

Rational Theism, Part Two

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Copyright: Mikhail Kelnikov
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Contact: kelnikovmikhail@gmail.com

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Rational Theism

Part Two:

The Problem of Evil,
and God's Omnibenevolence

(A Biblical Exegesis)

Mikhail Kelnikov

I received word from a Christian minister having formed the false impression that I was seeking representation by a mainstream Christian publisher, and who upon learning that this work did not shy away from the subject of demonic forces and their direct relation to this world, that it would meet with resistance; but given the nature of the problem of evil and the scriptures that provide the one and only possible answer to this problem, it is compulsory to put forth what can be found in these sources, rather than to exfoliate them in a misguided attempt to mollify the sensibilities of either the masses, or those who find themselves unwilling to stray beyond the narrow confines of their theological indoctrination.

In his work *The Philosophy of Civilization*, Albert Schweitzer of civilization wrote that, *it is the sum total of all progress made by man in every sphere of action and from every point of view in so far as the progress helps towards the spiritual perfection of individuals*; and if Schweitzer is correct, the question follows: How can civilization survive if all that it achieves leads only to the spiritual degradation of the individual; or how can it survive when the autonomy of the individual is attacked or nullified; or how can it survive when the individual nation states that make up what we understand as civilization are dissolved by their absorption into a global, and an unidentifiable, collective whole?

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Part Two:

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The Word Demystified

[To be clear, it is a Biblical exegesis that here follows, and the God referred to is (are) the God(s) identified in the Bible, and not some notion of God as might be gathered from some other source. As to why the plural is used, though the singular may suffice as they are one and the same—leaving us with a mystery to be explained—the plural points to what is mentioned in the text: God the Father, and God the Son.]

The belief or non-belief in the existence of a higher Being presents us with two ways of thinking about ourselves and the world, and while it may seem that there is an alternative third way, this being agnosticism, this third way reflects only an indecision based on what is perceived to be a lack of compelling reasons to render a judgment on

the matter, but given both part one and part two of this work it is believed that there are no longer any grounds for refraining from forming a conclusive judgment grounded on pure reason.

Atheists are bound to regard with some irony, mixed with disdain, the opening line of David's 14th and 53rd psalms: *The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'*, for this insult being found in the company of that series of books that make up the Bible is for many atheists who so contend, only another example of the kind of foolishness committed to writing by primitive, wandering nomads, like the psalmist himself, having only myth and superstition to offer in the place of science.

But here we have this appeal, as to an oracle, seen so commonly now with this word suggesting infallibility, to be invoked whenever the need arises to lend the impression of knowledge, even in the absence of knowledge; for what truth flows from the mouth of this oracle that goes by the name *science*, whose wise counsel so many atheists seek, that would cleanse us from the foolishness of this belief in the existence of a higher Being, or the foolishness of thinking that the Bible in which we find the words of the psalmist, is the inspired Word of God?

The wisdom received from the oracle that atheists would pass on to us, as though it offers for our safety and refuge a world of rich and fertile lands populated only by the enlightened, and outside the gates of which the barbarians of ignorance stand ready to plunder, is no more than an arid wasteland wherein multitudes of lost souls wander about seeking sustenance, but find only such noxious weeds sprouting up as this specious reasoning that there is no one, past or present, whom we can regard as being in some way uniquely gifted, someone whom we may regard as being of any special importance, for the oracle has declared that we

are all made from the same cosmic stardust that found its way to the Earth to provide the material stuff from which we are all made, and so there is nothing to distinguish any individual apart from any other; and from this same parched ground there has arisen, as if having been summoned up from the darkest regions of the netherworld lying deep below, a macabre and debased vision proclaiming itself as the ultimate rationale for our existence, and holding out to us in our endless need to satisfy our thirst for knowledge, this new revelation that we are not only not individuals, but we are not even human beings, for this individual self that we think we are is but an illusion foisted on us by our genes—our true Masters and Creators—and to no end other than their mindless self-replication; and of this truth we can be certain for it has passed directly from the mouth of the infallible oracle to the ears of one whom, it is widely held, is most capable of interpreting its message.¹

¹ The refutation of our individual uniqueness by reducing us to mere cosmic stardust was put forth by various scientists, more notably by the late American astronomer Carl Sagan, and more recently, broadcast to Canadians through their publicly funded CBC radio in an interview with another physicist on *The Sunday Magazine*, Oct. 17, 2021; the second refutation of our individual uniqueness can be found in *The Selfish Gene*, R. Dawkins, wherein the author puts forth what he calls *the ultimate rationale for our existence*; also, S. Blackmore: *The Meme Machine* (with a foreword by Dawkins), in which the author states toward the end of her book that *we live our lives as a lie, because our genes made us do it*. If such nihilist dogmas are truly shared among atheists they should, to remain true to their self-refuting reasoning, remain silent on all matters, for should they dare speak, they refute themselves.

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Given such pernicious views of our reality—amounting to nothing more than an abject, morally bankrupt philosophy of nihilism—as alternatives to an intuitive faith in the existence of God, it is not difficult to understand why the apostle Paul took the insult of the psalmist even further:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honour Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations.... Professing to be wise they became fools.... and just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind....²

Having offered by means of pure reason something rational in contrast to such alternatives that reduce this omnipresent reality of the self to an illusion, there are certain conclusions that follow, necessarily, from the first part that are of more practical consequence, and these are:

This present stage of expansion that marks the final stage of the causal series that preceded it is finite in extent, and as time and space are inextricably linked to this expansion, when this expansion obtains to its limit time will cease and all things will in their form pass from a finite, temporal state, to an infinite, eternal state.

Further to this, we have the formative followed by the creative phase, and the idea of a beginning to what we now have. The practical aspect of this transition from one state to another state on the cosmic, or universal level, follows through to our human level, as will be explained in our

² Romans 1: 20-22; 28 [all references are from the New American Standard Bible, 1971; unless otherwise specified].

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examination of various scriptures such as again, in Paul's letters:

Behold, I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet, for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable... and this mortal shall put on immortality; then will come about the saying that is written, *death is swallowed up in victory, oh death, where is thy sting?*³

This text that supports this judgment concerning the end of time, or the transition from a temporal to an eternal state of being, and that speaks of those who will be alive on Earth to witness Christ's return, and those who are asleep—this being the analogy used in the Bible to describe the state that we enter into with death—is integral to the problem of evil and the unequivocal answer to it that can be found in the scriptures.

This answer to the problem involves not just the question of God's existence as a Being in possession of all three of the attributes that God must possess, but it is a question as to God's presence or absence, and a question having to do with God's judgment as explained in the scriptures.

However, how can we further connect what has been said in the first part, that dealt with God's existence as an omniscient and omnipotent Being, and this part where we will be dealing with God's existence as a morally perfect Being?

In the first part the *A* and *B* representations define a pure relation of mind whereby the infinite=*A* acts as the Cause, the source bringing about its finite manifestation=*B*; where in the Christian faith this relation is the same as that

³ 1 Corinthians 15: 51-5.

between the Father: the Cause= A , and His only begotten Son: the Creator= B , for we find: “By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might be saved through Him;”⁴ and: “Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master, neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him.”⁵

These statements define the message, the gospel as put forth in the scriptures, and they tie together what follows; but as the statement: *that we might be saved through Him*, portends some danger of which we should be aware, there is the question as to what it is, exactly, that we need to be saved from.

The answer given in the scriptures is: Saved from an impending judgment under an Absolute law that cannot be anything other than what it is, an Absolute that admits to no imperfection, and saved from the consequence that must follow from one’s failure to adhere, perfectly, to that law—meaning without deviating from the law even in the slightest degree. The consequence of deviating from this law, even in the slightest degree, is inevitable death, whether one is aware of this or not. One must understand that the Absolute means just that. Absolute in the sense of Absolute, not relative perfection. Before this Absolute the only passing grade where the whole of our lives is concerned, laid out from beginning to end, is nothing less than utter perfection. With this realization that not so much as a single short-coming is tolerable lends sense to the scripture: “This is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, and the life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son of God does not

⁴ 1 John 4: 9.

⁵ John 13: 16.

have life.” And: “He who believes in the Son has eternal life, but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides in him.”⁶ This wrath implies God’s judgment that is not grounded on a philosophy of relativism, but it is grounded on God’s Being and Absolute nature that calls for a standard of conduct in both mind and action that Christ alone was able to adhere to, without deviation.

As with what has been put forth in the first part we have, in the premise that was advanced with the *A* and *B* representations, and the constant pure state of relation maintained throughout the causal process explained, its parallel here in the idea of the existence of not one, but two higher Beings, with one proceeding from the other (*B* following from *A*) and being the lesser of the two; and while this is explained abstractly in the first part, we nevertheless arrive thereby at a rational understanding free from the mysticism that shrouds those scriptures that speak of this same relation.

In the life of the Son we also have the same process of becoming that is evident in our own beings, from birth and a process of maturing through to death, and Christ’s resurrection, with this portrayal of the Son again paralleled in the explanation of the first part as a pure relation of Cause and effect, and the idea of a movement following from an initial, most original, and simplest possible state of Being to a final, and most complex state of Being.

Although the one process is cosmic, or transcendent, and the other is corporeal, the one and the two are the same as explained in Christ’s words: *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*⁷

⁶ 1 John 5: 11-12; John 3: 36.

⁷ Rev. 22: 13.

The Alpha, the first, and the beginning, are in the process of this movement distinct from the Omega, the last, and the end, yet they are the same for there is no break in the movement from the one to the other, and in this sense God the Father and God the Son, while distinct, can be understood as the same; and while existing as the Prime Movers of space and time, as those eternal Absolutes bringing these conditions and all things bound by them into being.

This process that can be seen as a process of emergence toward life, while not explained in the scriptures, is reflected in those versus wherein Christ equates Himself with God the Father: "I and the Father are one,"⁸ and further: "And the child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom, and the grace of God was upon Him."⁹

Critics may see a contradiction here in this claim of Christ that He and the Father are one, but if one's whole being is fully contained within the other: God the Son in God the Father, there is no contradiction even though the one stretches out infinitely beyond the boundaries of the phenomenal world that reflects the work of the one of whom John in the opening of his gospel wrote: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*

Confirmation of this process whereby all things have come into being, as a movement or an emergence toward life, is attested to not only in what we find in the scriptures, as seen in Christ's physical birth, maturing to adulthood, and death and resurrection; but this process we see working

⁸ John 10: 30.

⁹ Luke 2: 40.

in our own being. It is further reflected in what we can gather from the science of cosmology that points back to a beginning billions of years ago, and it is reflected in what we can gather from the natural sciences showing that simpler forms of life have over time given way to more complex forms, from the appearance of the simplest living organisms three billion years ago through to the appearance of *Homo sapiens* roughly 200,000 years ago.

This process as an emergence toward life and toward greater complexity can also be seen as a process of upheavals with abrupt changes, with the old giving way to the new; and this is not only a feature of the archaeological record, but it can be seen even in the Biblical account of Genesis that can be understood as yet another new beginning following the overthrow of what went before, and in the future, there will be yet another abrupt change giving way to another new beginning, as gathered given the words of Paul as quoted, and others to be mentioned.

While it is impossible to comprehend this vast timespan of the emergence of life on Earth, it is of some benefit, conceptually speaking, to have at least some rudimentary idea of this vast history if only to see how it relates to what the scriptures portend concerning the future toward which all things are heading; and to this end we can have some idea of this vast timespan if we compress the Earth's 4.5-billion-year history down to an easier to fathom 24-hour day.

On this reduced time scale with the Earth being formed at midnight, the simplest organisms would appear at dawn. The breakup of Pangaea, when the Earth's landmasses were joined together, began before the final hour of the day. Dinosaurs arose to populate the Earth while these land masses moved apart to become separate continents, and in the last hour of the day, 22 minutes before midnight,

dinosaurs became extinct. Some twenty minutes after they became extinct *Homo erectus* appeared, with only 90 seconds remaining in the day, and *Homo sapiens* appeared just four seconds before midnight; and the history of civilization from the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, the Egyptians and the building of the great pyramid of Khufu (finished between 2560 and 2550 B.C.), the empires of Greece and Rome, and all the events that followed from then up to the present, occurred during the last one-tenth of the last second of the day; and the clock has not yet wound down to midnight.

Thus, from what we can gather from science and our own personal experience and what is found in the scriptures, the picture is given of a Creator whose creative capacity, we can conclude, has increased over time through the sheer exercise of this capacity, and of a Creator having directed the whole of creation through its various stages of development to what we now have.

Is this a heresy, as some might contend?

It is left for the individual reader to judge whether or not this makes more sense, in light of the facts, than those religious dogmas that portray God as a changeless Being having existed throughout eternity, who just suddenly awoke, as if from a timeless sleep, and decided to engage in the act of creation, not as portrayed in all the sciences that can tell us about the Earth's vast history, but as simply and literally, not metaphorically, described in Genesis.

The belief in the existence of a transcendent Absolute Mind guiding all of creation along its course, while outside the purview of natural science, is yet a rational belief that can be grounded on pure reason in such a manner that it does not fall into conflict with science, and in such a way that it helps us make sense of reality, and furthermore, without any appeal to the idea of miracles. For what is

thought impossible for we finite beings subject to the conditions of space and time cannot be thought impossible for an omniscient and omnipotent Absolute Being not bound by these conditions. And what miracle can still be called a miracle when it can be understood rather as the empirical evidence of this Absolute Mind capable of manipulating the substance of our phenomenal world howsoever this Absolute Mind wills, and so restore in an instant, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, make the lame walk, heal diseases, turn water into wine, and raise the dead back to life?

The entire process of all things coming into being can be comprehended as following according to God's boundless capacity, and from what our common sense might assume as nothing at all to all that now is. Pure reason cannot be prohibited by some arbitrarily imposed limitation from obtaining to a rational understanding of this process, and while there will always be for some the appeal to our inescapable ignorance as a shield against what they deem to be objectionable, what do atheists, or those who hold to the dogma that matter is all that exists, offer to account for how this creation has come about?

Here they have no answers.

It is just something that happened.

It could have come about, they say, by all sorts of mechanisms of which we have no clear understanding or proof, but which may one day become known; but even granting this expectation, which is no more than the kind of wishful thinking and blind faith that so many atheists contend theists exhibit, where in all the mathematical equations of theorists in physics, who may happen to share the same expectation, are you?

You cannot be reduced to a mathematical equation and so you are nowhere.

You are an illusion.

The one thing that we can be sure of here is that atheists have the advantage where the masses are concerned given that for the most part they see no distinction between their physical being and this consciousness of theirs that cannot be reduced to just that which can be seen. Thus, they have successfully advanced the dogma that you are not a being whose design reflects the work of a higher intelligence but you are a being whose design reflects the work of natural selection—a blind, mechanical process that is sufficient to explain itself as its own cause—and so supplanting the notion of a transcendent, universal Cause with this physical, earthly cause, they make the problem of the why of your existence go away.

Atheists, in the absence of any such proof as that which has been provided in the first part, have promulgated to much critical acclaim on the part of those indoctrinated into this Darwinian cult of biological evolution, not just such senseless ideas as selfish genes, but there are the further sideshows of theoretical physicists performing miracles of their own, juggling numbers in the air and making multi-universes appear out of nothing; and what end do all these sideshows put on by these puppet masters serve but to keep the masses tied to their strings blind to the fact that they have no answers; for to have an answer they must explain why you yourself exist, but if this self that you think you are is no more than an illusion, all they are obliged to state is that existence is a brute fact and there is no reason to assume that this brute fact required a Cause outside of itself. The notion of a transcendent Cause cannot be supported for if we cannot see it then it cannot exist. The only thing that we can know exists is what we are able to see, this being this material world before us, and if you cannot live with this fact that you are only a physical being

and not an immaterial being, don't worry, one day you'll die, and this certainty that is your future will inevitably confirm that this thinking self that you've been tricked into thinking you are, was only an illusion all along.

Like expert counterfeiter, atheists with all such claims to scientifically legitimate knowledge and wisdom, denying all they cannot see and confirming only this material reality before us, pretend to be rich, when in fact, they're destitute.

Beyond the critical use of pure reason and proofs by means of principles and concepts *a priori*, theists have such scriptures as the following—though these for the host of those who see themselves as only beings composed of matter, most certainly provide only a further source of mockery—to add to the rational alternative to atheism's pretensions: “I am the good shepherd, and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father, and I lay down my life for the sheep.”¹⁰ And: “All things have been handed over to Me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son reveals Him.”¹¹

And we have further:

Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother and brought them up to a high mountain by themselves, and He was transfigured before them, and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became white as light and behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.... While he [Peter] was still

¹⁰ John 10: 14-15.

¹¹ Matthew 11: 27.

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speaking a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, ‘This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!’¹²

And:

Jesus said to him [referring to Thomas], “I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also....”

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father.”¹³

The pure conceptual understanding abstractly explained in the first part is supported by such texts wherein we have the attribute of God as light, and where we have the *A* and *B* relation—as a pure relation of the finite, reflected in the manifestation of God in the form of the only begotten Son, representing God the Father—the infinite that reaches beyond all that can be said to be; and this judgment in the first part is a judgment *a priori* that admits of no rational contradiction, and it is not by mere coincidence that it agrees with what we can find expounded in the scriptures.

¹² Matthew 17: 1-5.

¹³ John 14: 6-9.

The Problem of Evil

The first part puts forth that God is both omniscient and omnipotent, so that there arises in this part the need to address what philosophers call the problem of evil, putting in doubt the third necessary divine attribute, God's omnibenevolence.

The argument grounded on the fact of evil is given the following apparently logical line of reasoning:

1. If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
2. If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate evil.
3. If God is omniscient, then God knows when evil exists.
4. If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil.
5. Evil exists.
6. If evil exists and God exists, then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil, or doesn't know when evil exists, or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil.
7. Therefore, God doesn't exist.¹⁴

The first five deductions are straightforward, but the sixth and seventh deductions do not follow for three reasons.

First, the argument assumes that because a certain objectionable or intolerable state of affairs exists, then God

¹⁴ Tooley, Michael, "The Problem of Evil", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). First published Mon. Sep. 16, 2001.

is either unaware of that state of affairs or has no desire or ability to alleviate that state of affairs. This reasoning however conflicts with our personal experience wherein we know that if we are faced with an objectionable or intolerable state of affairs, this does not mean that we are not aware of that state of affairs or that we have no ability to alleviate that state of affairs.

Second, the sixth deduction rests on the argument that for God to be God, no evil of any kind could at any time or under any circumstances ever have even begun to exist. But this reasoning betrays that the argument is written from an omniscient point of view; one that assumes to know all that can be known regarding God and the existence of evil. The issue however is not like that of a novelist inventing a world of their own that they can convey to readers from an all-knowing perspective; but as we are here dealing with not only the world of our immediate experience that reaches beyond our full comprehension, and a transcendent world that also reaches beyond our full comprehension, it is safe to assume with respect to both this immediate world and this transcendent world, that the author of the argument posed by evil is not all-knowing, but is like the rest of us, limited in understanding.

Third, the sixth deduction also rests on the assumption of God's presence, overseeing all things that happen in the world; but given that God made Himself known to us 2,000 years ago, we might then well ask: If God is once again present, where is He? Is He perhaps in Jerusalem, where He appeared before, in the city where He was formerly crucified, and to which He said He would return; or can He be found elsewhere?

That such a question could be asked appears to have gone unnoticed by apologists having offered up their

various answers to the problem of evil. But is it not a perfectly logical question?

We have with the argument an accusation, or a charge, such as might be leveled against anyone alleged to have committed a crime, if we can liken all the evils that we can point to as crimes, to be charged against the accused; however, with the twist in his case being that the accused is charged with delinquency for having failed to prevent all the crimes that were fully within His power to prevent.

In any normal case anyone charged with a crime has the right to defend themselves against the charge, and while in this case the whereabouts of the accused is unknown, there has arisen from this presumption of His presence—even if this is not meant in the physical sense but in the spiritual or transcendent sense—an array of counterarguments to the argument posed by evil, such as the following abbreviated defenses, in italics, followed by their brief refutations:

The infinite power of the Spirit cannot be grasped by those who complain about their insubstantial sufferings, and who find in these reason to disclaim the principles on which faith rests.

This defense does not say anything except that those who complain about suffering have nothing to complain about; and it diminishes the true nature of human suffering. It also undermines the faith it pretends to defend by placing God on such a remote and higher level that the idea of the God it proclaims, for all its practical value, may as well be abandoned.

Evil is impenetrable to finite minds while God's vision is infinite and just as scripture states, His ways are not our

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ways and His thoughts are higher than our thoughts, therefore He must have a good reason for allowing evil.

This line of reasoning, like the former, is not only a confession that we lack an answer to the problem of evil, but it amounts to stating that we can never have an answer to it. This is the trouble-free approach to every truly serious problem. It makes light of the problem and allows us to carry on with our ordinary lives free from the difficulty of having to think about such inscrutable problems.

God permits evil to prevent a greater evil that might otherwise ensue.

This is a statement of the moral principle of choosing the lesser of two evils.

This principle may prove of some practical value when considering a circumstance such as in a state of war, sacrificing one's life for the sake of many, but how can a principle applicable to a particular circumstance make sense of a problem that is universal in its scope?

God permits evil to encourage responses to those evils that will lead to some greater good.

The problem with this reasoning is that it reduces the individual to the level of a sacrificial pawn, and it also, as with the previous arguments, fails to address the true extent and nature of human suffering.

There may be powerful demons exercising their free wills by wreaking havoc.

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It's a poor excuse for one's evil actions or the evil actions of someone else—passing off the blame.

Evil and suffering are conducive to the development of our spiritual strength, which is similar to exercising a muscle that if not exercised, withers away.

How much suffering and how much spiritual growth is necessary, and to what end?

Is the end, as we might suspect, eternal life?

What does eternal life mean?

Why should we desire it?

What of all those who suffered premature deaths by some calamity, natural or otherwise, that prevented them from increasing in their spiritual strength to whatever degree was necessary for them to gain eternal life; and what of all those whose suffering was so intense that the result was not spiritual strengthening but spiritual devastation?

God is good and cannot create or allow evil, therefore, evil does not exist. Evil is not an absolute fact or a substantial positive, like a table or chair, it is a subjective concept and so constitutes an insubstantial negative.

This defense only puts into question our perceptions, which being subjective, cannot be trusted; but how can apologists then defend this very argument itself, which is just another insubstantial negative? The reasoning puts into doubt every belief of any kind, and since it casts into doubt that which cannot be seen and affirms only that which can be seen, it amounts to a defense of atheism, not theism.

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Evil does not exist but what we call evil arises from the exercise of our free will and can be thought of as the lack of something that is good, or a corruption of something that is essentially good before corruption set in through choosing something less than the most perfect good.

This Platonic reasoning, envisioning perfect Forms, only adds more confusion to the issue of what is real and what is not real; it offers nothing that can be called a rational answer to the problem.

Evil is the absence of something that is perceived to be good. If you want something very badly and have trouble obtaining it you might look at this as being terribly evil, but the thing that you desire may be very bad for you, therefore the evil that you see may be very good for you.

The principle reflected here might be of some practical benefit for parents when teaching their children that eating too much candy may not be good for their long-term health; but given the extent of evil in the world, both manmade and natural, it does not rise to the level of a serious solution to the problem, but it appears even to mock the notion that there can actually be something that we can call truly evil.

The fact of evil to conclude that God does not exist is self-contradictory for it presumes the existence of a perfect moral code against which evil can be measured. Therefore, evil does not disprove God's existence, but it proves God's existence.

Atheists can use this same logic to argue that evil does not point to a perfect moral code and therefore to God, but evil simply confirms the existence of obstacles that species

adapt to and overcome according to natural selection, and the changes that species thereby undergo improve the odds for their survival. For our human species, by overcoming all the evils we confront, we will pass on the same positive attributes to our offspring, improving their chances of survival.

The idea of evil is wrapped up in probability judgments and these are not a good enough reason to believe that evil is not fully compatible with God's existence as a morally perfect Being.

If you're a criminal lawyer defending a client who killed a police officer while running away from the scene of a crime, and the courtroom is full of witnesses who took pictures and filmed videos of the accused in the act of committing the crime, try and convince the jury that the assumption of your client's guilt, based on their shaky ideas of what constitutes evil, is but a probability judgment. If one of the twelve jurors buys the logic it might be enough to get your client off the hook.

The common flaw in these responses to the problem of evil is that they all rest on the assumption of God's presence, overseeing all things that happen in the world, and this lends itself to another excuse for evil, namely, that they are God's divine punishment for our transgressions.

This assumption appears to be generally shared given that upon any mishap, or misfortune, the name of Jesus Christ is habitually invoked as a curse to express one's anger or frustration.

Such responses to the problem leave other things to consider.

What about all the animals in the wild that tear each other apart for food?

Should we regard their suffering as evil?

Given that some evils are necessary to prevent even greater evils from happening what greater good came from Stalin's purges of rural peasant populations, or the deaths of those whose bodies went up in flames through the chimneys of the Nazi crematoriums?

What can we make of the 92,000 lives lost in 1815 when Mount Tambora exploded on the Indonesian island of Sumbawa; the 36,000 lives lost in Java and Sumatra in 1883 when Krakatoa erupted; the 29,000 lives lost when Mount Pelee in the Caribbean erupted in 1902; the 228,000 swept away with the Boxing Day tsunami on December 26th 2004; or the 20,000 who perished when an earthquake off the northeast coast of Honshu, Japan, triggered a tsunami that swept away, as though they were so much raw sewage, homes and businesses along its coasts on March 11th, 2011?

Were the purges of rural populations by Stalin, and was the holocaust, and all these natural disasters ignored by God so that we could have His perfect code of morality against which to weigh these evils, and thereby assure ourselves of His existence?

Or, since the idea of God is that of a Being so much higher than we mortals, were all these evils allowed by God to show us how remote, and how impenetrable His mind and His thoughts are?

All these deaths inflicted by deranged dictators wielding unlimited power, and catastrophic natural events, are far surpassed by the approximate 70,000,000 deaths from all the wars fought since the Sino-Russian war of 1900; and the equally vast numbers of Chinese dispatched during the communist Chinese revolution; and given all those lives

obliterated by such sweeping political changes and modern warfare, what does history from its earliest traces to our own time convey if not more of the same, along with the extreme depravities to which we human beings can succumb when ironically, in our own selflessness, we yield to that vacuous sentiment of the collective welfare of the State, or of the greater good of society as a whole, to which all thought of the individual must be swept aside, even if necessary, by brute force?

This tendency to diminish to insignificance the value of the single individual, in contrast to the greater good of the State as a collective whole, is reflected throughout human history not only in such episodes as the Russian and the Chinese revolutions, but it revealed itself between the early thirteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the French inquisition initiated by Pope Gregory IX (1216-1227 A.D.). This State/Church sponsored campaign to cleanse humanity from the plague of heresy spread to other parts of Europe, and to the New World, extended through the next six centuries and ended only after the Napoleonic wars. During these blood-soaked centuries the servants of the inquisition, not content with inflicting on their victims death in and of itself, took measures to publicly torture to death millions of heretics, beheading some, burning others alive at the stake, or expediting them by some other means; and of the line of eighty-three or so Popes that spanned these six hundred years none did anything to inhibit those methods, but some went even further by promoting ever more horrific means of execution; as in the case of the twenty-four year old Lutheran civil law student and graduate of the university of Padua, Pomponio Algerio, on August 22, 1556, whom these servants of the Most High dispensed with by lowering him into a cauldron of boiling oil, tar, and turpentine. All this on the premise of God's

judgment having been conferred by God on the Vicar of Christ, thus making God's wrath a thing of the present; an immediate judgment to be unleashed against all perceived threats to the State, with the State being seen throughout these blood-soaked centuries as an entity inseparable from the one true faith.

Blizzards, floods, famines, forest fires, automobile accidents, industrial accidents, and all sorts of other calamities, including diseases and fatal illnesses that have cut so many lives short, add multitudes to these already incomprehensible numbers, each of which represents not a probability judgment, not an illusion, not an individual deserving punishment for their sins, their heretical beliefs, or their imagined threat to the State, but each representing the life of an irreplaceable and unique human being.

And what can we make of this central dogma that lies at the core of so many religious institutions, that extended back throughout the centuries of the inquisition as its underlying excuse, that holds that we human beings who never asked to be born, must struggle against the miseries of this mortal life only to then for the crime of not having the good sense to submit to their truths, be punished and tormented forever in the afterlife in the unquenchable flames of eternal hell?

The moral principle found in the scriptures that has not been surpassed in its force or simple clarity by any system of moral laws devised by men, can be found in the words of Jesus: "Do not judge lest you be judged, for in the way you judge you will be judged, and by your standard of measure it will be measured to you?"¹⁵

If such a moral principle were to be followed universally, even by those who do not believe the words portend a

¹⁵ Matthew 7: 1-2.

future judgment, what grounds would remain for evil to flourish?

The portrait of God painted by those who fail to grasp the nature of the Mind behind this principle, and who can be found behind pulpits everywhere proclaiming their gospel of eternal damnation, is that of a God not as understanding of human weakness, not as compassionate or forgiving, but as accusatory, as fault-finding, and as the most monstrous of all prosecutors and executioners, for unlike such feeble human instruments as Pope Paul IV (1476-1559) who dedicated his resources to rid Catholic held territories of heretics, and sent Pomponio Algerio to his excruciating death, this God has the power to raise His victims back to life so that He can pleasure Himself by inflicting on them torment without end.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul wrote: “Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?” Thus, we have in this dogma of eternal hellfire reserved for the damned a reflection of the thinking of those preparing to take upon themselves the role of judges, but as we have the words, *by your standard of measure it will be measured to you*, that should serve as a cautionary principle foremost to these future judges, should we not to remain consistent with this principle demand that those who hold to this dogma of eternal torment reserved for the damned, be called on to stand before the scales of Divine justice, and be put to the endless task of keeping the scales perfectly aligned by continually adding to the one side substantial weights that they must somehow fashion by their own cunning, out of nothing, so that the finite number of the sins of the damned will always balance out to the weight of their infinite torment?

If God is Absent,
What is Meant by God's Presence?

The two contradictory ways of thinking about ourselves and the world cannot help but convey two different ways of looking at evil. For those who live in the expectation of nothing but what this temporal world offers, evil points to not only the absence of God, but the non-existence of God, and it also points to not only the possible loss but the actual loss, through death, of all that they have strived for and lived for—and regardless of however lasting they may feign their temporal legacy to be.

For those who live in the hope for something more, evil points only to God's absence, and this world is seen not as an end but as a means toward a world that is eternal, and this clear division in the way that atheists and theists think about themselves and the world is well reflected in Christ's words: "... unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies it remains by itself alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit. He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal."¹⁶ And: "If the world hates you, you know it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."¹⁷

We have before us not just evil, but we have the hard evidence of just what we should expect in a world where God is both absent and entirely irrelevant. In such a world it is only natural for atheism to abound and for theism to be dismissed as foolishness; for those who belong to this

¹⁶ John 12: 24-25.

¹⁷ John 15: 18-19.

world, those who stand out prominently and are esteemed as most successful, as shown in all the gossip columns and popular media, love to be honoured, love to be talked about and admired, love to be idolized; and so they are; for they, just as with the vast majority of others, famous, infamous, or just someone of no special importance among countless others of no special importance, expect nothing except what this temporal world has to offer and in this they find peace with themselves and acceptance by those who are likeminded; but for those who seek for something beyond this world, they are deluded, they are the most deserving of ridicule, they are the most to be loathed.

Atheists though appear with more sense than those who, despite God's absence, see God's presence, even in the natural world, in the majestic lakes, rivers, mountains, and expansive forests untouched by human progress, and that they proclaim as the handiwork of God, but where once the curtain of serene beauty is lifted we see a world where the remorseless principle of the survival of the fittest is amply displayed; a world where all the beauty gives way to decay; and a world that has pronounced on many unwary souls having ventured off into its enchanting realms, like lovestruck suitors blind to the intentions lurking in the hearts of their lovers, a certain and unexpected sentence of death.

There is no accounting for this fact of evil in all its manifestations by any human reasoning, as apparent given the various answers offered by apologists to the problem of evil, but what of the book that apologists have largely neglected?

That evil exists by reason of God's absence is, at least in part, the answer to the problem of evil found in the book of Job, of whom it is written in his position as a judge seated at the gate of the city:

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When I went forth early in the city, and the seat was placed for me in the streets, the young men saw me and hid themselves, and all the old men stood up... I saved the poor out of the hand of the oppressor, and helped the fatherless who had no helper... I put on righteousness and clothed myself with judgment like a mantle. I was the eye of the blind and the foot to the lame. I was the father of the helpless... I broke the jaw-teeth of the unrighteous; I plucked the spoil out of the midst of their teeth.¹⁸

Before considering what this account has to offer, the grounds for arguing that God is absent, not present, can be found in the gospel of Luke following Christ's forty day fast, where it is written that Satan, sensing an advantage, led Him up to a high mountain, and in an instant, showed Him the kingdoms and riches of this world, and proposed: "I will give you all this domain and its glory, for it is handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if you worship before me, it shall all be yours."

Since you cannot offer to someone else something that isn't yours, it is clear according to the scriptures that the kingdoms and riches of this world belong to this one whose character is the antithesis of God, as this account of Job also clarifies:

And it came to pass on a certain day that the angels of God came to stand before the Lord, and the devil [in the Tanakh: *Adversary*] came with them to stand before

¹⁸ Job 29: 7-17. All quotations, unless otherwise noted, from the book of Job, are taken from the *Septuagint, Greek and English* (Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Mich., by arrangement with Samuel Bagster & Sons Ltd., London, 1976—eighth printing).

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the Lord, and the Lord said to the devil, ‘Whence comest thou?’ Then the devil said... ‘I am come from going through the world and walking about the whole Earth.’ And the Lord said to the devil, ‘Hast thou then observed my servant Job, that there is none of men upon the Earth like him, a harmless, true, blameless, godly man, abstaining from all evil, and he yet cleaves to his innocence, whereas thou hast told me to destroy his substance without cause?’

And the devil answered... ‘Skin for skin, all that a man has will he give as a ransom for his life, nay but put forth thine hand, and touch his bones and flesh; verily, will he not blaspheme You to Your face?’, and the Lord said to the devil, ‘Behold, I deliver him up to thee, only spare his life.’¹⁹

So the devil went out from the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from his feet to his head, and he took a potsherd to scrape away the discharge, and sat upon a dung-heap outside the city.

And when much time had passed his wife said to him, ‘How long wilt thou hold out, saying: Behold, I wait yet a little while, expecting the hope of my deliverance? For behold, thy memorial is abolished from the Earth, even thy sons and daughters, the pangs and pains of my womb which I bore in vain with sorrows; and thou thyself sittest down to spend the nights in the open air among the corruption of worms, and I am a wanderer and a servant from place to place and house to house, waiting for the setting of the sun, that I may rest from my labours and my pangs which now beset me; but say some word against the Lord, and die.’ But he looked on her and said... ‘Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women. If we have

¹⁹ The line *will he not blaspheme You to Your face* is the translation in the Tanakh.

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received good things from the Lord, shall we not endure evil things?’

In all these things that happened to him, Job sinned not at all with his lips before God.²⁰

Job’s wife reflected the thinking of those who assume God’s presence in the world, overseeing it, and causing evil, however in this account the world, as in Luke, is the domain of Satan, the *adversary*—who is given free reign, to the extent that God allows.

Upon hearing what had befallen Job his three friends visited him with the intent to console him, but upon seeing him, sat silent and aghast for seven days, and afterward, only added to his misery with longwinded exhortations that he could not possibly be innocent, and his pains had been brought about by his guilt, even though his innocence was all that he had to hold on to:

Eliphaz: *...blessed is the man whom the Lord has reproved; and reject not thou the chastening of the Almighty.*²¹

Baldad: *Will the Lord be unjust when He judges, or will He that has made all things pervert justice? If thy sons have sinned before Him, He has cast them away because of their transgression.*²²

Sophar: *...say not, I am pure in my works, and blameless before Him.*

²⁰ Job 2: 1-10.

²¹ Job 5: 17.

²² Job 8: 3-4.

*But oh that the Lord would speak to thee, and open His lips with thee... and then shalt thou know that a just recompense of thy sins has come to thee from the Lord.*²³

Rather than well founded judgments grounded on facts these accusations are grounded on an assumption of God's presence, along with His judgment prepared to answer wrongdoers; but the accusatory spirit arising from this assumption, that we can judge as the catapult for enmity, violence, injustice, and the like, is the defining characteristic not of a God whose judgment above all we should hold as most just, but of God's antithesis, as shown where Satan, whose name translates as the accuser or slanderer, challenges before God the sincerity of Job's righteousness, this being consistent with what we find in the book of Revelation:

And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil [διαβόλου Greek, *diábolos*—slanderer], and Satan, who deceives the whole world, he was thrown down and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, "Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of the brethren has been thrown down, who accuses them before God day and night."²⁴

Eliphaz, unwittingly, betrays this same source for his accusations against Job in what he calls his *visions of the night*:

²³ Job 11: 4-6.

²⁴ Rev. 12: 9-10.

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Now a word was brought to me stealthily, and my ear received a whisper of it. Amid disquieting thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, dread came upon me, and trembling... a spirit passed by my face... I could not discern its appearance; a form was before my eyes; there was silence, then I heard a voice: "Can mankind be just before God? Can a man be pure before his maker? He puts no trust even in His servants; and against His angels He charges error; how much more those who dwell in houses of clay?"²⁵

Given that this spirit that came to Eliphaz put forth the complaint that God puts no trust even in His servants, and *against His angels He charges error*, it can be gathered that this spirit who appeared to Eliphaz is the subject of the lamentation in Ezekiel: *you were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you.*²⁶ Though Eliphaz assumed that it was God or a messenger from God who appeared to him, Job responded:

Far be it from me that I should justify you... for I will not let go my innocence, but keeping fast my righteousness I will by no means let it go; for I am not conscious to myself of having done anything amiss.²⁷

And holding to their belief in God's presence, God's judgment of Job's accusers followed:

And it came to pass... that the Lord said to Eliphaz the Thaemanite, 'Thou hast sinned, and thy two friends,

²⁵ Job 4: 12-19 [New American Standard Bible].

²⁶ Chapter 28.

²⁷ Job 27: 5-6.

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for ye have not said anything true before me as my servant Job has... And my servant Job shall pray for you, for I shall only accept him; but for his sake, I would have destroyed you, for you have not spoken the truth against my servant Job.²⁸

By their own reasoning Job's interlocutors would have merited condemnation, given that their judgment was guided by an accusatory nature reflecting the antithesis of God's spirit, and also grounded on the assumption of God's judgment being a thing of the present, though they were spared not only through Job's intervention, but they were spared because God's judgment is not a thing of the present, but it is reserved for a future time, as brought about in God's response to Job, who had also assumed that God's hand had turned against him: "Will you really annul my judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?"²⁹ The implication here being that if evil is attributed to God as a form of punishment, then God merits our condemnation, for how given the indiscriminate nature of evil have the scales of divine justice been balanced, and if we are to equate evil with God's ever present judgment, the punishment enacted by way of these evils, would they not nullify the grounds for any further judgment; given that the sentence would have by way of these evils been carried out, and the guilty, so to speak, washed clean?

It is not only that God is absent from this world, as seen in the book of Job, in Luke, and elsewhere, and we have been left to our own devices, but there is a purpose that is being worked out, and that purpose, involving our free will, steers us further in the direction of the answer to the problem of evil given in the scriptures.

²⁸ Job 42: 7-8.

²⁹ Job 40: 8 [NASV].

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But setting aside for a moment this matter of free will, since it is put forth that God is absent, what then are we to understand by God's presence?

This is clarified by such books as Isaiah where it is mentioned what the world will be like just prior to Christ's return and what it will be like afterward:

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us, and the government will be upon His shoulders, and His name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forever more.³⁰

Though before this future unfolds, we have in Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, the foretelling of an event that will prove not only divisive, but calamitous to many, and that will by its magnitude signal the immanency of Christ's return:

Now we request you, brethren with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, that you be not quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that

³⁰ Isaiah 9: 6-7.

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he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God... that is the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders.³¹

And further to this, in Isaiah:

Terror and pit and snare confront you, O inhabitants of the Earth.

Then it will be that he who flees the report of disaster will fall into the pit, and he who climbs out of the pit will fall into the snare, for the windows above are opened and the foundations of the Earth shake.

The Earth is broken asunder.

The Earth is split through.

The Earth is shaken violently.

The Earth reels to and fro like a drunkard, and it totters like a shack, for its transgression is heavy upon it, and it will fall never to rise again.

So it will happen in that day, that the Lord will punish the host of heaven on high, and the kings of the Earth on Earth, and they will be gathered together like prisoners in a dungeon, and will be confined in prison, and after many days they will be punished.

Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed for the Lord of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders.³²

And in the book of Revelation:

And I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he lay hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand

³¹ 2 Th. 2: 1-4; 9.

³² Isaiah 24: 17-23.

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years, and threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him so that he should not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed....

And I saw thrones, and they that sat upon them, and judgment was given to them, and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of the testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received the mark upon their forehead and upon their hand, and they came to life....

The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.

Blessed and holy is the one who has part in the first resurrection, over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him a thousand years.³³

Mention of this restoration of the dead back to life is conveyed in Paul's letters, as in others, but also in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones: "Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My peoples, and I will bring you into the land of Israel.... And I will put My spirit within you, and you will come to life.... Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it,' declares the Lord."³⁴

And continuing with Isaiah, we have a vision of what follows with the overthrow of the world of which it is stated, *it will fall never to rise again*:

Now it will come about that in the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above

³³ Revelation 20: 1-6.

³⁴ Ezekiel 37: 12-14.

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the hills, and all the nations will stream to it, and many peoples will come and say, "Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us of His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations and render decisions for many peoples, and they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation. And never again will they learn war.³⁵

Behold a king will reign righteously, and princes will rule justly, and each will be like a refuge from the wind, and a shelter from the storm, like streams of water in a dry country, like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land; then the eyes of those who see will not be blinded and the ears of those who hear will listen, and the mind of the hasty will discern the truth, and the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak clearly.³⁶

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them. Also the cow and the bear will graze. Their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra; and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.

They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the Earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.³⁷

³⁵ Isaiah 2: 2-4.

³⁶ Isaiah 32: 1-4.

³⁷ Isaiah 11: 6-9.

Rational Theism, Part Two

Given the possibility of some doubt as to God's presence, or absence, it is obvious that the world as it stands is not full of the knowledge of the Lord, nor is the word of the Lord going forth from Jerusalem.

If it is, since there always have been and still are pretenders to the throne, where are the saints who have been martyred, and where are Peter and Paul?

Where are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and his sons who are the patriarchs of the house of Israel?

Where is David?

Where are Moses and Elijah who were together seen by Peter speaking with the Lord?

Have the rulers of this world been gathered up and imprisoned?

Leopards and lions have not stopped hunting their prey. Poisonous snakes are still poisonous snakes. Armed soldiers still massacre each other on the battlefield and people still murder other people in cold blood. Crime and violence still grip the streets of cities everywhere. The rich and the elite rest content with their spoils, though unsettled with thoughts of losing what they have and pressed on with the single-minded thought of only accumulating more, while the impoverished live in squalor and die from starvation by the millions all around them. Innocents are still judged guilty and imprisoned; natural disasters still abound; and children still die from accidents.

A Question of Genocide,
Free Will, and God's Nature

There is with this matter of life and death and the exercise of our free will (according to what is found in the sacred texts), that we can utilize toward either one or the other of these two ends, a clear division in the two contradictory ways of thinking about ourselves and the world, where for the one view that dismisses these sources there is but the immediate present that indicates no evidence of any ultimate purpose, and given the brute fact of the untold calamities to which we are all susceptible, do not these evils mock the very notion?

Yet, is it not this very fact that you are able to think about your existence that is the most consequential aspect of this reality—despite there being those who pretend their thinking self is but an illusion?

Even should this fact of the thinking self be admitted, what is the focus of your mind when it comes to your existence? Is it your inner consciousness, or is it your physical body and the external world that, like an enticing Medusa, draws you so deep into its spell that you cannot, despite all your attempts to resist, escape its embrace?

If the only thing that exists is the material world then the expectation of anything beyond the grave is just as atheists contend, no more than wishful thinking; and here there is no need for theists to discourage those who believe this to be so from this belief, for through the exercise of their own free wills atheists have chosen to wed themselves to the enchantress, and is not this freedom to choose death, rather than life, what is reflected in the following:

“But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read that which was spoken to you by God saying,

*I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”*³⁸

Here we have a reference to the resurrection of the dead, previously mentioned, with two phases, with the first taking place upon Christ's return, and the second following the millennium. The first pertains to life, the second to death; and whether acknowledged or not, we have a choice between the one or the other; and how the problem of evil and the answer to it relates to this can be approached by first addressing another objection raised by atheists, and this is that the campaigns mentioned in the Old Testament, waged by the Israelites against the nations they were directed to displace, amounted to genocide; and how can they be seen otherwise? Entire populations were wiped out down to the last man, woman, and child. Do not such accounts of wanton genocide provide ample grounds to view this God of Abraham as anything but morally perfect? Would it not be more in keeping with a decent, normal moral sense, to view this God, filled with such an insatiable bloodlust, as morally depraved, and worthy only of our condemnation?

There is here only this further reflection of the two different ways of looking at ourselves and the world, and with this question of genocide we find how far removed the world conveyed in the scriptures is from the world that defines for the vast majority, whether atheists, agnostics, not to leave out theists, their sole frame of reference. Since the present is all that we experience and all that we can judge the past by, except for the accounts of historians and what we can gather from the natural sciences, there is no doubt that only further reasons can be provided here for

³⁸ Matthew 22: 31-2.

atheists to discount the scriptures wherein we read of such events as the transfiguration of Christ before His disciples; with this connection between the material world and the spiritual world being a theme repeated throughout these sources, as again in the account of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, where though Abraham petitioned God to spare the cities for the sake of the righteous there were no righteous in the cities, save his cousin Lot with his family, that would have spared these cities from destruction.³⁹

It is not only that those who populated these cities were irredeemably lost, but they also posed a threat to any foreigners travelling through their lands. This we can gather from the attempt on the part of some of their inhabitants, who upon hearing that strangers had entered their midst, to sodomize the angels having taken on human form, and who had been sent to warn Lot to flee, but being struck blind by their intended victims, were rendered incapable of carrying out their assault.

Where atheists cannot fathom how life can persist once the physical body has exhausted itself, God's promise to those not blind to His powers (as Paul writes concerning the works of creation as seen in the natural world), is reflected in God's covenant with Abraham:

³⁹ Evidence of the destruction of these cities was apparent even 2,000 years afterward, during the time of the historian Josephus (37-100 A.D.), as he indicates in his writings, noting their location and the blanket of sulfur that covered the land that has since been analyzed and found to have a degree of purity higher than what is commonly found in nature.

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Now when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abraham and said to him, “I am God Almighty, walk before Me and be blameless, and I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly.... And you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.... I will make nations of you and kings shall come forth from you.”⁴⁰

I will make nations of you and kings shall come forth from you, being plural, cannot mean anything other than that the Jews, thought to constitute the entire nation of Israel, are but a part of the Israelites, and that this seems apparent is evidenced given the various blessings bestowed by Israel on his twelve sons, providing some clues as to the characteristics of the nations arising from them; but regardless of the identity of those nations that arose from Jacob’s sons, even if it can be said that they are all Jews by definition, the importance of the covenant is that it was not an ordinary agreement between men, but it was an agreement between man and God, and the blood sacrifice it was written in made it binding. This covenant was the Old Testament equivalent to the New Testament covenant between Christ and those who believe in Him—a covenant also written in blood, with both covenant’s, old and new, reflecting the binding promise of eternal life.

That there are these two different choices open to us, one death, the other life, is seen not only in the confrontations of the Israelites with the nations that posed a threat to their obtaining to the promise, but it is seen in the confrontations between John the Baptist and certain Pharisees and Sadducees who believed themselves to be descendants of Abraham, and heirs to the promise, but whom he addressed with: “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from

⁴⁰ Genesis 17: 1-6.

the wrath to come...” and again with Christ’s similar response to the same: “You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart.”⁴¹ And addressing the same again with:

If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth you do not believe Me. Which one of you convicts Me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears the words of God, for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God.⁴²

The remarks, *if God were your Father and you are of your father the devil*, emphasized again with, *you are not of God*; contrasted with Genesis: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel,”⁴³ provide a clue that points to two opposed genealogies arising on Earth, supported further in the account of the first homicide with Cain’s murder of Abel—the murder of which Jesus spoke to His accusers as being attributable to their father, the devil—and this mentioned

⁴¹ John, in both Matt. and Luke 3: 7; and Jesus, Matt. 12: 34.

⁴² John 8: 42-7.

⁴³ Genesis 3: 15.

again in the first letter of John: “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious. Anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one, and slew his brother.”

The question here is then whether John is speaking in the metaphorical or in the literal sense. If in the metaphorical sense, the related scriptures citing John the Baptist’s and Christ’s rebuke of the religious authorities of their time, appear mute, or impotent, but if in the literal sense, we have clear mention of Satan’s seed emerging through Cain, born at the same time as his brother Abel, leaving then the question as to whether the story conveyed in Genesis is through allegory, conveying the literal fact of Eve falling to the temptation of the serpent, and giving birth through the devil to Cain—the ungodly seed.

As Christ’s genealogy through Mary extended back to Abraham’s great grandson Jacob and his son Judah (from whom according to the blessings bestowed by Jacob, we are told *the sceptre*—referring to Christ—*will not depart*), and from Abraham back to Adam (evident in Christ’s reference to Himself as the *Son of man*), Satan’s ambition, to usurp the throne of God, involved—if we adopt the literal truth hidden in the allegory—his attempt to infiltrate Christ’s genealogical line with his seed, the remnants of which extended from Cain through to the appearance of Christ, hence the appellation, *you brood of vipers*, and if from Cain to Christ, then it is not a stretch to say, given that the same forces of evil have not ceased to operate, from Christ through to the present.

The *brood of vipers* bruised Christ’s heel when His feet were nailed to the cross and Satan’s seed will be bruised by

Christ when He returns to judge them. This coinciding with Isaiah, where it is stated that the kings of the Earth will be gathered up and imprisoned, and this falling in line with Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

Given their dismissiveness of the scriptures it is only natural for atheists, as for anyone for whom the scriptures are of no real consequence, to underestimate the universal nature of evil that works its course not only through certain human instruments, but through beings immaterial in nature, as shown in these scriptures where Satan is spoken of not allegorically for mere poetic purposes, but literally, as a created, immaterial being with powers that exceed anything that we can or dare imagine; and this as a being who was not prevented from taking a course of action in opposition to God, and why should he have been allowed to take such a course except that God, in providing us with a free will, does not infringe on our use of it; preferring not thoughtless beings incapable of acting according to their conscience, but beings with the sense to think through their actions, and do of their own volition, that which is right.

The scriptures speak not only of beings immaterial in form who as we have free will, or a heavenly realm reserved for the faithful, but we find: "For thus says the Lord who created the heavens (He is the God who formed the Earth and made it; He established it and did not create it a waste place, but formed it to be inhabited."⁴⁴

And, with the 96th Psalm:

Sing to the Lord a new song;

⁴⁴ Isaiah 45: 18.

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Sing to the Lord, all Earth.

Sing to the Lord, bless His name; proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.

Tell of His glory among the nations,

His wonderful deeds among all the peoples, for great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised.

He is to be feared above all gods, for all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

Splendor and majesty are before Him.

Strength and beauty are His sanctuary.

Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name; bring an offering, and come into His courts.

Worship the Lord in holy attire; tremble before Him all the Earth.

Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns; indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved; He will judge the peoples with equity."

Let the heavens be glad, and let the Earth rejoice.

Let the sea roar, and all it contains.

Let the field exult, and all that is in it.

Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy before the Lord for He is coming; for He is coming to judge the Earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness, and the people in faithfulness.

This foretells the realization of God's promise to make of Abraham a multitude of nations and kings arising to rule them, and where are these to be found but here on Earth, though it has been given over temporarily to the adversary: "...and no longer was there any place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was cast down, the serpent

of old... he was cast down to Earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.”⁴⁵

Where a question may be raised as to what might have caused the Earth to become, as the second verse of Genesis states, formless and void, or as the words may also be translated, *empty* and *unfilled*, given that there are reasonable grounds to doubt that God would not create the world in a vacuous state, do we have some indication here, given Satan’s wrath at having been cast down to the Earth—given over to him as his new domain?

All this however discounted by atheists as foolishness, and leaving among theists a bone of contention; but in this dismissiveness do atheists not do themselves a disservice given that in failing to understand the scriptures they can only undermine their own objections? This can be seen most clearly with the objection to the genocidal purges carried out by the Israelites against certain populations, of which we have some indication by piecing together what has been put forth thus far, with such passages as:

Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took wives for themselves whomever they chose. Then the lord said, ‘My spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh, nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. These were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Revelation 12: 8-9.

⁴⁶ Genesis 6: 1-4.

What can be gathered by *and also afterward*, is that this genealogy following from *the sons of God*, who can only be a reference to the angels having been purged from their former habitation, were no less predominant on the Earth at the time of Noah as they were previously, and so continued their influence over this material realm through Noah's son Ham, whom Noah cursed; thus through Ham's son Cush we have Nimrod—*the mighty hunter before the Lord*—whose line followed through to the Assyrians, mentioned in the book of Micah: “When the Assyrian invades our land, when he tramples on our citadels, then we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight leaders of men; and they will shepherd the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod at its entrances; and he will deliver us from the Assyrian when he attacks our land and when he tramples our territory.”⁴⁷

Through Ham's son Mizraim we have the Philistines and the giant, Goliath, slain by David.⁴⁸ And a further description of the peoples who occupied the lands the Israelites were directed to possess was brought back to Moses from the spies he sent to search out these lands:

“We went into the land where you sent us; and it certainly does flow with milk and honey... Nevertheless, the people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover, we saw the descendants of Anak there. Amalek is living in the land of the Negev and the Hittites and the Jebusites and the Amorites are living in the hill country, and the Canaanites are living by the sea and by the side of the Jordan.”

⁴⁷ 1 Chronicles 1: 10; and Micah 5: 5-6.

⁴⁸ 1 Chronicles 1: 11-12. The six cubit and a span giant, Goliath, using the Egyptian royal cubit of 52.36 centimeters, works out to 11+ feet in stature.

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Then Caleb quieted the people before Moses, and said, “We should by all means go up and take possession of it, for we shall surely overcome it.”

But the men who had gone up with him said, “We are not able to go up against the people, for they are too strong for us.”

So they gave out to the sons of Israel a bad report of the land which they had spied out, saying, “The land through which we have gone, in spying it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people who we saw in it are men of great size. There also we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim); and we became like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight.”⁴⁹

This correlates with: “The Nephilim were on the Earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came into the daughters of men.” And: “Yet it was I who destroyed the Amorite before them, though his height was like the height of cedars and he was strong as the oaks; I even destroyed his fruit above and his root below.”⁵⁰

What we can gather from such texts, piecing them together into a coherent picture, is that the genocidal campaigns of the Israelites were waged not against ordinary populations, but populations descended from Satan’s seed, from these *sons of God*, as they are called, and of whom we have a literal, not metaphorical reference with John the Baptist’s and Christ’s reference to those who sought to challenge them as a *brood of vipers*; this being

⁴⁹ Numbers 13: 27-33. For a historical account and evidence of Semitic names found on cuneiform tablets showing their dispersion among these nations—see: *The Empire of the Amorites*, Albert Clay.

⁵⁰ Amos 2: 9.

consistent with Satan being cast down to the Earth, the destruction of the world as it was then; the establishment on Earth of Satan's kind beginning with Cain, and continuing on after the flood through Noah's son Ham; and this also falling in line with Satan's offer to Christ: *I will give you all this domain and its glory, for it is handed over to me.*

Whether one chooses to believe in such or not, this is the world reflected in the scriptures, and God being not a relative but an Absolute, set before the Israelites the condition for obtaining to the promise that rested in the covenant that they remain undefiled by the nations around them—the various gods of whom, going by different names, *Baal* as but one, having at their source the same spiritual force mentioned by God in His response to Job, again allegorical, but conveying a literal reality:

But wilt thou catch the serpent with a hook, and put a halter about his nose? Or wilt thou fasten a ring in his nostril, and bore his lip with a clasp? Will he address thee with a petition, softly with the voice of a suppliant? And will he make a covenant with thee and wilt thou take him for a perpetual servant? And wilt thou play with him as a bird, or bind him as a sparrow for a child? And do the nations feed upon him, and the nations of the Phoenicians share him? And all the ships come together would not be able to bear the mere skin of his tail; neither shall they carry his head in fishing vessels. But thou shalt lay thy hand upon him once, remembering the war that is waged by his mouth; and let it not be done anymore.

Hast thou not seen him? And hast thou not wondered about the things said of him? Dost thou not fear because preparation has been made by Me? For who is there who resists Me? Or who will resist Me, and

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abide, since the whole world under the heaven is mine?⁵¹

And elsewhere we find reference to God's preparation, as here mentioned, for the removal of this serpent and also the removal of the human instrument through which this serpent will manifest himself—mentioned by Paul in his second letter to the Thessalonians:

And the word of the Lord came again to me, saying: "And thou son of man, say to the prince of Tyrus, 'thus saith the Lord. Because thine heart has been exalted and thou hast said, I am god, I have inhabited the dwelling of God in the midst of the sea, yet thou art man and not God, though thou has set thine heart as the heart of God; art thou wiser than Daniel? Or have not the wise instructed thee with their knowledge? Hast thou gained power by thyself by thine own knowledge or thine own prudence, and gotten gold and silver in your treasuries? By thy abundant knowledge and thy traffic thou has multiplied thy power; thy heart has been lifted up by your power. Therefore, thus saith the Lord: Since thy has set thy heart as the heart of God... behold, I will bring on thee strange plagues from the nations, and they shall draw their swords against thee, and against the beauty of thy knowledge, and thy shall die the death of the slain in the heart of the sea. Wilt thou indeed say I am god before them that slay thee?'"⁵²

In versions other than the Septuagint, the interrogatory line: *art thou wiser than Daniel?* takes the form of the declarative statement: *thou art wiser than Daniel*, implying that this man who would be God has acquired his

⁵¹ Job 40: 20-7; 41: 1-2.

⁵² Ezekiel 28: 1-9 [Septuagint].

knowledge and wealth all on his own, where with the same line in the form of a question, it is rather that his knowledge and wealth has been given to him by others. Thus, we have two conflicting clues as to the character of this individual, with the more accurate characterisation being most likely, since we are dealing with a pretender, that found in the Septuagint. And as to the spirit being who manifest himself through this, his human counterpart, and who also was given all that he claims as his own but through no effort of his own, we have:

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, take up a lamentation over the king of Tyre, and say to him, ‘thus says the Lord God, You had the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty; you were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering: the ruby, the topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the lapis lazuli, the turquoise, and the emerald; and the gold, the workmanship of your settings and sockets [in the King James Version the translation is, *thy tabrets and of thy pipes*] was in you. On the day you were created they were prepared. You were the anointed cherub who covers, and I placed you there. You were on the holy mountain of God; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you. By the abundance of your trade you were filled with violence and you sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane from the mountain of God, and I have destroyed you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom by reason of your splendor. I cast you to the ground; I put you before kings that they may see you. By the multitude of your iniquities; in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries, therefore [the preceding

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from the New American Standard version continues in the Septuagint as:] I will bring fire out of the midst of thee, this shall devour thee, and I will make of thee ashes on the land before all that see thee. And all that know thee among the nations shall groan over thee; thou art gone to destruction, and thou shalt not exist anymore.⁵³

The subject of the first passage, the prince of Tyrus—or the antichrist—followed by the subject of the lamentation, the king of Tyre, or the leviathan of the book of Job, depicts the hierarchy, with the one in authority over all referred to again by Isaiah: “For behold, The Lord is about to come out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the Earth for their iniquity; and the Earth will reveal her bloodshed, and will no longer cover her slain.

“In that day the Lord will punish Leviathan, the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent, and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.”⁵⁴

⁵³ Ezekiel 28: 11-19 [Septuagint].

⁵⁴ Chapters 26: 21; 27: 1. Putting this together with what we find in the book of Revelation, this prepared fate spoken of with regard to the Leviathan, follows the 1,000 year period of Christ’s rule (the millennium as in the book of Isaiah), after which he will be released, only to be abolished before the creation of the new heavens and new Earth.

We thus have two incompatible thoughts with one being this epitome of evil who is to be spared from a sentence of eternal torment, while with the other we have all those whom he has led astray condemned to suffer forever in the unquenchable flames of an eternal hell—as fancied in the imaginations of hosts of professing Christians—in whose company, I dare not venture.

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The intention behind the two beings spoken of is the same, to overthrow Christ's throne, and the threat where the Israelites were concerned we see with such scriptures as: "And Israel sojourned in Sattin, and the people profaned itself by going a-whoring after the daughters of Moab... and the people ate their sacrifices... worshipped their idols. And Israel consecrated themselves to Beel-phegor..."⁵⁵ And: "...the children of Israel dwelt in the midst of the Chananite... Chetite... Amorite... took their daughters for wives... served their gods... and forgot the Lord their God and served Baalim and the groves."⁵⁶

And with the prophet Jeremiah:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Hear the words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Cursed is the man who does not heed the words of this covenant which I commanded your forefathers in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron furnace, saying, Listen to My voice, and do according to all which I command you, so you shall be My people, and I will be your God in order to confirm the oath which I swore to your forefathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey....'"

Then the Lord said to me, "A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem... and they have gone after other gods... 'Behold I am bringing disaster on them which they will not be able to escape.... the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem will go and cry

⁵⁵ Numbers 25: 1-3 [Septuagint].

⁵⁶ Judges 3: 5-7 [Septuagint].

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to the gods to whom they burn incense, but they surely will not save them in the time of their disaster. For your gods are as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up... to burn incense to Baal.”⁵⁷

And with the prophet Elijah:

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal, follow him.” But the people did not answer him a word. Then Elijah said to the people, “I alone am left a prophet of the Lord, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men. Now let them give us two oxen and let them choose one ox for themselves and cut it up, and place it on the wood, but put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other ox, and lay it on the wood, and I will not put fire under it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord, and the God who answers by fire, He is God.” And the people answered and said, “That is a good idea.”

...Then they took the ox that was given them and they prepared it and called on the name of Baal from morning until noon saying, ‘Oh Baal answer us.’ But there was no voice and no one answered. And they leaped about the altar which they made.

And it came about at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, “Call out with a loud voice, for he is god, either he is occupied, or gone aside, or is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and needs to be awakened.”

So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. And it came about when midday was past, that they raved until the time of the

⁵⁷ Jeremiah 11: 1-5; 9-13.

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offering of the evening sacrifice, but there was no voice, no one answered....

Then Elijah said to the people, "Come near to me." So all the people came near to him. And he prepared the altar of the Lord which had been torn down. And Elijah took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, 'Israel shall be your name.' So with the stones he made an altar in the name of the Lord, and he made a trench around the altar large enough to hold two measures of seed. Then he arranged the wood and cut the ox in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, "Fill four pitchers with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood." And he said, "Do it a second time," and they did it a second time. And he said, "Do it a third time," and they did it a third time. And the water flowed around the altar and he also filled the trench with water. Then it came about at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice that Elijah the prophet came near and said, "Oh Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, today let it be known that Thou art God in Israel, and that I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, that these people may know that Thou, O Lord, art God, and that Thou has turned their hearts back again."

Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the stones and the dust and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it they fell on their faces and they said, "The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God."⁵⁸

The Israelites never came into possession of the land promised to Abraham for they were bound by the condition of adhering to God's laws, and each time they attempted to

⁵⁸ 1 Kings 18: 21-39.

return to God, they eventually fell back and became as those nations around them.

Though there are those who may deny the truth of the scriptures, given the stories of angels populating the Earth with giants, what is put forth here is that as God's perception is omniscient, and He examines not appearances but sees what lies in the heart and mind, then it follows that there was something in the hearts and minds of those populations that the Israelites were to purge completely, that nothing less than such campaigns as waged by the Israelites was called for; and even should this be dismissed, who can deny that given the extent of the evil that can be attested to in the world that there are those who walk among us who appear to lack a normal moral consciousness that convinces them clearly of the difference between good and evil? If the inquisition that extended throughout most part of the last millennium, and the Nazi crematoriums were not sufficient to convince us, then what evidence would suffice?

If not the literal descendants of demons, those who orchestrated such atrocities may as well be called their spiritual descendants, for though such evil forces may be disputed even among theists not content with taking God's words concerning them literally, did not all those who helped facilitate and who took part in orchestrating those horrors give birth to such demonic forces in their own persons?

What similarities seem to be at work here with all those who wish to lord it over us with their political might, and who to achieve their ambitions would compel us to live in their deliberately orchestrated state of fear rather than in peace and freedom?

What of the philosophy of moral relativism, the doctrine that each of us holds their own truth and outside of them there are no absolute truths?

Where we are told God does not change, we have the idea of an Absolute Being admitting of no compromise with evil, and the inalterable moral law of God is reflected in our own moral consciousness that distinguishes between good and evil as naturally as we distinguish between pain and pleasure, whether this discernment is thought to be placed in us by a higher power, or not. Though it might be denied or suppressed through an unwillingness to admit to guilt it is as certain as the laws that govern our material world, in the laws of physics that do not work one day one way and another day some other way; and just as we cannot if we fall off the edge of a precipice toward the rocks below save ourselves by preferring that the law of gravity be suspended, we cannot in defying God's moral laws save ourselves from the consciousness of our guilt by willing those moral laws be suspended.

The scriptures depict Satan as the deceiver of this world, and it was the realization of this leviathan that Job failed to comprehend as the source for all the misfortunes that befell him, however the reality of which God brought to his full attention so that he might guard himself against this adversary. And though one can in the confidence of their maturity mock what they view as childish myths, one cannot deny the extent of evil evident in this world that points to something beyond what mere men can accomplish on their own; nor can it be denied that there is a certain order to nature. However, given God's absence, we are free from any Absolute constraint and so have not only swept aside as irrelevant God's laws, and sacred days, and replaced them with our own, but we have formulated according to our own ideas of a more perfect order, a more

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humane social ideology of all-inclusivity—to which the rulers of this world, in their wisdom and foresight, all ascribe—so that no one can be felt an outcast, and if we should prefer to defy the very chromosomes that define our form, we can by the sheer exercise of our free will overthrow nature, and change not only from male to female, or female to male, or any number of floating variations in between, but if we should choose to shed ourselves of our human affiliation altogether, we might rather prefer to be a dog, and if not a dog, a cat, and if not a cat, an owl; or if this seems too much a strain on the exercise of our free will, we might then choose to be not just another ordinary human being, but we might choose to be another brilliant mathematician, say, another Newton, and if not, perhaps the dictator of the world, another Genghis Khan, or if a saviour, another Christ?

Absolute Judgment,
and the Sentencing and the
Execution of the Accused

The argument posed by evil lays a charge so that we have something resembling a trial, with the jury composed of we ourselves, who must weigh the evidence for and against the accused. Though related to this there looms large a critical aspect to the problem that apologists—whom we may regard as the self-appointed defense counsel—have failed to raise, most likely for the same reason, this being that almost all of us, atheists, theists, agnostics alike, simply take our existence for granted. However, where this fact of our being is concerned there was no meeting of minds. None of us asked to be born. There was no contract presented to us bequeathing the gift of life and asking for a signature signifying our agreement with the terms of the contract. What accountability, or responsibility therefore, if any, should we bear for an existence that we did not ask for and did not give our consent to?

That such a question could be asked, even though it might at first impression strike one as ridiculous, or even preposterous, it plays a critical role with respect to the answer the scriptures provide to the problem of evil.

We can safely assume that over the course of human history vastly more have suffered and died miserably than have ever prospered enormously with great riches and died having lived happily all their lives, so what is to be said for all those whose lives were so insufferable that, had they foreknowledge of what would become of their lives, would have chosen not to be born?

Does responsibility come simply by our exercising this undeniable aspect of our existence that only philosophers

hopelessly out of touch with reality care to debate—this fact of our free will?

Even if responsibility arises from the exercise of our free will, this does not nullify the unquestionable fact that life was given to us without our asking for it. Furthermore, life has come with the guarantee that this gift, if it can even be called a gift and not a curse, has an expiration date, which had we foreknowledge of as part of the contract if it really did exist, would be sufficient grounds to cast it aside as fraudulent and worthless.

Though Christ places some onus on us to act with His statement: *I am the way, the truth, and the life*; and to live by a moral principle of forgiveness with His further statement: *I desire compassion and not a sacrifice...*⁵⁹ the question of responsibility remains.

Since the accused is absent where do we look for answers? Though He is absent, did not the accused provide us with His written testimony?

This is in fact, what we have for the Bible—the Word of God—provides us with the written testimony of the accused. It stands as God’s written confession, handed down to those entrusted to write down God’s words, and not as so many are inclined to argue, their own—as Paul wrote: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”⁶⁰ And Peter: “... no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”⁶¹

⁵⁹ Matthew 12: 7.

⁶⁰ 2 Tim. 3: 16.

⁶¹ 2 Peter 1: 20.

Why, in this testimony did the accused qualify His statement with regard to what is demanded from us, by adding the words, *and not a sacrifice*?

What we can gather from these words is that we need not remain in doubt as to God's answer to the charge laid against Him, for the trial has already taken place.

Though Pilate did not see anything in the accused that merited punishment, and though the accused stood before him silent, the words had already been spoken: ...*greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.*

Thus, Christ took upon Himself the sins of the whole of humanity, to which He pled guilty, and for this He was put to death, and when He died our sins were paid for having been nailed to the cross and put to death in His person.

Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken; smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him; and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way; but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon Him.⁶²

With the sacrifice of Himself as a guilt offering, as the lamb slain on the Passover, but who has Absolute power over life and death, Christ wrote the condition of death out of the contract that we did not consent to.

No further sacrifice is possible for only Christ as the Creator, and no other for there is no other Creator, could have taken on the responsibility for His creation, and so

⁶² Isaiah 53: 4-6.

spare us from the impossible burden of an Absolute law. No matter how perfect one may imagine themselves to be not one of us can live up to the demands of such a Law.

So what then is required on our part from the One who without our consent, brought us into being? Since the words are *and not a sacrifice*, nothing more is required other than the recognition that salvation is possible through Christ alone, as Peter proclaimed in his mission to spread this message of forgiveness:

And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees came upon them, being greatly disturbed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them and put them in jail until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who had heard the message believed; and the number of the men came to about five thousand. And it came about the next day that their elders and rulers and scribes were gathered together in Jerusalem; and Anas the high priest was there, and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of high priestly descent.

And when they had placed them in the center, they began to inquire, “By what power, or in what name, have you done this?”

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands before you in good health.

“He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which has become the very cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no

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other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.”⁶³

The recognition that the penalty of death that hangs over us as the result of an uncompromising Absolute law was paid on our behalf by Christ, and that this is all that is necessary was made unmistakably clear by Christ’s final words on the cross: “It is finished.”

Though there is nothing we can do on our own to secure eternal life this does not imply that there are certain things we must refrain from doing, such as denying our moral imperfections:

How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity; and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to Thee. And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord”; and Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.⁶⁴

When Moses was directed by God to make a bronze serpent and hang it on a pole for the Israelites to look upon as a cure from a snake bite (symbolic of sin), this foreshadowed the death of Christ on the cross; so that just as Christ through His sacrifice saves us from the inevitability of death, the Israelites with the venom flowing through their veins, looked upon the bronze serpent and

⁶³ Acts 4: 1-12.

⁶⁴ Psalms 32: 1-5.

were healed. Thus John, quoting Jesus: "... as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."⁶⁵

This gospel of Christ's salvation is the critical theme that weaves together all the books of the Bible from Genesis through to Revelation, as hinted at in details easily glossed over; as for instance, with the encampment of the twelve tribes of Israel in the wilderness, grouped under four distinct ensigns, with three tribes under each ensign, with their numbers stretched out to the east and west, the north and south, taking the form of a cross that pointed toward the future crucifixion of the Messiah. Then again in the account of Elijah asking that four pitchers, representing these four groups, be filled three times over with water and poured out on the sacrificial altar, and God's spirit in the form of fire licking up the seeds and water poured around the altar, symbolic of the resurrection to life. Then again in the names of the ten generations from Adam through to Noah, combining to form the portentous sentence: *Man is appointed mortal dwelling on Earth, but praise God, who came down to make disciples, was speared (pierced) by a man, unknown, to give rest.* Then again in the account of the four gospels written by men whose genealogies traced back to one of the four groups of Israelites, and again, in the twelve disciples, one from each of these twelve tribes; and again, with the four walls and four gates to the New Jerusalem mentioned in Revelation; and the 144,000—12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel—who are sealed; etc.

Where this theme is absent we have the clear indication of a book that does not belong, just as where this message

⁶⁵ Numbers chapter 21; John 3: 14.

of Christ crucified is absent in religious institutions we have the indication of teachings devised by men.

So it is that this same message of Christ crucified is repeatedly emphasized by Paul in his letters: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as the result of works, that no one should boast...;” and: “Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. And working together with Him, we also urge you not to receive the grace of God in vain—for He says, ‘At the acceptable time I listened to you, and on the day of salvation I helped you’; behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation.”⁶⁶

Thus the gospel, the message contained in the scriptures has been put forth, succinctly. But what of those who regard this as mere superstition, as mere nonsense?

Since we are under no compulsion we can leave the book closed or we can open it. We can study it with the intent to understand it, or we can regard it as a waste of our time; but whatever we choose cannot affect how the universe works according to an Absolute that cannot be anything but Absolute, both in the way the physical world works and in the moral realm with respect to both our thoughts and the actions that follow from them.

The only thing we can affect is the destiny toward which we move through the exercise of our own free will, and the choice before us is made clear in the scriptures that take account our human limitations, for as Christ put the matter:

⁶⁶ Ephesians, 2; 2 Corinthians 5 and 6.

“Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls, for My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”⁶⁷

Whatever the choice this temporal world must give way to the eternal and once confronted by this ultimate reality that must one day be revealed, what can be said when apart from the perfection found in Christ, nothing will stand but that which is perfect in its nature?

What more remains to be said then other than that the evils used as an excuse to deny the existence of an omnibenevolent God, exist by reason not of God’s presence, but God’s absence, and there remains only the other question as to the end toward which all these evils are moving us. Is it within our ability to overcome all these evils and move ourselves toward the establishment of a world free from evil?

To think that we could put an end to wars, for instance, would demand that we deny our helplessness in the face of those overwhelming powers that retain their power only through the facilitation and propagation of war. Though we are not so helpless when it comes to realizing the end toward which these powers are moving us.

What other end have these profit driven corporations geared toward the manufacture and sales of ever more cost efficient and effective weapons of war moved us toward but a world where not just armies, cities, or nations, but the whole of humanity can now, without any great expenditure of effort, be annihilated?

This is the reality we face; and is not the dehumanization of the enemy in order to stoke the flames of hatred and

⁶⁷ Matthew 11: 28-30.

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make the elimination of the enemy seem like a necessary and noble goal, the tactic used as the means to achieve the end employed by the most successful commanders of armies; and are we not constantly being pummeled with the dogma of atheistic nihilists that we are mere cosmic stardust; or offshoots of our primate ancestors; or mere gene replicating machines; that our lives are meaningless; and as some argue, we are all spelling the doom of civilization by contributing to global warming with our unhealthy and gluttonous lifestyles, and the planet cannot sustain such huge masses of selfish, irresponsible, and out of control consumers, polluters, useless eaters, and useless breeders.

Does not this grim reality of our present situation reflect the very time spoken of by Matthew where he quotes Christ's outline of the events signaling the immanency of His return: *...unless those days be cut short no flesh would be saved alive?*

We can gather therefore that we are all of us the enemy, and since the course of evil is bent toward our annihilation, should we not—if indeed we are no more than what they say we are—spare those who are herding us toward this end from the trouble of dispensing with the whole wretched lot of us, do the necessary and noble thing, and just go out and hang ourselves?

Just as with the overthrow of the world that preceded the six days of creation mentioned in Genesis, leading to a new beginning, an overthrow of this present world, as foretold in the scriptures, must precede the new beginning that will arise from its remains.

Given the stubbornness of the human mind and the overriding need of the human heart to assert its dominance and need to be free from all constraints, what other reason

would there be for God to have us experience the extent of evil we witness, except to present us with the hard evidence of the only end toward which man's rule over man can lead?

Once evil has been allowed to run its full course we will have the undeniable evidence of how far we can go on our own toward achieving a world free from evil; and so we need not be in any doubt as to why evil persists, for once we have been brought to the brink of our total annihilation, no one will be able to protest and say, upon Christ's return to prevent this otherwise inevitable outcome: "We could have done well enough on our own without any divine guidance."

This is the answer to the problem of evil apparent in the book that is the most widely published and most readily available book of all, but that has remained oblivious to apologists, being as it were, adventurers having sailed off into the storm only to find themselves stranded on an island all alone, and making nothing of the fresh water streams and rivers flowing from the mountains to the lakes below, resort to digging holes in the sand in search of a well, and looking up to the clouds for a hint of rain with which to quench their thirst.

What Makes the Most Sense?

The division between atheists, those who dismiss the scriptures as mere nonsense, and theists, those who hold to the veracity of the scriptures, leaves us with two opposing visions, but which of these makes the most sense—which more resembles the truth?

With one, we have a mindset that accepts only what is most obvious—the immediate present, and this mindset is not able to accept anything else unless science is able to support it. This is the mindset of those enraptured by the Medusa, who see nothing but matter.

With the other, we have those who intuitively understand that this reality, in all its complexity, despite all the evil that can be pointed to, reflects the design of a higher Will and a higher purpose.

With the former, this reality that we experience is just something that happened. There is no reason to think that a higher Will orchestrated it. The existence of evil is sufficient enough to mock the notion of a higher Will and a higher purpose. The concept of cause applies only to the natural world and not to the whole of what lies beyond, and that we can never truly comprehend. Such ideas as God reflect a simplistic way of thinking and our understanding now is more complex and sophisticated, able to adapt to the ceaselessly changing reality before us where the only certainty that we can attest to is uncertainty, and the only absolute truth we can assure ourselves of is that there is no absolute truth. In the moral realm there is no law that can be said to be the equivalent to a natural law such as that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction; for if there were we would then have reason to be concerned for

we would then be compelled to examine every possible thought and every possible action that we might undertake; but we can be happy that there is in this sense, no absolute law that would render our lives impossible. Furthermore, the book theists claim to be the Word of God, that would subject us to such an impossible burden cannot be taken in any literal sense as a book in history that can be studied, or taken seriously, as for say a book by Thucydides recounting the Peloponnesian wars, or Plutarch speaking of the lives of the noble Greeks, or Herodotus citing Xerxes' invasion of Greece, or any historian of any period; and given the complexities of our modern world, how can it be considered in any serious sense as a reasonable code of morality? Of more practical relevance than its simple list of ten shall and shall nots are the more comprehensive 53 titles and 60,000 pages of the U.S. Code of the general and permanent laws of the United States, with updates every six years by the House of Representatives. How could a simple list of ten commandments written on stone tablets, having undergone no revisions or amendments over several millennia, even begin to compete? We have moved from the obsolescent thinking evident in the primitive text expounding those moral commands to a much broader view of life, where we now know that the one thing that has been established by the most reflective minds is that our lives have no meaning. Just as our petty lives are reduced to utter insignificance by our vast universe, so our vast universe is itself reduced to utter insignificance within an infinity of other universes, so what room remains then for us to entertain any grandiose notions of ourselves? That we are truly as nothing is clear given all the accidents of nature before us, and the happenstance of fortune or misfortune, randomly dispersed among the kindest and most ruthless individuals alike. And anyone with sense must given this,

admit that this reality is just as much a matter of pure chance. We live out our lives in a cold and indifferent universe that grinds up everything thrown into its teeth and spits everything back out into the nothingness from whence it came. The best explanation we have for our being is that natural selection has, as the agency that science confirms, overcome all the obstacles, and this truth is fully compatible with the world we see before us, for who can deny that the fittest grow stronger and multiply while the inferior grow weaker and disappear? In our various societies the corresponding principle at work is the end justifies the means, and to deny this is to offer yourself up as a slave to those who, not opposed to their primal instincts, will by the exercise of their superior will bend you to that will. Subjecting others to one's own will is essential for survival as countless kings, rulers, despots, and tyrants have demonstrated throughout history. No selfless saint ever sat on a throne and no empire ever extended its lands by polite request. Wealth and riches if not inherited must be gained by conquest, whether by strength of arms, or individual ingenuity, and it is a blessing and a portent of good things to come for a nation when a Caesar appears offering both. Those who temper their means cannot survive against those who confidently exercise their might and invite the storm. To retain a sense of selflessness and nobility all one need do is to abide by whatever laws may exist that prohibit going to extremes, but for those who are not content with lowly positions, and prefer to rule rather than have others rule over them, and who rise to command nations and armies, there are no extremes, for the principle is what matters and it cannot yield to ordinary laws intended only to prevent the masses from engaging in anarchy; nor can it yield to abstract concepts like inalienable rights, or this noxious venom running through

the veins of those driven to the point of insanity by it, that they call natural law; nor can it find peace with the most absurd of all concepts imaginable, that all men are created equal. Extremes are extremes only to those upon whose inferior heads they fall. Winners, as Machiavelli noted, have no shame, no matter how they win. At the end it will be proven that only those who are the most resourceful, and the most merciless, will die having lived free from suffering and misery, or have by their superior strength minimized these discomforts to the least possible degree, so dedicate yourself to the end after which you lust and use whatever means are at your disposal to establish it. The rich and the poor, the good and the bad, bloodthirsty warmongers, saints, and humanitarians all go to the same place. This truth is also plainly seen for no one ever came back from their eternal home except as fatted worms. The only hope for eternal life for those who seek it is that one day medical science will progress and overcome the disease of death, and will restore those who, after their demise, were able to cover the cost of having their bodies frozen in liquid nitrogen and preserved for future reanimation; but if you are not one of those inclined toward future reanimation, or were unable to cover the cost, do your best with the time that you have. It's a free ride and it won't come around again, except for those who had the foresight and the means to invest in a cryogenic company and wake up some time, perhaps not in the too distant future, to find that their investment has paid off, in which case, just follow the same principle of the survival of the fittest the next time around when the carnival ride will last forever. For this one and only truth—the truth of atheism—rests on the certain grounds of science and the clear, the undeniable, and self-evident facts before us, and not on foolish outmoded myths and superstitions, and to think beyond this one and

only truth is to engage in fantasy, mere wishful thinking, vanity, and futility.

With the latter, to think that the complexity of this reality that we experience could have just happened without a Cause, is to deny what experience tells us, for we see that accidents lead not to order but to disorder. In the aftermath of two automobiles having collided violently we do not expect to find that the vehicles are in much better condition, nor do we expect the occupants to have undergone sudden improvements in their health, yet while we would have reason to believe that anyone believing such could happen to be unbalanced in their thinking, some nevertheless believe it perfectly reasonable to think that all the atoms of the universe, along with their constituent parts, just happened through myriads of violent collisions with each other, to produce this complex reality, and perhaps for their amusement, created thinking beings like ourselves so that they could have an audience to applaud this wondrous theatrical show of theirs. And all of this happened without any Cause, without an Author. A bunch of tiny black dots cast themselves high up into the sky, and they all combined there to form letters, and from these letters, words and all the languages we know, and as they fell to the ground some of the dots that had assembled themselves into Elizabethan English aligned to form the complete plays of Shakespeare, in chronological order and down to the last punctuation mark; but not only this but they also happened to assemble themselves to form theatres in which the plays could be acted out, as well as the theatrical companies with their actors who could present the plays on stage, and the audiences who could attend the theatres and applaud the plays that had no author. And this of course is perfectly reasonable to think, for throughout our daily lives do we

not find that all sorts of unexpected and miraculous things happen all the time without anything causing those things to happen? When we are surprised by some unexpected event do we not confirm this fact given that the common expression we so often use is: “*How did that happen!?*” So then why express surprise at the fact that the universe just happened? Eliminating the idea of causality in this universal sense, as distinct from causality in nature, of course works to the advantage of atheists for the dogma that defines their thinking depends precisely on the elimination of that troublesome notion. It is a double-edged sword one side of which they must blunt, for should any room be allowed for the thought that an effect, such as our universe, demands a cause, we open the door to the worst possible horror that hides behind that door, this being a Supreme Being and the idea of the individual created in the image of God. The question of why anything at all exists must also be swept aside as it hints at the possible answer that our lives are not accidental, but intended, and if intended then there must be a special meaning and purpose for our being. The question pushes us to reflect more seriously and beyond the atheistic dogma that dismisses the question, that makes its appeal to our lack of an answer, to our ignorance, and our laziness, our unwillingness to strain our minds with thoughts beyond those that we deem comfortable, and ordinary, and practical. The only antidote to this widespread opposition to the question of the why is to be found in the fact that we have minds with which to think and reason without restraint, for no politician however farsighted ever managed to pass a law limiting the amount of thinking we do. Though they most certainly have passed laws intended to direct our thoughts, and with them our actions, along more productive lines, so that if they should rule that we are entertaining, as they say, *unacceptable*

ideas, that can lead us in ways they consider to be unproductive, then they can bring down on our heads their penalties for posing a threat to their ideals. But despite the enactment of laws intended to control our very thoughts and move humanity toward a more tolerant world to be overseen by these new self-styled ministers of truth, law, and order, our freedom to think is something that, no doubt to their great displeasure, is beyond their full control, and so with it is the knowledge that thinking can lead to. We are ignorant, confessedly, but we have the innate ability, as beings created in the image of God to make rational judgments concerning what makes the most sense of our being. Is it truly this nihilistic vision that atheism offers that makes the most sense—this reduction of our being to an exaggerated form of the ancient primates our base animal instincts point back to, and beyond these, the drifting dust from exploded stars that found its way to the Earth? Or is there something in us that finds such a thought abhorrent, or as unpleasant as the smell of say, a rotting corpse? Is it this foul odour of death that atheistic nihilists savor and preach as their gospel, or is it the odour of life that Christ promises that we savor and preach as our gospel? We have within ourselves a spirit that drives us toward the creation of and appreciation of great works of art in all forms. If in the exercise of this innate capacity there is anything that arises from it that can be thought of as having lasting value, why not struggle with as much determination as it took to produce that thing of lasting value to the end of eternal life that promises only more of the same? Why not distance yourself from the grave that is beckoning all those who, caught in the spell of the enchantress, are drawn toward it as though they were but momentarily lost and must find their way back home?

While Paul in his letter to the Romans wrote that *we have all come short of the glory of God*, we at least have been created in God's image and are so by nature creative beings and can find meaning only by sharing this innate capacity that we have with one another; and what is it that is held with the most high regard in all those works that arise from the exercise of this capacity if it is not that which speaks of the physical and the temporal, but that which speaks of the spiritual and the eternal?

So which view makes the most sense?

Is this reality that is your existence a freak, inexplicable accident, or is it best understandable as the design of an omniscient, and omnipotent higher Will?

If one of these views is false, then those who believe the lie are those who live in a state of unreality, but does it strike one as true that those who employ their reason to confirm their belief in God, and who renounce this transitory world, are those having taken hold of a lie, while those who embrace this world and the grave that is its reward, have taken hold of the truth, even though death must prove all that they once held to be true, to be false?

If there is any sense of unease or faint hint of futility intermingling with the multitudes who while engaged in all the temporal distractions the world has to offer, and busy themselves with preparing for themselves their graves, the one who said, *I am the way, the life, and the truth*, has left the decision of your own free will open for you to embark in the opposite direction. Had His testimony not been given we would be with an excuse, but as it is given what excuse can follow but our willingness to remain content in our ignorance to the promise found in the Word, of which Paul also wrote in his letter to the Romans:

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Wretched man that I am. Who will set me free from the body of this death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.... He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be filled in us who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the spirit....

And if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you.⁶⁸

Once again we have the contrast between two conflicting ways of seeing ourselves and the world, where on the one hand there is on the part of those who regard themselves as no more than physical beings, only this physical world, and on the other hand, there are those who regard themselves as spiritual beings confined within a mortal body, but for whom in their struggle against the temporality of this physical existence, Christ bore the struggle and paid the price, so that if you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Romans 7: 24-5; 8: 1-4, 10-11.

⁶⁹ Romans 10: 9.

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There is no but or however added here that would nullify this gospel, this saving power that is found in our Lord, but the only conjunction that follows is, as Paul explains:

Each man's work will become evident for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each man's work. If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.⁷⁰

Here then, as in the account of the altar restored by Elijah, we have reference to God's nature as a consuming fire, and how is this to be understood other than as that qualitative feature of His cosmic Being as the forge out of which the elements have been fashioned, with both these characteristics residing in the same Being, and being inseparable what can this portend but two contrary outcomes depending on whether our lives are directed only at this temporal world or the eternal world to come?

As a creative force this attribute of God, occasioning in some through their careless reading of the scriptures their perverse dogma of eternal torment set aside for the damned, and providing ample qualification for the phrase: *the deceiver of the whole world*, can act either to consume and destroy, or can act to preserve life not only in body but in the spirit, as seen in the account of Nebuchadnezzar who among the three men cast into the blazing furnace observed a fourth with whom the three were speaking, this fourth

⁷⁰ 1 Corinthians 3: 13-17.

being the one of whom it is written: “For behold, the Lord will come with fire and His chariots like the whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire.”⁷¹

With this unveiling the Absolute will no longer be absent but will forever remain present, and only with this new beginning will evil be abolished, just as it is foretold of God’s adversary, turn to ashes through his transformation from a spiritual to a physical form, and from the fire that will thus consume him from within.

In his monumental *City of God* St. Augustine, having written of moral and spiritual evils, *which are above all others to be deprecated* ... added, “I must now speak of those evils which alone are dreaded by the heathen—famine, pestilence, war, pillage, captivity, massacre, and the like calamities.... For evil men account those things alone evil which do not make men evil; neither do they blush to praise good things, and yet to remain evil among the good things they praise. It grieves them more to own a bad house than a bad life, as if it were man’s greatest good to have everything good but himself.”⁷²

Though sixteen centuries have passed the spectacles of violence and eroticism available at the Roman theatres to satisfy the addictions against which St. Augustine cautioned, are readily available today in an endless variety, awaiting to purge from the minds of the addicted anything of any lasting value, and lending capacious sense to the words: “Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it.”⁷³

⁷¹ Isaiah 66: 15.

⁷² Third book, opening.

⁷³ Matt. 7: 13-14.

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This narrow gate is opened not by but for us, for “all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment. And all of us wither like a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, carry us away.”⁷⁴

Though no works of our own can suffice we witness even in these, however unworthy of penance, along with all that we see stretched out along the great expanse of human history, including all that can be seen in the natural world, as though all things are in a constant state of unease, an eternal drive to press on toward something beyond the present, and so we find in scripture, not by coincidence, the underlying universal principle:

For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, declares the Lord, for as the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are My ways higher than your ways.

Though the end toward which the whole moves may remain beyond the limits of our finite comprehension, the moral direction is yet clear:

Thus says the Lord, “Preserve justice and do righteousness, for my salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed. How blessed is the man who does this, and to the son of man who takes hold of it; who keep from profaning the sabbath, and keeps from doing evil.”⁷⁵

“Wash yourselves and make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from My sight. Cease to

⁷⁴ Isaiah: 64: 6.

⁷⁵ Isaiah: 55: 8-9; 56: 1-2.

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do evil. Learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless; defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord,

“Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool. If you consent and obey, you will eat the best of the land, but if you refuse and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.”

Truly, the mouth of the Lord has spoken.⁷⁶

This pledge of amnesty grants mercy for all, but for those habituated to evil, these words will remain long after any memory of their ever having been has disappeared: “Do I have pleasure in the death of the wicked,” declares the Lord, “rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?”

“For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,” declares the Lord, “therefore repent and live.”

“... there is no other God besides Me. A righteous God and a Savior. There is none except Me. Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the Earth.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Isaiah 1: 16-20.

⁷⁷ Ezekiel 18: 23, 32; Isaiah 45: 22.

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