case.

A parent forces a child to take a spoonful of bitter medicine. The parent thus brings about an instance of discomfort--suffering. The parent could have refrained from administering the medicine; and he knew the child would suffer discomfort if he did administer it. Yet, when we are assured that the parent acted in the interest of the child's health and happiness, the fact that he knowingly caused discomfort is not sufficient to remove the parent from the class of perfectly good beings. If the parent fails to fit into this class, it is not because he caused this instance of suffering.¹²⁵

Pike admits that if we knew only that the parent knowingly caused an instance of discomfort, we would be tempted to blame him. However, he adds, when the

¹²⁵ Pike, op. cit., p. 88.

full circumstances are known, blame becomes inappropriate. Here there is what Pike calls a "morally sufficient reason" for the parent's action, i.e., "a circumstance or condition which, when known renders blame (though, of course, not responsibility) for the action inappropriate."¹²⁶ Analogously, says Pike, it does not follow from the claim that God is perfectly good that he would prevent suffering if he could. God's allowing or bringing about suffering is compatible with his perfect goodness as long as there is a morally sufficient reason for his action.

These reflections, says Pike, necessitate a reformulation of the problem of evil, i.e.,

- (4) The world contains instances of suffering.
- (5) God exists, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good.
- (6) An omnipotent, omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing instances of suffering.¹²⁷

Suppose (6) and (4) are true. Then, says Pike, (5) must be false. That is if an omnipotent, omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering, then, in a world containing instances of suffering, either there would be no omnipotent, omniscient being or that being would be morally blameworthy. And, if (6) and (5) are true, then (4) must be false, i.e., if God exists and cannot, under any conceivable circumstances, be excused for allowing evil, then it must be the case that there is no evil in this world. And finally, if (5) and (4) are true, then (6) must be

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ A clearer equivalent of (6) might be: If God allows suffering, etc., then God is not good.

false, for if an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good being exists and allows instances of suffering to exist, then he has to have a morally sufficient reason for doing so. Pike concludes that this sequence is logically tight.

He then goes on to consider the question of the truth of the individual statements. It is obvious, he says, that (4) is true; but what about (6)? First of all, he points out that it is irrelevant to enumerate a number of putative morally sufficient reasons for allowing suffering, and then show that these reasons will not work in the case of an omnipotent, omniscient being. Any theist, Pike claims, could always retreat to unexamined reasons, i.e., he could always insist that God's morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering is one which has not as yet been considered. (And this move would always be open to him no matter how long the list of already examined reasons seemed to be.)

Secondly, Pike makes this rather startling observation--the sceptic, he says, must affirm (6) as a logical truth. To make this point clearer, Pike draws our attention to yet another inconsistent triad of statements.

- (7) All swans are white.
- (8) Some swans are not large.
- (9) All white things are large.

Now if (9) is true, but not necessarily true, then either (7) or (8) will be false. However, unless (9) is a necessary truth, the conjunction of (7) and (8) will not be a self-contradictory statement. Because Hume (Philo) holds that "There are instances of suffering" (4) and "God exists" (5) are logically incompatible, then, says Pike, he must also be prepared to affirm "An omnipotent, omniscient being would have no morally sufficient reason

for allowing instances of suffering" (6) as a necessary truth.

Since there is no doubt that proposition (4) is true, the debate now centres around the question "Is (6) a necessary truth?" And if we answer in the affirmative, says Pike, then (5) must be false.

Pike admits that prima facie (6) does seem to be a logical truth, for when we consider the conditions which, in ordinary life, are usually accepted as morally sufficient reasons for permitting instances of suffering, none of these can be assigned to an omnipotent, omniscient being. For example, reference to a lack of some physical ability will obviously not provide God with a morally sufficient reason for permitting evil to exist, nor will the possibility of a lack of knowledge serve as an adequate condition for rendering him free from blame. A somewhat more plausible theodicy might be: God does not eliminate suffering because it results in goods whose value outweighs the negative value of suffering. But this will not work; "An omnipotent, omniscient being could find some other means of bringing about the same results."¹²⁸ And finally, Pike considers the possibility that instances of suffering result from goods, e.g., natural law and free-will, which outweigh the negative value of suffering. However, he also rejects this possibility by acknowledging, as a point well-taken, McCloskey's suggestion that an omnipotent, omniscient being could devise a law-governed world which did not include suffering, and by conceding the same to Mackie's thesis that God could create a world populated by free agents who always chose the good.

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

The above considerations, of course, do not by themselves guarantee that (6) is a necessary truth, for as was suggested earlier, the theist can always take refuge in the possibility that a theodicy is to be found in an as yet unexamined reason. However, says Pike, they do suggest that there might be a principle operating in each of the formerly proposed morally sufficient reasons which guarantees that no such reason could be assigned to an omnipotent, omniscient being. That is, in all cases in which men might be excused for permitting suffering, there was an explicit reference to a human limitation, viz., either a lack of knowledge or of power. Now, he asks, might it not be maintained that since an omnipotent, omniscient being cannot (by definition) be deficient in these faculties, it is impossible to find a theodicy for him?

Rather than pursuing this line of thought, Pike now asks us to consider a theodicy which he claims does not fit any of the previously mentioned forms. This theodicy is suggested by Demea in the Dialogues.

The world is but a point in comparison of the universe; this life but a moment in comparison of eternity. The present evil phenomena, therefore, are rectified in other regions, and in some future period of existence. And the eyes of men, being then opened to larger views of things, see the whole connection of general laws, and trace, with adoration, the benevolence and rectitude of the Deity through all mazes and intricacies of his providence (p. 67).

Pike points out that Aquinas, in Chapter LXXI of the Summa Contra Gentiles, reasons in a somewhat similar fashion:

The good of the whole is of more account than the good of the part. Therefore, it belongs to a prudent governor to overlook a lack of goodness in the part, that there may be an increase

of goodness in the whole. Thus, the builder hides the foundation of a house underground, that the whole house may stand firm. Now, if evil were taken away from certain parts of the universe, the perfection of the universe might be much diminished, since its beauty results from the ordered unity of the good and evil things, seeing that evil arises from the failure of good, and yet certain goods are occasioned from those very evils through the providence of the governor, even as the silent pause gives sweetness to the chant. Therefore, evil should not be excluded from things by the divine providence.

Pike admits that neither of these statements is entirely satisfactory. Aquinas's theodicy, for example, contains unmistakable hints of causal reasoning. Nevertheless, each suggests another theme, and Pike now goes on to expand this without pretense of historical accuracy.

Pike asks us to imagine a finite set of blocks, including a T-shaped block, an L-shaped block, an F-shaped block, and so on. Each block has an aesthetic value, with the T-shaped block the most valuable and the L-shaped block the least valuable. Suppose that, in fitting the blocks together, there is one and only one subset which will fit together into a square, and that the L-shaped block is a member of that subset. Pike then stipulates that any formation of the blocks (consisting of two or more blocks fitted together) will have more aesthetic value than any of the blocks taken individually or any subset of blocks taken as a mere collection. His final assumption is that among all logically possible block formations, the square formation has the greatest aesthetic value. The L-shaped block, the block with the least aesthetic value, then becomes a necessary, i.e., logically indispensable, part of the square formation, and therefore a necessary component in the best of all possible block formations.

Returning now to Demea's theodicy, Pike attempts a restatement in terms of his block-model. First, given that God is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being, then it is to be expected that he would create the best of all possible worlds. However, the best of all possible worlds (presumably, from all points of view) is such that it must contain instances of suffering: they are logically indispensable components. This is why there are instances of suffering in the world which God created. And so, there is a morally sufficient reason for God's allowing suffering to exist in this world.

Conceding that (1) if instances of suffering are logically indispensable components in the best of all possible worlds, then this would provide a morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent, omniscient being to permit instances of suffering and (2) the best of all possible worlds might, in fact, contain instances of suffering, a crucial question is still unanswered. That is to say, any sceptic who conceded these two claims would still be entitled to ask, "How are we to know that, in fact, suffering is logically necessary in the best of all possible worlds?" Pike admits that he knows of no argument which would verify this claim. But on the other hand, he says, he also knows of no argument which shows it to be false. And this, says Pike, is all the theist needs; if it is not obviously false that there might be a morally sufficient reason for an omnipotent, omniscient being to permit suffering to exist, then "God exists" and "There occur instances of suffering" are not obviously logically incompatible as Hume and other more contemporary philosophers have claimed.

II

Before proceeding with an evaluation of Pike's theodicy, I would

like to take issue with his interpretation of the position held by other philosophers with respect to the problem of evil qua problem. Pike claims that Mill, McTaggart, Flew, Aiken, Mackie, Ducasse, and McCloskey are but a few of many philosophers who have maintained that "God exists" and "There occur instances of suffering" are logically incompatible statements. If Pike is correct in his interpretation, then it follows that any philosophers who held the above position and yet devoted time and energy to the refutation of some of the proposed solutions to the problem of evil were obviously wasting their time and not paying close attention to the implication of their own position. That is, anyone who claimed that the above statements were logically incompatible would also be committed to the view that it is logically impossible for there to be an acceptable solution to the problem of evil. These philosophers, then, would have had excellent a priori grounds for immediately rejecting any putative solution to the problem of evil. Pike, then, should certainly have found it strange that Mackie, McCloskey, and Ducasse do, in fact, devote considerable space in their treatment of the problem of evil to the analysis and evaluation of many of these putative solutions.

Actually, Mackie, Ducasse, and McCloskey were not inconsistent in their treatment of the problem of evil; rather it is Pike's interpretation of their position that is incorrect. These three individuals, at least, did not claim that "God exists" and "There occur instances of suffering" are logically incompatible. Ducasse, for example, says:

The theologians of orthodox monotheism have expended vast ingenuity on the attempt to dispose

of the prima facie contradiction which constitutes their problem of evil.¹²⁹

McCloskey's position is also that "there is a clear prima facie case that God and evil are incompatible--both cannot exist."¹³⁰ Mackie, who formulates the problem of evil solely in terms of God's omnipotence and perfect goodness, claims that

There seems to be (italics mine) some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them are true, the third would be false.¹³¹

It should now be apparent that the position held by McCloskey, Mackie, and Ducasse is, in fact, quite different from the one attributed to them by Pike. Their claim is that the statements "God exists" and "There occur instances of suffering" are prima facie incompatible, whereas Pike interprets them as saying that these statements are actually incompatible. This difference is not a trivial one; it is important to both the analysis of the problem of evil and the treatment of its putative solutions. But more on this point later.

At this point, the reader may be slightly puzzled about what it is Pike is claiming. Pike says his position is this: suffering might be a logically necessary component in the best of all possible worlds. But, one may ask, "What exactly is one committed to in saying that suffering might be "logically necessary"? The modern view of logical necessity is that this

¹²⁹ Ducasse, op. cit., p. 353.

¹³⁰ McCloskey, op. cit., p. 66.

¹³¹ Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence", p. 47.

type of necessity is attributable only to propositions, i.e., propositions and only propositions are either contingent or logically necessary. On this modern interpretation then, to say that suffering might be a logically necessary component in the best of all possible worlds is to say that the proposition expressed by the statement "There occur instances of suffering in the best of all possible worlds"¹³² might be a logical truth or, alternatively, that the phrase "the best of all possible worlds" might mean or entail the phrase "contains suffering".

III

Now that we have a clearer insight into what Pike is actually asserting, it seems appropriate to ask, "How do we establish which statements are and which are not logical truths?" Given the statement "All bachelors are males", for example, we could refute the claim that it is a logical truth simply by finding a female bachelor. But how could we refute Pike's claim that "There are instances of suffering in the best of all possible worlds" might be a logical truth? Obviously, it is fruitless to search for other actual universes which do not contain suffering, and then assess their value. Nevertheless, besides empirical investigations, there seems to be another criterion for testing for necessity in statements. That is, if a statement is a necessary truth, then it should be impossible to conceive of its contradictory. For example, if "All bachelors are males" is

¹³² This is the statement which Pike claims might be a logical truth. However, a more plausible candidate for a logical truth--more plausible because it contains no existential quantifiers--is: "(x) (x is the world better than all others) \supset (x contains instances of suffering)."

a necessary truth, then it should be impossible to conceive of a female bachelor. The question now arises, "Can we conceive of a universe containing no suffering (or at least less suffering than we now find in this universe) which would be a better world than ours?" My own opinion on this matter is that we can indeed conceive of such an alternative universe, and for those with less vivid imaginations than myself I refer them to the many passages in the Bible which copiously describe the habitat of God and his angels. For example,

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.¹³³

Pike says that God would have a morally sufficient reason for allowing suffering if the latter were logically necessary in the best of all possible worlds. Consider this claim in terms of his block analogy. Here it is asserted that block L is a logically necessary part of the best of all possible block formations, viz., the square formation. But in what way, we may ask, could block L be a logically necessary component of this particular formation? We can immediately rule out the possibility that L contributes to the value of the square formation as a whole simple because of its own value. And we can do this, because Pike has explicitly stipulated that L has the least aesthetic value of all the blocks considered individually. This stipulation entails that L is a logically necessary component in the square formation because it is necessarily related to blocks of

¹³³ Revelations 21: 4

higher value, blocks (goods) which would not be present unless L was also present. If L were not related in this way, then it is obvious that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being would have replaced L with some other block of higher value which could perform the same function. The question now arises, "What blocks is block L necessarily related to such that without its inclusion they too would necessarily be absent?" Or, translating this question into the context of the problem of evil, we may ask, "What goods is suffering logically related to such that they could not be present without the concomitant existence of suffering?" The only two plausible candidates would seem to be natural law and freedom of the will. And yet, Pike explicitly rejects these two possibilities (p. 92). This concession seems to make the suggestion that suffering might be logically necessary in the best of all possible worlds an extremely implausible one. But for those who still claim that evil might be necessarily related to some yet undiscovered good, I suggest that they read carefully the following passage and realize that they are committed to saying that the sort of world there described is the one that an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being is obligated to create.

"By the way, a Bulgarian I met lately in Moscow," Ivan went on, seeming not to hear his brother's words, "told me about the crimes committed by Turks and Circassians in all parts of Bulgaria through fear of a general rising of the Slavs. They burn villages, murder, outrage women and children, they nail their prisoners by the ears to the fences, leave them so till morning, and in the morning they hang them--all sorts of things you can't imagine... These Turks took a pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from its 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 their mother's eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here

is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with a 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 his pistol four inches from the baby's face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby's face and blows out its brains. Artistic wasn't it?¹³⁴

After reading this passage, one is very tempted to echo Ivan's words:

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 an unexpiated tear 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. But how? How are you going to atone for them? 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 those children have already been tortured? And what becomes of harmony, if there is hell? I want to forgive. I want to embrace. I don't want more suffering. And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that truth is not worth such a price.¹³⁵

But suppose Pike is right, i.e., suppose that suffering is a logically necessary component in the best of all possible worlds. Does this not imply that if this is the best of all possible worlds then (1) it would be dangerous to eliminate evil because we might in this way introduce a discordant element into the divine symphony of the universe and (2) it may be wrong to condemn the elimination of what is good, because eliminating

¹³⁴ Fedor Dostoevski, The Brothers Karamazov, C. Garnett, Trans., Book V, Chap. IV (New York: The Modern Library, Inc., 1950).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

good may result in the production of more, higher goods?¹³⁶

One final consideration seems to be to point out the absurdity of the suggestion that suffering might be a necessary component in the best of all possible worlds. If, as we have argued earlier, Pike's theodicy amounts to the claim that the statement "There are instances of suffering in the best of all possible worlds" is a logical truth, then Pike is also committed to the following position. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that in this world there are 1,000,000,000 instances of suffering every hour. Pike, if he is to be consistent, must now say that the statement "There occur 1,000,000,000 instances of suffering every hour in the best of all possible worlds" is also a logical truth.¹³⁷ For if he does not accept this statement as a logical truth, then he must regard it as being a contingent one. But if the statement is merely contingent, then surely an omnipotent, omniscient being could reduce this number of instances of suffering; and if he did not, then he would be subject to blame. Pike's theodicy, then, not only implies that suffering in general is a logically necessary component of the best of all possible worlds, but it also commits him to the view that each and every instance of suffering is logically required for the creation of this type of world. According to Pike then, to suggest that God might have prevented the existence of one case of incurable cancer, one mentally retarded

¹³⁶ These implications are suggested by McCloskey, *op. cit.*, p. 72, though not intentionally against Pike.

¹³⁷ To be precise, however, Pike is not only committed to saying that this statement is a logical truth, he must also agree that the statements "There occur X instances of suffering every half-hour (minute, second, etc.)" are also logical truths.

child, or one instance of torture is, in effect, to advocate that God might have decreased the amount of good in this world.

IV

Let us grant, for the sake of argument, that Pike has indeed shown that God might have had a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil. What I now intend to show is that the concession of this possibility is of little consolation to any theist who was originally troubled by the existence of evil.

Assuming that the statement "There occur instances of suffering in the best of all possible worlds" might be a logical truth, what, if anything, can Pike be said to have proven? It seems to me that the only implication of this concession which the theist might take comfort in is the fact that Pike has shown that the existence of evil is not conclusive evidence against the existence of God. But, the reader is reminded, in originally setting up the problem of evil we nowhere insisted that there was a logical incompatibility between the statements "God exists" and "Evil exists", nor was this the way that Mackie, McCloskey, or Ducasse (contrary to Pike's interpretation) analysed the problem. My earlier analysis of the problem of evil qua problem suggested that the existence of evil presented itself as a problem to any theist who held the modified Judeo-Christian conception of God in that evil was prima facie evidence against the existence of a being of this sort. And in saying that evil was prima facie evidence against the existence of God, one of the things I wanted to make clear is that we would not expect a being who was omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good to

permit evil to exist. Now it should be quite obvious that nothing Pike says is damaging to this analysis. In fact, Pike suggests that he too opts for this sort of analysis of the problem of evil qua problem; for in elaborating his analogy between God's allowing evil and the parent who forces his child to take a spoonful of bitter medicine, he says:

Given only that the parent knowingly caused an instance of discomfort, we are tempted to blame him--that is, to exclude him from the class of perfectly good beings.¹³⁸

Also, if evil were not prima facie evidence against the existence of God, why would Pike bother showing that God might have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil?

Given that the existence of evil is prima facie evidence against the existence of God, we may now ask: "What is the proper epistemic attitude towards the claim that God exists?" Before answering this question, I would ask the reader to remember our earlier discussion concerning an individual who apparently allowed a child to suffer, without offering any assistance. Here we stated that this person's action or lack of action was undoubtedly prima facie evidence against the claim that he was a paradigm case of a morally good person. And furthermore, we insisted that (1) this evidence in no way supported the claim that the individual in question was a morally good person, and (2) that it was incumbent on anyone who wished to defend this individual's moral worth to provide a morally sufficient reason for the latter's action. This latter implication is important and demands some elaboration.

¹³⁸ Pike, op. cit., p. 88.

First, I take it as a truism that anyone who wishes to defend a particular thesis on a rational basis must provide evidence for that thesis. Secondly, it seems to me that we do regard an individual as being irrational if he continues to support a particular thesis in the face of prima facie evidence against that thesis. That is, unless an individual at least attempts to show that certain prima facie evidence against a particular thesis is not really damaging, then there can be no rational basis for his continuing to support that thesis. (Assuming, of course, that the only evidence before us in this same prima facie evidence against the thesis.) It follows from these remarks that in the case of the apparently unconcerned individual we do and must regard as being irrational anyone who, while admitting that the individual's action constitutes prima facie evidence against the thesis that he is a perfectly good person, nevertheless defends this person's moral worth while failing to provide a morally sufficient reason for the latter's action.

It seems to me that the analogy between God's allowing evil and the situation discussed above is a good one. First of all, consider Pike's claim that the statement "There occur instances of suffering in the best of all possible worlds" might be a logical truth (italics mine). Since Pike explicitly denies that he has shown that the above statement is a logical truth, it would not seem too presumptuous to assume that he would admit the possibility that the above statement might not be a logical truth. Given these two possibilities, any basis for theism which was present in the possibility of God's having a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil is counterbalanced by the possibility of his not having a morally sufficient

reason for allowing evil. Thus any justification for theism present in the first possibility is wiped out by the obvious justification for atheism in the second possibility. These considerations, per se, would seem to make agnosticism the proper epistemic attitude. However, there are two other factors still to consider. First, Pike has offered no evidence in favour of the claim that the statement "There occur instances of suffering in the best of all possible worlds" is a logical truth. We, however, have presented at least three good reasons suggesting that the above statement is not a logical truth. Secondly, and most importantly, the theist is still left facing the fact that evil is prima facie evidence against the existence of God. If he accepts this evidence as being prima facie evidence against the existence of God, and most theists do, then it is incumbent on him to provide a particular morally sufficient reason for the existence of evil; providing, of course, he wishes to claim a rational basis for his belief. In conclusion: Unless the theist provides a plausible candidate for the position of a good whose existence is necessarily connected with the existence of evil, he can find no justification for the belief in an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good being who is responsible for what happens in the world.

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