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TOWARDS A CONTEMPORARY THEODICY:

**BASED ON CRITICAL REVIEW OF JOHN HICK, DAVID GRIFFIN AND
SRI AUROBINDO**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE
UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF**

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By

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Dedicated to my wife, Anne Selten,

*who has proven countless times that the power of love can indeed heal
even those who have been most gravely and personally afflicted
by the problem of evil.*

ABSTRACT

The author seeks to make the fewest changes that would allow Christianity to withstand the challenges of the problem of evil (POE). The project includes a critical review of the theodicies of John Hick and David Griffin, and also draws upon the thought of Sri Aurobindo.

From Augustinian thought, the author retains the emphasis upon moral evil. He argues that any theodicy resolving moral evil also resolves natural evil, and that natural evil, as such, would not create major barriers to religious faith.

The author accepts John Hick's ideas of epistemic distance and soul-making, with supplementation. But he rejects Hick's use of the Greater Good Defense, instead positing that evil cannot be justified. The only question is whether it can be healed.

David Griffin's strategy of adjusting divine traits to solve the POE is rejected. Instead, the author modifies Christian ideas of human identity and human destiny. Griffin's definition of evil is also rejected. Instead, the author defines evil as "a horrendous violation of an important human value."

The author posits that Aurobindo correctly identified the Christian doctrine of "one lifetime only" as posing major problems for theodicy. The Indian view of multiple lifetimes helps to resolve dysteleological evil. Karma does not solve the POE all by itself, the author holds, but a revised notion of

karma as “a law of appropriate experience” can make an essential contribution. The Indian view of human identity in terms of Self and ego personality is also adopted, again with some modification.

The author uses an analogy of evil with a wound to argue that all evil can be healed, and must be healed in the process of psycho-spiritual growth. The conclusion is that evil may be ultimate to the ego personality, but is not ultimate to the soul, as such. From the perspective of the Soul or Self, suffering can be self-chosen for important and positive reasons.

In short, a total picture of human identity and destiny gained by borrowing and revising Indian doctrines enables the author to suggest a new format for the interpretation of evil.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- ECG Madden, Edward H. and Hare, Peter H., *Evil and the Concept of God*, Charles C. Thomas Publisher, Springfield Illinois, 1968.
- EE Davis, Stephen T (Ed.), *Encountering Evil*, John Knox Press, Atlanta, 1981.
- EGL Hick, John, *Evil and the God of Love*, Harper Collins, San Francisco, 1966.
- ER Griffin, David Ray, *Evil Revisited*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1991.
- GPE Griffin, David Ray, *God, Power and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, University Press of America, 1991.
- JHT Mesle, C. Robert, *John Hick's Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991
- LD Aurobindo, Sri, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, Pondicherry, India, fifth edition, 1970.
- POE Problem of Evil
- PT Nash, Ronald, *Process Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987.
- WW Bruteau, Beatrice, *Worthy is the World: the Hindu Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, Cranbury, New Jersey, 1971.

PREFACE

The traditional question of theodicy in the West is a simple one: How can evil exist in a world that has been created by an omniscient, omnipotent God, whose primary quality is love? However, the answer to this question depends very much upon the answers given to a number of underlying questions -- questions concerning God's qualities, the character of radical creation, the nature of human identity, human destiny, the afterlife, and, perhaps most importantly -- the nature of evil itself.

In the chapters to follow, we will see how the answers to these questions within traditional Augustinian theology do indeed result in an overall world-view that fails to reconcile evil with a God of love. Many Augustinian doctrines such as the final Judgment, hell, the problem of imposed characteristics, and the problem of unequal origins, make evil permanent, absolute, and insoluble.

In the first two chapters, I will review the two main rivals to traditional theodicy which have emerged over the last few decades, John Hick's "soul-making" theodicy, and David Griffin's process theodicy.

Having located the great contributions -- and also the difficulties -- in these well-known theodicies, I will proceed to outline a religious world-view

that tries to preserve the contributions and avoid the problems. While I don't think it is possible to "solve" the problem of evil (POE), as if it were some sort of math equation, I do think it is possible to construct a world-view which is far more resistant to the main critical arguments of the POE than are the views presented by Hick and Griffin.

The first move in constructing such a world-view comes in chapter three, where I define the word "evil." Operative definitions are always central to any philosophical analysis, but as many critics have noted, definition plays a special role relative to the POE. I will argue that the definition of evil used by Hick and Griffin is inappropriately utilitarian, since it suggests that evil is like a quantity which can added and subtracted. By this utilitarian definition, evil is seen solely in terms of objective events, and thus, evil must be automatically perpetuated into the future, where it can continue to ruin all further values and consummations forever.

By contrast, my own definition will posit evil as representing *a horrific betrayal of an important human value*. Thus, I will argue that the locus of evil is personal, and that evil always has an unavoidable connection with human subjectivity. This subjective element is important, for it *raises the possibility that evil can be healed*. By my view, evil emerges as a psycho-spiritual event, one that occurs within a format of interpretation and is thus part of *an ongoing play of values*. This means that as a person grows and

matures, and as further developments and initiative occur, it is possible for any evil to become part of a *new* totality of meaning, one that *does* express creative intent in some way.

By my suggested definition, evil is like a flesh wound. One is able to recognize that it is horrible, painful and ugly at the time that it occurs, and *also* to recognize that there is such a thing as the power of healing. Healing can be successful; the time can come when the wound is simply no longer there. The time can come when even the memory of the wound does not create significant pain or obstruct further creativity.

Locating evil within the play of psycho-spiritual values means that evil is not best understood as an empire governed by mighty angelic beings, and it also means that evil is not something that *must* occur. I will argue repeatedly that evil is *not* ultimate, that it is not the outworking of some sort of law to which we are subject. Evil does *not* occur because of any inherent necessity. Everything to do with evil is contingent. As the free will defense implies, evil is always the outcome of specific human decisions, beliefs, and interpretations. The choices which resulted in evil could always have been made differently by the people involved, and any evil practice can indeed be left behind -- provided that we are, personally or collectively, willing to adopt new beliefs, make new interpretations, and to act differently.

The theme that all evil can be healed and that there is the possibility of resolution and restoration relative to even the worst evils seems to have been rarely discussed in today's academic world. The theme made so popular by the Auschwitz material is rather that many evils exist which are so horrid that they cannot possibly be resolved.

So critics may well ask me how, exactly, I think that horrific evils can be healed? Although it may seem old-fashioned, I will argue that evil is healed through the power of love and forgiveness. I will argue that this idea is neither simplistic, nor too lofty and remote for consideration. Neither does it happen only in some future kingdom of God, or in heaven. On the contrary, there are many, many instances in everyday life where we can see that the power of love and forgiveness already functions to heal evil. I believe these themes deserve discussion in the modern theodicy debate.

In chapter four, I will turn to the great Indian philosopher, Sri Aurobindo, for help in establishing a view of human identity and human destiny that will be resistant to the challenges of the POE. I don't take the familiar position that the traditional Indian notion of karma "solves" the problem of evil all by itself. Rather, I try to show how a modified version of karma and rebirth can make an essential contribution. Aurobindo's treatment of human identity also makes an essential contribution, and other factors such as the definition of evil are also part of a total treatment.

These efforts will set the stage to take my thesis forward yet another step, as I argue that not only *can* all evil be healed, but that the ultimate character of human destiny is such that all evil *must* be healed. I posit that just as a flesh wound automatically sets in motion bodily processes that function to heal, so does evil itself as a psycho-spiritual event set in motion psycho-spiritual processes that will lead to its resolution.

Whenever we have done evil, or suffered evil, the horrid event cannot be quickly left behind. It will become an obsessive factor, one to which we must return, again and again, until we achieve resolution. If there is a substantive evil that we simply cannot face and cannot resolve within the format of one lifetime, then this theme must be “carried over,” so as to be resolved within some further context of identity expression. Here is the role for karma and rebirth relative to the resolution of evil.

Of course, no one can speak with any real authority as to what occurs beyond the point of death. Here, every world-view is in competition with every other. Atheists and humanists believe that death amounts to the extermination of the identity, which means that evil will never be healed. Fundamentalist Christians believe that post-death conditions are such that persons are judged by God, and may be condemned to hell. But here too, evil becomes ultimate and is never healed.

I believe theodicy must compete with these views by at least outlining some format by which it is conceivable that the healing of evil could take place in a post-death environment. This cannot amount to a proof, but then no view of after-death conditions, including the view of extinction, can be proven. Outlining a *possible* way by which healing *could* occur (through karma and reincarnation) is still a valuable service, since many people have been so conditioned by pessimistic world-views that they cannot even imagine how such a thing as the healing and resolution of evil could occur.

Although I will be introducing new ideas concerning the soul and human destiny, my goal is to stay within the traditional Christian framework of belief to the extent possible. I want to locate the exact doctrines and ideas which have made the POE insoluble within Christianity so far, and to suggest modifications of only these. Because of this effort to maintain continuity with Christianity, I will take pains to point out the biblical passages that support my conclusions.

Working primarily with the notions of human identity, destiny, and afterlife, I will suggest fewer changes to traditional Christianity than does David Griffin, who works primarily with God's qualities in order to create a theodicy. In the process, Griffin changes the traditional notions of creation and God's omnipotence, which are quite fundamental to traditional Western religious thought. Like both Hick and Griffin, I will try to assist Christianity

in developing a view which is compatible with the facts of evolution and the reality of the modern world.

I believe the viewpoint to be forged here represents an effective way to meet the usual spectrum of atheological or critical arguments in the POE debate. Specifically, it opens up important new interpretive possibilities relative to dysteleological evil, which is widely seen as the most difficult aspect of the POE today. This issue, and many others will be discussed in the final chapter, chapter five.

In regard to method, I do not believe that the problem of evil can be fruitfully approached as a purely logical or rational enterprise. Emotional issues are obviously important whenever we are dealing with the topic of human pain or human wrongdoing. Any examination of these issues also requires a large role for intuition. An adequate approach to the topic of evil must also acknowledge actual experience and emphasize practical application.

So my goal in regard to method is to attain to a rich interpenetration of reason, intuition, emotion, and practicality, with none of the factors exaggerated, and none eliminated. I can't claim to have achieved this ideal, but it has served to guide my efforts. Another ideal is to avoid both the obvious and subtle forms of male chauvinism which still infect philosophical and theological thought to such a surprising extent.

With over 4,000 entries in Whitney's *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography*, it is clear that theodicy today is a huge and growing field. While I do hope to introduce some new perspectives, I will borrow heavily from all of our main authors, and can only hope to provide a sketch, or bare outline of a theodicy that can be called new.

Actually, the view of the soul and the afterlife presented here is not "new" at all. The basic view has spontaneously appeared in many different cultures and time periods, and its main elements have emerged not just in Indian philosophy, but in Plato, and in many other ways. What is new is the modification and selection of specific themes relating to the soul and the soul's possibilities, and the application of these themes to the challenges posed by the POE.

I will be presenting a fundamentally optimistic world-view, and also taking notions like the soul and reincarnation seriously. This orientation goes against the grain of much contemporary academic philosophical thought. Even in positing that God exists, one has the feeling of stirring up a nest of angry bees, and many other themes found here are even more unfashionable philosophically. I would like to state, however, that my boldness in presenting these notions does not stem from a lack of respect for my many academic adversaries.

I also realize that many of the themes to be explored here may go against the sincere convictions of many Christians. I have no desire to offend anyone's religious views, but I would point out that Jesus never taught that the soul has but one lifetime to live, or that the soul was created at the time of conception. These doctrines, and many others that create insuperable obstacles relative to the POE, were developed hundreds of years after Christ's death. There is every reason to distinguish between what is essential to Christianity, and what is not, and anything that contradicts the *most* fundamental idea -- that God is Love, is, in my view, a liability Christianity can ill afford in the modern world.

Many might question, not just whether theodicy can succeed, but also whether it is even a legitimate pursuit today. Surely, we are long past the point of wrangling over fine points of theological doctrine. But the issues discussed here are *not* "fine points," they are quite basic. Many critics pose as if they are God's prosecutor, but it would be ludicrous for anyone involved in theodicy to respond to this by posing as if they were God's clever attorney. Obviously, if God exists at all, God needs no advocate. It is we who need to understand. The project of theodicy is simply to explain a world-view in which God is conceptualized as infinite and loving, evil is taken seriously, and to show that this world-view contains no conceptual contradictions.

I do think that theodicy is a legitimate pursuit in today's world, but despite the etymology of the word "theodicy," I don't think the ultimate question in theodicy any longer relates to whether God is just. The real question today is about evil: *Is evil the kind of thing that can triumph over the human spirit?*

That, surely, is a question that concerns everyone, whether atheist or believer. It is a question that has only become more important with the rise of new and staggeringly horrific forms of evil in the modern world. Theodicy has meaning today because we need to ask that question, and we need to answer it in terms of our unique set of modern beliefs and modern circumstances. Every other generation has also faced that question, and answered it in terms that were then current and which correlated to the main features of the world as it was then understood.

Many modern philosophies proclaim, explicitly or implicitly, that humans are *geworfen*, that they have been "thrown" into the world. No one asked to be created, and our "destiny" consists of random events, planned by no one, ending in nothingness. Some philosophies try to salvage some meaning at least in the idea that life is without meaning. But there is scant nourishment in the notions that humans are alienated, lost in the cosmic vastness, alone and without hope. Rather, on these suppositions, one can

only conclude that evil *is* out of control, and that it *does* conquer the human spirit.

But these conclusions are not necessary. They follow from suppositions which I believe to be very questionable. Theodicy is still of interest today because it dares to offer a *different* description of the human condition. Theodicy today must align itself with the answer given in a vast variety of tribal cultures -- the rather unsophisticated, but possibly quite true, answer that we humans ought *not* to be alienated from this world, because this world is our home. Despite appearances, despite difficulties, this world is made for us, and we are made for it.

Theodicy today may be a “minority report” in the philosophical world, but it represents an interesting attempt -- an attempt to face the full reality of evil without flinching, to also comprehend the full spectrum of modern ideas and modern developments, and yet still to be able to declare, “No, evil *cannot* triumph over the human spirit.”

CHAPTER 1. JOHN HICK'S THEODICY

The theodicy of John Hick, presented primarily in his 1966 book *Evil and the God of Love*, has been highly influential over the last three decades. In this work, Hick presents a thorough and insightful critique of the Augustinian-Thomistic approach to theodicy, and gives a clear and plausible alternative to this traditional view. Hick's theodicy doesn't attempt to build a complete philosophical framework of thought and demonstrate that it is more probable than any other. He rather sets himself the more modest goal of showing that the evils we observe in human life do not create insuperable barriers to religious faith. An ordained Presbyterian minister, Hick wants to stay as much as possible within the broad boundaries of the Christian faith, although he does modify certain fundamental dogmas. Hick's theodicy is his way of explaining how the fact of evil does not contradict the presence of a traditionally omnipotent creator God, whose main quality is love.

A central belief of the Augustinian-Thomistic theodicy is the idea that God created a perfect world, and evil originated through the disastrous fall by Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. For Hick, any literal interpretation of the biblical story mixes up mythology and history. He finds it inaccurate and unhelpful to suggest to modern people that mankind once occupied some

sort of paradise or state of primal innocence. He insists that any theodicy or religious outlook must square with the scientific facts concerning evolution. Hick thus expands upon an alternate set of ideas loosely based upon the theology of St. Irenaeus (c. 120 -202), who posited that the creation of humankind should be understood as a two stage process.¹ Humans were originally created in the “image” of God, but they must go through a long process of development until they achieve their full potential, which is to also exist in the “likeness” of God.

Hick acknowledges that humans share a long biological heritage with the other animals of earth, although they are unique because of their special intelligence and self-consciousness. But early *homo sapiens* were not Adam and Eve. Early humans were spiritually and morally immature creatures, incapable of profound relationship with God. The struggle for survival caused humans to be self-oriented and was not conducive to the development of spiritual values. Only in the second stage of human development, in

¹¹ Hick's theology is to a large extent his own accomplishment, with only loose and indirect roots in Irenaeus' own theology and understanding of evil. Irenaeus firmly believed in a literal interpretation of the fall in the garden of Eden, and was in fact one of the first Church fathers to fully develop the theory of original sin. Irenaeus did attribute some responsibility for the fall to God (who could have made Adam and Eve stronger), but overall, Hick exaggerates the role of the weakness theory for Irenaeus. Hick's overall treatment of evil is inconsistent with the ransom theory of redemption which Irenaeus himself proposed. (See F.M. Young, "Insight or Incoherence: The Greek Fathers on Good and Evil," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 24 (1973) 113-126).

which many are now involved, are cultural, ethical and spiritual potentials developing to a point where it is possible to freely choose to love God.

For Hick, these ideas present a cogent answer to the famous Flew-Mackie question as to why God did not simply create human beings as creatures who are free, yet unable to do wrong. Since God's purpose was to bring about a condition in which free finite creatures come *by their own choice* to know and to love God, God had to create them initially in a state in which they did not already have that knowledge and love. This reasoning involves an important idea in Hick's theodicy -- epistemic distance. This is the perceived psychic distance between God and creature. The world and human consciousness are so structured that God's existence is not overwhelmingly clear, but rather is a matter of debate and uncertainty. For Hick, human freedom would not exist if God's presence were obvious in the way that the existence of other humans is obvious.

Hick's idea of epistemic distance is similar to the ancient Jewish idea of *tsimtsum*. *Tsimtsum* was the very first act of creation, God's voluntary act of self-contraction or self-limitation. It created a primordial space, *tehiru*, in which the universe could exist. If this had not been done, there could be no finite creatures such as humans, for it would have been impossible for anything to experience itself as *other* than God. God's infinity would have been a bullying, crowding type of infinity that left no room for anything else.

Tsimtsum relates human autonomy to God's infinite Being, but Hick's epistemic distance relates it to God's consciousness and love. For Hick, in order to make a creature who is free to *choose* a relation with God, God has to give that creature a "mental space" in which they can exercise their own mind and make their own choices. In practical terms, such independence means that the creature must be able to think and function normally, while being entirely unaware of the fact that God exists. So, ironically, in order to be available for freely-chosen love, God has to first "hide."²

Epistemic distance is also related to Hick's rejection of the traditional Thomistic "proofs" of God's existence. If such proofs were really persuasive, one could logically demonstrate the existence of God. Any rational person would have to accept God, and all unbelievers would automatically be irrational. But this would compromise epistemic distance. There would only be one real choice for human consciousness. It would be necessary to forsake the use of reason, an intrinsic human power, in order to deny the reality of God's existence. Epistemic distance guarantees that unbelief in God is not a mark of insanity or irrationality, and will carry no direct penalty. Epistemic

² Not everyone is convinced by Hick's argument that God must hide. C. Robert Mesle charges that Hick's epistemic distance is "morally, religiously, and philosophically unacceptable" because it makes ignorance the ground of freedom and faith. Mesle compares Hick's God to a coquette who tests a suitor's love by acting coldly, and even to a demented parent who believes that children must be beaten before their love can be valued. See C. Robert Mesle, *John Hick's Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, especially chapters 2 and 5. Hick replies in chapter 8.

distance means that the world is religiously ambiguous. We can live “as if” God is not. Both atheistic and theistic beliefs can be sane ways to interpret our ultimate context.

Still, the Flew-Mackie challenge is not entirely resolved by the concept of epistemic distance. Perhaps humans could have been created with epistemic distance and genuine freedom, yet also created as morally perfect beings who would not perpetrate horrors upon one another. Hick agrees that a free and perfectly good being would never do wrong, even though they were free to do so, and even thinks God could create humans already in possession of all virtues.³ Yet Hick takes the position that virtues which have been formed within an agent as the result of their own right decisions and in the face of challenges and temptations are “intrinsically more valuable” than virtues that would be just given to a person at birth, like the power of speech or locomotion.⁴

³ Perhaps Hick gives away too much to the Flew-Mackie challenge at this point. A virtue is a disposition or habit of action, which follows from and corresponds to a specific set of beliefs. Thus, it is inherently an *acquired* aspect of character, and a *chosen* aspect of identity. It doesn't make sense to speak of a virtue as something that *could* be inborn. If it were inborn, a virtue would be an instinct. It would then have the same kind of value as our other instincts, which is less than the value we ascribe to a virtue. A virtue is also a habit of right conduct freely chosen *despite a desire and opportunity to act otherwise*. If inborn, virtues could not be freely-chosen, and could not be the result of choice among competing desires.

⁴ EE, p. 44.

The concept of humanity as growing into moral and spiritual maturity through the exercise of freedom in a religiously ambiguous world also gives Hick an answer to the traditional question of natural evil -- why did God create such a dangerous world, with so many forms of harm such as disease, earthquake, and flood, when omnipotence could presumably have easily eliminated such problems? The Irenaean approach to this question defines an appropriate environment for humans in terms of the basic purpose of creation. The world should be a place for growth and development, a place for "soul-making," not a hedonistic paradise constructed only to assure comfort and safety. The many ills that beset humans, and even the unpredictability, intensity, and unfairness of natural evil provide substantial challenges to which humans must respond. A world with no such challenges would be static and would demand no exertion. Choices must have consequences, and without real penalties, there would be no right choices or wrong choices. Despite danger, wastage, horror, and tragedy, humans grow as they learn how to live within an objective world that has real laws and real consequences.

So for Hick, if there was no pain or suffering, there would be no moral choice and hence also no possibility for moral growth. The world we actually live in does, in broad terms, fit the requirements of soul-making, as just described. Ours is not necessarily the only world that could fit these

requirements, but it is one such world, and it does provide a context in which the highest values of mutual love and care, self-sacrifice, and commitment to a common good can be achieved.

Hick's theodicy is often described as teleological or eschatological, because he emphasizes that the soul-making process is not completed on this earth. The fulfillment of the divine purpose implies that each person survives bodily death, and is reborn into some world (not necessarily this one) where the process can continue to its consummation. His theodicy requires an eschatology because what justifies evil is that by means of the difficult soul-making process that involves evil, all persons will at some point attain a state of freely-chosen love with God. Hick does not affirm "universal salvation" as a logical necessity, for he also wants to recognize human freedom. A person can refuse even beatitude. In his strongest wording, he calls universal salvation a predictable outcome, based upon the fact that this is what humans are made for, and a faith that over infinite time, all obstructions can be removed. In his weakest wording, it is merely a hope.

In the final state of beatitude, humans will enjoy a fulfillment of infinite value, and this is what gives meaning to the entire process of creation. The ultimate justification of evil lies in the limitless and eternal good of the end state to which it leads.

Critical Challenges to Hick's View

Hick's theodicy has been widely discussed in books and articles for nearly thirty years now, and nearly every aspect of his presentation has been called into serious question. In what follows, we will assess some of these critical objections. In cases where Hick's answer seems inadequate, we will venture answers more in accord with our present theodicy effort.

A fundamental point is raised by A.H. Ahern when he states that the biggest problem with Hick's theodicy is that Hick cannot prove that it is true.⁵ This objection goes to the very nature of theological discourse. It assumes that religious belief *can* be proven by logical demonstration, or by marshaling evidence. We will discuss this at greater length elsewhere, but fundamentally we will argue that neither theistic nor atheistic beliefs can be proven. The problem of evil forces us to take a position on a number of surd issues like the nature of human identity, human destiny, God's qualities, eternity, and life after death. All these matters exceed the boundaries of human knowledge in fundamental ways. No beliefs concerning surd issues can be proven, including beliefs such as "God *doesn't* exist," "there is no soul," or "death is extinction."

⁵ Ahern, M. B., *The Problem of Evil*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971, p. 64.

Relative to such surd issues, all discourse is inherently metaphorical, and so beliefs concerning surd issues have a quite special epistemological role.⁶ Such beliefs can *never* become demonstrative knowledge, yet they are foundational and set standards.⁷ Surd beliefs actually reverse the usual definition in which belief, to be rational, must be supported by evidence. With surd beliefs, the belief is primary and dictates what will be considered to be evidence in the first place. Because of this, the “call for evidence” in regard to surd beliefs is uniquely problematic.

Hick’s epistemic distance in part illustrates the power of surd beliefs, because it illustrates that if one doesn’t *want* to believe in God, one cannot be forced. The belief God *doesn’t* exist alone is enough to enable one -- or force one -- to shut out, dismiss, or reinterpret all possible evidence to the contrary. The belief God *does* exist functions the same way. Thus, evidence cannot be decisive in choosing between these two beliefs.

Another fundamental point is John Roth’s objection that Hick’s theodicy is “too good to be true.”⁸ He says this presumably because Hick

⁶ See Sallie McFague’s *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1987), for more complete development of the idea that religious discourse is inherently metaphorical.

⁷ If a surd belief can become knowledge, it must become a special kind of knowledge -- a direct, intuitive knowing, such as occurs when a mystic or saint claims to have an overwhelming immediate perception of God’s existence. It is not a matter of scientific knowledge, although the level of certainty may even be greater.

⁸ EE, p. 61.

affirms that all humans will attain a state of fellowship with God, that evil ultimately is limited, and that God was justified to create the world. Roth objects to the very fact that this outlook is so optimistic, so positive.

Interestingly, in order to escape Roth's criticism, it would be necessary for Hick to assert that evil *is* wild and out of control, and that in a basic sense, all is *not* "right" with the world.

Yet no religious view can really do this. When it comes to the ultimate features of existence, religion *does* teach that all is well. The term gospel originally meant "good news," and this implies that when a person first learns of God's arrangement of ultimate things -- the things that only God *could* control, like the set-up of the universe, the terms of salvation, the role of evil -- they should be relieved and gratified. If superlative qualities like wisdom, love, omniscience, and omnipotence really do apply to God, then all things God does are done in the best way possible. Thus, from a religious standpoint, it is strange to object to a description of ultimate issues by saying they are "too good to be true," because it is to be expected that all of God's arrangements would be superlatively good. Of course, Hick has to make his thesis persuasive in view of the suffering in the world, but Roth's objection, as such, has no content. Optimism is simply inseparable from a religious approach to the problem of evil, just as pessimism is inseparable from an irreligious approach.

The Flew-Mackie Challenge

We have briefly mentioned Hick's response to the famous Flew-Mackie challenge, which is designed to undermine the basis of any free will defense. J. L. Mackie, in his article "Evil and Omnipotence," and Antony Flew in his "Divine Omnipotence and Human Freedom," both argued that God could have created humans in such a way that they would act freely, and yet always do what is right. Flew explains that we can be said to be acting freely so long as we do not act under external compulsion. Our acts can be free and yet fully caused by the tendencies in our own nature or our own character. When a man decides to marry, for example, this is a free decision because, in most cases at least, no one forces him to take this step. But the man's decision is still caused by his entire background of psychic preferences and inclinations, his character, for it is because of these factors that he made the decision. Flew also points out that in the case of hypnotic suggestion, a person may regard their acts as freely-chosen, even though the acts have been actually caused by a hypnotist's suggestion.

Mackie formulates the challenge this way:

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

possibility of making beings who would act freely but always go right.⁹

Mackie breaks the argument down into three basic questions. First, if it is logically possible that one man should on one occasion freely choose the good, is it also logically possible that all men should always do so? Hick says (and I agree) that because this is the expected fulfilment of human life, any Christian theologian has to hold that it *is* logically possible for all humans to always choose the good. Secondly then, if it is logically possible that all men should always choose the good, is it logically possible that they should be *constituted* so as to always choose the good? And thirdly, if it is possible for men to be so constituted, then is it also logically possible for God to create them already in this state?

Hick agrees with the second point that it is logically possible that humans should be constituted so as to always choose the good, but denies the third, that it is logically possible for God to create them already in this state.¹⁰ According to Hick, the Christian viewpoint recognizes both a religious and an ethical dimension in human choice. While God could create persons with characters such that they would always do right in relation to each other, thus satisfying the ethical dimension, it would be impossible for

⁹ Mackie, J. L. "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, Vol. 16, No. 254 (April, 1955).p. 209.

¹⁰ EGL, p. 271-2.

God to create persons that would freely respond to God in love and faith. Religious love must be freely given and freely received. The love relationship cannot be caused to occur by any set of prior conditions or causes.

To support his contentions, Hick replies to Flew's analogy of the hypnotist. He agrees that a hypnotist can indeed make a subject *act* in a certain way. But can a hypnotist bring about a *genuine* love relationship through suggestive techniques? Surely, a hypnotist can *try* to make a subject love him, by suggesting that the patient trust the hypnotist, or love him, or devotedly serve him. But even if the techniques succeed, and the patient does make gestures of love and devotion, no one could say that this is *genuine* love. No matter how sincere the expressions of love from the patient might seem, the fact that the attitudes have been artificially produced by prior suggestions ruins the profound and spontaneous character that marks true love.

Perhaps the most central of the many objections that have been made to Hick's treatment here is David Griffin's critique, which points out that if Hick accepts Flew and Mackie's arguments for the compatibility of freedom and divine determination in relation to moral relationships, then he has no

basis for considering them incompatible in relation to religious relationships.¹¹

Griffin schematizes the argument Hick *accepts* into three parts:

A. An omnipotent being can infallibly bring about any being that is logically possible.

B. A being that is free and yet is so constituted that it always chooses the good is logically possible.

C. Hence, an omnipotent being can infallibly bring about a being that is free and yet so constituted that it always chooses the good.

This is fine. But the argument that Hick *rejects* is quite similar:

D. An omnipotent being can infallibly bring about any being that is logically possible.

E. A being that is free and yet is so constituted that it always responds to God in love, trust, and faith is logically possible.

F. Hence, an omnipotent being can infallibly bring about a being that is free and yet so constituted that it always responds to God in love, trust, and faith.

The form of the two arguments is identical. Premises A and D are identical. Hick accepts C, but wants to reject F. He can only reject F if he

¹¹ GPE p. 194.

rejects E. But surely, E is a description that Hick himself would say characterizes Jesus or the saints in heaven. Because Hick cannot reject E, he is inconsistent to want to accept the first argument but reject the second.

Actually, in view of the doubts Jesus had at Gethsemane, one could question whether even Jesus *always* responded to God in faith and love. But in my view, Griffin's critique is basically sound. Hick should have rejected Mackie's premise two as well as premise three. One can't be *constituted* so as to choose the good, for character determination is an unsound description of human choice. After all, character is only *one* contributing factor when a human being makes a choice. A choice is also an act of self-expression, by a creative identity functioning in a present moment. A creative admixture always occurs as a human choice is made, a contribution from the present personality, such that the exact direction of choice is never fully prefigured in the previous character or habits of the person acting.

When he discusses freedom, Hick shows that he appreciates this fundamental point. He insists that a free action does not arise from an agent's character in a fully determined way, and that it is largely but not fully prefigured in the previous state of the agent.¹² I find it odd that he did not apply this insight to the Flew-Mackie challenge.

¹² EGL, p. 276.

Also, the issue of freedom is not nearly so simplistic in regard to hypnosis as either Flew or Hick's discussions indicate, for after all, a hypnotic subject does agree to undergo the hypnotic session in the first place. By relaxing and concentrating, the subject gives consent. This decision is a free act, and even if it serves to foreclose future options, it does not differ in this respect from a large number of other free acts. What hypnosis really illustrates is the incredible power of beliefs, and how human identity is layered into interdependent conscious and subconscious portions. Any philosophical treatment of hypnosis that ignores these basic issues will easily get off track. At any rate, to suggest that God might conduct relations with human beings by assuming the role of a Mega-hypnotist is to put forward a notion of divinity which is ludicrous.

Additionally, the Flew-Mackie challenge seems to assume that the level of freedom that currently characterizes human consciousness relative to God is not an essential aspect of human consciousness and is not essentially linked to the types of values human consciousness can create. We obviously have no direct experience of what any basic tampering with our fundamental freedom of thought vis-à-vis God would do, and so their thesis cannot gain empirical support. However, in examples like brain washing, it seems that drastically reducing the amount of freedom of thought which is permitted to someone does have a drastic effect on their resultant ability to create value.

At the very least, it seems reasonable to say that whatever mechanism was imposed to assure that certain forms of behavior must obtain in human life would drastically impact the kinds of value humans could create. In fact, this impact would be great enough to raise the question as to whether the resultant species was even human anymore. The kind of change in human nature that the Flew-Mackie proposes is like proposing that there could be kangaroos, who are exactly like regular kangaroos, except that they had the ability to do calculus and drive automobiles. The imagination does allow us to pose hypotheticals of this kind, but no one can possibly understand the full implications of what is being proposed.

So I resist the entire line of thought that posits fundamental changes to human nature, and then goes on to speak of the humans who would result from this tampering as still "similar to us" and as being able to create similar forms of value. To me, it is much more probable that if you tamper with human nature, you end up with a new species. At the very least, you end up with creatures dramatically *different* from us, capable only of creating *different* forms of value. The values such creatures could create would be quite different than the values we know of -- if for no other reason than the fact that these new values would have no correspondent real possibilities of disvalue.

It isn't that God couldn't create new species with different styles of conscious awareness, or different forms of valuation. But the Flew-Mackie challenge takes on a different tone when it is seen as posing the question as to why God didn't create some other race of conscious beings *instead of ours*. Their critique ultimately implies that because God is omnipotent, God should be able to do so. Thus, their approach is typical of a whole range of inquiries where the critic imagines conditions which are "logically possible," which means not self-contradictory, and then tries to indict God for not creating this set of things *instead of the present world*.

But God's omnipotence cannot be brought into question through this approach, because for all we know, God *has* created any number of species of conscious beings who differ from human beings in all kinds of radical ways in terms of how consciousness functions and how valuation occurs.¹³ There might be many species of conscious beings who have developed cultures and value schemes which, for a vast variety of reasons, have no equivalent to what we call "evil." Even strange individuals such as character determinism posits might exist on some other planet or in some other dimension.

¹³ Neither can God's goodness be brought into question by this approach. R.W.K. Paterson deals with this topic in his article, "Evil, Omniscience and Omnipotence," which appeared in *Rel. Stud.* 15, 1-23. On page 6, he notes that God's goodness does not dictate that God create only beings who are perfectly good. God can add to the richness of the universe by creating beings who are imperfect in certain ways, but good on the whole. A value-rich universe could imply a universe that has many species of conscious beings with endless variations in styles of awareness and forms of valuation.

Yet even if such races exist, this does not solve the question as to whether the human race ought *also* to exist. It is probable that the kinds of values humans can create can be created on no other world, by no other species.¹⁴ In any event, speculation about other possible worlds or other possible species does not seem like a fruitful way to approach the problem of evil. The problem is constituted by the set of conditions that affect the human race as it is, functioning in the world that we know.

Finally, Plantinga's work on free will has satisfied most philosophers that just because a situation is "logically possible," this does not indicate that even an omnipotent God could bring it about *unilaterally*.¹⁵ God cannot unilaterally bring about situations that involve the free will decisions of other autonomous beings, because if God *forces* the relevant decisions to be made, through hypnosis or whatever clever mechanism, then the decisions are no longer free.

Although long philosophical storms have raged over this issue, I agree with those philosophers who hold that basically, it is double talk to speak of a human decision as being free, and yet as also being caused by God. Thus, at

¹⁴ This assumes that values have a deep biological base, and that the values created by differing species with different styles of awareness and different goals are largely incommensurable.

¹⁵ See Plantinga, Alvin, *The Nature of Necessity*. Barry Whitney's *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil* lists most of the many articles Plantinga's work has inspired.

least for anyone who chooses the incompatibilist stand, the third of Mackie's proposals should also be rejected. Hick is an incompatibilist, but curiously, he does not reject Mackie's third proposal on this basis.

Dysteleological Evil

As John Hick himself admits, the most important single challenge to his theodicy is the problem of dysteleological evil. This refers to a general category of evil which is excessive, cruel, and destructive, and often seems to be randomly imposed. Many different writers express the idea with different terms -- Griffin calls it "genuine" evil, Plantinga's term is "unjustified" evil, McCloskey calls it "unnecessary" or "superfluous" evil, Chisholm's term is "indefeasible evil," Terrance Penelhum calls it "pointless" evil, Madden and Hare's phrase is "gratuitous evil," and it is also called "radical evil" occasionally.

Dysteleological evil can perhaps best be understood relative to the greater good defense. This defense states that some evil is justified because it is the necessary condition for a greater good, or the means by which a greater good is accomplished. And this does make sense for a very small and limited number of "evils" -- such as the pain of an inoculation. Such pain is bad, because it hurts, but it prevents us from getting a much worse disease, so this particular pain is really good.

Thus, dysteleological evil refers to all the evil events (the vast majority, one would think) that *can't* be explained or justified in terms of their role in accomplishing any greater good. This is why David Griffin calls dysteleological evil “genuine evil,” to distinguish it from the “apparent evils” that one might consider evil at first glance, until one realized that they are actually good because they lead to the accomplishment of a greater good.

Dysteleological evil prevents people from accomplishing their goals, detracts from the overall good of the universe, and represents a “dead loss.” It is pain or suffering that ought not to occur, does no one any good, and degrades, dehumanizes or destroys the victim. John Hick does recognize the existence of dysteleological evil in many strongly-worded phrases. For example, in speaking of Auschwitz, he says:

These events were utterly evil, wicked, devilish and, so far as the human mind can reach, unforgivable; they are wrongs that can never be righted, horrors which will disfigure the universe to the end of time.¹⁶

Despite these explicit phrases, however, David Griffin and others still accuse Hick of not really recognizing the reality of “genuine evil.” This is because Hick’s theodicy basically applies the greater good defense to all evil, and to the world as a whole. On this view, all evil is ultimately justified, because it is all part of a process that leads to the accomplishment of an end

¹⁶ EGL, p. 361.

of infinite worth. All evil would therefore seem to be what Griffin calls only “apparent evil,” only a step on the way to an end of infinite worth. But if all evil is to be justified in terms of its usefulness in a soul-making environment, then what can we say about those examples of evil that seem to have no soul-making possibilities?

Roland Puccetti is one of many critics who raises this issue, although his article, “The Loving God -- Some Observations,” was supposed to focus upon Hick’s treatment of natural evil. As we shall see, dysteleological evil is so basic an issue that it has implications for nearly every other category of theodicy. Puccetti gives four examples of natural evil, a rabbit that is caught by a cat, an infant toddler who stumbles into a swimming pool and drowns, a woman with cancer who suffers horribly before she dies, and a brilliant pianist who is incapacitated by Huntington’s Cholea, and deteriorates slowly.

All these cases, however, illustrate dysteleological evil as well, for these forms of suffering apparently can’t be explained in terms of “soul-making.” The infant’s death results in no “soul-making” benefit, for as Puccetti puts it, “the child has not gained any higher moral values from drowning: she is dead.”¹⁷ The cancer patient gains nothing in terms of character growth simply by suffering terribly for an entire week before she

¹⁷ Puccetti, Roland, “The Loving God -- Some Observations on John Hick’s Evil and the God of Love,” *Religious Studies* 2, p. 262.

dies. And the brilliant pianist was a victim of genetic defect. His disease came upon him through no fault of his own, and actually hindered his soul-making process by preventing him from creating beautiful music, which was the purpose of his life.

In his reply, in "God, Mystery, and Evil," Hick admits that the sufferings Puccetti describes do appear to be needless, excessive, without purpose, and sheerly destructive. Such events seem to reach far beyond any constructive purpose required by character training or soul-making. Irenaean interpretation of Christianity holds that good will be brought out of all evil, and declares that all suffering will ultimately become a stage in the journey towards the Kingdom of God. Yet, Hick observes, this does not mean that in specific cases we can always foresee how exactly this will work out. So far as we can tell, some suffering does appear to be random, haphazard, useless, and unjust.

Yet in another sense, Hick continues, this very haphazard and random quality of suffering contributes to the soul-making process. Suppose that the world was such that all suffering *was* clearly related to soul-making -- suffering always followed swiftly upon the doing of a wrong deed, or was clearly and immediately seen as instrumental to a greater good. Such a systematic elimination of unjust suffering would actually foreclose moral options. With such clear lines of consequence, one would avoid doing wrong

things in order to avoid punishment, and would act rightly in order to gain the reward. It would be impossible to do what is right simply because it *is* right, which, as Kant proclaimed, is the essence of moral value.¹⁸ Also, in such a world, suffering would not awaken deep personal sympathy, or call for organized relief and sacrificial effort. Those qualities are not awakened by suffering that seems just, but rather by suffering which seems haphazard and iniquitous.

Puccetti, like many other critics, criticizes this “all or nothing argument,” and complains that it is a false dilemma when Hick claims that the only alternatives are either that the world should be a pain-free paradise, or else have the present structure in which horrible suffering is common.¹⁹ There are all kinds of ways we can imagine improvements to the world by God’s intervening to preventing specific evil events.

¹⁸ On page 89 of ECG, Madden and Hare object that a) God could administer punishment based on motive as well, b) Such punishment would be beneficial, and c) God could still get a good effect by only punishing some of the time. Like many of their objections, these fail to appreciate the full force of Hick’s concept of epistemic distance. Any demand that God take an active role in human life, appearing as a factor to be reckoned with in social and personal events, functioning as a moral teacher or enforcer of justice and right, would eliminate the epistemic distance Hick regards as essential to God’s most fundamental purpose.

¹⁹ Madden and Hare (ECG, p. 84-85) call this the “All or nothing” fallacy, and apply it even to Hick’s concept of epistemic distance. They posit that if we were “more” aware of God, we might act better and yet still have some freedom. But mystical activity in general suggests that Hick may be right. When we become aware of God, we are *really* aware! It is an engulfing and encompassing experience. Madden and Hare also don’t seem to recognize that within Hick’s format, humans already have all degrees of “partial” awareness of God. Since humans all make varying efforts to find God, they attain all degrees of dim sensing that some type of God, in some way, may be present.

However, Hick replies that intervention to prevent “the worst” evils would always be an endless process. Whatever evil was left over after any intervention would still be objectionable, and so the next argument would be that God ought to eliminate that evil, too.²⁰ The categorical point is that there is no basic alternative to suffering which seems unjust and destructive, except a situation in which all suffering is perfectly just and does lead to a clearly-seen good result. But such an option makes morally significant choice impossible. So soul-making does require some amount of dysteleological suffering. This means Puccetti’s examples are compatible with Hick’s view. These examples are simply vivid instances of dysteleological evil, and Hick has shown that soul-making requires some instances of dysteleological evil.

Still, because these particular evil incidents do not seem to be directly necessary for any soul-making purpose, Hick realizes that his arguments do not answer the entire question. Hick’s refuge when the issue of dysteleological pain is pushed beyond this point is to turn to mystery:

Our “solution,” then, to this baffling problem of excessive and undeserved suffering is a frank appeal to the positive value of mystery. Such suffering remains unjust and inexplicable,

²⁰ Madden and Hare call this the “slippery slope” fallacy (ECG, p.87), and object that a wise God would surely know just where to stop on the slippery slope. The problem with this objection is that we have no way of knowing that God didn’t indeed give us the exactly right mix of a pain-free paradise and a smoking hell of suffering. Certainly, human life does present a mix of frustration and satisfaction, and is by no means the vale of unrelieved sorrow and torture that critics often suggest. Madden and Hare also ignore the vast extent to which our sufferings are self-chosen, directly or indirectly.

haphazard and cruelly excessive. The mystery of dysteleological suffering is a real mystery, impenetrable to the rationalizing human mind.²¹

Of course, one could object that if John Hick really means this, he has just admitted that he has no theodicy. The task of theodicy is to explain why people suffer as they do, to provide a context for their suffering which is hopeful, and to reconcile that suffering with the superlative qualities of a creator God. Theodicy *must* speculate about surd issues, and hope *its* speculations appear more plausible than the speculations atheists venture on the same surd issues.

Perhaps Hick gives away too much to his critics in regard to dysteleological evil. There is an important difference between saying that some suffering *seems* excessive, unjust, haphazard, and sheerly destructive, and saying that it *is* ultimately destructive, which means that it is beyond the scope of all possible healing or redemption. We can never know that evil is ultimate in the sense of being beyond redemption -- unless we take definite positions on the entire range of surd issues. We must state, implicitly or explicitly, what is the nature of the soul, life after death, human destiny, eternity, and God's powers in order to judge the *ultimate* implications of human suffering.

²¹ EGL, p. 335.

Hick is right to point out that the ultimate issues at stake here are true mysteries. But the critic makes judgments about these mysteries, and theodicy must do so as well. Neither set of beliefs and interpretations can be "proven." When, for example, Roland Puccetti tells us that the infant toddler is in no position to grow spiritually from the experience of drowning, he implicitly uses a view of death as extinction. By this view, once the child is dead, there is no growth, no future. But Puccetti does not prove this. Nor can he. There is no certainty whatever that death is extinction. If we adopt a different view of the soul, such as the one used in Indian thought, by which the soul has many lifetimes to live, its sudden demise in one lifetime is not the end of all opportunities for reflection and growth. So likewise, if the soul has many lives, the pianist may still express his talent for music in another context.

So depending on what concepts of eternity, human identity and destiny, and God's qualities we use, the sufferings under discussion change. Their immediate impact remains the same, of course, but their *ultimate meaning* changes drastically. Nearly all critics regard a wrong not righted *in this life* as ultimate. But this carries the hidden implication that this life itself is ultimate, that there is no other framework larger than the framework of this life. This hidden implication is an irreligious assertion concerning what lies beyond death -- an implication which a religious viewpoint has

every right to challenge, since this irreligious assertion has no empirical support whatsoever. It is quite possible that eternity is a sphere of healing, a sphere where values and perspectives can be recast, a sphere where what is called "evil" can be snatched up into a larger scheme of values, and through this activity, transformed.

This does not imply that evil is an illusion, nor does it deny the horrific impact of pain and loss within the framework of this life. Such denial is widely regarded as a superficial and misleading approach to the problem of evil, at least in the West. Yet if the effects of evil are exaggerated to the point where evil is seen as permanently retarding the soul in its spiritual development and interfering with the purposes of creation, this would indicate that God's decision to create human beings was wrong or misinformed. To avoid these two problems, theodicy must walk a fine line -- recognizing the reality of evil within this life, yet *also* denying its ultimacy by insisting that a more broad spiritual context that includes yet transcends this life is also real, and is relevant to the discussion of evil.

There are three primary ways in which evil is seen as ultimate, and theodicy must present countering views along all three lines. First, dysteleological evil is ultimate if it has no *possible* resolution and is beyond the scope of all *possible* healing. But as mentioned, what healing might be ultimately possible depends largely on one's view of afterdeath conditions

and the nature of eternity. The atheist describes afterlife conditions, in effect, by saying that there aren't any, or that if there are, they don't give us any help in regard to evil. The theologian also describes afterlife conditions, but does so in an effort to explain how they do present opportunities for healing and redemption of evil.

Secondly, because dysteleological evil appears to be "randomly imposed" or to happen by chance, it also can be seen as ultimate in the sense that it is beyond any divine plan. Dysteleological evil is described as "gratuitous" to indicate that individuals, as they develop their own individual life patterns, are vulnerable to random, chaotic, and unforeseen violation. So dysteleological evil is also inseparable from the heavy claim that there is no providence, that some events happen outside the divine purpose. When the sparrow falls, it does so not under God's watchful eye, but because the integrity of its life has been violated by the whim of the hunter. Likewise, if events of suffering are truly random, then humans have no spiritual destiny. No principle of karma or event formation guarantees that all experience is *in some sense* educational or *in some sense* reflective of the previous behavior and current beliefs of the person involved.

But such ultimate conclusions don't follow from just what we observe, and they don't square with Christianity. When Jesus was being judged by Pilate, torture and a horrible death were coming upon him unjustly. This

would seem to be a clear violation of his destiny. But he did not complain that the events were gratuitous. Instead, he told Pilate that he would have no power to oppress him unless that power had been given to him by God (John 19:11). So Jesus believed that the *ultimate* features of his destiny were still intact, and that *despite appearance to the contrary*, a divine plan was operating. In my view, in order to deny that evil is ultimate in the sense that it is gratuitously imposed on the victim, theodicy must turn either to Christian teachings concerning providence or else borrow from a profound version of the Indian concept of karma.²²

Thirdly, dysteleological evil can also be seen as ultimate in the sense that it frustrates the infinite future good of which Hick speaks. If events like Auschwitz really will, as Hick says, mar the universe to the end of time, then dysteleological evil has interfered with God's ultimate plans. Also, if evil can interfere with the final goals and ultimate purposes of the universe, God was not justified in creating the world in the first place. God should have

²² Yet the claim that evil is gratuitous is ambiguous, and in some ways, it *is* appropriate to characterize evil as gratuitous. From *the standpoint of the perpetrator*, evil is gratuitous in the sense that it need not have occurred. Basic ideas of responsibility will be blunted unless we insist that every time moral evil occurs, it is done by a human being who does, in fact, have the power to do otherwise. Evil is always a fresh "fall from grace" no matter what instincts, habits, prior causes, influences of others, pressures, or institutions might be involved. Evil and suffering can also be seen as gratuitous in the sense that they are not required for the growth or perfection of a human being, or for the creation of value.

foreseen the ugly events of dysteleological evil, and should have refrained from creating a world where such events can occur.

In my view, theodicy also must insist that evil is not ultimate in the sense that it can mar the universe until the end of time, prevent beatitude, or constitute a reason why creation should not have happened in the first place. Hick's policy of taking refuge in mystery is sound in the sense that the surd issues involved are obviously mysteries, and also because the minute one introduces specific concepts of the nature of the soul, eternity, God's qualities and human destiny, critics can always attack the speculative or visionary elements involved. Yet we *must* speculate to discuss these issues at all, and if the idea that dysteleological evil is *ultimate* is allowed to stand, it suffices to "dethrone God," and goes against many of Hick's own criteria for theodicy:

We must not suppose that God intended evil as a small domestic animal, and was then taken aback to find it growing into a great ravening beast! The creator to who this could happen is not God.²³

Despite the difficulties then, I believe an adequate theodicy must go beyond Hick, and venture into areas that are often considered mystical.²⁴ While Hick gives a general view of human destiny and the other surd issues,

²³ EGL, p. 289.

²⁴ A recent book by Michael Stoeber makes this theme explicit. See Stoeber, Michael, *Evil and the Mystic's God: Towards a Mystical Theodicy*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1992.

I believe an adequate theodicy cannot avoid presenting specific concepts for each of these issues, and explaining how evil's role is limited such that it cannot frustrate the achievement of ultimate spiritual values.

The Greater Good Argument

As mentioned, Hick applies the greater good defense to all evils, and to the world as a whole. All evil is justified because it plays a role in an overall development that leads to an end of infinite worth, which is beatitude or universal salvation. This is why, although Hick's theodicy is often spoken of as a form of the free will defense, in my view, the greater good defense really plays a more basic role for him. Yet the greater good defense is in essence an explanation for only a few apparent evils that turn out, upon further inspection, to really be fortunate because they are a necessary preliminary to the achievement of a greater good. Not many evil occurrences can plausibly be explained in this way, and it is not clear that the greater good defense can be stretched so as to actually cover the entirety of things in the way Hick wants. Likewise, it is not clear that the religious experience of beatitude can serve the role of a final good within this kind of an argument, for this would seem to imply that beatitude or union with God can only be achieved by means of a prior dalliance with moral evil.

To begin with the first issue, if all evil is to be justified in terms of its role in bringing about beatitude, a host of unanswerable questions emerge. M. B. Ahern declares that Hick's theodicy rests on "the unprovable assumption that the world as it actually exists at any moment is logically necessary for the kind of perfection that God has in mind."²⁵ Madden and Hare claim that Hick must "show how all the suffering in this world is the most efficient way of achieving God's goal."²⁶ David Griffin demands that Hick demonstrate for each and every evil just how it is necessary in order to obtain the good end that Hick proposes.²⁷

Hick replies that such highly specific demands cannot be fulfilled. "We can offer a general, but not a detailed explanation of our human situation," he writes, "A vast surrounding mystery remains."²⁸ The Irenaean claim is not that each evil that occurs is specifically necessary to the attainment of the eventual end of universal beatitude. Successive events of human history have not been planned or prearranged by God like an obstacle course. The divine intention was to create a world where the moral freedom of human beings was a reality, and this means there will be real contingencies and

²⁵ ECG, p. 65.

²⁶ EE, p. 86.

²⁷ EE, p 53, 54.

²⁸ EE, p. 64.

dangers, and real possibilities of failure and tragedy. There is leeway in the divine plan, room for human freedom to operate. Of any specific abuse, we can say that it ought not to have occurred, and was the fault of the perpetrator.

One wonders if Hick is really on safe ground here. His critics rightly point out that the greater good defense will only work for any particular evil if that evil is strictly necessary in order to accomplish a greater good. Hick can't show that. He claims instead that the overall course of human experience is necessary to the greater good, but that no one aspect of this series is necessary. The possibility of evil is necessary, but it is not necessary that any particular evil event occur. Evil could, in theory, not be actualized at all, or it could also be actualized to any horrible extreme. In a way, Hick's reply is similar to the argument that a series as a whole can have properties which are not properties of any one member of the series. This is true of course, but in this case, the series as a whole is necessary to obtain a certain end -- so the series is necessary, yet the series consists of individual members that are contingent. I don't think this represents any really fatal logical error, but it is a complex argument and is easily misunderstood.

Seen in other terms, Hick is making a unique combination of the free will defense and the greater good defense. It might help to pause and spell out these connections clearly. What Hick's greater good defense takes as the

necessary condition for beatitude to take place is human experience, which implies the presence of the human style of consciousness and human freedom. Human freedom must be understood as the strong kind of freedom that implies a real possibility of going wrong. Without this kind of freedom, there can be no human consciousness, and without human consciousness, there can be no beatitude. Yet the presence of genuine freedom does not point to any determinate amount of evil. That amount is indeterminate. It could be none, or any amount at all -- the amount will depend, as the free will defense insists, simply on the choices that people actually make. Since the end is of limitless value, it can justify any finite amount of evil. The exact amount of evil that will occur is a contingent matter, to be decided by human beings themselves.

Such a combination of the two defenses does serve, in my view at least, to give the bare-bones basis for a theodicy. It also accounts for the quantity and intensity of moral evil in human life, which is an essential issue in the modern theodicy debate. Modern critical attacks often focus upon the amount and intensity of evil, and seem to regard these factors as posing a special problem for God. However, on this view, the amount and intensity of evil traces back only to human choice. That is to say, we have the amount and intensity of evil that corresponds to how we act, how we *humans* have collectively and individually chosen to use our freedom.

A point often missed is that while the amount and intensity of evil do create indirect issues for a God who “permits” such things to occur, they create *direct* issues for the human beings who *cause* such things to occur. There is something disproportionate about pursuing and exaggerating the indirect questions concerning God at the expense of confronting the direct questions which concern human beings. In the narrow sense theodicy is the justification of God’s ways, but in the broad and more adequate sense, theodicy is the philosophical examination of the phenomenon of evil. In regard to this latter task, it is absolutely essential that humans take responsibility for their own direct creation of evil, and seek out positive suggestions for improvement. This important function is inhibited if the indirect issue of God’s involvement is allowed to loom disproportionately large. In theodicy, there is great danger that philosophical argument can become a mere vehicle of what psychologists call “denial” -- a psychological mechanism by which humans evade responsibility for their own actions by blaming them on someone else. God makes a broad and convenient target for human denial. It takes no courage at all to ask why God did not intervene to prevent Auschwitz, but it can take tremendous courage to ask the real question -- why *human beings* did not intervene.

One ambiguity that infects the discussion is that Hick and his critics use different notions of “justification.” Hick thinks of evil as “justified” in the

very general sense that if one has a wide enough view, and takes everything into account, one would say that any suffering or injustice was “worth it” because it is all part of the process of attaining union with God. Hick’s critics think of “justification” in strict logical terms, where an evil is justified only if it is logically necessary to attain a greater good. The religious notion of justification as being “made right” before God is another use of this term, and in yet another usage, justification means “being shown to be just.” In this latter sense, the very attempt to “justify evil” is self-sabotaging, because by definition, moral evil is an *unjustified* occurrence, one that represents a breaking of some important moral principle or law.

Still, the deeper problem lies in the greater good defense itself, for this defense can only partially justify evil even under the best of conditions. The limit is that even if an evil does lead directly to a greater good, the evil itself still remains intrinsically evil. It is “justified” only instrumentally. For example, it might happen that a member of a SWAT team is killed in the process of rescuing a large group of hostages. Perhaps it is better that one man be killed, rather than the large number of hostages. But it is still intrinsically bad that even one man died. The fact that a greater good was obtained does not fully justify the loss of life. Such considerations are relevant when we try to apply the greater good defense to the world as a whole, because even if beatitude is such a great good as to justify any amount

of evil, all the evil still remains intrinsically evil. If the good end could be obtained without the bad means, we would prefer this. Since God has all power, critics wonder why (S)he can't bring about the good end without making use of evil means.²⁹

Another problem is that in many important respects evil is *not* instrumental to the good. When we involve ourselves in evil, we are not "preparing" for anything better, or bringing any imagined future consummations closer. The only good that comes from many wars is the fact that the war itself ends. As persons, the main lesson we learn from delving *into* pits of despair is how wonderful it is to crawl back *out* of them! When we "shake evil off" and get back to love and other creative concerns, that is when we grow. What we learn "in the pits" of despair and fear is of very little enduring spiritual value.

This does overstate the case a bit. In order to not denigrate the human experience of suffering, it is important to also add that suffering *can be* a pathway of growth. Suffering does not necessitate growth, but it can be a pathway of growth. There are hidden reasons why suffering is sometimes

²⁹ When referring to God in the third person, I will use (S)he or Him/Her. I'm not entirely happy with this kind of impromptu convention, but I do regard it as better than using "It" or "Him" or "Her" alone. The point is obviously that God ought not to be characterized as either male or female, and that we haven't yet developed a non-awkward way to express this in English.

educational, is sometimes chosen by people as a pathway of growth or sacrificial self-giving. Suffering has dramatic value, it can serve a unique purpose within interpersonal communication. Suffering can be ennobling if it is chosen or accepted for the right reasons and undergone the right way.

The history of Christianity illustrates this, for the sufferings on the cross and the sufferings of the early martyrs certainly had dramatic impact. Because of the cross, no Christian can deny that suffering sometimes has spiritual significance, or hold that suffering is always a punishment. It can be an ennobling act of self-sacrifice, even if it seems to be imposed from without. Actually, the idea that suffering can be self-chosen for important and positive reasons, not merely endured as punishment, is probably the least utilized and most obvious of theodicy arguments. However, it is problematic to think of suffering as *the* pathway of growth, as if there were no other, or to speak as if suffering were always required for spiritual growth. To make spirituality into a cult of suffering is as just as distortive as it is to deny (usually implicitly) that suffering can have important spiritual or educational value.

The second question Hick must face relative to his use of the greater good defense is whether beatitude or universal salvation can really serve in the role of an infinite good that makes the entire human experience with evil worthwhile. That Hick thinks it can do so is obvious. He says,

The reason why universalism is required in an Irenaean type of theodicy is that a justification of suffering and wickedness as part of the process through which finite spiritual life is being brought to perfection, requires that the process shall eventually succeed. If it fails, the sin and pain that it has involved remains unjustified. A person's sin and suffering can be redeemed, retrospectively, by becoming part of the history by which that person arrives at the fulfillment of God's purpose.³⁰

One biblical teaching that supports Hick's view here is the parable that compares the kingdom of heaven to a field with a treasure in it. When the person discovers the hidden treasure, they go and sell all they have and use the money to buy the field. This parable certainly seems to teach that the presence of God brings such a complete sense of satisfaction, joy, and peace, that one will be quite willing to abandon all attachments to earthly life in order to possess that one, great treasure. The parable indicates a need to abandon attachments to one's sorrows and losses as well as attachments to one's accomplishments in earthly life as part of gaining the prize of beatitude. Oddly, abandoning one's sorrows is often the more difficult of these two tasks. The spiritual significance of pain is largely due to how strongly attached we become to the sources of our suffering. But we must release our suffering before we can find peace.

On the other hand, the biblical teachings concerning the kingdom of heaven are in many ways baffling and paradoxical, and other parables

³⁰ EE, p. 66.

indicate that beatitude doesn't work out neatly when it is looked on as a "reward" for previous effort. In the parable of the master of the vineyard, for example, a man hires a worker in the morning and agrees to pay him a certain amount, and the worker goes out into the vineyard and labors. Then an hour before sunset, the master also hires another worker and agrees to pay him the same amount. When the money is actually dispersed, the first worker complains because he did so much more work than the second worker, and yet they both got paid the same. But the parable insists that the master of the vineyard is blameless.

In one sense, this parable does support Hick, because it seems to imply that attaining the kingdom of heaven is indeed a good so overwhelming that it "justifies" any amount of work in the field. That isn't the question. Even if one has worked a whole day, the reward is more than fair. This is why the worker who worked longer is wrong to complain. But on the other hand, the parable also implies that there is no ratio between the effort and the reward, so that salvation is not a matter where we exert so much effort, and in return, we get the great reward. The parable denies this kind of *quid pro quo* because it insists that the master was blameless in giving the same reward to two people who did different amounts of work.

Part of the problem, perhaps, is that, as Hick himself insists, beatitude is really beyond value. So no amount of previous work really "pays" for it. If

the teaching is really that the experience of beatitude is *incommensurable* with finite value, then it may be questionable to use beatitude as the “greater good” in the greater good defense.

Hick does reject a simplistic “compensation” view whereby the greater one’s sufferings on earth, the greater one’s rewards in heaven. But his use of the greater good argument still posits that working in the field of life as such is the necessary condition of getting the “reward” of beatitude at the end. This means-end relationship is uncomfortably close to a *quid pro quo*. With Hick, it can appear that God created the world as a vale of soul-making because (S)he knew that without having the chance to experience obstacles and temptations, we could never develop our characters or acquire virtue, and without virtues, we wouldn’t be the kind of people who 1) God would be able to love, or 2) would be able to love God. A better view might encompass the insights that our souls were not only made for beatitude, but as we shall see in the next section, in a curious way they carry that consummation around with them all the while they search for it.

Soul-Making

Many objections have been made to the way Hick characterizes the soul-making process. G. Stanley Kane, in his article “A Failure of Soul-making Theodicy” charges that the development of the character traits that

soul-making theodicy values so highly does not necessarily require the existence of such evils as pains, diseases, and natural disasters. Hick responds that there are indeed many virtues such as courage, charity, compassion, and forgiveness that can occur only in response to genuine tragedy. But Kane adds that there is still an irony, because by Hick's account, we need this world as a scene of soul-making in order to mature and develop virtues, yet the virtues acquired at such cost are only relevant to life on earth. The process is supposed to culminate in heaven, yet presumably in heaven conditions are ideal and we have no use for the courage and other qualities acquired at the cost of so much suffering and effort.

Hick complains that Kane takes an overly moralistic view of soul-making, and that what the process is really about is not developing virtues, but rather overcoming that form of self-centered egoity that makes humans act in evil ways.³¹ Only when this egoity has been overcome can love for others be possible.

Hick's answer seems barely sufficient, and it might have been good to also point out that Kane doesn't distinguish between possessing a virtue and actually exercising it. To possess a virtue is to have already acted in virtuous ways in the past, such that one now has supportive beliefs and positive

³¹ EGL, p. 382.

habits, which provide a strong tendency to again do the right thing. Yet as R.W.K. Paterson points out, before one can possess a virtue, one must first acquire it, and this commonly needs an encounter.³² There can be no courage without danger, and the greater the danger, the greater the courage. But the virtue, once acquired, remains a valuable trait even if it is not exercised in an endless variety of further tests. Even here on earth, a genuinely courageous man or woman can have good fortune to never encounter further situations that put them to the test. So a virtue is arguably a valuable trait even if circumstances are such that it isn't exercised all the time.

Also, as Hick does mention, we don't know enough about the life beyond to speak with any authority as to how, exactly, satisfaction there may depend upon virtues acquired during life. But many myths and religious doctrines do affirm that our virtues do continue to have important value, or even supreme value, in the world beyond.

Hick may not intend to imply that God will only embrace the soul when the soul has managed to cover itself with a seamless suit of virtue, but soul-making comes uncomfortably close to implying this. Because he emphasizes union with God as the *end* or goal in the greater good defense, he

³² See Paterson, R. W. K., "Evil, Omniscience and Omnipotence," *Religious Studies* 15, 1-23. although Paterson's own use of these points is quite different from the use they are given in this argument.

invites an interpretation whereby it seems that God cannot really love the immature, self-seeking soul who exists at the beginning of the soul-making process, and so the soul-making process is necessary because otherwise, the soul is not yet “ready” for fellowship with God. Such an idea is unacceptable, because if God is really separate from the soul prior to this final point of glorious consummation, God’s omnipresence and infinity are compromised.

Hick’s constant emphasis on the God Transcendent, the God of the Future, and on union with God as a valuable *end to be achieved* thus carries a price. Downplaying the role of the God Within, the immanent God, the God closer than hands and feet, makes Hick miss out on a series of issues that are equally important for soul-making. As immanent, God is fully present during all stages of change. The God Immanent is available whether one has overcome egoity or not. And importantly, because of the immanence of God, it is possible for the soul to discover the full truth of human destiny and enjoy the gift of beatitude right here in human life through mystical experience. If Hick emphasized mystical experience more, he would avoid an implication that outrages many of his critics -- the implication that one must wait for the post-death future situation to find out whether evil is ultimately justified, or whether the other things Hick says are true.

Hick’s presentation of soul-making may also suffer from a too-scant treatment of just what the soul is in the first place. His concept of epistemic

distance raises many questions in relation to the soul. If God is infinite, exists without limit, then God must in some sense exist *as* the soul, and the soul must, in some sense, always be one with God. If the soul is a power of awareness, and if God is omnipresent, then the soul must be aware of God. How then, can the soul experience “epistemic distance,” and function *without* an awareness of God’s presence? Hick never elaborates on these basic issues.

A view of the soul such as is presented by Sri Aurobindo in *The Life Divine* may present an answer, for he makes a distinction between the soul as such, a greater format of identity which *is* in union with God, and the personality or ego, which functions in space and time and experiences itself as separate or distant from God. Seen in these terms, epistemic distance would not be a valid description of the soul as such, but rather would be a description of the condition of ego. Such a distinction makes it possible to acknowledge the complete reality of evil (to the ego personality) and yet deny that, to the soul, the effects of evil are final. Evil *is* ultimate to the ego, and within the framework of this life, for injustices are often not redressed nor injuries healed in the world that we know. Yet evil may not be ultimate in terms of the soul’s greater powers and ultimate potentials, and this is precisely what is under discussion in the problem of evil.

Discussion is also needed as to the conscious and subconscious or unconscious factors that affect human identity, and of the mysterious power

we have to *not* be aware of features that are nevertheless real portions of our own identity. Specifically, Hick would have to show us how the barrier between soul and personality which makes epistemic distance possible is not an essential division, but only a partition. How can human identity remain fundamentally one, even while it functions in terms of complementary centers of awareness?

In other words, even though soul-making is a profound and valuable concept, and we owe Hick much for bringing it up, it can't be fully developed apart from a more sophisticated view of what the soul is and how it relates to ego personality than Hick provides. Without such a distinction, soul-making falls into contradiction, for the ego, as it tries to "discover God," or as it goes through the "soul-making" process, is looking for something. Yet in other terms, we must say that "this something" is something that it already has. So why is it looking?

Perhaps a metaphor might make this more clear. The ego that experiences epistemic distance and searches for God can be compared to a person who is searching everywhere for their glasses, and all the while the glasses are perched on top of their head. One person in such a situation might search very methodically and diligently for their glasses, and go through every dresser drawer, and search every garment in the closet, and even tear up the carpet, and finally after a few days of furious searching,

collapse in a chair -- and when they finally nod off and lower their head, are surprised to see the glasses fall off onto the floor in front of them. Another more casual person might simply look around for ten minutes, then give up the search and go drink a six pack of beer. But after the drinks, the second person needs to go to the bathroom, where he looks in the mirror, and suddenly sees the glasses on top of his head.

These are two radically different ways of finding your glasses, and obviously the first person shows more “virtue” and “industry” during the process than the second. But can we say that all the work the first person did was “instrumental” to finding the glasses? In a way yes, because that person was an organized person, and had to go through *some* procedure in order to find the glasses. But in another way, the procedure was not necessary, because the second person found the glasses sooner, and without using any organized procedure. It is paradoxical that there is no actual “procedure” for finding your glasses in such a case, yet a procedure of some kind is necessary. The irony is that the person already *has* the glasses -- and they have the glasses in a more fundamental sense than the sense in which they don’t have them. Yet the sense in which they don’t have them is also real, which is precisely why they need to search.

Just as the glasses were there all along, so also God’s love and fellowship are there all along during the soul-making process. And just as

there is no real procedure for finding one's glasses in the example, there is also no real "way of proceeding" in order to experience beatitude or fellowship with God. The "virtue" of the first person did not enable them to find their glasses sooner, and likewise, whatever virtues we develop in the soul-making process Hick proposes do not "enable us" to find God.

In the end, Hick's description of soul-making, because of its marriage to the greater good defense, does end up suggesting that the development of virtues is a necessary preliminary to fellowship with God. In our metaphor, this would be like saying that it necessary to look for your glasses with great industry before you will find them. And this is true -- except for that fellow who finds them without any industrious prior search.

Another issue is that Hick's view of soul-making makes sin or moral evil virtually inevitable. For Hick, humans begin development in a stage of immaturity and self-centeredness, and are under such pressures to survive that reflection and discrimination are impossible. But if sin is inevitable, then how can sin be condemned? On the Augustinian view, this wasn't such a problem. The original sin of Adam and Eve was gratuitous and unnecessary, which meant that sin itself could be condemned in the strongest possible terms. But because Hick comes so close to actually saying that sin and egotism are inevitable, it becomes difficult to see how he can condemn evil actions.

However, this last problem may not be decisive. For one thing, the doctrine of original sin in the Augustinian tradition also made evil virtually inevitable for the ordinary person, yet the church still retained the prerogative of condemning sin in the strongest possible terms. For another, in any act of judgment, it is possible to focus either upon the principle or law that has been violated, or upon the special circumstances and extenuating conditions that led to the deed. The first emphasis is legalistic, and tends towards a stern judgmentalism. The second emphasis takes special circumstances into account, and tends to be more flexible and forgiving. Fair judgments take both of these polar factors into account and balance them. The Augustinian tradition portrayed moral evil primarily as a culpable violation of law, which is a valid, though limited, perspective. Hick's Irenaean perspective emphasizes the biological exigencies, instinctive factors, and necessary limitations of viewpoint which combine so as to almost inevitably produce egotistic self-seeking. So perhaps these two views can be seen as polar and complementary, and as combining to give a more realistic and balanced appraisal of moral evil.

Animal Pain and Natural Evil

The topic of natural evil has created many difficulties for Hick, primarily because he relates God's aim in creating the world so strictly to the

requirements of soul-making. Hick often speaks as if the natural world exists simply to be an environment for human life, which has led David Griffin, for example, to ask why, if God's only purpose involved humanlike creatures, God would have used a method of creation and evolution that took billions of years to set the stage for this finale.³³ And what of the suffering of all the many animals who lived and died during that time before humans came on the scene? Did that suffering have no purpose at all? Why didn't God just create everything in the twinkling of an eye, to eliminate that long history of animal pain? Also, much of the pain which animals suffer today cannot be explained away as possibly having a positive impact on humans -- by its role in causing humans to feel compassion, for example, because humans are not even aware of much of that suffering. If one accepts the traditional Christian idea that animals do not have souls, this suffering cannot have a soul-making purpose relative to the animals themselves, either. Their suffering cannot be compensated by any beatitude or consummation in heaven.

However, in fairness to Hick, we must recall that he never set himself the task of constructing a complete philosophical framework of thought and demonstrating that it is more probable than any other. His more modest goal

³³ ER, p. 20. EE, p. 53.

was to show that evil does not create insuperable barriers to religious faith. In this regard, he has some justification for considering the natural world primarily in terms of its impact upon the specifically human religious issues he is discussing. Also, Hick does discuss animal pain at some length, insists that nature has “permanent significance,” and warns against the danger of anthropocentrism in his approach.³⁴ He also points out that all animals have their own fulfillment in the natural activity of their species, and that they do not fear death or suffer many of the anxieties that beset humans. Further, he reminds us that the pain mechanism which accounts for animal suffering is necessary to the survival of organisms inhabiting a world with a fixed structure. Unlike the Augustinians, Hick declines to explain the pain in the animal world as the perversion of the natural order due to the fall or as due to the influence of fallen angels.

Still, in his discussion, he expresses puzzlement as to why animals exist at all, and in the end, he strictly subordinates the problem of animal pain to human needs:

The justification of animal pain is identical with the justification of animal existence. And from the point of view of the divine purpose of soul-making, animal life is linked with human life as the latter's natural origin and setting, an origin

³⁴ EGL, p. 260, 309 ff.,

and setting that contribute to the “epistemic distance” by which man is enabled to exist as a free and responsible creature...³⁵

In facing criticisms of his presentation, Hick removes most of the objectionable implications of his basic position. He acknowledges that the universe does not exist only to provide a setting for human existence, and follows the lead of Hindu and Buddhist thinkers in seeing all life as a unitary process. But most importantly, he also leaves room for the possibility of a spiritual destiny of some kind for animals.³⁶

Hick’s admission that the higher animals “have a soul” and a spiritual destiny that is appropriate to their level of consciousness does much to remove the special status of animal pain as a problem in theodicy. If animals have souls, then the same general explanations that account for human suffering will apply to animals, with appropriate modifications. Yet we need not spell out the specifics of the spiritual experiences and forms of spiritual development proper to other species. We are really in no position to do so. If their spiritual possibilities are not different *in kind* than our own, then we can return to the discussion of human destiny, knowing that our conclusions will carry over in a general way to the animal world.

³⁵ EGL, p. 316.

³⁶ EGL, p. 240.

Critics who present animal pain as an important special issue for theodicy may be speaking on the behalf of animals in a way they are not entitled to do. No one doubts that if the rabbit in Puccetti's example could speak for itself, it would protest being caught and eaten by the cat in the strongest possible terms. But this is not to say that if all things were taken into account, the rabbit would consider its life unworthwhile, or claim that God was to blame for making a world in which pain as well as pleasure had a role. It is quite possible that animals do have a knowledge of life's overall terms and that they accept those terms whole-heartedly. They very much seem to value their existences, and give every sign of considering life to be a precious gift, rather than an intolerable burden.

If the rabbit, or other animals do instinctively understand the meaning of their lives and make a whole-hearted assent to the terms and conditions of life, including its necessary lack of guarantees and its inevitable mix of pleasure and pain, critics are being somewhat disingenuous to try to make use of animal experiences of pain in order to show that life is so unfair and intolerable that God was not morally justified to give the gift of life. In other words, if a critic has an objection that life is not worth living, let them present it as their own judgment, and not project it onto animals.

Of course, the terms of life are also such that no one is forced to continue living. Anyone who really finds life not worth living can usually

find a way to exit, so the objection when made in those more personal terms always involves a certain contradiction. William Hasker argues a similar point in a different context, and aptly points out that so long as one values one's life and continues living, one is in a poor position to object that a God who gave this life can in no meaningful sense be called good.³⁷ Such "existential" considerations do have a role in the problem of evil, for the discussion of evil can never be reduced to a purely logical or intellectual exercise. Examination of the critic's existential presuppositions are no more "personal" or "*ad hominem*" than are the critic's attacks on the foundational premises of religious faith.

In a more general sense, the problems of natural evil are similar in many ways to those of moral evil. There is great continuity between them, for example, from the standpoint of the victim. A woman who is dying from cancer suffers from natural evil, but her pain may be just as intense as would result from deliberate torture, which is moral evil. Parents who lose a child by means of accidental drowning or sudden disease suffer the same loss as they would if the child had been killed by a drunk driver. So from the standpoint of the victim, natural evil and moral evil can be very similar in

³⁷ See William Hasker, "On Regretting the Evils of this World," in *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings*, by Michael Peterson, editor, p. 163. Hasker extends the argument such that a person's consent to live involves not only appreciation of their current life, but an implicit approval of all the historical conditions that made that life possible.

that both of them are possible *sources* of suffering, and either of them can raise the basic question, which is why God allows us to suffer at all.

Much of what is at stake in the issue of natural evil is tied in with the exigencies of life in a biological form, and emphasizes our attitude towards life's process. But if this is the question, the critic is not justified in simply picking out the worst aspects of life, and then asking us to pass judgment on all of life based on this. Such a procedure is like asking a jury to come to a conclusion after hearing only half of the evidence. If life is to be judged, it has to be judged as a whole, and this means instances of pain must take their place along with life's many satisfactions, pleasures and wonders.

In our present situation, it is almost impossible to assess the dimensions of natural evil as separate from moral evil. This is because the degree and impact of natural evil is constantly augmented directly and indirectly by the decisions humans make. We complain of cancer as a natural evil, for example, but there is no doubt that cigarette smoking, pollution, food choices and daily habits greatly influence the onset of cancer. We complain of hurricanes and floods as examples of natural evil, but by this stage of history, humans could have largely overcome even these problems if scientific efforts and economic resources had been totally devoted to the purpose. At this stage of history, we are responsible for the waste of all the resources that have gone into war and other negative social usages, for if

humans made decisions differently, if we had different customs, different beliefs, and different social institutions, war preparations would not be necessary. Wars are not ordained and dictated by either God or Nature.³⁸ Likewise, things like famine that seem like natural evil really trace back to economic want, which at this point in history is primarily due to human choices as to how to use resources and set priorities. Even in very subtle ways natural evil and moral evil merge, for wrong behavior creates tension and anxiety which is probably a great general cause of disease.

This argument is mentioned by R.W.K. Paterson, who points out that while the basic argument is plausible, it cannot be taken as showing that *all* suffering could have been brought under human control.³⁹ It is true that this argument does not show that all natural evil can be reduced to moral evil, but it does considerably reduce the proportions of natural evil as a special problem. No doubt, some pain and some danger is a truly inseparable concomitant of life in a biological form. Human life would always require courage and generate compassion, even if there was no moral evil whatever.

³⁸ My point here is that there would be no lightning bolts from above, no sudden volcanic outburst if humanity ever developed peaceful customs. If we lived peacefully, life would go on, the sun would still rise and the grass would still grow. I am also assuming, of course, that war is also not ordained by any innate destructive instinct, or any necessary aspect of human nature. Erich Fromm's *Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* amasses considerable evidence and makes a persuasive argument for this latter point.

³⁹ See Paterson, R. W. K., "Evil, Omniscience and Omnipotence," *Religious Studies* 15, page 12.

The point here is that usual discussions of natural evil often greatly exaggerate the extent of the issue, and thus miss the point that the amount of pain and suffering due to natural conditions alone would not generate “the problem of evil” as we know it today. Also, the all-too-human tendency to avoid responsibility for the negative results of human choice is greatly at work complicating discussion of the problem of evil. It takes a special effort of will and imagination to make even a somewhat objective appraisal of the extent of natural evil.

Definitions of evil also greatly influence why one speaks of certain things as instances of natural evil in the first place. For example, the idea that death is a great evil, and an important example of natural evil goes largely unchallenged in the modern discussion. Yet death is a surd issue, which means that we can't claim *knowledge* about it, ever. For all we know, death is really a great good, and in fact one of the most consistent themes repeated by those who have had near death experiences is that our fear of death is really groundless. With different beliefs, customs, and practices concerning death, we could transform the impact of death tremendously. So the dimensions of the problem of natural evil are also greatly influenced by issues of human interpretation and belief.

We recall that for Augustine, there was no natural evil -- by definition, evil was always a matter of human choice. There is much to recommend this

viewpoint. When we speak of natural evil, we may be stretching the term “evil” to an extent that isn’t legitimate. It may be essential that what is called evil, as opposed to what is simply unfortunate, must be un-natural. The unpleasant events of the natural world can perhaps be best described by terms such as pain or misfortune, words more neutral than our word “evil.”⁴⁰

In any event, the category of dysteleological evil is more basic than the categories of natural and moral evil, and it spans these categories. Suffering stems from many different causes, but what is important is whether loss and suffering occurs outside the divine plan, comes randomly, and wreaks destruction which is ultimate in the sense that it cannot be redeemed or healed. Ultimate questions are posed equally whether one’s loss or suffering occurs because of “natural causes,” or is due to the wrong decisions of others.

If theodicy can establish a view of the surd issues in which evil is not ultimate, and all evil *can* be redeemed, this will apply to both natural and moral evil. On the other hand, if human life is vulnerable to interruption through any chance occurrence, we can be victimized just as thoroughly and made to suffer just as intensely by natural evil as we can by moral evil.

⁴⁰ Indeed, the modern discussion of the problem of evil has become so vast and unwieldy that one searches eagerly for valid ways to simplify or subdivide the issue. My position is that natural evil alone would only raise “the problem of pain and suffering,” which is but a small part of the problem of evil. My focus here will thus be on what has traditionally been called moral evil, because any “solution” to this must necessarily “solve” the problem of pain and suffering as well.

Universalism

Hick's insistence on universalism, the doctrine that all humans will eventually be saved, has drawn a number of objections, as one would expect, from conservative theologians. Douglas Geivett, for example, insists that universalism involves the problem of God "forcing beatitude upon unwilling persons."⁴¹ Jerry Walls, in his *Hell and Divine Power*, insists that the doctrine of hell is compatible with God's goodness, and finds Hick's arguments on behalf of universalism fraught with inconsistency and confusion.

Walls rightly points out that what leads Hick to posit universalism are God's goodness and omnipotence -- if good, God wants to save all, and if all-powerful, God must be able to achieve this goal. But the knowledge that all will be saved conflicts with Hick's doctrine of freedom, which holds that future free actions are unknowable in principle. Walls suggests that if Hick wants to be consistent, he must either 1) give up his view of human freedom and opt for a compatibilist view where our sense of freedom is compatible with divine determination, 2) argue that a good God would not create beings who can go on resisting him forever, or 3) hold that if someone displays

⁴¹ Geivett, Douglas R., *Evil and the Evidence for God: the Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993.p. 236.

obstinance past a certain point, God would simply override their freedom and make them willing to accept salvation.⁴²

Actually, Hick does follow strategy 2) above, and it is odd that Walls does not notice this. For Hick, the actual constitution of our nature is what ensures universal salvation. Because humans are made “in God’s image,” they are designed by nature for relationship with God. Hick quotes Augustine’s phrase *ad te domine*, to emphasize that human hearts are restless until they find their rest in God. Hick also compares God to a therapist who works with each human in order to remove the obstacles which prevent beatitude.⁴³ Over endless time, extending limitless opportunities, given the infinite patience and insight of the therapist, and the fact that the patient cannot rest until they at last follow the urgings of their own nature, it is sure that this program of therapy will succeed. Thus, while Hick admits that it remains logically possible that any (or indeed all) humans will eternally reject God, he also insists that there is a practical certainty that all will be saved.

Hick makes use of the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* necessity to deny a contradiction here. The proposition “all will be saved” is affirmed

⁴² Walls, Jerry L., *Hell and Divine Power*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1992. p. 79-80.

⁴³ EE, p. 67

in terms of *de dicto* necessity. It follows from God's omnipotence and goodness. But the proposition "all will be saved" is denied *de re*, meaning that it is not of the essential nature of the "all" that they will be saved. So humans are saved necessarily from one standpoint, and contingently from another, and there is no contradiction because the proposition is affirmed in a different sense than it is denied.⁴⁴

In my view, universalism is an appropriate doctrine. Assuming, along with Hick, that human souls are meant to find their greatest completion and highest satisfaction in some form of direct knowledge of God, any soul that ultimately fails to achieve this has been fundamentally frustrated. A soul, once created, could only have a few basic kinds of ultimate destiny. One would be that the soul could be later destroyed -- an possibility that I think theodicy must strongly deny. To deprive a soul of existence would be a very basic violation.⁴⁵ Or possibly the soul could end up *permanently* frustrated or rendered *incapable* of ever attaining satisfaction. This is involved in the basic doctrine of hell, which again seems a major violation. Or perhaps the

⁴⁴ Geivett, Douglas R., *Evil and the Evidence for God: the Challenge of John Hick's Theodicy*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1993.p. 236.

⁴⁵ Destroying a soul is an example of what I call Mega-evil. I mean by this to point to a group of acts that only God *could* perform, and if God indeed does any of them, the violation actually exceeds the descriptive power of our word "evil." A thesis of my theodicy is that although we are exposed to evil, which is of our own doing, we have never been, and will never be, exposed to Mega-evil. Without downplaying evil, we can still say we are free of the very *worst* things imaginable, the Mega-evil events such as hell, essential separation from God, and the destruction of our souls.

soul might wander forever between the extremes, never actually gaining its final end, yet never actually losing its capacity for so doing. But from the soul's standpoint, this option would be just as insufferable as the option of hell. Only universalism gives assurance that every soul, once created, will indeed find the form of satisfaction that it was destined to have. In a sense then, universalism is simply the thorough denial of hell.

For me, one of Hick's best achievements is to have presented the case against the Augustinian view of hell and eternal punishment so cogently. He rightly pointed out that the traditional doctrine of hell made the problem of evil insuperable all by itself. It involved the disproportion of imposing eternal punishment (often seen as unending punishment) for crimes that were merely temporal, and thus made God unjust. Hell also made God unjust in various formulations where sinners were consigned to hell even though they had never heard of Christianity, were predestined to hell, or not given grace to avoid hell. Even more importantly, hell was also a proof that God's purposes could be permanently frustrated, and thus that God is not omnipotent. Hell is one way of making evil ultimate, and the project of theodicy is always to deny evil's ultimacy, while recognizing its reality. God also cannot be loving or wise if horrific suffering must be imposed upon humans, and of course, the fact of a permanent torture chamber with untold

millions of human victims could also be expected to spoil whatever normal or healthy joy there might otherwise have been in heaven.⁴⁶

There is truth in the argument that God had no business creating souls in the first place if there was an intent to let them be ultimately frustrated, or a lack of power to even assure that at some point they would eventually stop frustrating themselves and be able to find happiness. Although the comparison seems slightly demeaning, God would have no more right to create humans with the intent of letting them be frustrated than a human would have to keep farm animals or pets with the deliberate intention of frustrating or harming them.⁴⁷

However, I do think Hick's justifications for universalism could be supplemented in various ways. For example, I think Wall's third suggestion above has value. The fact that humans have free will does not necessarily mean that God does not sometimes "step in" and take initiative in various ways.

⁴⁶ The torture chamber is the less sophisticated version of hell, but even the more sophisticated versions, which posit hell as a "place where God is not" are impossible if God is omnipresent. In view of how vehemently fundamentalists defend God's other "omni" qualities, it is amazing how they ignore omnipresence. Views of hell as a *temporary* abode, a kind of bardo state where negative emotions are *worked through* after death, are something else entirely, and may have some justification.

⁴⁷ However, raising animals with the deliberate intent to frustrate them is an essential aspect of our American "factory farms," and those who protest this treatment are often considered extremists. Here is an instance where we instinctively trust God to hold to higher standards than we demand of ourselves.

Because Hick uses highly personal metaphors for God, we can observe that the relation between *any* two persons always involves an *interplay* of initiative and response. At certain junctures, either partner to a relationship can take unilateral actions or initiatives which affect the other deeply. In the history of prophesy, sometimes the prophet asks to be a prophet, and sometimes it seems to be God's initiative. Sometimes the mystic asks to have a mystical experience, as when a Zen monk sits in zazen with the hope of attaining enlightenment, or when a sick person prays for a healing. But other times, divine interventions seem to just happen, with no prior petition or implied consent on the part of the human subject. St. Paul, for example, did not *ask* to have a revelation of Christ. He was simply knocked off his horse by a blinding vision while on the road to Damascus. So, if St. Paul did not initiate this crucial event that so radically changed his religious destiny, perhaps every person who resists God's influence will also at some point come to a juncture where God simply self-reveals. If God is seen as having the power to emerge from hiding as well as a power to hide, this would also help to explain how universalism can be affirmed.

Stephen Davis makes a different objection to Hick's universalism in complaining that Hick's treatment is unbiblical. But Hick points out in reply that there are both universalist passages and non-universalist passages in the New Testament, and that the teachings of the historical Jesus in the

Synoptic Gospels contain only one passage that threatens eternal punishment (Matt. 25:41), despite the fact that the idea was widespread within popular Judaism at the time.

Hick has been greatly criticized for asserting universalism and human freedom, but I think he has every right to assert both, since he makes it quite clear that he asserts universalism not as a philosophically justifiable doctrine, but as an item of faith and an expression of hope. He is entitled to this hope so long as the beatitude of all is a *logically possible* state of affairs, given his philosophical treatment of freedom -- and this it clearly is.

Freedom

Free will has also been mentioned as problematic in many ways apart from its relation to universalism. John Roth, for example, questions whether moral freedom is really indivisible in the way that Hick says it is, that is, whether the freedom to act rightly is really indivisible from the freedom to act wrongly.⁴⁸ Roth also joins with other critics such as Stephen Davis, Edward Madden and Peter Hare in suggesting that even if our freedom is indivisible in such a way, the bargain is a bad one, and freedom is not worth the price of suffering. Hick's freedom, as Roth puts it, is a freedom to "make all hell break loose."

⁴⁸ EE, p. 63. As mentioned, Hick cannot make sense of the idea that we could have a "freedom" which was a freedom to act in one way only. I agree.

Hick's position is that if we fully value human freedom, we cannot consistently want God to revoke that freedom when its wrong exercise becomes intolerable to us. The final consummation of limitless value cannot be attained without that freedom, and this infinite goal is worth any amount of finite suffering.

There are actually many senses in which freedom is indivisible, and human freedom also has an important relationship to the issue of divine intervention. Consider the following sentences:

1) God grants us freedom of choice, respects our autonomy and allows us to make real decisions with real consequences.

2) God allows horrific events like Auschwitz to occur and does not prevent them.

Even though the first sentence sounds good, and the second sounds terrible, 1) and 2) are essentially linked, interdependent statements. A strong sense of human freedom is inseparable from a God who follows a basic policy of non-intervention. God cannot intervene *to unilaterally enforce a policy of creating a world with less moral evil*, and at the same time be a God who respects human freedom. But this is not to say that God cannot intervene at all.

To explain this, let us suppose that the example of St. Paul holds, and God can intervene occasionally without "denaturing" the persons who are so

manipulated. By intervening in this case, God probably stopped some evil, since St. Paul was on his way to persecute Christians. But God let St. Paul persecute other Christians prior to the vision, and made no visionary interruption of the careers of countless others who persecuted Christians. So when we address the central issue, which is *why* such intervention takes place, we have to conclude that the goal of intervention is not to unilaterally enforce a policy of creating a world with less moral evil. If that had been the goal, God would be a very busy intervener indeed. Neither could God intervene to help only those who are most spiritual, for presumably, if this were the policy, then God would have intervened to help Jesus, and Pilate would have been struck with a sudden vision, rather than St. Paul.

The call for intervention in the problem of evil debate is essentially a demand that God intervene in order to enforce a policy of unilaterally converting the present world to one with less moral evil in it. Humanity's dream of having a Superman who *enforces* right and justice would be realized. Yet it is evident that if God exists at all, God has rejected this role of Superman. The question is why this decision has been made, and if it is right.

For Hick, epistemic distance answers the issue of intervention. A Superman God would be taking back the very autonomy which it was the fundamental purpose of creation to bestow. God would be an actor upon the

stage of human life. With God so overtly busy and very visible, it would be impossible to deny God's existence.

But perhaps God could intervene in subtle ways, just giving events a little tweak here or inflicting a Hitler heart attack there, so as to at least give us a *better* world, while still remaining quietly hidden.⁴⁹ Yet this only creates a more subtle problem, for now our subtle God is quietly elbowing aside the humans who wish to use human events in order to express human forms of creativity, and instead manipulating those events personally. Intervention in such a way would still make God into a bully who robs someone else of their only sphere of expression -- who takes over that sphere of expression, and appropriates it for personal use. Also, with God assuming the role of Moral Enforcer, whether subtly or not, there would be no vacancy, no need for humans to grow into an awareness that they themselves need to assume the role of enforcing justice and right.

The fact remains, of course, that in the absence of any Superman or Moral Enforcer, human freedom is dangerous. However, if it is an

⁴⁹ Quite an interesting philosophical discussion has taken place concerning this option, centering on the idea that for all we know, God *does* intervene quietly. We have no way of knowing how much evil God may indeed have eliminated by intervening in a quiet manner, for "quiet manner" means, by definition, that we are not aware of the intervention. This also relates to the discussion of what, exactly is meant by "excess" in the definition of dysteleological evil as excess evil. See Hewitt, Harold Jr., (Ed.), *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion: Critical Studies of the Work of John Hick*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, pages 111-137.

inseparable aspect of human consciousness, if we could not *be* human without this freedom, then the question becomes whether God ought to destroy the human race, since having humans at all is inseparable from the possibility that they might misuse their freedom.⁵⁰

The story of Noah is not usually mentioned in writings about theodicy, but it is important because it clearly indicates that the biblical answer to that question was “no.” As the story begins, God proposes to end the human race precisely because of the extent of moral evil, but at the end, God realizes that wholesale destruction of humanity is no solution, and promises never to destroy humanity. Since Hick wants to take his stand on the biblical portrait of God, I would suggest that the story of Noah is an important resource in replying to critics who complain that human freedom is just not worth the cost.

Felix Culpa

The expression “*O felix culpa*” means “O fortunate crime” or “happy fault” and is taken from the Roman Missal in the *Exsultet* for the evening before Easter, where the phrase appears, “O fortunate crime, to merit such a redeemer!” The idea is that Adam’s fall was actually a fortunate occurrence,

⁵⁰ Griffin makes this fundamental point in ER, p. 84 -- that if people realize that the choice is really between dangerous human beings and no human beings at all, they will choose to have humans.

because without it, Christ's glorious work of redemption would never have taken place. More generally, it is taken by Hick as summarizing the Augustinian idea that God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist. Hick considers the notion of *felix culpa* to be one of the cornerstones of Christian theodicy.⁵¹

Hick finds it intolerable to think that God would have permitted the fearful evil of sin without having intended to bring out of it an even greater good than would have been possible if evil had never existed. So sin plus redemption is of greater worth to God than the values that would have been created had humans functioned in a state of innocence. Part of the reason this idea seems appealing is because of a particular interpretation of God's omniscience. On this view, God must have known that sin would occur in the world even before creation took place. But God created the world anyway, and this decision must be right. This would appear to mean that God knew a world with evil plus the cure for evil would be better, overall, than a world with no evil at all.

However, this is not the only view of omniscience, and *felix culpa* has awkward implications both for the concept of evil and for the value creation process. Evil becomes somewhat tame and excusable on this view, as the

⁵¹ EGL, p. 176.

phrase “happy fault” implies. When the loss, pain and damage of human evil is taken seriously, it seems strange to represent evil as in any way leading to happiness. It is one thing to proclaim that God’s redemptive plans can fully reverse the effects of evil, and that nothing of ultimate value will be lost because of evil. Theodicy must say that in order to preserve God’s omnipotence and competence as a creator. Yet it is quite another to proclaim, as does the *felix culpa* doctrine, that the *best* forms of value all have evil as a necessary component.

A helpful approach here is to view evil on the analogy of a wound. A wound represents real damage, and is painful and incapacitating. However, most wounds can be healed. So wounds are real, but if full health can be restored, wounds are not ultimate. For theodicy, evil can also be viewed as genuine, painful, and incapacitating, but also as non-ultimate. So when we compare evil to a wound, we mean a wound that *can* be healed, not one that does permanent and irreversible damage. In this sense, evil is a “flesh wound” when seen from the perspective of soul. And this view goes all the way back to Plato, who also pointed out that evil was remarkable, because while it can damage, it cannot destroy the soul. Plato also felt that the evil of injustice could be “cured” through punishment, assuming as he did that punishment would result in the soul becoming just again.

But who would ever find any healing process so satisfying that they would actually be *glad* they were wounded in the first place? That seems to strain credibility. If one is in fact wounded, then of course healing is a good thing. But a man who is wounded has *less* capacity to create value than he would if he were healthy. The time spent in healing, getting over an injury, could have been spent creating some new and positive value. Healing only has an instrumental value. It gets us back to where we were before the wound took place. It restores our capacity, but of course, if our capacity had never been damaged, such restoration would not be necessary.

So by this analogy, *felix culpa* exaggerates the value of healing compared with never having been wounded or damaged in the first place. Wounding does not become a good thing just because it leads to healing. If a wound has been suffered, then of course it is good that there is healing, but the healing only has value in relation to the prior wound. The wound plus the healing is not superior in value to the situation of steady health all the way through. Likewise, in value creation, there are types of value that can only occur if there is a prior disvalue. But it is hard to see how a value creation process that first incurs disvalue and then corrects the disvalue would be superior to a process that just keeps going from accomplishment to accomplishment, from value to value.

But would this line of thought imply that evil in fact *is* ultimate? The very best value creation processes simply go from creativity to creativity, with no time spent creating disvalue, and no time spent healing or compensating that disvalue. But this is not the pattern of our present world. So evil really has “marred the universe” to the end of time. Even if we can heal from all evil, we’ll still never attain those values that *might have been* created had there been no human dalliance with evil at all. So in comparison to a world in which moral evil never was actualized, our present world must represent a net loss of value after all.

While there is a certain sense to this objection, there is also some non-sense involved in trying to compare a real excursion into creativity with an ideal one that we dream up in our minds. In our minds, it might seem to be a ridiculous waste of time when an artist spends many years making terrible drawings, and only gradually develops the capacity to create a masterpiece. It is certainly more “logical” for the artist to simply sit down and create masterpiece after masterpiece right from the beginning, and it would seem that a greater pile of masterpieces would result from his career if he would only follow this simple advice.

But perhaps the character of creativity implies a need to learn, a need to venture, a need to try out “bad” ideas and fool around a bit with experiments that don’t turn out, so it is possible to learn the difference

between those and the ones that do turn out. Of course, such an “aesthetic approach” to the problem of evil tends to recommend a more lenient view towards human wrongdoing than does a moralistic approach. One of our tasks in pursuing the character of God will be to determine whether the image of the Great Moralizer who judges each error sternly and punishes it righteously fits God better than does the image of the Great Artist, who makes no errors in their own works, but actually expects students to make errors, and tolerates those errors as an essential part of the process of learning. In a way, as we have indicated, the first God is closer to the Augustinian presentation, and the second is closer to Hick’s Irenaean alternative. Hick’s soul-making implies that we cannot make masterpieces right from the beginning, that God’s purpose was to allow us to grow from a state of ignorance and incapacity to a state of spiritual maturity. This implies that God would not so harshly judge our errors, since a certain range of mistakes and false starts are inevitable in any growth process.

Evil and Creation

Here I would like to explore an extended metaphor in order to supplement Hick’s outlook in regard to what soul-making implies for the purpose of creation. Hick’s position is weak to the extent that it seems to imply that our material world was made because God knew that preliminary

steps or a maturing process were necessary before creatures could graduate and go on to the really important part of creation -- enjoying beatitude.

It might be better to explore the idea that creation occurred as an act of agapeic love. Creation occurred, that is, because God knew that creatures needed something, and God wanted to provide it. Creatures needed a context for interaction, a theater for self-expression, choice, and self-discovery. In giving us a material world, God provided that context for self-expression.

So just as a great and rich artist who has her own studio might sponsor beginning artists, and pay for studios where those artists could create their own works of art, so God might have created the world in order to provide a scene of creative self-expression, expressly designed for others to use. This rich and famous artist might say to the apprentices, "Listen, this is *your* studio, not mine. Create great art, that is my hope. But if you want to draw cartoons, or doodle, or make terrible art, I won't interfere. I will come and give you art lessons if you want. But I will only come if I am asked. I will not censor your creations, and I will not grab the tools and brushes in your studio and begin to use them myself. I won't do anything at all without permission, for this is your studio, not mine."

Soul-making then would be seen as happening, not in order to "get somewhere," to make progress towards the eschaton. There is no one, final masterpiece of art which it is the whole purpose of this arrangement to

produce. Rather, the arrangement has been made so that art can be produced continually. And there is no “final purpose” beyond the creation of art, the selling of the artworks, for example, which is what justifies the procedure. Rather, the great artist believes in art for arts sake, and believes that the younger artists will find inherent satisfaction in creating and beholding the art that they will produce.

Of course, in a sculptor’s art studio there are power tools, and if these tools are used carelessly, or deliberately misused, they are capable of inflicting great injuries. And if many artists are in one studio, then someone who misuses a power drill or saw could damage other people. So one could imagine that if the conditions in the room became chaotic enough, there might be an outcry, a demand to the great artist to not only provide the studio, but to come and run the place as well.

Did God, in giving us a material world, simply give too many tools which were capable of misuse? And when we cry out to God to come and run the world for us, so that every criminal gets arrested -- by God personally, if necessary -- we find that God is slow to come perform this task. So our studio becomes a chaotic place where there is just as much bad art as creative art being produced, and it sometimes appears that not even the most sincere artist is really safe. This is a fundamental problem, for if there are tools in this studio that can do permanent damage, unrecoverable damage, this

would be a legitimate complaint against the landlord. A benefactor who gives a gift that easily misfires and does basic damage, is no benefactor at all. If a certain tool can only be used safely by a mature person, and a benefactor gives that tool to an immature person, then again we have a complaint against the benefactor.

It would appear then that another basic task of theodicy is to show that for the soul at least, for the overall identity, the world is a safe place. Obviously, this isn't what it appears to be. Sustaining this thesis will require theodicy to embrace some form of the distinction between ego perspective and soul perspective. If theodicy is to succeed, some sense will have to be made of the idea that the world can be regarded as safe for the soul, even if it is clearly not safe for the ego personality.

The soul/personality distinction also relates directly to the reality/appearance distinction. There has been a low regard for any form of the reality/appearance distinction in the West, but this seems to be based entirely on the idea that it implies that evil is unreal, or an illusion. Yet this distinction can be grounded in the Christian scriptures, for when Jesus was faced with the prospects of torture and death, he indicated faith that *despite appearances*, his spiritual destiny was still intact, and that a loving God was not suddenly in lapse. I regard John 19:11 as an essential text for any Christian theodicy. Also, the evil expressed in this central drama of the

Christian faith was entirely real. The personality of Jesus was destroyed, and suffered the worst that could happen here on earth, and yet, we are told, the spiritual purposes were all accomplished. Further, in a way hard to define, when the spiritual purposes were accomplished, they included the level of personality. The whole identity was part of the transfiguration. Nothing was lost, nothing wasted.⁵²

Critics and theologians alike often write as if the only way to justify God's act of world-creation is to posit that God could foresee all the immense pile of good that would be done, and compare it with the immense pile of evil that would be done, and know that the first pile was bigger. But that kind of foreknowledge is not a necessary interpretation of omniscience, despite its high credentials in the Augustinian world. It is possible to state, as Hick does, that only *existing* beings can be said to have a future that is in any way foreseeable.⁵³ In a situation before creation, there are no free beings, therefore, they are not acting, and there are no actions of theirs to foresee. And, in my view, it is inappropriate in any case to "justify" creation through a purely utilitarian calculation.

⁵² The paradoxical idea that as long as the soul is preserved, the ego personality is also preserved will have to be developed in a future chapter. But ultimately theodicy must say that every form of identity, including ego personality, has a guarantee against non-existence. Ego personality can be transformed, but nothing of value will be lost in the process.

⁵³ EGL, p. 178-9.

Even without possessing a panoramic view of all that would occur in human life “before” the creation of humans actually took place, God must have known that making free choice a reality would mean that horrendous suffering and cruelty would be possible. If the avoidance of pain were the only standard, then this type of creation in terms of a biological form and a material world would not be justified.

But God could have also known that the avoidance of pain was not the highest standard, and that, from a spiritual perspective, evil would be inherently limited in its effects. Evil could do certain bad things, yes, but it could not accomplish the really worst possibilities. Mega-evil, the very worst possibilities imaginable from a spiritual perspective, could not become real. Mega-evil would include the possibilities that souls could be destroyed, that they might become essentially separated from God, that they might be permanently damaged, robbed of their fundamental nobility, or cut off from the powers of healing and creative growth. If creation carried any of these risks, then creation would not be justified. But if evil had no power to do these things, then God could, in effect, give the artists their freedom and let them work away. Whatever damage they *could* do down in their studios would be non-ultimate and could be healed.

In regard to the first problem, God could have known that the soul was immortal, so creation did not carry any risk that the creature would be

destroyed. In regard to the second problem -- that creatures could be essentially separated from God, or lost in the cosmic vastness -- God would have known that God's own omnipresence or infinity precluded any such danger. There simply would be nothing "outside" God, no area devoid of God to which creatures could go in order to *get* themselves lost. And in regard to the third problem, if evil is essentially a "flesh wound" to the soul, something that, by nature, the soul *can* heal from, then the soul is not in any position to do itself ultimate harm, even if the worst happens in the material world. God could have known that although the destructive action or corrosive power of evil are considerable, they do not extend so far as to be able to efface the fundamental "image of God" away from any identity, or remove that identity's potential for further growth and healing. If all these things were true, then this may have been enough to assure that, from a spiritual perspective, the studios are safe.

The "context of expression" which God provided certainly made terrible suffering and horrific experiences possible. But life in a material world also has a vast range for value creation and deep enjoyment. Creation could have also been justified if God had knowledge that what is of value or touches upon the reality of love would transcend the material world and endure eternally, but whatever had disvalue or is evil would be healed. Creation

then, could have been justified even in the absence of a utilitarian calculation, if the thesis presented here is correct -- that evil has no ultimacy.

Even before venturing to create then, God could have known that the universe itself would have an inherently creative character. Thus, every time evil would occur, its strength would be too small to resist the power of more fundamental trends towards good. Evil then would be the kind of thing that might have a horrid initial impact, but it would always be caught up into a greater scheme of values that would necessarily express creative intent in some way. The precautions that would assure the triumph of the good would have been built into the very structure of what would come to be. If so, even without utilitarian calculation or omniscience as panoramic preview, it would be possible to hold that God didn't taking any wild or unacceptable risk with creation. Creation would then be best described as an *adventure*, not as a wild and unacceptable risk

Conclusion

Although we have had frequent occasion to disagree with Hick, or amend his thoughts, it seems appropriate in closing this chapter to emphasize the extent of his accomplishment. Probably Barry Whitney summed this up best when he said that John Hick revitalized and redefined theodicy itself, and managed to awake everyone from "their Augustinian

slumber.”⁵⁴ There are, of course, many valuable aspects of the Augustinian approach to the problem of evil, but Hick helped to focus attention on many glaring problems that were also present. Any of the traditional doctrines of original sin, the doctrine of hell, the view of the soul as limited to one lifetime only, or the idea that animals don’t have spiritual destinies appropriate to the level of their consciousness, were enough to make the problem of evil insoluble all by itself.

The Augustinian theodicy held sway for some fifteen centuries, and it is remarkable how little real dialogue took place once the doctrines became settled into dogmas of the Western Church. It was as if once the ideas became official doctrine, nothing could then be done to resolve the problems and internal contradictions they involved, nor to modify the ideas to accommodate the trends and discoveries of a changing world.

Hick was well-poised to burst through these barriers, and since he worked from within the Christian tradition, his modifications have had more impact than any amount of criticism from outside the circle of Christian belief. For example, thinkers from India have long observed that if humans have only one life to live, the fact that God gives them such unequal talents and opportunities at birth simply cannot be reconciled with justice -- and if

⁵⁴ Whitney, Barry L., *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography on the Problem of Evil*, Garland Publishing, Inc, New York & London, 1993, p. 155.

God is not just, then God is certainly not good. But until a prominent *Christian* thinker and theologian was willing to acknowledge the truth of this simple conclusion, no one noticed that Christian scriptures don't really say the soul has only one life to live. Such a limited view of soul was merely a secondary interpretation that got mixed into the historical brew of Christianity and then was perpetuated as if it were gospel.

Thus, Hick's new emphasis on the Irenaean standpoint not only pointed out many of the problems with the Augustinian interpretations of Christianity, they helped to demonstrate that these were only interpretations in the first place. I think for many it was stunning to think that one could be a Christian and not believe in original sin, or hell, or that one could be a Christian and yet allow for the possibility of reincarnation.

Hick's real accomplishment, in my view, is that he maintains a maximum continuity with traditional Christianity, while at the same time making modifications in the precise areas where they were most needed. Hick also introduced concepts like epistemic distance and soul-making that will likely have a permanent value, and be incorporated in some way into any future theodicy effort.

CHAPTER 2. DAVID GRIFFIN'S PROCESS THEODICY

David Griffin is a philosophical theologian working in the tradition of process theodicy, which has become in recent years a recognized alternative to traditional Augustinian theodicy. Process theodicy is generally based on the writings of Alfred North Whitehead (1860-1947), although Charles E. Hartshorne (b. 1897) developed the theological side of this philosophy.

In his influential 1976 book *God, Power, and Evil*, Griffin was the first to fully apply process philosophy to the problem of evil and form a systematic theodicy. The bulk of this seminal early work by Griffin consists of critiques of the theodicies of St. Augustine and St. Thomas, and also Luther, Calvin, Leibniz, Barth, Hick, and other modern figures. Griffin proposes that the doctrines of divine power found in all these thinkers are implicitly self-contradictory, which opens the way for the process view of God's power as noncoercive to gain acceptance. He also accuses most of them of failing to recognize the reality of what he calls "genuine evil."

God, Power, and Evil, together with a chapter by Griffin in Davis' 1981 book, *Encountering Evil*, attracted enormous attention to process theodicy and generated a vigorous philosophical debate. In *Evil Revisited* (1991), Griffin published his responses to this critical uproar. Although he stoutly

maintains most of his basic positions against all comers, Griffin at this point makes two major revisions to his theodicy. First, he posits the importance of a demonic dimension of evil, defining “demonic” as a power “which intensely opposes the divine creativity of the universe.”¹ Secondly, he recognizes that a fully satisfactory theodicy requires an eschatology that speaks of the overcoming of human evil in the long run. So Griffin at this point explicitly endorses the notion of an afterlife, an issue that had been left open by Whitehead and more or less denied by Hartshorne.

Griffin’s change in this regard also resulted from his review of the parapsychological evidence and his study of the modern documentation of near-death experiences. A further change, probably made in response to criticism, is an endorsement of the idea that God must be seen as the trustworthy ground for hope in the ultimate victory of good over evil.

However, in *Evil Revisited*, Griffin still stands by his basic insistence that the traditional Christian view of omnipotence is incoherent, that is, that God cannot *unilaterally* bring about events in the world. Griffin also explains that an unfortunate editing decision caused him to leave certain chapters out of *God, Power and Evil*, with the result that he was widely misinterpreted by critics in regard to supposed correspondences between

¹ ER, p. 31.

final causation and persuasion, and also between efficient causation and coercion. Griffin explains that he never intended to imply that his process God was limited to final causation. On the contrary, the process God acts continually through efficient causation, and Griffin says that his omitted chapters would have made this clear. Griffin insists that when properly understood, God's universal efficient causation always acts as an influence, but it is never the sole influence to determine any effect, so this kind of causation does fit in with the basic process idea that God never acts in a coercive way.

As we have seen, John Hick limited his conception of theodicy to the project of showing that there was no contradiction involved in holding traditional Christian beliefs about God and also recognizing the reality of evil. An even more limited project was pursued by Alvin Plantinga, who attempted only a logical defense, that is, attempted only to show that there is no logical contradiction between the proposition "God is omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good" and the proposition "there is evil." Plantinga felt no need to demonstrate that theistic belief was plausible, only that it was free of inherent contradictions.

In contrast to these thinkers, Griffin insists that theodicy must present a "global argument," that is, must show that a theistic interpretation can illuminate the totality of our experience, including our experience of evil,

better than any nontheistic interpretation.² Griffin identifies the main rivals to his own viewpoint in today's world as traditional theism and neo-Darwinian atheism.

Because Griffin works within the Whiteheadian tradition, it is important to review briefly some of this background material in order to understand Griffin's thinking. For Whitehead, the most basic constituents of reality are not the "things" that meet the eye, nor the substances of Aristotelian metaphysics, but rather droplets of experience called actual entities or actual occasions. These are energy-events which momentarily come into existence and then immediately vanish. Each of these actual occasions is dipolar, that is, it has a physical pole and a mental pole. As the occasion comes into existence, it prehends (receives and appropriates) all the causal influences from the immediate past, and it also prehends God's initial aim, which is the most ideal possibility for its own development.

All this occurs at the physical pole of the occasion. At the mental pole, the occasion gives expression to its own power of self-determination. This self-determination is limited by the activities at the physical pole, for the occasion inherits its own past history and feels some impulse to act in accordance with God's ideal aim. However, no entity is ever forced to do

² ER, p. 43.

what God wants, nor is it fully determined by the past, for it always chooses a subjective aim for itself from among a spectrum of possibilities. Once the occasion has unified the chosen data and selected a direction for its own development, it achieves value and then perishes as an experiencing subject. At this point, its own experience becomes an objective datum which is available to be prehended by subsequent actual entities.

Whitehead's view of reality is based upon the findings of particle physics, although a subatomic particle, such as an electron, is not quite the model of the most real that Whitehead has in mind. For Whitehead, an electron is a serial society, a group of successive "electron" entities that all come into existence very rapidly, each inheriting its main structure from a past occasion, and providing the basis for a future occasion. The situation is similar to that of a movie, where a flow of individual pictures is so rapid that it gives the impression that one identity is being seen in continuous motion. However, for Whitehead, the individual units themselves are units of becoming, bits of process, and are not static like the images on individual frames of film.

Even an electron inherits the past from the prior members of the series, has an ideal aim, and makes a spontaneous contribution of its own during its process of becoming. But for a low order actual occasion like an electron, the inheritance from the past is dominant, and there is little room

for novelty to be introduced. So in this case, a single form tends to be perpetrated in a somewhat mechanical fashion. However, as enduring societies like electrons aggregate to form more complex societies such as atoms and molecules, the amount of freedom or unpredictability increases. When the level of human consciousness is reached, the mental pole is a fully developed aspect of experience, freedom is a marked feature, and much higher forms of value can be achieved.

At this point, we can already appreciate a key element of process thought that Griffin was able to apply to the problem of evil. For on this view, to be actual at all is to be self-determining and to possess genuine freedom. All individuals therefore have *inherent* power and this means power even vis-à-vis God. Griffin often insists that freedom is not a “gift from God” in the first place, and hence it *cannot* be revoked or overridden by God. In fact, according to the process outlook, existence itself is not a gift from God. Process thought rejects the traditional Christian notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. For process thought, God is a creator only in a special sense. There has always been a realm of actual entities, independent of God. God’s creative action was to present ideal possibilities in such a way that more complex entities became real and higher forms of value emerged within the independent actual realm. God did not create the world, God lured it from a state of random nonpurposeful activity into a vast and complex array of

interacting multistructural societies, capable of producing deeply meaningful forms of value.

Griffin insists that because the traditional view of omnipotence whereby God “has all the power” is incoherent, it provides no standard for interpretation of what “all power” means.³ For Griffin, “all powerful” as a divine attribute really means that God has the “most power that it is possible for one being to have.”⁴ God’s influence is always present, and God contributes to all experiences, for God always provides an appropriate initial aim. But God does not have, and could not have, a monopoly on power. God’s power is necessarily limited by the freedom which is built into the very structure of things. Freedom is an inherent metaphysical attribute of all that is actual. Thus, our human self-determining activity, and our human ability to influence others *cannot* be totally controlled by God. God can only persuade. God’s influence is always one influence among many as any event occurs. This is why God *cannot* prevent the occurrence of evil in human life. God will always provide an urge to go in an ideal direction, but if a human chooses to act badly, God cannot prevent the consequences.

³ ER, p. 70.

⁴ See chapter 3 of ER.

A second key element of Griffin's theodicy can be appreciated at this point, which is that he posits a positive correlation among these four variables:

- 1) The capacity to enjoy intrinsic goodness (or value)
- 2) The capacity to suffer intrinsic evil (or disvalue)
- 3) The power of self-determination
- 4) The power to influence others (for good or ill)

The relationship between these variables is such that when one increases, the others must also increase, and if one declines, the others must also decline. Process thought posits a non-dualistic perspective. Because units of *experience* are the fundamental units of what is most real, there are no non-experiencing individuals which are mere objects. A "mental pole" of some kind is always a part of any real individual, so all individuals have some capacity, however minimal, to enjoy value and to suffer disvalue. This doesn't quite amount to the doctrine of panexperientialism however, for it isn't the case that *everything* undergoes experience on the process view. Things like rocks and chairs are mere *aggregates* of individual molecular and cellular occasions of experience. As with a crowd of humans, for example, the group itself has no experience over and above the experiences of the individual members.⁵ However, the correlation among the four factors above

⁵ See ER, p. 102 ff. Griffin himself gives the example of a crowd, which is questionable because crowds are different than chairs. Crowds do seem to make collective decisions at times, and to have collective experiences.

holds for all *genuine individuals* such as electrons, atoms, molecules, cells, animals, humans -- and God. God in process thought is an actual individual, and is no exception to the metaphysical principles that govern either what it is to be actual, or what it is to be an individual. On the contrary, God is the chief exemplification of these principles.

Griffin thus sees the world as a hierarchy in which less complex individuals cooperate so as to play roles in the formation of more and more complex ones. The electrons "know" what they need to know to play their role in atoms, the atoms "know" what they need to know in order to form molecules, and these in turn form cells. The human body is formed from a vast, cooperative society of lesser occasions of experience which are all dominated by the central individual occasion of experience called the soul. As we "rise" on this scale, the four variables above all increase in lock step -- atoms have negligible capacity to enjoy, suffer, self-create and influence others, but cells have a greater capacity, and at the top of the scale, human individuals have a very great capacity to enjoy, to suffer, to be self-determinative and to influence others.

Griffin tells us that this fourfold correlation is due to metaphysical necessity and is independent of God's will or creative activity.⁶ This gives

⁶ See EE, p. 107.

Griffin a ready answer to many of the speculative questions critics propose in regard to the problem of evil, such as “Why did God create us so that we have such capacity to suffer?” or “Why were we given such a dangerous freedom?” Griffin’s answer is “God didn’t have any choice.” It is true that God could have left the world in a state of chaotic indetermination. But if God had done that, only trivial forms of value could manifest. To avoid this triviality, which on the process view is a significant evil in itself, God decided to present ideals, to lure more and more complex individuals into actuality.

But even God couldn’t avoid the metaphysical principles which governed what it is to *be* an actuality. So as more complex individuals emerged, it was inevitable that they would have greater capacity to suffer as well as to enjoy. As they developed more capacity to create value, they also inevitably developed a capability to create disvalue. Great freedom means a great ability to depart from one’s ideal impetus, as well as a capacity to choose it consciously. A high grade individual will necessarily have a great capacity to influence others, which has its dark side in the ability to deliberately inflict pain. In short, the foundational elements that make the problem of evil possible are inseparable from the most basic freedoms and prerogatives that necessarily go into the formation of high grade individuals.

In assessing God’s responsibility for evil, Griffin makes the profound point that the aim of a “morally good being” is more accurately stated

positively rather than negatively. That is, the aim is first of all to produce good, not to avoid suffering.⁷ God is responsible for the world having reached a state in which evil *can* occur, but God is not blameworthy because evil *does* occur. If the primary aim of a moral being was to avoid any possibility that others might suffer, then any human who is moral should refuse to have children, for that would be the only way to assure that they would neither suffer nor inflict suffering. Analogously, God could have avoided the possibility that there would be a Holocaust, but only by refusing to lure highly complex individuals into existence at all. But in that case, God *would* be indictable -- for God would have left the world in a state where there was no significant value at all, and would have done so simply to avoid pain.

For Whitehead, God has, like all other actualities, a "physical pole" and a "mental pole." The mental pole is God's primordial nature, in which God envisions an interrelated spectrum of ideals and establishes a realm of unlimited potentiality. These ideals are organized and specified as God provides a subjective aim for each finite occasion and functions as a lure for feeling or object of desire. God's physical pole is God's consequent nature, in which God shares with every actual occasion the fullness of physical feelings as these feelings become objectified. Griffin points out that because of God's

⁷ EE, p. 110.

consequent nature, God is the *only* being who has experienced every single evil that has ever occurred. God has, then, shared our sufferings, and hasn't asked us to be the sole participants in the risk which God's creative activity inevitably involves.

Griffin also accounts for "natural evil" in terms of his hierarchical scheme and his fourfold correlations.⁸ The reason the natural order contains germs and cancer cells, or wreaks mass destruction in earthquakes and tornadoes is that the natural order has always had some inherent power to deviate from God's aims. While no individual electron or atom has very much power to deviate from the divine purpose, over a period of billions of years, and with untold billions of atoms involved, slight deviations add up. Thus, all kinds of things can be present in nature that God never intended.

God's limits in power are many. God has no influence at all on aggregates, and so speeding bullets *will* hit their targets, and locomotives *can* jump the tracks. God has some persuasive power relative to a cancerous cell, but not enough to prevent it from reproducing and spreading. In the case of a human being, God can be *very* persuasive, and in fact has been a partner in all acts of idealism, and the inspiration behind all commitment to justice or love. Without God, the "voice of conscience" would not be present,

⁸ See EE, p. 111.

and so God does, in a co-creative role, prevent much evil. However, God lacks a physical body, and without a physical body, there can be no coercive, unilateral forms of power. In short, there is simply no way God *can* simply force appropriate or moral forms of behavior to occur in human life.

A Christian Theology?

As we have seen, in his approach to the problem of evil, John Hick changed some traditional Christian interpretations, particularly the literal interpretation of the sin of Adam and Eve and the doctrine of hell. However, David Griffin goes much further in revising Christian doctrines, suggesting radical changes in God's attributes and creative action, as well as in understanding the natural world and human identity. Thus, the question of continuity with the Christian tradition becomes more critical for Griffin than it was for Hick.

Conservative theologians such as Bruce Demarest charge that process thinkers generally come to the theological task with "a low view of Scripture," and feel free to dismiss or rewrite the orthodox body of Christian doctrine.⁹ Demarest points out that the incarnation and the trinity have long been the central pillars of Christianity, and insists that Jesus must be seen as the

⁹ See "The Process Reduction of Jesus and the Trinity," in Ronald Nash's *Process Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987, p. 65.

“unique and final agent of salvation.” Process thought, for Demarest, is inadequate because it denies Christ’s eternal pre-existence, virgin birth, sinlessness, deity, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, and second coming, to say nothing of the denial of other basic Christian doctrines such as *creatio ex nihilo* and final judgment.

To this kind of charge, Griffin replies that all Christian doctrines are human attempts to formulate the significance of a certain core group of revelatory experiences. “It was never shouted down from heaven,” he writes, “that God is triune, or that the world was created out of nothing, that God is omnipotent, or even that God is love.” Rather,

Each of these doctrines arose in the past as fallible human beings, guided but not controlled by the divine spirit, tried to express their understanding of God in the most adequate way possible, given their context, including their questions, their knowledge of the world, and the conceptual tools available to them. *Our theological task today is not to try to hold on to their formulations at any price, but to re-think the implications of the Christian revelatory events in the light of our contexts--our questions, our knowledge, and our conceptual tools.*¹⁰

Accordingly, Griffin concludes, one theologian cannot rightfully dismiss another’s position as “unchristian” simply by showing that it does not correspond with ancient dogma. The real task of the Christian theologian is to help people arrive at a set of beliefs that make sense *in this time and at*

¹⁰ EE, p. 115. Italics are used in the original quotation.

this place, beliefs that can function as a lens through which people can perceive God as a Holy Reality.¹¹ A set of doctrines that performed this task quite well in previous centuries may fail to do so miserably in the modern world. Throughout much of Christian history in Europe, from roughly the 4th to 18th centuries, the cultural situation was such that the reality of God seemed overwhelmingly obvious to most people. The truth of the Christian position was widely held to be externally guaranteed by the authority of the Bible and the authority of the Church, and to a lesser extent, through rational argumentation. In those centuries, the problem of evil constituted no overwhelming problem capable of undermining faith itself. There was confidence that there *had* to be a solution of some kind, even if the details were known only to God. In such a situation, if confronted by insoluble difficulties, the theologian could appeal to mystery and still not default on the theological task.

However, all this has changed. The authority of the Church and its theologians has declined. The historical and critical approach to the Bible in the past two centuries has made it more difficult for people to consider the Bible infallible or literally true. There has been a growing appreciation of the validity of other religions. I would add that another major factor in

¹¹ EE, p. 118.

modern life is the growth of science, which has also led to a prevalence of *scientism*. Scientism can be defined as the unrealistic over-rating of science, resulting in various attempts to apply scientific methods (or procedures that appear to be scientific) to areas where they may not be appropriate. Scientism has promoted materialistic philosophy so successfully that any outlook involving transcendent ideas or values can today appear to be nothing but a form of superstition. Modern life has also seen the rise of new forms of evil such as nuclear destruction and global war, and been marked by abject despair in the face of what is seen as impersonal and inevitable evil.

Within this situation, the problem of evil represents a much more serious challenge to religious faith than ever before. Theology and theodicy can no longer take anything for granted, and must directly compete with other views. Theodicy must now be displayed as part of a total theological position which is more consistent, adequate to the relevant facts, and illuminating of the total human situation than any competing view. I would add that theodicy must now also show how the acceptance of theistic beliefs leads to more positive consequences, such as better mental health or reduced chances of global destruction, compared with the acceptance of atheistic beliefs.

So while Griffin's brand of postmodern theology does appeal to religious experience, it does not appeal to the Bible as an external authority

whose truth-claims are to be accepted apart from their capacity to illumine our common experience.¹² The appeal to religious experience is not even made in such a way to appeal, in principle, to one tradition to the exclusion of others. Griffin sees himself as occupying a position which has been influenced by Hebrew, Greek, Christian, Egyptian, and modern-American perspectives, and he also notes that Whitehead and Hartshorne studied Buddhism, and sought to make their position adequate to Buddhism as well.¹³ Still, although the world-view Griffin presents has many sources of input, it can be thought of as a *Christian* philosophy or (natural) theology, simply because it has been born in the Christian cradle, and the Christian influence is more important than any other.

I share Griffin's views in this regard, although I would emphasize that even with this kind of outlook, the Bible can still be an important resource. There is still benefit in maintaining as much continuity with Christian tradition as possible, and there should be no special impetus to change traditional doctrines simply because they *are* traditional. Yet because of the pressing need to relate Christian insights to a new world, no ancient dogma

¹² Griffin, David Ray, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, State University of New York Press, New York, 1989, p. 9.

¹³ Some might say that the process position is *so* adequate to Buddhism that it shares the Buddhist difficulties in regard to human identity. The denial of a permanent, underlying format of identity that transcends death (a soul) creates special problems for both positions.

or interpretation should be considered off-limits. Unlike most theologians, a philosopher does not have a primary commitment to uphold particular church dogmas or traditions. For the philosophical theologian, the Bible is more a treasure house of important ideas than an infallible guide to reality. From this perspective, it is to be *expected* that, like all human creations, the Bible will contain some rather misleading ideas mixed in with the valuable ones. Reason, experience, emotional authenticity, and intuitive sensibility are all important guides in sorting out what is to be retained, and what revised.

I have reported Griffin's views here at some length not only because he makes an excellent response to an obvious potential problem, but because I would anticipate similar questions in regard to my own views concerning evil. I don't propose the same changes to traditional theology that Griffin suggests, but I also want to suggest revision of central doctrines of traditional theology, especially the idea of redemption and the nature of the soul. I also believe that Christianity can most readily face the problem of evil by selectively absorbing, with appropriate modifications, ideas derived from other religious traditions. Any particular religious tradition achieves in-depth understanding of certain issues, yet allows other issues to go out of focus. The basic advantage of an eclectic approach is the possibility of combining depth and breadth to the greatest extent possible, by selecting

from each tradition what is done especially well. In particular, in later chapters I will be looking at how Christianity could profit by adapting perspectives from India in regard to the nature of the soul and the structure of human destiny (karma).

Demarest is right to point out that numerous passages in the Bible support his own views. However, the question of what is “biblical” is not so easily settled. Any format of interpretation simply makes certain passages of the Bible gain importance, while others go out of focus. The basic idea of karma is not, for example, absent from the Bible. On the contrary, it is very aptly summarized in the biblical passage, “as you sow, so shall you reap.” This passage could have been emphasized by the early Church fathers, but it was not, simply because of their interpretive priorities. They wanted to promote a notion of human destiny in which Christ was the central figure, and one of the “metaphysical compliments” they wanted to pay Christ was to credit him with the ability to overcome evil on behalf of all humans. This caused the notion that each person had to work out their *own* destiny to go out of focus. This, in turn, forced them to downplay texts which emphasize a person’s individual responsibility to form their *own* destiny.

In regard to his revision of the traditional notion of omnipotence, Griffin points out that little in more than two thousand years of history suggests that the Christian God actually has controlling power, and forces

human events to occur according to a divine plan. On the contrary, God's prophets were stoned, God's "chosen" people defeated, God's son was crucified, and the suffering of the Jewish people culminated in one of the most horrible events of the modern world, the Holocaust.¹⁴ Griffin suggests that if we let the experience of the Jewish people be our guide, we may well conclude that God's power does not involve a proclivity to unilaterally control human events and force ideal outcomes to occur.

Yet with this idea in mind, we can go back to the Bible and find that in many places, this idea was actually presented. Even in Christ's lifetime, there were repeated attempts to try to get Jesus to play the role of king, to control political events, to overturn the injustices of the day. If God were in the business of personally overturning social injustices, the Roman occupation of Judea was as cruel an occupation as has ever occurred. In one massive miracle, Jesus could have transported all of the Romans back to Rome. But Jesus consistently *resisted* this interpretation of his role, insisting instead that "my kingdom is not of this world."

This illustrates the relativity of biblical support for theological views. Theologians who wanted to portray God as all-powerful and to interpret divine power as the power to control political and social events found plenty

¹⁴ EE, p. 132.

of passages to support the idea that God was Lord of creation, a powerful King whose will would be done on earth. Yet it is also possible to find support in the Bible for the opposite conclusion, that God's kingdom is not of this earth.¹⁵ This doesn't mean that the Bible is useless. It simply means that the Bible is a repository of various ideas, and like any other primary text, it does not interpret itself.

Divine Self-Limitation and Overall Value

Griffin makes a strong effort to be accurate in regard to the theologies he criticizes, yet his critiques are unsympathetic, and in many cases, this leads to certain distortions. Griffin himself admits to a tendency to collapse the distinction between a God who is said to actually control all events in life and a God who potentially *could* control all events, but has chosen not to because of respect for human autonomy.¹⁶ There is a tremendous difference between these two positions. The former is untenable, as Griffin suggests, because it means that there are no real human actors and God is the only agent. On such a view, God was the one who directly made Auschwitz

¹⁵ On the Internet (at <http://www.caltech.edu/cgi-bin/webnews/topic>) a document lists out 143 separate and major contradictions in the Bible. In support of "God is the author of evil," is Lam 3:38, Jer 18:11, Is 45:7, Ez 20:25 and Amos 3:6. In support of "God is not the author of evil," is I Cor 14:33, Deut 32:4 and James 1:13. Believers have gone through the entire list trying to show that there are really no contradictions. Lack of a common definition of evil is a main factor preventing communication between believers and critics.

¹⁶ See ER, p. 58, "Some of my statements, however...do not take into account the distinction between the free-will and the all-determining versions of traditional theism."

happen, which clearly is offensive. If God is the only real agent, evil becomes lodged directly in the Godhead, divine goodness disappears, and evil becomes permanent and insoluble.

Yet the doctrine of divine self-limitation is not nearly as weak as Griffin makes out, and it does not, as Griffin often claims, reduce back to the view that God is the only agent.¹⁷ Griffin believes that divine self-limitation would not be *essential* limitation, and that it matters little whether it is said that God *does* control all events, or only *could* control them all, but chooses not to. Griffin declares that whenever human autonomy is said to be *bestowed* by God, it has a precarious status, because God could always change His/her mind and override the autonomy.¹⁸

But this does not follow. Divine self-limitation *can* be viewed as a stable and permanent decision, which results in a *genuine* human autonomy that will not be revoked. Griffin's contention to the contrary depends on his own assumption that any bestowed autonomy could be taken back if God changes His/her mind. But why assume that God lacks the ability to make a *permanent* decision of self-limitation, resulting in a *permanent* gift of autonomy? Even a human being can make a gift in such a way that it will

¹⁷ See ER, p. 66, EE, p. 103, 111 and also his response to John Hick.

¹⁸ See EE, p. 103, 105.

not later be taken back. Even a human being can make a decision and stick to it. In fact, if a decision is a good one to begin with, sticking to it is regarded as a virtue. Griffin gives us no reason to view God's decisions as inherently arbitrary or to deny that God can set up reliable formats in which others can express themselves. One can say that finite beings are totally dependent without saying that they are endangered, for to be totally dependent is not to be in a precarious situation, provided that one is dependent upon what is *perfectly reliable*.

Griffin handles the matter his way, because he wants to emphasize what he sees as an advantage for process thought, which holds that human autonomy is an essential and inherent power which God *cannot* override. This gives an automatic explanation for God's lack of intervention to prevent evil -- God can't override human freedom in order to prevent misconduct. Yet despite Griffin, genuine human autonomy is also assured when it is said that God *could*, in theory, override our autonomy, but chooses not to by means of a permanent decision. In both cases, you have genuine human autonomy, a separate sphere for human action and creativity that will not be interfered with, even for the sake of preventing horrors like Auschwitz.

Griffin's approach assures human autonomy and explains non-intervention, but does so at the cost of God's omnipotence -- by saying there are a whole range of things God *can't* do. Divine self-limitation preserves

omnipotence, because God *can* intervene, but now explanations are needed as to why God does not intervene more often, how God can be good and yet not intervene in certain cases, and how intervention can take place without removing human autonomy. Wherever God is a world-creator, it also must be shown that the overall arrangement of things is an expression of divine wisdom. No doubt, this is a difficult task, but in my view, not impossible.

Griffin's approach allows him to avoid such difficult questions, but his denial of omnipotence involves other problems. The issues of whether a God with limited power is worthy of worship, whether we should pray to such a God, and whether such a God can assure the ultimate triumph of the good have all been widely discussed.¹⁹ But Griffin also faces a second series of problems that come about precisely because he *doesn't* posit a creator God and because he *does* successfully duck the question of whether the overall arrangement of things is good. That is, process thought simply says that there has always been God plus a separate finite realm. No one planned this overall arrangement of things, no one is responsible for it. The overall arrangement is not the result of divine wisdom -- it is simply the way things

¹⁹ Norman Geisler's article "Process Theology," in Nash's *Tensions in Contemporary Theology*, p. 235, gives a particularly complete and incisive rendering of the problems involved in the process approach.

are. This really amounts to elevating Necessity to the position which on more traditional theistic premises is occupied by the creator God.²⁰

But in relation to the problem of evil, this move leads to a serious set of practical consequences, because it robs the one who suffers of a context of ultimate value. No doubt, to establish that the overall arrangement of things is good is a difficult task, but at least if theodicy can do it, it will assure the one who suffers that their suffering takes place within a context of overall value, and thus has meaning and purpose. This is no small matter. When we sense that our suffering has meaning and creative purpose, it makes a tremendous difference in our ability to bear the suffering.

Consider the difference between the pain of childbirth and the pain of torture. In some cases, the actual pain and duration of childbirth are similar to an episode of torture. But the pain of childbirth is often quickly replaced by joy and does no lasting psychological damage. Yet in torture, the pain often continues on as a horrible psychological burden. This damage occurs because the physical pain is compounded by a massive sense of personal violation. Thus, whether pain occurs within a context where creative

²⁰ This point is convincingly brought home by W. Norris Clarke, in "Christian Theism and Whiteheadian Process Philosophy," found in Ronald Nash's *Process Theology* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1987), p. 215. Clarke complains that process thought takes us back to the old Platonic primal dualism where God is placed over/against the world, and neither of the primal poles is ultimately responsible for the other. He also makes the point that this doctrine makes Necessity the final explanatory principle.

purpose and meaningful values are expressed makes a great difference in the ability to bear pain, and in the psychological damage that results.²¹

So it is no small matter whether human suffering is said to take place within a context of overall value. To the extent that process thought ducks the question of the overall goodness of things and ascribes the overall arrangement to Necessity, the question of suffering begins to lose an essential link with meaningful value. The one who suffers cannot be told that their suffering has a dignity and a role in the outworking of creative purpose. They are simply told that there is no alternative, that suffering results from the way things are and have always been.

Yet if the message of process thought from a practical standpoint really comes down to a Stoic perspective, this perspective could have been obtained directly, without all the metaphysical paraphernalia of process thought. In fact, it is not necessary to have any concept of God at all to tell the one who suffers that this is the way things must be. Obviously, anyone who suffers has no choice but to suffer. If they had a choice, they would have chosen to avoid the suffering. So to ascribe suffering to necessity does little to relieve the psychological burden of suffering, and carries a heavy penalty

²¹ Similar considerations apply to other forms of suffering. People find it much more difficult to bear the loss of a loved one, for example, if they think that the other died "in vain." The joyous deaths of martyrs is also often mentioned in this regard.

on the practical level. We must always recall that the problem of evil is not just an intellectual exercise. Emotional factors and practical consequences are important criteria.

God's Power

We have already seen how a redefinition of God's omnipotence is central to Griffin's theodicy. This subject has been extensively pursued in books and articles, and both the objections to be made, and Griffin's own responses have become quite complex. I believe we can find the central issues most easily, however, by working with David Basinger's probing analysis, which he presented in a series of journal articles that were later published in the book *Divine Power and Process Theism*. Specifically, in his article "Divine Power: Do Process Theists Have a Better Idea," Basinger points out that in *God, Power and Evil*, Griffin supports his idea that God cannot coerce humans by saying that this is equivalent to saying that we ourselves could be completely determined by another.²² If we could be so determined, we would be totally devoid of power, but talk of totally powerless individuals is meaningless because it has no experiential basis. We know what it is like for individuals to have power, but we have never experienced

²² The summary which follows makes use of Basinger's essay in Nash's *Process Theology*, called "Divine Power," and the rewritten form of it titled "Divine Persuasion" in his own book, *Divine Power and Process Theism*. Griffin's response is in ER, p. 109, ff.

totally powerless individuals. Thus, it follows that no one, including God, could totally control another individual.²³

Griffin insists that the inherent link between being an individual and having self-determination is not invalidated by examples where it *appears* that one person controls another, such as when a parent forcibly picks a child up and puts her to bed. In such a case, the child's power of self-determination is not removed. The child's body is being coerced, but the child retains the power to resist the imposition at least mentally. The child's mind has not been changed, she does not agree with this treatment. She is still self-determining in the sense that she "makes up her own mind" about the incident and what it means.

Basinger points out that process theists have simply *defined* coercion in such a way that a person has only been coerced when they have lost all power of self-determination. This would be equivalent, in the example given, to the impossible situation where the parent makes the child into a robot, who not only instantly goes to bed, but *desires* to do so, and is also fully accommodated to the parent's wishes in all other respects. Such total coercion cannot occur. Griffin is right to point out that no individual is

²³ In my view, this argument is no model of philosophical logic. It posits that God *cannot* totally determine our actions because that is not what we see happening. Any argument from what we *don't* observe is weak. But to argue that something we don't see happening must be not occurring because of *necessity* seems to me especially weak.

powerless in this way, and if they were, we would no longer see them as an individual just on this account.

Basinger aptly points out, however, that when coercion is thus defined, no one ever coerces anyone. This is not what is *normally* meant by coercion. For most people (and probably for the child herself), if the child is picked up and forcibly put to bed, the child *has* been coerced.

More importantly, this is not the kind of coercive power that critics have in mind when they complain that God does not intervene to prevent evil. The coercion critics want to see is like what happens when a criminal is arrested and put in jail. Like the child, the criminal does retain the power to make up their own mind about what has happened to them. But because they are now in jail, they have been prevented from carrying out further criminal activities. They do retain freedom of thought, but they have been coerced in the sense which is requisite to protect other people.

So for Basinger, the crucial question in theodicy is not whether God could take away all our power of self-determination. The crucial question is whether God could control human behavior in the way that police control the behavior of criminals. Basinger goes on to raise other important points, but for now, let us focus on Griffin's response.

Griffin begins by complaining that Basinger spoke of "powerless entities" rather than "powerless actualities," and mishandled other fine

points of process terminology. Griffin's full and corrected set of distinctions divides coercion into metaphysical and psychological categories. In the metaphysical sense, there is an absolute difference between coercion and persuasion. Coercion is where the cause fully determines the effect, and persuasion is where the cause makes an influence on the effect, but the individual affected retains at least an iota of self-determination.

Metaphysical coercion can only be imposed *on* an aggregate, such as a billiard ball, which has no self or unity of experience and therefore no power of self-determination.²⁴ Metaphysical coercion can also be accomplished only *by* an aggregate, such as the billiard cue or a hand.²⁵

In psychological terms, however, coercion and persuasion are only relative differences. To persuade someone is to convince their will such that they agree with you, and to coerce someone is to override their will, so that they must do what you say whether they like it or not. Often in human life, behavior is controlled through a combination of psychological persuasion and coercion. The government wants you to pay taxes because it is good to do so, for instance, but they also attach penalties if you don't.

²⁴ See ER, p. 112. Griffin actually sees the body, like the cells or molecules, as an individual occasion of experience that can make a self-determining response. The body does have its own kind of self-determination, as for example, when one wants to do something, but one's body is too tired. Griffin is not contradicting himself, he is saying that the mother in this case *treats* the child's body as a mere aggregate, i.e., as if it were a lifeless corpse.

²⁵ ER, p. 102.

God has persuasive metaphysical power, for God is always an influence acting along with other influences. But God lacks metaphysical coercive power, because God is never the *only* factor determining an effect in the finite world. God cannot coerce even though we can, because humans use their bodies in such a way as to coerce other bodies. But God is a universal rather than a local agent, and does not have a localized body. God has no mechanism with which coercion could be applied, so God's mode of influence is always persuasive. Griffin's conclusion is that "the God of process theism cannot coerce (completely determine the activities of) any actual entities," and thus "cannot coerce the outward, bodily behavior of any beings, human or otherwise."²⁶

Still, after all these distinctions, I can't see how Griffin addresses Basinger's point. Griffin admits, as Basinger contended, that on a process view, God lacks the ability to coerce in the usual way we think of coercion -- as when a criminal is restrained from carrying out criminal acts. Yet the key question was whether God *ought* to have that kind of power, since it is said to be an important power in overcoming evil. In this regard, it is not enough for Griffin to just point out that, on his system, it is impossible that God have such power. One can grant that, and ask whether this lack represents a fatal

²⁶ ER, p. 113.

flaw in Griffin's portrait of God. Is theodicy possible if God lacks the power to overcome evil? Is it *odd* that God lacks an important power that humans have? Is a world where God doesn't prevent wrongdoing a world worth living in? Griffin addresses these issues elsewhere to the extent he can, but to many, they still provide convincing reasons to reject Griffin's system.

Another issue that Basinger tries to raise with Griffin is that the thesis "God has no body" rules out only one possible *mode* of divine intervention. It successfully rules out the idea that God could stop a burglar by putting a gun to his head and escorting him to jail, and it stops any other kind of intervention which depends upon physical action. However, Basinger points out that God can still use *mental* techniques, even on Griffin's account. Could not a psychological influence be so "persuasive" that it amounts to a type of coercion under certain circumstances?

Basinger's point is good, but his example of how this might occur is flawed. He gives the example of a woman who is having an extramarital affair, who could be coerced by a blackmailer. The blackmailer threatens to tell her husband unless he receives ten thousand dollars, and given the woman's scheme of values, she has no other choice but to submit.²⁷ Griffin replies that this is not an example of what he calls coercion, because the

²⁷ PT, p. 206.

woman in this case still has the power of self-determination, and still makes up her own mind how to reply to the threat. The blackmailer is not exercising unilateral control.²⁸ But Basinger was not saying God could coerce in Griffin's sense. He was saying God could coerce in the sense important for theodicy. Basinger wonders why God does not prevent (or minimize) particularly horrible evils by the judicious use of psychological manipulation, since process thinkers do admit God has access to mental modes of activity.

Here Griffin objects that the term "psychological manipulation" is metaphorical and emotive, and rephrases Basinger's question to a mild form in which it only asks whether God can sometimes influence persons to change their minds. Griffin's reply to this easy question is that he believes this happens all the time. God often works cooperatively, in the process scheme, to prevent evil. It is probable that God has in some cases stopped people from having affairs by inducing in them feelings of guilt.²⁹

In my view, we have here a situation where two philosophers are talking past each other, rather than communicating. Basinger's example of the extramarital affair is flawed because of course, no one ever imagined in the first place that God is like a blackmailer who will get people to do things by threatening to tell secrets. Yet Griffin's response is also poor. He says

²⁸ ER, p. 114.

²⁹ ER, p. 115.

that his process God cannot coerce even psychologically because psychological coercion always depends upon the threat of physical coercion.³⁰ Yet this isn't true, and Basinger's example, poor as it is, at least demonstrates this. In his example, there is no question of using physical coercion, the coercive threat is supposed to be that God might tell the husband, using mental means, something that the woman didn't want her husband to know.

All too often, philosophical discussions of intervention go wrong because no one bothers to take a look at what the people who *do* believe in intervention actually say. There have been untold numbers of sincere testimonials from people of all cultures, in both the ancient and modern world, claiming that God *has* intervened. If even one of these reported incidents really occurred, it would mean that Griffin's system is incorrect. Yet whether they have really occurred or not, at least they would provide a *context* for the discussion of intervention, and this in itself would change the discussions considerably. For example, many of these claims involve the idea that God intervenes through the agency of angels, which directly leads to the rather important conclusion that the whole question of whether God has a body or not is simply irrelevant.

³⁰ See ER, p. 106 for this critical point.

In the next section, I will provide a context for discussion of intervention by briefly looking at the question of angels, and giving an example of someone in modern life who claims to have had an experience of divine intervention. After this has been done, we may be in a position to press home Basinger's arguments with a force that Griffin cannot so easily evade.

Angelic Intervention

Classical theology also posits that God is an immaterial being, but in classical thought, this does not hinder God from being able to intervene in the material circumstances of human beings on earth. An ability to affect material circumstances is inseparable from the *creatio ex nihilo* idea. Obviously if God has the power to make all of the universe appear out of nothing, God also has the power to make a speeding bullet disappear, or to manipulate any other material circumstance in any manner whatever.

Yet another factor is that, in classical theology, God's will can be enforced by angels, who "come to earth" not only to make announcements, but sometimes to directly change things. In the biblical view, angels can definitely alter material circumstances, and in fact their powers to do so seem unlimited. When the apostles are locked up in prison, for example, an angel releases them by causing locks in several different locations to all spring

open at once. So even if angels are immaterial beings, they have the power to change material circumstances. They do this for a good purpose, but they don't attempt to prevent all misdeeds, or even the worst ones. Apostles are let out of prison by angels in one incident, but later apostles are not only held in prison, but flogged and put to death without any intervention taking place.

So if Griffin wants to say that God cannot intervene because God is immaterial and doesn't have a body, he also needs to supplement this with a denial that there are such beings as angels, who could enforce God's will even if God is immaterial. Griffin might be inclined to do just this.³¹ In chapter 6 of *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, Griffin traces out the reasons why he wants to reject a supernaturalistic theism and instead posit a new and postmodern form of theism in which relations between God and the world are seen as natural and lawful.

However, it is hard to see why the existence of angels would necessarily be seen as unlawful, or why it must be said that their activities would create unnatural interruptions of the context of the material world. If angels exist at all, this means that they *are* natural. Angels might just be one of the extraordinary things that happens to exist, like warthogs or fireflies or any number of other odd creatures with unusual abilities. If

³¹ Norman Pittenger, another prominent process thinker, rejects angels.

angels act to change things, or even to disrupt them, so do warthogs when they tear up the turf, or elephants when they push over trees. The only extraordinary thing about angels is that they are conscious and intelligent beings who exist without a material body. But Griffin now posits that the human soul could exist in a disembodied, postincarnate state, and thus recognizes the possibility of intelligent life with immaterial form. He also has recently posited a demonic aspect to evil, which possibly also implies an acceptance of angels.

There are also other reasons why denying angels would be somewhat out of character for Griffin. Griffin is one of the few modern philosophers who has actually taken the time to examine the evidence concerning paranormal phenomenon in general, and the near death experience in particular. Griffin found this material “both qualitatively and quantitatively suprisingly impressive,” and endorsed the notion of an afterlife on this basis.³² Of course, to endorse one form of paranormal experience is not necessarily to endorse another. Yet it is hard to see how Griffin can endorse near death experiences, and yet reject angles, since the actions and activities of angels play a prominent role in these experiences.

³² ER, p. 39.

Griffin's flexibility in regard to extrasensory perception or ESP is partly due to a distinction in Whitehead's thought between perception in the mode of causal efficacy, and perception in the mode of presentational immediacy. Because actual occasions of experience are involved in a process of prehending, they have connections with all other aspects of the world. These are real relations, and perception through causal efficacy is a web of connection between every actual occasion and every other. In higher grade individuals such as animals or humans, certain aspects of this more fundamental prehension are accomplished through the sense organs, becoming on this account quite immediate and vivid. Presentational immediacy is the process word that describes ordinary forms of sense perception, such as seeing, hearing, or touching.

Griffin believes, rightly I think, that these distinctions provide a good basis for explaining ESP. Extrasensory perception is, on Whitehead's view, actually the most basic mode of perception, the mode that would be used exclusively by occasions like electrons, atoms, or cells -- any occasions that lack sense organs. On the human level, causal efficacy is also real, but humans of course primarily undergo perception through our sense organs, in terms of presentational immediacy. In ESP, we could be simply falling back to the more basic level of causal efficacy, or rather, suddenly becoming

conscious of connections presented directly rather than as mediated by any of the sense organs.

Whitehead and Griffin also want to come down solidly on the side of empiricism rather than rationalism, and to me at least, this would imply a certain respect for experience, and a certain reluctance to deny the experiences of large numbers of people just because these experiences happen to collide with some philosopher's *a priori* reasoning concerning what is and what isn't possible. If he wants to deny the possibility of intervention entirely, Griffin owes us an explanation of how so many people could be deluded, and how he *knows* that they misinterpreted the events in which they claim to have been contacted by angels or experienced direct divine intervention.

So I do think Griffin should spell out his position on angels, and that angelic intervention should become part of the modern theodicy discussion concerning intervention. The only discussion of angels that seems to be a well-known part of the philosophical literature is Plantinga's use of bad angels to explain the ultimate origin of disorder in the natural world. If that kind of thing can be taken seriously, it is hard to see why people's claims of positive interventions by angels should be seen as taboo and beyond discussion.

In the huge and growing modern popular literature concerning angels, some of these interventions occur in a way that reinforces the argument Basinger tried to raise against Griffin, that God could accomplish interventive purposes by operating through the mental pole, by simply operating in a *more* persuasive way.

The incident I have in mind is a story told by a woman who was a passenger on a Hawaiian airline flight en route to Honolulu. On this flight, a large section of the fuselage was torn off in mid-flight, and a number of passengers were sucked out of the airplane and killed. This woman happened to be seated in the row directly behind the six rows of seats that were torn out of the plane. She reports that she normally does not leave her seat belt buckled, but that on this day, when she went to unbuckle it after takeoff, she heard a loud voice say, "No, fasten it tighter. You are in for the ride of your life." She was very startled, and looked in the seat next to her and in the seats behind to see who had spoken to her, but no one was there. Although she hesitated, she finally did pull her seatbelt tighter and leave it on. Within a few minutes, the accident happened, and she was put in the horrible position of staring directly down at the ocean through a gaping hole in the airplane, while the wind was howling by and only her seatbelt was keeping her from being sucked outside. She reports that she never believed in angels before, but has no doubt that on this critical occasion, an angel

spoke to her and saved her life. She also had the vivid impression that the airplane itself was protected by an angel as it reduced altitude and finally landed.³³

If this is really a case of angelic intervention, it raises many questions. Why did the angel not warn the six passengers who were sucked outside not to get on the airplane at all? Why did the angel not simply alert the maintenance man that the airplane was defective and avoid the entire incident? Why was no one but this woman aware of the angelic presence? These questions may indeed have answers, but in any event they do show that intervention is a more complex issue when discussed in terms of people's real experiences than it appears when discussed in terms of made-up examples or philosophical abstractions.

A psychologist might say that this voice was the woman's own deeper self, or represented her intuitive realization of immanent danger, and a theologian might say that the voice was really the voice of God, which the woman only mistook for an angel. However, whether God was acting directly, through an intermediary angel, or through a psychological function of the woman's own mind, this intervention accomplished a good purpose

³³ The woman related this story on the Oprah Winfrey show. As I said, the modern discussion of angels is a very popular phenomenon. However, I don't think anyone who saw the woman relate the story would conclude that she was a deranged, unreliable person. She was obviously very deeply moved by the experience.

without engaging in any direct form of bodily manipulation. God wouldn't need to have a body to intervene if God were to simply speak forth at critical junctures in a loud and distinct voice, as reported in this example. I would say then that since Griffin admits that God can communicate through the mental pole, Griffin still has a problem with intervention.

Basinger's example of intervention was unacceptable to Griffin because it implied that psychological manipulation can be quite coercive at times, especially if we imagine God as being the manipulator and using all of God's vast knowledge of a person's desires and weak spots.³⁴ However, there is no need to bring up the subject of coercion in order to raise the issue of intervention for Griffin. The woman on the Hawaiian airline flight did stop and think how to react to the voice, so her self-determination was not compromised by this process of intervention. In Griffin's sense she was not coerced, and she was also not coerced in any usual understanding of the term. Yet, if God were to speak up in such a loud and distinct voice more often, many human difficulties could be avoided and critics could not complain that God does not intervene to prevent evil. The question that

³⁴ Here Basinger was probably right. B.F. Skinner has to be taken as an authority in this regard, and he ultimately found that direct coercion was ineffective, because it engenders resentment. For Skinner, the ultimate coercion *was* persuasion, for only if you can convince the subject to willingly do what you want can you really succeed in controlling their behavior.

Griffin needs to face, then, is why God does not intervene *in this particular manner* more often, so as to eliminate evil.

In conclusion, if Griffin still has major problems in regard to intervention, despite his observation that God doesn't have a body, this is ironic, because he pays such a heavy price in giving up traditional notions of God's omnipotence and radical creative power. He loses a lot of his potential audience by so changing the conception of God, and yet from the standpoint of the problem of evil, his only benefit is a stronger position relative to intervention. If, after all these problems, Griffin still has difficulties concerning intervention, he would seem to have made a poor trade.

Creativity and Coercive Power

The discussion so far has given us some tools with which to discuss intervention, and helped us see that intervention really poses many questions, depending on what type of intervention the critic has in mind. Process categories can still be useful in discussing intervention as it applies to a traditionally omnipotent creator God, for it is one thing to ask why God doesn't intervene *physically* to prevent evil, and another thing to ask why there is not more of the psychological type of intervention along the mental pole, such as was just illustrated.

The question as to why God doesn't intervene to prevent evil by means of coercive power is the cruder form of the question. Even if one poses that God is omnipotent and can accomplish all things, this does not necessarily mean that we should expect to see God vacuuming our rugs, cleaning our houses, repairing our roads -- or doing the work of a policeman. The physical work of forcibly stopping someone who is intent on doing harm is a human task. We might like to get God to do any number of our jobs for us, but whatever God's power is, it simply is not a handy type of power like electricity that we can harness and employ to accomplish our ends.

When discussing intervention, critics often simplistically transfer to God notions of goodness and power, and sets of duties and obligations, that only make sense for human beings. This is what is really at stake in Griffin's observation that God has no body -- an observation which is also relevant to the traditional theistic God. The fact that God has no body is just of many indicators of a huge difference between God's mode of existence, and the way that human beings exist.

On no issue more than intervention is the attempt to apply human standards of morality to God, without any adjustment at all, so blatant. One of the phrases in which this attempt is made is often repeated in philosophical literature, when critics proclaim that God must have a "morally sufficient reason" for allowing each and every instance of evil. God would

indeed have to have morally sufficient reasons -- if God were a human being, with human powers, subject to human morality in *all* respects. There have, of course, been many historical attempts to make of God a bulwark of this or that moral system. However, in my view, while there may be a few moral principles such as "do unto others" which are so fundamental and unquestionably right that they could plausibly claim divine sanction, such sanction does not extend to *systems* of morality or groups of specific moral rules. I find many reasons to question whether God even *endorses* systems of human morality, let alone is subject to one of them.

The main point is that God is not a human being. We should not *expect* God's power, God's outlook, or God's activities to be identical to those of a human being.³⁵ In the problem of intervention, especially on the crude version of it, the basic expectation is that God should function like a policeman and manifest the forms of power we expect from a good policeman. Presumably, after putting a gun to the crook's head, but before escorting them off to jail, God is supposed to tip his hat to the adoring innocent victim, and say "It was nothin, mam. Just doing my job."

³⁵ In classical theology, and often in modern discussions as well, this issue is usually covered at the beginning of the discussion, when the very nature of "God talk" itself is established. One of the most adequate and useful of the Thomistic doctrines is that of analogical predication, which has major implications for intervention.

But this *isn't* God's job. It is the job of a human policeman. The goodness of a thing and the kind of power we should expect to see it manifesting are very much related to the *kind* of thing it is. We can't say that God lacks power if God doesn't do the job of a policeman, anymore than we can say that lacks power if God never acts like a good real estate agent, or never seems to get clothes as clean as does a Kenmore washing machine. Every finite thing that exists has its own form of power, and none of these forms of power have much in common with infinite power.

Infinite power is not an idea that we are likely to understand readily, and a certain vagueness in this notion is inevitable. Yet on traditional theistic premises God creates the universe *ex nihilo*, that is, out of nothing at all. We have no precedent in human life for this type of creativity. It is a trick when the magician appears to create a rabbit *ex nihilo* in a hat. The sense of amazement at seeing such a trick partly comes from our knowledge that most human forms of creativity involve re-shaping materials that are already present. The sculptor creatively rearranges a hunk of marble, turning it into a pile of chips and a masterpiece, the painter creatively rearranges paint, taking it out of tubes and applying it here and there on a canvas. The closest we come in human creativity to what *creatio ex nihilo* would represent may be in the activities of a novelist, who does in a sense

make fictional characters appear that did not exist before.³⁶ It is true that the novelist may base a character on someone they have known, and in one sense is simply shaping and rearranging words. But in another sense, when the imagination works, its products can be startlingly new, and the novelist's characters may have a dynamism of their own.³⁷

So it is probably in the works of the creative imagination that we humans come the closest to manifesting something similar to divine power, and it would be from this realm that helpful analogies to God's power could best be drawn. Yet it seems impossible to get critics, or even many theologians, to recognize creativity as God's central trait, or to think through examples of creativity as part of the effort to understand God's actions.

Parents also exhibit radical creativity in the sense that they make a child exist who didn't exist before. God as father is a familiar analogy, and these days the analogy of God as mother is also being used in creative ways. However, it is rarely observed that God could be *like* human parents precisely in that God is unable to "live someone else's life for them," and thus must sometimes stand by helplessly while a son or daughter makes grave

³⁶ One of many places where the point is made that it is in our *creativity* that we are most like God is in Thomas Morris' essay, "God and the World," which appears in Nash's *Process Theology*, p. 304.

³⁷ Because of this, it need not be said that the novelist "completely controls" the actions of their characters. Novelists can also "care for" their characters deeply, but still put them in all kinds of difficulties and even let them die in the end.

mistakes or brings on great harm. Parents, too, are often unable to intervene. God was given such a poignant parental role in the parable of the prodigal son. In this parable, it can be assumed that the father did have the power to *force* the son to stay at home. But the father didn't *exercise* that power. Why? Because the son had the right to make his own decisions. The essence of the free will defense is summarized in that single parable.

A factor that complicates the intervention issue is that while coercive power can be *useful* upon occasion, it has been vastly overrated as a way of proceeding in life and obtaining good results. If a thug is about to commit a mugging, we do need to stop them if we can. But coercion to prevent a crime is a case of something intrinsically evil which has a good instrumental effect. Such coercion has a cost. It is not good to overpower people and throw them in jail. It may be better to coerce a criminal than to let an innocent victim be harmed, but no occasion involving coercion can ever be a positive occasion in all respects.

Process thought has, in general, made a valuable contribution by pointing out the limitations of coercive power. Coercion is not inherently creative. Coercion never makes something new and valuable exist, it never *creates* something that didn't exist before. It's only possible role is preservative, to prevent a loss of what might otherwise be destroyed or compromised. If there were no threat in the first place, there would be no

positive role for coercion whatsoever. So coercion is stopgap, compensatory, reactive, partial and noncreative, even in its best forms of expression. Rather than complaining that God does not act coercively, perhaps we should take God as an example, and make less use of it ourselves.

Yes, something has been accomplished if an attacker can be stopped from hurting a victim. But the very nature of the coercive method limits the good effect. Simply because the criminal's mind is *not* changed, the task left undone is far greater than the task that has been accomplished.

What would be true power, in such a situation, would be the ability to create a new set of relationships among everyone involved, such that the would-be attacker no longer feels desperation, negativity or hatred but actually wants to be a part of the society and to contribute positively towards it. *That* kind of situation could never be obtained by overriding a person's will, by meeting force with greater force. It would have to be accomplished with persuasive means.

We widely believe in our society today that persuasion is not an effective form of power. We believe that only physical force counts, that each is locked against the other in a pitiless form of Darwinian struggle. And yet, if we approach things this way, how exactly does our set of values differ from that of the criminal? This person, too, is simply attempting to gain what they want by force, and also believes that only force can be effective.

Of course, when persuasion is attempted apart from any form of loving intent, it certainly will fail. And the firm belief in coercive methods itself functions so as to inhibit interest in persuasion, to leave much in this area undone, to force the society to not put time, effort, money, or creative thought into enhancing its effectiveness.

But the point here is not to try to establish how, exactly our society could be transformed if we were to place less emphasis upon coercive power. The point is that when any human community defines power as coercive, sees each as struggling against each in pitiless competition, and locks up one portion of society -- the "bad guys," it loses the resources that must be devoted to keeping those "evil" elements repressed. And it also loses any potential positive benefits that might have been created by the people who are locked up.³⁸ This is a double loss. Such a double loss will always be characteristic of any "house which is divided against itself."

On the other hand, if everyone in a society *wanted* to make positive contributions, no energy, time and money would need to be spent on coercive restraint. A fully integrated society of this kind may not be possible, but if it

³⁸ According to a recent report by the Sentencing Project, a nonprofit Washington research group, more than one third of all black men between the ages of 20 and 29 years in the United States are now in jail or under probation. Incarcerating and supervising these men now costs about \$6 billion dollars annually. For the same cost, the men could have been given college educations or each of them could have been put through medical school, an alternative that would obviously be more beneficial both to society and to the individuals themselves. My argument here is not as abstract as it might seem.

could occur, it would be a healthier, wealthier and happier society than any divided one. Such a society would have to achieve this integration through persuasive means -- for the moment someone was no longer persuaded, the moment they wanted to oppose, rather than join, the common good, they would have to be restrained, and the society would be back to the position where it must tie up resources to achieve coercion.

So the greatest form of power that we can *imagine* is persuasive. If this kind of persuasive power were available, it would be far superior to coercive power, and would in fact make coercive power unnecessary. This line of thought is just one of many ways to demonstrate, even without process assumptions, that coercive power is not the greatest imaginable power.

The Battle of Good and Evil

Another issue that relates to intervention is the definition of goodness. In this regard, it is important to examine John Mackie's apparently simple and straightforward principle that "good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can."³⁹ This definition has never, to my knowledge, been challenged, and in fact has been widely repeated. Everyone who wants to approach the problem of evil from a logical standpoint must at some point seek to establish that God's goodness operates

³⁹ See Mackie, John L. "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955), p. 200-212.

so as to defeat evil. Otherwise they cannot show a contradiction between God's goodness and the existence of evil. If a good thing cannot be defined as attempting to eliminate, prevent or overcome evil, then the whole intervention issue has to be rethought.

But I *do* challenge the idea that goodness is to understood or defined in terms of eliminating evil, especially by attempts to defeat evil in direct physical confrontations. This is not even true of human goodness, let alone God's goodness. If humans are meant to define themselves as spiritual warriors who confront and destroy evil, then what becomes of Matthew 5:39, "Do not resist one who is evil" or the "love your enemies" message that we find in Luke 6:25? In my opinion, the spiritual outlook differs from the secular very sharply in this regard. The whole projection of a situation in which good and evil are locked in battle is secular. It has been presented in some theological circles, but when this occurs, theology is just not functioning at its best.

This is why I paused to compliment Griffin earlier for his observation that goodness has to be understood in positive terms, in terms of what it accomplishes creatively, not in terms of what it opposes or prevents. In actuality, the idea that good and evil are locked in battle is extremely dangerous -- this idea itself is the source of many of our modern problems. The idea that good must *define* itself in terms of this imagined struggle and

confrontation is worse yet. It is the result of sheer projection, projection such as has been extensively documented in the Jungian tradition in regard to the phenomenon of the "shadow."⁴⁰ The dangerous aspect of this projective process is that nobody, no matter how abominably they are behaving, lacks the capacity to convince themselves that they are good, and that the horrors they perpetrate are justified because they are done to destroy evil.

A poignant example of this occurs in the biography of Saddam Hussein, who was in one point of his career a kind of "enforcer" for his political party in Iraq. In this role, he applied the most hideous of tortures to countless victims. One day, he noticed that someone he knew from childhood was being brought in and strapped to a table. "No, stop!" he shouted, "Let that man go. He is a good man." Even in the act of applying torture, Hussein remained in his own mind very much a good man, who was only doing what was necessary to destroy evil. The minute he saw someone he could not identify as evil, he released him.

The battle of good against evil is a pervasive myth in modern life, as illustrated recently by Ronald Reagan and his much publicized battle against the "Godless empire" of communism. It is the theme of the simplistic Westerns, where the cowboys once wore white hats and black hats to make

⁴⁰ John Sanford's book, *Evil: the Shadow Side of Reality* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) is one of many books that discuss evil in terms of the shadow aspect of Jungian psychology.

the roles clear, it is the theme of Star Wars, it is the theme of *every* war. All wars are battles of “the good guys” against the bad guys, and the ironic aspect is that every participant on both sides sees their side as good, and the other as evil. Without this projective process, war would be impossible. The moment we accept this flattering and deceptive goal of becoming the “noble warrior” who defeats evil (the evil of others) we have become part of the problem rather than part of the solution. Our noble intentions will all be subverted and redirected. No war against evil can succeed in destroying evil. On the contrary, wars against evil simply multiply evil.

From a spiritual standpoint, there is no *need* to war against evil, because evil is self-defeating. Ample provision for evil’s undoing has been built into the structure of existence. The notion of karma to be introduced as part of this theodicy effort very much functions to relieve the sense that evil is wild and out of control, such that special forms of stopgap intervention are necessary. On the contrary, when evil occurs, the persons involved automatically activate processes that will ultimately lead to the resolution of that evil. Our human responsibility is not to enroll ourselves in grandiose mythological “battles” with evil, to join in cosmic battles against the Dark Empire. Our human task is to function creatively and to love others.

Even when a policeman does successfully prevent a crime, he or she does not prevent evil -- for evil manifests in the criminal’s very predatory

intention. We have no obligation to defeat the evil of others, and we don't even have a direct obligation to prevent evil from gaining a foothold in ourselves. The task of refusing to allow "me" to become evil is not one of the tasks of human goodness. It is not a task because it is not something that can be directly accomplished. The prevention of "my" evil can only occur obliquely, it can only happen as a byproduct, an added benefit that accrues when there is a full engagement with positive and creative pursuits.

To the extent we enthusiastically pursue positive goals, we present no "opening" through which the insidious, the twisted or the destructive can gain a foothold. But if the avoidance of evil is made a goal, it only increases the concentration on evil, and this has the effect of multiplying evil. Evil thrives on being opposed.

So a good thing *cannot* be defined as something that seeks to eliminate, oppose, or overcome evil. Rather, a good thing must be defined as something that strives to create. A good person is not one who succeeds in stopping as many bad people as possible. A good person is a person who loves.

Conclusion

In a sense, traditional theology has fewer problems than does process thought with intervention, because traditional theology doesn't have to deny

the countless reports from people throughout history who claim intervention has occurred in one way or another. Most of these do not, of course, involve God intervening in the crude sense of taking up a material body and using force to prevent some mishap. The means used are usually more subtle, like the voice warning the woman on the Hawaiian airplane.

Traditional theology still must explain why God does not intervene more by speaking up loudly at critical moments, as in this example. But in this regard the questions of human receptivity and mental preparation become important. Interventions are reported as happening both to people who believe in God and pray for intervention, and to those who aren't believers and haven't asked. Why one believer has an interventive experience while another does not can no more be answered than why one unbeliever gets an experience but others do not. Intervention along the mental pole is *intervention mediated through a human mind*, so beliefs and stages of preparation necessarily play an important role.

Intervention issues in this regard become very individual, and go into subjective realms where the appeal to the unknown is not at all forced or artificial. We don't even know why one woman may be prepared to be a good mother at age 13, while another is not prepared for the role at age 30. If we can't explain our preparation for common experiences, there is no reason to

expect we can explain why a particular person is or isn't prepared to have a spiritual experience.

Because belief and personal preparation plays so large a role, it is not clear that intervention can even be approached as an abstract topic. Usually, the critic wants to take their own beliefs and definitions as the standard, and their argument comes down to "Because I have not had such experiences, I disbelieve those who say they have, and I don't believe interventive experiences are possible." To this, the believer can simply respond, "Well, I *have* had such experiences, and I *do* believe in God and I also believe that some of the interventions that others report may be true."

It is not clear that there is any way to mediate between these two positions. Yet in the Christian tradition, Jesus was represented as frustrated with the "unbelieving generation" of his time, and as refusing to do interventive miracles in order to prove God's existence. So unbelief is definitely presented as a barrier to experiencing intervention. From the Christian standpoint, it can be said that if the critic has not taken practical *measures*, such as prayer and mediation, which would make an experience with intervention more likely, they are in a poor position to testify that intervention is impossible. You can't erect barriers to having an experience and then pass yourself off as an expert on that experience. There are many things that we cannot experience if we believe we can't.

While theodicy has no reason to deny intervention, it must admit that intervention is sporadic. Intervention is not a regular and public occurrence, which it would be if God were busy enforcing a policy of unilaterally reducing the total amount of moral evil in the world. In most reported instances of intervention, the event is private, and the purpose of the “outbreak” appears to be that God has decided to self-reveal to a particular person. Overcoming danger or difficulty seems to be done not so much to eliminate evil, as such, but rather to provide a tangible and unusual gesture, in a particular time and place, to prove that a particular person is loved.

Perhaps then, intervention along the mental pole occurs when particular human beings arrive at certain stages of readiness, and perhaps if we had different beliefs, intervention would be more frequent. The critic is right to point out that God follows no policy of systematically eliminating moral evil. But whether God *ought* to follow such a policy is another question. Theodicy must argue that the claim God *ought* to do so is based upon an illegitimate attempt to transfer to God obligations and duties which are characteristic of human beings. The process position that God *cannot* intervene is fraught with contradiction, and is additionally too distant from the idea of God which has become meaningful in the Western world.

CHAPTER 3. GENUINE EVIL

A set of distinctions concerning the nature of evil plays a central role in David Griffin's analysis of both traditional and modern forms of theodicy. Griffin accuses Augustine, Aquinas, Maritan, Journet, Luther, Calvin, Leibniz, Barth, Hick, Ross, and most of the personal idealists of constructing theodicies that are inadequate because they fail to recognize the reality of "genuine evil," as he defines it.¹ His definition varies little in its different formulations:

By genuine evil, I mean anything, all things considered, without which the universe would have been better. Put otherwise, some event is evil if its occurrence prevents the occurrence of some other event which would have made the universe better, all things considered, i.e., from an all-inclusive, impartial viewpoint.²

By genuine evil, I mean evil that would retain its evilness when viewed from an all-inclusive perspective. To believe in genuine evil is to believe that some things happen that, all things considered, should not have happened; the world would have been better if some alternative possibility had happened instead.³

I see a certain circularity in this definition, because Griffin uses terms like "worse," "better," and "bad" in defining evil. If we ask someone to define

¹ ER, p. 80.

² GPE, p. 22

³ ER, p. 3.

evil, and they say “Evil is something bad,” then of course, we will have to ask what they mean by bad. If they then say that by bad they mean something bad on the whole, bad overall, bad for the universe, then we can only say that this also assumes that we know what he means by bad in the first place. To this, he replies that what is bad is what is *worse* than what might have happened if the bad thing hadn’t happened. But after all this, we still have our original problem, because worse just means “more bad.”

Also, Griffin here defines evil as a *comparative* term. An event is evil by comparison with another event that might have occurred instead. But it is always problematic to compare an actual property with an imagined one. What imagined one? Does Griffin really mean that anything is evil if we can imagine that something better might have taken place instead? Shakespeare wrote a fine play when he wrote “Hamlet,” but I can imagine that he might have written a better one instead. Beethoven’s fifth symphony is a nice piece of work, but I can imagine that a better one might have been written instead. No matter how good something is, we can *always* compare it with something we imagine might have been better. This would seem to imply that, on Griffin’s view, everything that happens is evil.

We will notice other problems with this definition as we proceed, but for now, let us try to see this definition from Griffin’s own perspective. He wants his definition of genuine evil to be contrasted in certain ways with

apparent evil and *prima facie* evil. *Prima facie* evil refers to anything that appears to be evil at first glance, from a partial perspective, or within a limited context. When we are confronted with an instance of *prima facie* evil, Griffin tells us that we must reflect and decide whether the badness of the event is compensated by the goodness to which it contributes. If so, the event ultimately made the world better, and so it isn't *genuine* evil. In such a case, the event was only an example of *apparent* evil.

Griffin's threefold distinction between *prima facie*, genuine and apparent evil depends upon an underlying twofold distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value. Something is good intrinsically if it is good in and of itself, and things are intrinsically evil if they are evil in and of themselves. But the instrumental goodness or badness of something is relative, and concerns consequences for others. Something that is bad in itself, such as the death of a deer, can be good instrumentally, that is, good for the cougar who killed it.

For Griffin, the relativity of instrumental value is what requires that *prima facie* evil be subdivided into genuine evil and apparent evil. He says:

Some events that are *prima facie* considered intrinsically evil, such as sin or suffering, may be regarded as really being good "in the long run." For example, it may be judged that the suffering a young woman experienced helped make her much more sympathetic to others than she would have been

otherwise, so that it was really good, all things considered, that she underwent the suffering.⁴

Notice Griffin's phrase "really good," for his position is that the extrinsic goodness of an event is enough to override the intrinsic evil quality. He sees an event that is intrinsically evil but instrumentally good not as a mix of good and evil, but rather, as "really good," that is, as good as such, good according to the wider view that includes the consequences.

Also, events which are judged instrumentally evil in a limited context may be judged instrumentally good if they are seen in a larger context. Griffin gives an example of this by speaking of a heavy rainfall. This may prevent some people from taking a vacation, which would be bad. Yet despite this, the rain may be justified if it saves food crops in the region, which are necessary for the health and well-being of the population as a whole. Another example is that a minor catastrophe may cause people to take precautions so as to avoid major catastrophes in the future. If so, the minor catastrophe can be regarded as a "blessing in disguise."

On the basis of these distinctions, Griffin condemns any theodicy which uses the greater good defense in any important, overall way. To use this defense is to assert that all the evil which happens contributes to a final state, such as beatitude, which is of great enough value to compensate the

⁴ GPE, p. 22

evil. But this is to deny genuine evil, for by Griffin's definition genuine evil makes the world worse than it might otherwise have been.

So if evil is an *ingredient in* a greater good, or a *necessary preliminary* to a greater good, we were speaking wrongly to refer to it as evil to begin with. Rather than being bad, even as it happened it was a "blessing in disguise." The greater good defense reduces all *prima facie* evil to merely apparent evil. But if all things contribute to the ultimate good, then nothing that occurs really and truly makes things worse.

According to Griffin, there are a number of "common notions" which all people agree with in practice, even if they deny them verbally.⁵ An example of a common notion would be the idea of causality. We know people really believe in causality because their actions show it. They presuppose that they are influenced by others and also able to influence others. So even if people deny causality (as Griffin claims that Hume did), this is a purely verbal denial which is in fundamental contradiction with an underlying assumption which everyone holds to the contrary. Freedom, the existence of a real external world, and the idea that the world would be better without evil are all examples of common notions. Griffin insists that any adequate

⁵ EE, p. 116.

philosophy or theological position must be compatible with fundamental common notions.

Although he admits it can be difficult to formulate common notions precisely, Griffin takes his stand on this common sense notion that *genuinely* evil things happen in the world. To stay in accord with common sense, we must declare that the harm from evil is permanent, irrevocable, and beyond the range of any possible healing or any possible justification. If a philosophy or theology will not acknowledge evil as ultimate in *all* respects, then, Griffin will claim that it denies genuine evil and is inadequate.

Intrinsic Elements in Evil

Most of the philosophical debate concerning Griffin's definition of genuine evil centers on a single, critical category -- that set of events which are intrinsically wrong, but which lead to good consequences sufficient enough to "outweigh" the harm. As mentioned, Griffin wants to insist that such events are "really good" and only constitute apparent evil. Yet when he thus makes instrumental roles and a calculation of consequences the criteria of what is genuinely evil, I believe Griffin loses all the support he claims to have in "common notions." After all, most of us see a murder as genuinely evil, in and of itself. The murder could lead to some good consequences. For example, the murderer might be paid for the murder and use the money to

feed his family. But this doesn't mean that common sense requires us to calculate that three fed children outweigh one dead victim, and so the murder was "really good."

So there is also common sense support for the idea that what makes something evil is an *intrinsic* quality, the fact that it is an act of deliberate harm right at the time it occurs, quite apart from any further consequences. Kant developed this view thoroughly and rigorously. We humans have to respect the integrity of other humans, because it is right to do so. If we violate the integrity of others, the violation is wrong *regardless* of consequences. Also, if we act from low motives, such as hatred, envy, spite, or malice, our actions are wrong even if we don't achieve the bad effect we intend. Even if we end up accidentally doing some good to the other despite our desire to harm them, our act is morally evil because of its foul *intention*.

The term "genuine" should be used to point to the most central and defining feature of evil. But the consequences of an evil act are not the most essential features of the act, and cannot form a criteria of evil. This is because the consequences vary with the perspective we choose to emphasize. When an event is intrinsically bad, such as the death of a deer (we'll assume this is bad for the deer), it can be instrumentally bad (bad for the deer's fawn) and also be instrumentally good (good for the cougar), all at the same time. Events can also be intrinsically good (telling the truth), but be

instrumentally bad (bad for the confessing criminal) and also instrumentally good (good for the victim who recovers his money because of the confession).

So instrumental considerations go all over the place, they vary with the point of view, and who we think of as being affected. No one of these points of view is ever final. If we had to gage whether or not an event is genuinely evil by looking to instrumental considerations, we would never be able to say that anything is definitely and without reservation evil. We can never finish totaling up all the possible consequences.

We can't solve this problem, either, just by positing a larger and impartial or objective perspective from which the consequences *can* be added up. God might have such an impartial and perfectly informed perspective, but that doesn't do us humans any good. As Griffin himself wants to insist in other contexts, no human can claim to mediate or access God's viewpoint in entire purity.⁶ Even when a human mind mediates a divine revelation, the human mind invariably introduces a subjective element, acts as a filter, and distorts to some extent, be it great or small.⁷ A human perspective is always a partial view, composed of a particular range of knowledge, constituted by a

⁶ See *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, p. 9, "None of us has that all-inclusive, impartial perspective which is to be ascribed to the divine center of reality alone. We necessarily see reality from a particular perspective, which both selects and distorts while it reveals..."

⁷ This is why there cannot, for Griffin, be such a thing as an infallible revelation, and the claim to know God's will in infallible scripture must be rejected. See ER, pp. 50-51.

given set of beliefs, and emphasizing a particular set of values. In short, no human is God, and no human has access to an all-encompassing standpoint.⁸

It is not clear that even God could arrive at a sum total of the good and evil consequences of an act and compare them like a good utilitarian. If good and evil are qualities rather than quantities, they aren't the kinds of things that *can* be added up. Further, there is no need to add up consequences, because many of the consequences are irrelevant. We don't care if a murderer got pleasure from doing his deed, and we don't care if he was able to feed his family with the money he got, we still say that his deed of murder was absolutely evil, despite all those good consequences.

So if Griffin wants to be able to say that some things are genuinely evil, perhaps his utilitarian definition of evil does not serve him well. Common sense does indicate that evil deeds always involve at least some evil consequences, but it is a great jump from that observation to the idea that evil consequences *define* an evil act. Common sense also recognizes a vital role for intrinsic elements of evil. An act which is intrinsically evil is *genuinely* evil even if it has an instrumental role in bringing about a great good. Such a thing is not a "blessing in disguise." It is evil, even if it does lead to some good effects along with the evil effects it most certainly has.

⁸ Although *claiming* to be God's agent is one of the ego's favorite recreational activities, since it has the wondrous effect of making the ego appear to be absolutely right.

Philosophical Debate

John Hick is one of the targets of Griffin's analysis, but in his reply to Griffin's critique, he doesn't object to the utilitarian quality of Griffin's definitions. Hick simply points out that Griffin presents the categories of "genuine" and "apparent" evils as if they were mutually exclusive, i.e., an evil must be seen as either genuine or apparent, as *either* making the world worse than it could otherwise have been, *or* as contributing to a greater good.⁹ This is an artificial choice, Hick says. All evil makes the world worse than it would have been if that evil had not existed. Otherwise we should not count it as an evil. Still, Hick insists, it may nevertheless be the case that all evils ultimately contribute to a greater good in that they are part of the actual process of the universe which is heading towards the limitless good of the unending joy of perfected spiritual life.

So Hick wants to assert that evil is *both* something that makes the world worse than it could otherwise have been, and *also* is part of a creative process which is leading to a limitless good. Stephen T. Davis also protests that Griffin's use of the term "genuine evil" is simplistic and unfair.

⁹ See EE, pp. 122-123, and also Griffin's response on p. 129.

Griffin's response to these protests shows the extent to which his definition of evil is designed to exclude the greater good defense. He directly addresses his opponent's concepts of a limitlessly good end state:

Hick and Davis evidently think they can, without contradiction, affirm that genuine evil exists and yet that all evil will be used to contribute to a state better than which none is possible. Hick's affirmation is clearer, as he speaks of a "limitlessly good end-state." If it is "limitlessly" good, there would seem to be no possible state that would be better. Hence, none of the evil is genuine -- it does not result in the world's being a worse place overall than it could have been. Davis is less clear, speaking of "the great good of the kingdom of God." If he means this to be the greatest possible state of affairs (or at least *one* of the greatest possible), then he too has denied the genuineness of evil -- all evil is merely apparent. But if he means only that the kingdom of God will be a great good, but less great than it could have been, then he should tell us why his God is perfectly good if this God allows the world to come to a worse conclusion than would have been possible. Why didn't his God use the divine omnipotence to bring about the best possible result?¹⁰

At this point, the debate in *Encountering Evil* ends, but later the discussion is continued. Process humanist Robert Mesle, in his book *John Hick's Theodicy*, devotes a chapter to genuine evil, giving a strong endorsement to Griffin's definitions. At the end of the book, John Hick provides a further response. Mesle, like Griffin, believes that the definition of evil should be a commonsense affair. "We all believe in evil," he says, "We believe most pain is needless, so we all try to prevent or relieve it. That we

¹⁰ EE, p. 129.

try to stop rape, use anesthetics and stop a child from running in front of a car shows that we believe that bad things happen and that we should try to prevent them if we can.”¹¹

Mesle tells us that this means that almost everyone functionally rejects traditional Christianity to the extent that it implies that nothing is ultimately evil, that “all things work together for good,” that “all manner of thing shall be well” (one of Hick’s favorite phrases). If we really thought that every pain, from a skinned knee to child abuse would eventually play a positive role in bringing people to the limitless good of salvation, Mesle says, it would be the end of ethics. People would think there could be no ultimately bad choices, no ultimately bad actions, no ultimately bad consequences. We would have no reason not to inflict harm or let people starve, because we would know that whatever experience our victims have must eventually play a positive role in their soul-making process. Mesle even asserts that if someone really didn’t believe in genuine evil, they would no longer see any ultimate evil in Auschwitz, and all the rest of us would view that person as criminally insane and incompetent to discuss theodicy.¹²

¹¹ JHT, p. 38

¹² Griffin also remarks (ER, p. 14) “The realization that this traditional view of God implied that Auschwitz must finally be regarded as good is what led Rubenstein to renounce theism.”

Of course, the idea that even Auschwitz must be seen as ultimately good *is* offensive, but the positions being so vigorously attacked here are a melange of Augustinian arguments and Hick's positions. It was Augustine who put forward the aesthetic argument, which suggested that evil is like the dark colors which are an important part of the overall painting, and thus evil should be seen as an actual *ingredient in* the good. It was Augustine who said that according to God's standpoint there is no evil at all, which implies that if we just *rise to an expansive enough view*, we will get over our *mistaken idea* that certain things are dramatically and irrevocably wrong. When Griffin gives the example of the rainstorm, which is bad from the standpoint of the disappointed vacationer but good from the overall standpoint, he refers to this Augustinian argument that evil is a mistaken notion due to limited vision or partial perspective.

Griffin and Mesle are right to attack these arguments, which do lead to offensive conclusions and cannot be supported. But Hick also rejects these Augustinian arguments. Summarizing his view of the Augustinian theodicy, Hick declares that "the whole aesthetic or quasi-aesthetic understanding of the perfection of the universe is sub-personal in character."¹³

¹³ EGL, p. 195.

It is vital to see that the word “ultimate” is ambiguous, and when Hick says that all evil is part of a process which will *ultimately* lead to an infinite good, this is not the same as saying that any particular evil deed or horrendous event is not *ultimately* wrong. An evil deed can be thought of as ultimate if it has no resolution *within the framework of this life*, or if it destroys the ego personality who lives this life. But the religious assertion is that this life *itself* is not ultimate, that the ego personality *itself* is not ultimate. The religious vision includes notions like eternity, eternal life, and the soul. When these are spoken of as ultimate frameworks for spiritual experience, the word “ultimate” is being used quite differently.

This is why, in the closing pages of *Evil and the God of Love*, Hick posits two standpoints. In one standpoint we limit consideration to what is apparent within the boundaries of this life, and in this regard, evil is “bad, harmful, destructive, fearful, and to be fought against as a matter of ultimate life and death.”¹⁴ Within the framework of this life, and to the ego personality living this life, evil consequences obviously can be ultimate, in the sense that they can result in death. An evil deed can also be referred to as ultimately wrong just because it is wrong within this context. This means

¹⁴ EGL, p. 363. It is unfortunate Hick says “a matter of *ultimate* life and death.” It shows how slippery the word “ultimate” is. But Hick doesn’t mean by this that evil can destroy the soul. Hick’s word usage is careless in many places, as Mesle rightly points out, and Hick does contribute in many ways to the misunderstanding of his position.

that it is absolutely wrong, it has no good component, it cannot be justified in any possible way.

But Hick also insists that there is another standpoint, the standpoint of faith, and this standpoint incorporates perspectives which go beyond the boundaries of the ego personality and the framework of one lifetime. According to this second standpoint, “what now threatens us as final evil will prove to have been “interim evil out of which good will in the end have been brought.”¹⁵

Hick finds each perspective valid in its own way. He wants to recognize evil’s absolute wrongness and irrevocability within the framework of one life, and also to recognize that evil must also be viewed in terms of a set of ultimate considerations which have to do with life beyond death and a future completion in the Kingdom of Heaven. What is true of evil from one perspective is no longer true from the other perspective:

We thus have to say on the basis of our present experience that evil is really evil, malevolent and deadly and also, on the basis of faith, that it will in the end be defeated and made to serve God’s good purposes. From the point of view of that future completion it will not have been merely evil, for it will have been used in the creation of infinite good.¹⁶

¹⁵ EGL, p. 363-4.

¹⁶ EGL, p. 364.

Mesle asserts that in the passage above, Hick tries to “obscure a real and obvious contradiction by simply shouting both sides of it very loudly.”¹⁷ Because Hick’s standpoint of faith refers to evil as “interim evil out of which good will in the end have been brought,” Mesle tells us that Hick fits in perfectly with Griffin’s description of merely apparent evils as those that “when considered in a larger context than originally may be judged not to be genuinely evil since their badness may be regarded as compensated for the by goodness to which they contributed.”¹⁸

At this point, we can notice the tremendous extent to which the problem of evil is constituted by definitions, and controlled by underlying and usually unstated assumptions concerning the surd issues.¹⁹ What is really happening here is that Mesle rejects the idea of a life beyond death. This means that Mesle will not recognize the “standpoint of faith,” assumes that this life itself is ultimate, and sees the ego personality as the only expression of identity. Based on this, he accuses Hick of contradicting himself. But Hick’s claims aren’t contradictory, they follow upon Hick’s own acceptance of transcendent factors, of a second viewpoint relative to all of these issues.

¹⁷ JHT, p. 52.

¹⁸ JHT, p. 52. The quote from Griffin comes from GPE, p. 22.

¹⁹ Griffin himself emphasizes how the POE is constituted by definitions. See GPE, p. 20.

Even if Mesle rejects such transcendent factors, he ought to at least recognize that Hick accepts them.

The irony is that according to Mesle's set of presumptions concerning the surd issues, the problem of evil is insoluble. This doesn't in itself mean that Hick's position on the surd issues enables Hick to resolve evil, but at least he has the possibility. But to take an atheistic or humanistic position and assume that the boundaries of this lifetime are final in all respects is to make the problem of evil insoluble. Wrongs are *not* always righted within this life, and damage from evil *can* end life. So if this life itself is final, then evil does absolutely and irrevocably conquer the human spirit.

Yet if this is seen as a *disadvantage*, if a view where evil itself becomes ultimate is distasteful, then such a defect should be ascribed strictly to the atheistic or humanistic standpoint where the surd premises make this conclusion unavoidable. There *are*, after all, certain philosophical disadvantages inherent in any view that takes this life itself as ultimate, and rejects all possibility of an afterlife or other transcendent factors. One of these disadvantages is that the problem of evil becomes insoluble.

I am speaking here of the problem of evil in the broad sense, as the problem of assigning meaning of some kind to the awful reality of human suffering. Any philosophy faces this issue. Too often, the problem of evil is defined in the narrow sense, limited to the idea of possible contradiction

between human suffering and God's superlative qualities. On this narrow view, the presumption is that theism has a problem of evil, but atheism or humanism have no problem of evil. Yet atheism and humanism have a *massive* problem *with* evil, because these viewpoints contain so few resources for explaining human suffering in some sort of positive or constructive light.

The Greater Good Defense

In my view, Hick himself invited this attack, and this is because the greater good defense really is inadequate to describe the processes involved in overcoming evil. The greater good defense is a philosophical or logical notion, which involves treating evils like quantities which are available for comparison and compensation. So it was Hick who opened the door to Griffin's utilitarian definition of evil. My argument is that such a utilitarian treatment is inadequate as such, and if this is so, it affects the position of both Hick and Griffin.

The greater good argument itself is what needs to be shrunk down to size. It's fundamental basis is mathematical. It posits that good is a positive, evil a negative, and that once we arrive at totals, a great good can compensate a smaller evil and leave a remainder that is purely good. This is really how Griffin fell into the idea that intrinsic evil can completely

disappear, that is, it represents a negative quantity that can be canceled out by a greater positive quantity after a calculation has been performed.

But this is not how evil is overcome. The overcoming of evil can best be seen in terms of the analogy of evil with a wound. What needs discussion is whether we can heal from the wound, whether we can be restored to full health, and how this healing can take place. There is no point at all in trying to *justify* the wound, trying to say that the wound was really good because it led to the experience of healing, or led to some other benefit.

How we recover from evil must be discussed in terms of ideas like healing, love and forgiveness, terms which have not yet played a great role in the male-oriented philosophical discussions of this topic.²⁰ The traditional Christian understanding of the overcoming of evil has been carried on in terms of doctrines of redemption. Yet these traditional notions also complicate the discussion, because they have led to two other ideas which have gone unchallenged in the modern theodicy debate -- that the overcoming of evil is God's task, and that this task either has already been accomplished (on the cross), or will inevitably occur in the future (in the eschaton, or kingdom of God).

²⁰ There are some fine theodicies by women philosophers that do speak of forgiveness and love. See chapter 5 of Sallie McFague's *Models of God, Embodied Love: Sensuality and Relationship as Feminist Values*, edited by Paula Coeey, and Wendy Farley's *Tragic Vision and Divine Compassion: A Contemporary Theodicy*.

I believe both these dogmas make it impossible to understand the real process of recovery from evil. Evil is a personal issue, not an impersonal or mythological one, and the recovery from evil is a personal task. We humans are the victims of evil and the perpetrators of evil, and the job of healing from evil is our job. We may need God's help to complete this job, but it is our job. Evil can never be overcome in the future or in the past. The escape from evil happens through the power of forgiveness and love, and these energies must always manifest in the present moment.

Much misunderstanding has also come about through the tendency to think of the Kingdom of God as a future state, and Hick is a prime example of this trend. Yet I will propose that if this terminology is to be retained at all, the Kingdom of God must be thought of as a situation which either is the case or is not, right now, in each particular moment.

Obviously, my ideas on the nature of evil and on redemption or recovery from evil are greatly different from those which are current in the philosophical literature of theodicy. In this climate, it appears to be controversial even to state that all evil *can* be resolved.²¹ However, I wish to go even further, and to suggest that not only can all evil be resolved, all evil

²¹ John K. Roth and Elie Weisel are among the many who believe that the message of Auschwitz is that there exists evils so horrible as to be beyond the scope of any *possible* healing or resolution. People in the large "Auschwitz" contingent of the problem of evil can react with great indignation when this idea is challenged.

must be resolved, and further, that there are laws or drives within us that see to it that evil will be resolved. Eventually, I will try to adapt the Indian concept of karma and use it to explain why we have this drive to overcome evil, to describe how it functions, and to show how it does eventually lead to the healing and resolution of all evil.

For now, however, the key issue will be to define evil. How we view the nature of evil determines the other issues debated above -- how evil is carried forward into the future, and what is meant by healing from evil, or arriving at a state such as the Kingdom of God in which one is free of evil.

A Definition of Evil

We have already presented a number of reasons to reject the utilitarian definition of evil, which emphasizes evil consequences. But this does not help us much in gaining a positive understanding. I would suggest that we might begin with the following general definition of evil: *Evil is a horrific betrayal of an important human value.*

This definition restricts evil to what has traditionally been called moral evil, that is, it returns to the Augustinian idea that evil must refer to human intentional acts. It thus distinguishes evil from the category of misfortune and from the idea that our lives have important limits, such as death, or the other vulnerabilities that accrue from the biological form and

the setting of life in a material world. These later issues can be discussed, for they do affect us, and they do have a connection with human sorrow and pain. However, such discussions can be carried out quite well just using the terms misfortune, limit, sorrow and pain. We don't need to speak of evil to discuss finitude.

In this regard, I find Whitehead's definition of evil as "perpetual perishing" to be particularly puzzling.²² If the fact that all things pass is evil, why would Whitehead make the appearance of temporary occasions of experience, which rise into existence and immediately perish, the central metaphysical doctrine in his philosophy? One does not ordinarily pick something evil to be the centerpiece of one's outlook.

However, in more general terms, if it is evil, or intensely *bad* that we have a biological form, live in a world of change, or are limited in certain ways, then God is an incompetent creator. That issue can be discussed, too. Possibly God *is* an incompetent creator, and has saddled us with a terrible set-up. Or maybe God is a malevolent creator and deliberately gave us a bad deal. But if so, we need a word worse than evil, perhaps Mega-evil, to

²² Whitehead, Alfred North, *Process and Reality*, corrected edition, eds D. Griffin and D.W. Sherburne (New York: Free Press, 1978), p. 230. In "God and Evil in Process Theology," (PT, p. 131) Michael Peterson complains that process thought does not tell us why perpetual perishing is evil, and says only the *premature* perishing of things should be seen as bad.

describe this flaw.²³ Or, perhaps there is no creator, and our existences are the result of random impacts among various atoms and molecules.

But in all these cases, the badness of things is not our fault, and there is absolutely nothing we can do to change it. In short, if the very fact of our finite being is a mistake, it is simply not a mistake that lends itself to correction. Our only choices concern how to deal with this tragic predicament of our existence. We can endure it courageously on the Stoic model, or we can feel estranged because of it on the existentialist model, we can try to end it by killing ourselves, or we can search for some other reaction. These are important choices, but we only face them if we believe in the first place that our existence is a mistake. In a religious view, it is not a mistake. So it is the atheistic rather than the religious view which might define evil in this way, and which bears the burden of carrying these thoughts forward.

By emphasizing that evil must refer to something *horrendous*, the definition above reflects the fact that “evil” is our most *powerful* term of condemnation in English. This eliminates the need to even discuss issues like disappointed vacationers, skinned knees, or inoculations in regard to an

²³ With over 4,000 articles and books listed in Whitney's *Theodicy: An Annotated Bibliography*, it seems that the time has indeed come to subdivide theodicy so as to make it more manageable. Perhaps a basic division would be to discuss the wrong things humans do, in terms of the word evil, and to talk about possible wrongdoing or incompetence on the part of God using another word like Mega-evil. This would seem to be a fundamental enough division.

analysis of evil. Evil cannot be a mere disappointment, just as it cannot be a mere mistake, or a mere instance of pain. Evil cannot be a trivial harm, or result from frustrating a trivial value -- our word "disappointment" covers that kind of thing. Evil involves deliberate harm, but animals harm each other deliberately, and we don't commonly speak of the lion as being evil because it kills the antelope. Evil does involve pain, but the equation of evil with pain is simplistic, because there are good forms of pain, and good reasons why there should be pain. Evil also involves pleasure in many ways.

The most important aspect of the definition is the insistence that evil involves a *betrayal of values*. I see a value as an ideal which is appropriately embodied. Values refer to enriched aspects of experience, or to what is inherently satisfying. Ontologically, values represent the completion and successful development of innate or inborn potentials. Cognitively, values form the basis of judgments. From the standpoint of identity, our most intimate and personal acts of self-definition concern *which* values we choose to pursue and *how* we choose to pursue them.

This is partly what makes the discussion of evil so complex, because there are as many types of evil as there are types of value which *can* be

betrayed.²⁴ To establish the various categories among evils, we need only describe the various categories of value.

We could begin with personal value and personal evil, for there is such a thing as “evil in relation to myself.” Despair, self-deception, and wrongful self-destruction are all evil. Yet any of these things affects other people, for we live in a social environment. If we harm ourselves, or give up on ourselves, we make the world worse than it might have been, and violate the right that others have to enjoy the fruits of our particular form of creativity.²⁵

Evil can also occur in intimate interpersonal interactions, such as sexual relations. Certainly rape is a terrible evil, precisely because the values that it betrays are intimate and personal ones. Family abuse is also a great evil because it is a betrayal of intimate values. The sexual abuse of children is a horrible evil because it is both a violation of personhood and a betrayal of the values and responsibilities those who are older have in relation to those who are younger.

Lying is an evil because it betrays the values involved in language and communication. Some might question whether lying qualifies as horrific,

²⁴ Pain enters the definition of evil here, for we generally and rightly put a high *value* on avoiding pain. Rights also enter the definition here, because we think we have a right to pursue or create the important values. Betrayal means base abandonment or repudiation, in this case, it means deliberately doing the opposite of what would be ideal.

²⁵ Griffin was right to notice that evil always makes the world worse in some way, no matter how private it might seem. I objected only that this was not the *essence* of evil.

because lying doesn't always have the obvious ghastly quality that evils like war or torture have.²⁶ Yet horrors can be subtle as well as overt. As Gandhi and others have emphasized, truth is an extremely fundamental and important ideal, and the fact that truth can be betrayed does have its own kind of horror. Additionally, in many cases lies do lead directly to wars, murders and acts of torture. Lies are actually the partner in every crime.²⁷

Other social evils like sexism or racial prejudice and all forms of injustice are ultimately betrayals of the value of friendship or love. Indifference towards others in a social setting is also an evil, because friendship and love require active involvement. Economic exploitation, which is a sneaky and legal form of robbery, harms people and also violates their right of fair access to resources. War heads the list of political evils, but any betrayal of the public trust such as making bad laws, bias, or taking personal advantage of a public position is a violation of the values inherent in society.

Spiritual evils are also a real category. Spiritual evils involve distorting or opposing the processes by which humans live full lives and come

²⁶ Thanks to Dr. Eliot Deutsch for pointing out this potential problem.

²⁷ As is emphasized in the classic treatment of lying in Sissela Bok's work, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, (Pantheon Books, New York), lies have many insidious social impacts, and do lead directly to great suffering. A world without lies would be less painful, not more painful, in my judgment.

to be aware of God's presence. Spiritual evil has little to do with ghosts and vampires, but rather with misrepresentation or distraction from what Tillich called our ultimate concerns. So something as mundane as television could represent an important example of spiritual evil in some cases. More abstractly, dogmatism and judgmentalism are examples of spiritual evils. We have an obligation to not allow our beliefs to separate us, either from each other, or from the Most Real.

The question as to whether there is a *worst* evil is difficult, because of the many possible criteria. However, I personally regard torture as the worst evil because of the criteria of intense horror and pain. To me at least, torture represents the most inexplicable aspect of human behavior. I agree with Judith Shklar, who insists that our scale of ethical values is skewed, and that we ought to regard cruelty as the worst vice. If this is plausible, then torture could be seen as the worst evil because it represents the most intense form of cruelty.²⁸ However, war itself certainly represents an arguable candidate for worst evil, and possibly a case could be made that economic exploitation causes even more suffering than war. Evils are hard to compare because both intensity and scale have to be taken into account. Possibly it is futile to seek to identify the worst evil.

²⁸ See Shklar, Judith, *Ordinary Vices* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1984).

Evil is destructive, of course, but it is also compulsive, corrosive, and infectious. It is compulsive in the sense that it distorts the pain/pleasure mechanism so as to make further evil acts more likely.²⁹ An evil act becomes a habit just as quickly as any other habit, because evil acts do have their own forms of gratification, and we always want to repeat what we find gratifying. In fact, because evil seems to promise “easy” ways to gain our ends, it has a special compelling quality. But this compelling quality is really compulsive because all the values evil can provide are counterfeit values that don’t really satisfy. Hence they lead to immediate and automatic attempts to repeat the act as quickly as possible, to gain more of this elusive satisfaction. Evil is thus inseparable from frustration and incompatible with happiness because it sets a person on an endless treadmill of compulsive repetition.

The repetition of evil means not only that evil becomes a habit, but also that it is ultimately banal, stale, and mechanical. Only creativity is fresh or spontaneous, and evil is the dampening or stultification of creativity. There are no evil forms of beauty for this reason. Still, there is a false glamour and false allure to evil. Awakening from the false glamour of evil is depicted in books like *All Quiet on the Western Front*, or *Born on the Fourth*

²⁹ This was the real point at stake in the ancient and medieval discussion of how God “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” as part of God punishment of his wrongdoing.

of July, where men discover the difference between the glory of war and the awful banality of the actual business of killing other men.

The corrosive quality of evil has been often noted. Evil tends to “eat away” in various ways as it destroys its host, and this relates both to the distortion of vision, and to the loss of impulse control. The problem from a cognitive standpoint is that evil twists beliefs, and then twisted beliefs tend to become more distorted and convoluted. The problem from the standpoint of emotion and action is that evil lives on in terms of low emotions such as greed, hatred, despair, and cruelty, which are never-satisfied and self-perpetuating. The result is that healthy desires and life instincts become more and more rigidly channeled into inappropriate forms of expression, and we can no longer trust our spontaneous reactions.

The infectious quality of evil refers to the ability of evil to spread itself from one person to another, like a virus. Of course, like a disease, evil can also be resisted, and need not be fatal. A society or a person can recover from evil as well as being made sick. Healthy beliefs are like strong immune systems, with good capacity to reject foreign and evil suggestion. But all evil still affects others, just because everything we do and think affects others. Once anyone cheats, it is harder for others who try to play by the rules. A society can be peaceful and share its goods equitably, but once one person uses violence to gain more, then everyone who abhors violence is at a

competitive disadvantage. Once anyone lies, no one can be believed. So at the very least, our evil acts make everyone else exert special efforts, and at the worst, we do infect others.

Griffin and Mesle are right to insist that evil doesn't contribute a single thing to the good. What evil does is pose a problem, impose a wound, and represent a debt. Love and forgiveness are able to solve the problem, heal the wound, and pay the debt that evil represents. However, these tasks, when they are accomplished, accrue to the credit of love and forgiveness. Evil gets none of the credit for this creative work, even though evil sets the stage which makes this particular form of creative work necessary. If love wasn't occupied with the task of redeeming evil, it would be off creating other wondrous forms of value and would not lack an outlet. So we in no sense owe anything to evil, and evil is not an ingredient in the good, nor a contributing factor that makes the whole of things better. Even if we heal, we are not grateful for having been wounded in the first place. There is no *felix culpa*, no good beyond the recovery process other than the restoration of the capacity for creativity -- but this is still a very significant goal.

The Locus of Evil is Personal

The fact that there are personal, social, political, economic and spiritual forms of value -- and thus just as many forms of evil -- does not,

however, mean that evil lodges in institutions. Institutions can be evil, but this is because people make them this way. Evil is fundamentally personal. It begins inwardly. If people are free of evil, they create institutions that are free of evil, whereas if people choose distorted ideas and beliefs, they eventually make institutions to carry out their distorted purposes.

Thus, the locus of evil is personal. There are social evils such as prejudice, but prejudice exists only in individual human minds, and harms only individual human persons. Wars are evil collective events, but in all wars the reality is that a great number of individual humans go off and murder each other, doing so in an organized fashion, and each thinking they have a legitimate reason. The victims of war are all individual people who feel pain and suffer damage, one by one. What is meant by saying that the locus of evil is personal is that there is no general entity to which evil happens, and there are no general entities who do evil. Evil is always done by people, and it is always suffered by people. It is true that people sometimes suffer or inflict evil for social or political reasons. But the locus of evil is still personal. If there were no people, there would be no evil, whereas there could be evil even in the absence of social and political institutions.³⁰

³⁰ With two people on a desert island, one could kill the other and there would be evil. I prefer to think that a political society involves at least three. I suppose even one person on a desert island could engage in many forms of evil.

Because the locus of evil is personal, it must be seen as making its primary movement as snowballing outwards from the personal level into social and political dimensions. Evil is first of all an individual habit, then it infects the social habits called customs, and then goes to a tertiary level and infects the political habits called institutions. Prejudice, for example, begins with a personal set of twisted beliefs, but it becomes social as soon as people share those beliefs, and gain some advantage by acting on them. As this spreads, prejudice becomes a social custom, and then an institution. Slavery is an evil institution, but it is rooted in the minds and actions of individual people who want to profit through the savage exploitation of others. Even if they pass laws to make this legal, slavery remains evil. Evils are simply compounded when they attain to institutional status.

The compounding of evil occurs in a secondary loop. That is, once evil infects social custom and spreads to political institutions, a mirage occurs in which evil seems normal and, to an extent, legitimate. This tends to pass the infection of evil back in the other direction, and so a secondary loop is created in which evil institutions do influence and infect new individuals who are born into the society. This secondary loop is an important method by which evil is passed along from generation to generation.

Because of this secondary loop, it can appear that evil does lodge in impersonal sources, and that evil can be an active force even when there are

no human agents. World War One, for example, seemed to happen even though a vast majority of the humans, even those with political power, didn't want it.³¹ The institutions that existed in Europe at that time seemed to lurch forward into the war, almost of their own volition. However, these institutions themselves were the creation of fear, and had been slowly put together through millions of individual human choices. The same can be said if a nuclear holocaust ever happens because of a computer error. Those computers were invented by individuals, who were all motivated by fear and willing to cooperate in a task of setting up mechanisms capable to destroy an entire country. The money for these systems all came from citizens who were willing to be "protected" by such means.

Still, even when evil seems to have an impersonal face, the fact remains that only the individual has a conscience, and only the individual can function as the point of change. The specter of helplessness in the face of impersonal evil that so dispirits the modern world is not necessary. When individual persons of conscience questioned the prevailing institution of slavery, that institution began to collapse. Customs like the binding of women's feet in China, or sexism generally, are getting weaker.

³¹ See *The Guns of August* for a careful study of this.

Any custom and any institution is a human creation, and can be changed through human vision, creativity, and courage. Yet no institution has a conscience, and no custom or institution can be the source of its own correction. One of our greatest and most neglected responsibilities as moral adults is to question the beliefs we inherit from our particular society, and if we find any of them to be infected with evil, to free ourselves from their influence and courageously strive to change the institution itself. To do this, we must realize that the locus of evil is personal -- as close, in fact, as "me."

How Evil is Carried Forward into the Future

The problem with Griffin's distinctions between "genuine evil" and "apparent evil" is that they locate evil in objective facts rather than subjective judgment, and this means that one must ignore the roles of forgiveness and love in transforming evil. If evil happens to a totality, then there is no person to forgive, and of course, no totality can feel love or experience union with God. If evil is a set of facts, then it is beyond the reach of transformation as soon as those facts become part of the past. We can never reach a future state where the past did not occur.

This is why Griffin insists that evil must be seen as beyond the reach of any *possible* healing, any *possible* redemption, any *possible* forgiveness. For Griffin, an evil event is necessarily and mechanically carried forward

into the future, where it continues to mar and diminish all perceived values forever. And certainly such a way of speaking gives expression to our outrage at the violation that evil represents. When evil is raw and unforgiven, we want to dramatize it, to call attention to it, to awaken a dumb world to this horror and to indict a God that allowed it to occur. To dramatize evil in such a way, it seems appropriate to shout out that evil mars the universe to the end of time, to declare that it is beyond any possible redemption, to insist that it can never be healed, never resolved, never forgiven.³²

Griffin is also right when he insists that this line of thinking corresponds to how many people view evil. Many people, when confronted with a horror so massive as that of the Holocaust, will say that no power whatsoever could possibly resolve it. They would also say, as Griffin indicates, that anyone who does regard it as redeemable simply doesn't appreciate its magnitude. However, even if most people would say this, they may not be entirely right. Perhaps by saying that evil, to be genuine, must be seen as unforgivable and beyond redemption, one is expressing a small

³² Conclusions drawn from the Auschwitz material may have emotional validity, without being on that account a rich basis from which thought can proceed. Stark indignation in the face of horrific events is appropriate. However, indignation is not the *only* emotion that has validity, and indignation is creative only if it leads to something beyond itself. Indignation is not, in itself, ultimately satisfying, nor does it necessarily give us the best clues as to the nature of reality or the character of the human situation.

view of the power of forgiveness and love, rather than expressing an accurate view of the magnitude of evil.

It is true that one ascribes a staggering potency to forgiveness and love if one suggests that they can heal resentments as deep as the ones engendered by horrific events such as the Holocaust. Yet we have the right to insist that our belief that all evil can be transformed *does* express a faith in the limitless power of love, rather than expressing an attempt to trivialize or minimize evil. The religious view is not that evil is a very small thing, so therefore forgiveness and love can overcome it. Rather, religion admits that evil can be a staggering thing, yet it asserts that forgiveness and love can still overcome it, no matter how great it might be. The Biblical position is that many powers are great, but that the power of love is greatest of all.

It is easy to recognize that great courage can only be shown in the overcoming of a great fear, or in enduring through a terrible danger. To say a person has shown great courage is not to belittle the fear they overcame, or to say that the danger they faced was really a small one. So likewise, when the religious mind expresses confidence that even the worst evils can be redeemed, this is not a belittling of evil. It is rather a tribute to the power of love and forgiveness. Only if these powers are limitless can they be sufficient to accomplish such staggering and almost unimaginable tasks as

transforming and healing horrendous evils such as occurred in the Holocaust.

In asserting their view of how evil is carried forward into the future, Griffin and Mesle are probably working with ideas that do correspond to common sense. Imagine one world, World A, that leads through World War Two and the Holocaust, but eventually arrives at the kingdom of God. Then imagine a second world, World B, where there is no World War Two and no Holocaust, and this world also arrives at the Kingdom of God. Griffin and Mesle seem to consider World B to be at least better than World A. Why then did an omnipotent God not bring about World B instead of World A?

Before we can answer that, we need to know *why* World B is better than World A. Is it because the evil represented by the war and the Holocaust continues on and mars the Kingdom of God by making the experience of beatitude there less rich? Apparently this is part of the problem, for Mesle complains that Hick does not seem to think it matters how we carry painful memories into eternity. If many genuine evils are carried into infinity, he asks, what happens to Hick's claim about the triumph of good?³³

³³ Mesle, C. Robert, *John Hick's Theodicy: A Process Humanist Critique*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1991, p. 58.

Yet this isn't how Christianity describes the Kingdom of God. Even if we assume that the Kingdom of God is a future state, most theists would still say that this state is one in which a person is in mystical union with God. But union with God is an experience of such overwhelming good and such fulfilling value that there is no way to feel regret or complain that anything is lacking. Total satisfaction is all the satisfaction there can possibly be. When the cup is filled to the brim, there is no empty space for regret. The parable of selling all you have before entering the kingdom suggests that as long as you *do* have regrets, you can't enter the kingdom. If you won't sell the small treasure, you can't purchase the great one.

But there might be another reason why World B might be seen as better than World A. If we total things up to determine the "total state of affairs," we see that World A represents the Kingdom plus a horrific set of prior events, whereas World B represents the Kingdom plus a more beneficial preliminary set of events. Since the horrible events have to count in arriving at the total amount of good, and we have posited that the worlds are identical except for these horrible events, then World B must have a better *total* of good, and be at least closer to the "best possible state of affairs."

So Griffin's utilitarian view of evil is also tied in with his notion of how evil is carried into the future. A view of time is also involved, the idea that the past must be carried forward into the future in a static manner. Yet we

have just looked at some good reasons to reject this idea that evils are like quantities which can be totaled up, and that “the world” is a kind of container which holds totals of good and totals of evil. If evil, as we have proposed, is a question of values, then evil has a strong subjective component.

Because of this subjective component, the movement of evil from the past into the future need not occur in a static manner. If evil resides in individual judgments and individual memories, then other events that also occur, and other decisions that later are made can influence the interpretation and valuation process. No matter how vivid the original experience and how obvious a particular valuation or set of judgments may seem at the time, it is all subject to change. As the people involved grow and change, they will inevitably come to value things differently. Through this kind of process, evil can be transformed.

The Holocaust, for example, involved millions of people making billions of decisions and having billions of individual experiences. The evil events of the Holocaust happened to each one of these persons individually. Now, once these events finished, they were over in physical terms. So how can the evil be carried forward into the future? In a primary sense, it must be carried forward in the memory of those individual people, the ones who were actually involved. In a secondary sense, evil can also be carried forward

into the future by those who only learn about the events at second hand. Even for them, though, the evil only exists in terms of memories and judgments. These second hand memories and judgments are less reliable, because they are second hand. But they still function so as to perpetuate evil and carry it into the future.

So if evil is lodged in the personal experiences of victims and perpetrators, which means their deeds and decisions at particular times, and later, their memories and further emotions, judgments and decisions, there arises the possibility of the transformation of evil. Certainly there also exists a core group of "facts," a sheer objective record of what occurred. But this group of "facts" is unreal as soon as it is past. Its only access to the present moment is through individual memory, and memory in the present moment is to a large extent determined by our sense of valuation.

When there is still a strong sense of violation, a sense of injustice, the past represents "unfinished business," and there is regret, resentment, hate or despair. In such a case, the evil of the past is being carried into the present in such a way as to inhibit creativity and lessen present value. However, through the general process of healing, forgiveness, or resolution, past experiences lose their sting and their ability to inhibit the sense of peace and creativity in the present moment. It becomes possible to develop new interests and new orientations in the present, and even the memory of the

past begins to alter significantly. As orientation changes, we put a very different “slant” on past events, we describe them differently. Memory and valuation are intertwined, and both of them are fluid, and subject to further development.

It is bound to create misunderstandings if one wants to insist that evil can be resolved, as Hick does, but yet one remains vague on the details, and provides no careful description of just how this healing or forgiveness process can occur. Hick simply refers in vague ways to a future “infinite good,” and the Christian tradition has always posited that evil is overcome in heaven, but then been unclear about just what exactly is supposed to be going on in heaven, and just how the evil is overcome.

Mesle complains that Hick doesn't deal with the problem of how painful memories can be resolved.³⁴ However, explaining how painful memories can be resolved doesn't require reference to a future state in heaven, and it doesn't necessarily even require a reference to religion or to theology. There are many instances where people *have* found peace in their lives, despite horrible memories. There are also instances where people are overwhelmed, and are destroyed by such memories. What is critical is to find

³⁴ Actually, on page 165 of *Death and Eternal Life*, Hick does deal with how horrific memories can be resolved. He uses Dostoevski's famous example of the general who sets his hounds loose on a child, and says that once the general's soul-making process is complete, it would be appropriate for the mother and the child to forgive him.

out what process is involved, how we can be part of the first group rather than the second, and also how we can help others to achieve peace.

Traditional Views of Redemption

The Christian tradition adds to the difficulty of understanding the resolution of evil in many ways, for in this tradition, the healing of evil was tied in at an early date with the notion of redemption, which was seen as God's task, accomplished through Jesus. Redemption became the only format through which recovery from evil was considered, and it was closely intertwined with mythological considerations and various abstract doctrinal conceptions of who Christ was, who the devil was, and what exactly was accomplished in the Passion.

Two of the Greek terms for redemption, ἀγοράζω and ἐξαγοράζω refer directly to the buying and selling of commodities in the marketplace, and the New Testament usage is based upon a metaphor of spiritual purchasing. (Gal 3:13, Rev. 5:9, 14:3-4). In chapter 5 of Romans, Paul sets up a metaphor in which because of the sin of Adam, all of humanity is in slavery to sin, and can only be released through Christ, the second Adam, who spilled his blood in order to purchase the release of humanity from the empire of sin. (See especially Rom 5:12-20, and 6:17-18). In Ephesians 1:7 and Hebrews 9:22 redemption is also said to be purchased with Christ's blood, and this whole

doctrine harkens back directly to Lev. 17:11 and the ancient Jewish idea that sacrificial blood alone is cleansing. Jesus' death is thought of as a "ransom" (Mark 10:45), a "reconciliation" (Rom 5:10), a "redemption" (Rom 3:24, 8:23), and a "justification." (Rom 4:25, 5:1)

These metaphors have the effect of reifying, expanding, and magnifying evil. Evil, on the Christian view, becomes an empire, ruled by its own king, who is a diabolical, clever, and resourceful angel, fully capable of capturing humans and making them do his evil will. Such powerful evil forces are totally beyond the coping powers of mere humans, and cannot be resolved by means of reason, good example, or any other human solution. Such a powerful demonic force for evil must be conquered, defeated and destroyed, and this can only be accomplished by an even more powerful, and even more superhuman force. The phrase of Collosians 1:13-14 sums up how redemption is tied in with this whole process of dramatizing evil and transferring its resolution into a realm of mythological battle: "He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sins."

So in this early Christian development, evil becomes more and more seen as a vast mythological and cosmic event. Recovery from evil on this outlook cannot be viewed in "naturalistic terms" -- as an understandable process, one illustrated by many people in ordinary life who do improve their

behavior, grow in realization, or start to exhibit more loving and creative emotions. No, rather than being a human task and a personal responsibility, the escape from evil must be seen as a supernatural event, a miraculous event, one that can only be accomplished through the power of Christ.

Thus, Christian doctrine turned decisively towards appeal to an authority figure outside oneself in recovering from evil. Within four centuries after Christ's death, the notion that one could recover from evil on one's own became a heresy, the Pelagian heresy.

There were, of course, some weaknesses to this approach to redemption. On the one hand, it was necessary to proclaim that people are helpless slaves of sin and had no resources to cope with it, yet on the other hand, society still held people responsible for their actions, and ordinary forms of moral urging, guidance, and punishment all went on pretty much as before. The notion that Christ was the "unique and final agent of salvation" radically called into question the validity of all other religions, and created problems relative to those who die without hearing of Christ, or lived before Christ was born.

From a scriptural standpoint, it became hard to see what Jesus could have meant when he said in John 14:12 that we ourselves would do greater works than he did. Certainly, if Jesus overcame all evil on behalf of all humanity, this would not seem to leave very many problems behind for other

people to resolve. It is hard to imagine how anyone else is supposed to think of, let alone accomplish, a greater deed than that.

But perhaps the most blatant problem for those who put forward this notion of redemption is that many people who did rely upon the blood of Jesus to remove sin and conquer evil, ended up acting pretty much as they did before this great event. There was no real evidence that evil had really been conquered, as the doctrine declared that it would be. In fact, within a few more centuries the leaders of the Church, who were supposed to have been delivered by the blood of Christ from Satan's empire, were themselves perpetrating some of the most horrific evils the world had ever seen.

The Pelagian view that a human being has the internal resources needed both to choose the good and to recover from evil on their own was actually sound in many ways.³⁵ It could have only been thought of as a *heresy* in a context where transcendence was being wildly exaggerated at the expense of immanence.³⁶ In the interpretive atmosphere of the early Church, this is precisely what was occurring. The interpretive priority was to

³⁵ Pelagius (c. 360- c. 431) rejected the doctrine of original sin, held that humans were inherently good, and said that redemption is not due to the grace of Christ, but to the value of Christ's moral teachings. Pelagius was vigorously opposed by Augustine, and his teachings were condemned as heresy at the Councils of Carthage in 417 and 418.

³⁶ There is now a growing recognition even within Christianity that "a serious one-sidedness crept into Christianity in the direction of transcendence." See Clark Pinnock's "Between Classical and Process Theism," PT, p. 313.

represent God as: outside, above, with authority over (and, of course, male). This led to neglect of the immanent God, the God that was, like the Chinese Tao, inside, below, non-authoritative or persuasive (and, in the case of Tao, female).

The interpretive priorities of Augustine and the other Church fathers led them to neglect the biblical texts, such as “The Kingdom of Heaven is within,” which legitimized immanence and would have led to a greater balance. Starting with St. Paul and St. Augustine, the effort to set Christ up as an external authority figure began to succeed, and the Pelagian view that human nature was good, and that a person could avoid evil, escape from evil, or recover from evil using their own internal resources, became a heresy.³⁷

The early Church fathers formulated three main views of how redemption worked. By the first interpretation, human nature was sanctified, uplifted and saved by the very act of Christ’s becoming man. In the second interpretation, Christ knowingly took the sins of humans upon himself and willingly made a sacrifice to a righteous God. In the third

³⁷ I don’t wish to enter the debate as to how, exactly, Jesus himself viewed his messianic role. The strongest indications that he would have seen himself as overcoming evil on behalf of all other humans would be in passages like Matthew 26:27, where he declares that his blood is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Yet Jesus didn’t write the New Testament, and by far the majority of the New Testament references to the doctrine of redemption come from St. Paul. St. Paul was involved in a church-building project and had his own style of spirituality. See chapter 7 of John Spong’s *Rescuing the Bible From Fundamentalism*, Harper Books, San Francisco, 1991.

interpretation, which found its first strong proponent in Irenaeus, Satan justly held the human race in prison. God needed to gain our release without violating Satan's property rights, and so God offered Christ to Satan as the perfect human who would be a ransom to gain the release of everyone else.³⁸

The second main New Testament term for redemption, *λυτρόν*, means precisely a ransom, a price paid to release someone from bondage. The verb form, *λυτροῦν*, means not just to release somebody from captivity, but rather to do so only after having received a payment.

All these theories are in some tension with theodicy, however, since theodicy tends to see evil as somehow a portion of God's cosmic plan, whereas these notions of redemption all imply that evil is an unexpected intrusion into the divine plan, so radical and important as to require a special act by which God sacrifices or makes a special payment in order to set things right again.³⁹ It is somewhat ironic that despite its rigid and self-righteous rejection of pagan thought and practice, Christianity gave such prominence to the controlling notions of animal sacrifice -- the ideas that blood must be spilled in order to buy forgiveness, that God really appreciates or requires

³⁸ Origin went on to add that Satan was cheated in this exchange, since because Christ was free of sin, Satan was unable to hold him. God here emerges as the great trickster, the one who outwits Satan in the game of great stakes. Origin's theory of the Trickster God does not represent one of the highpoints of Christian theology, and was later quietly laid aside.

³⁹ See Jefferey Burton Russell's *Satan: the Early Christian Tradition*, p. 85.

such “payment,” and that the blood spilt must be innocent. Christ became the scapegoat, the sacrificial lamb, the one sacrificed to atone for the sins of others. (I Peter 1:18-19)

The basic imagery of evil as a debt that needs to be paid is a profound one, and does need to be explored along with other metaphors in order to understand what evil is. Nevertheless, the notion of Christ as redeemer has made for subtle and pervasive misunderstanding in the modern theodicy debate. John Hick has well pointed out that to many modern people, it seems illogical and unjust that people born today should suffer an infection of evil, or any consequences at all from actions that were done by someone else -- Adam and Eve.

However, the complementary problem has gone relatively unnoticed. It is *also* unjust to say that those who are *guilty* of evil deeds today can be quickly and easily released from all consequences of their acts. It is unjust and illogical to say that one can attain to the kingdom of heaven, not because of one’s own merits, but because of the actions of someone else -- Jesus.

This problem is a real one, because something very basic in us says that each person is responsible for their *own* actions. Surely, if personal individuality is taken seriously, the burden of selfhood is not so easily transferred to anyone else, no matter how exalted they might be.

The notion that redemption from evil is God's responsibility and is accomplished through Jesus does have biblical support, but not entirely so. It conflicts with the biblical injunction that each person must "work out *their own* salvation in fear and trembling," with the notion that God is not mocked, with the idea that one will not be released from one's personal debt of evil until one has "paid the utmost farthing," and with Jesus' own statement that we ourselves will do greater things than he did. In making Jesus the savior of everyone else rather than an example to be followed, we may be elevating the teaching of St. Paul and St. Augustine above the teaching of Jesus.

Superficial notions of redemption have become a special problem in the presentation of salvation in evangelical Christianity, where it has led to a syndrome that might be described as the "ha, ha, I'm saved" problem. We have all been treated, for example, to the spectacle of Manuel Noriega, who after a long career of torture and murder, suddenly announces that he has "accepted Christ," and so is now instantly "washed free" of all wrongdoing and expects to face no consequences for what he has done. There is also the problematic idea that "accepting Christ as one's savior" suddenly leads to "instant" spiritual growth, such that immediately after such a conversion, one is qualified to go around knocking on doors and offering spiritual guidance to others.

These problems reflect in some ways the debate in China and Japan between enlightenment as an instant experience and enlightenment as a slow growth. Enlightenment as an instant experience can be real, because obviously the psyche does work in terms of realizations, which don't take time. There really is "no transition" between the instant in which I don't understand $2+2=4$ and that sudden rush of insight that changes me into a person who *does* understand $2+2=4$. All intuitive realizations are instant.

Yet perhaps what happens instantly must have been gradually prepared. The student doesn't learn how to do algebra by wandering through a forest and plucking daisies, they learn this by going into math class, listening to the teacher, making attempts to understand, and generally engaging a very specific *process*. Through this process, they become gradually transformed -- and eventually they change into the *kind* of person who is capable of having important *instant* realizations concerning algebra.

So instant realizations follow upon prior preparation, and if prior preparation is lacking, we need to beware of claims to realization. Sometimes, instant realizations can be "shallow," especially when it comes to the issues of spiritual maturity and wisdom. It is possible to use the words that embody the important realizations of others, without having the realization oneself. It seems improbable that a murderer like Noriega is *capable* of having any "instant" experience so profound as to make him

immediately “washed free” and a “new man” who need face no consequences of what the “old man” did.⁴⁰

Although psychological growth does work in terms of realizations, it also works in terms of habits. History is real. If “salvation” from horrendous crimes such as Noriega’s is really available *instantly*, then not only is God being mocked, it would also seem that the sufferings and deaths of Noriega’s victims have little importance.

The overall point then, is that the time may have come for redemption to be redefined so as to avoid a number of misleading implications this term has come to have. It must be made clear that redemption is not a “trick” by which consequences are avoided. The resolution of evil is not a purely punitive process, and this must be made clear as well. It is a creative process, not a mechanical one, and there can be “jumps.” Yet it is also true that as evil is resolved, a certain “justice” *is* done. God is not mocked. When we fully understand how a Hitler or a Noriega does finally come to resolve the awful impacts of evil in their lives, we could never be left with the

⁴⁰ I do not wish by my comments here to be seen as judging or condemning either Noriega or Hitler. We have no right to judge each other spiritually. One must hope Noriega’s conversion *is* real. However, when Noriega was asked recently “What was the worst thing you ever did?” he hesitated, then declared that it was to trust some people who were unworthy of trust. This from a man who ordered the torture of countless victims, and recorded it all on video tape so he could watch their agony again and again. This is what makes me wonder if, like many perpetrators, he simply *hasn’t faced* the horrors he has perpetrated, which would be the first step in a sincere and deep religious conversion.

impression that their careers are to be envied, or that they were able to make use of a quick fix.

The power of love can accomplish many things, but love is not a force or factor that bypasses justice. Love does provide a way out, even for individuals such as Noriega and Hitler. No matter how horrid may have been the prior activities, love will provide a way out. But love is not a weak dismissal of all consequences, and the way out it provides can be quite difficult. The more depraved the involvement with evil, the more painful, involved, and complex will be the process of escape.

Likewise, there is a need to rescue redemption from a literalistic interpretation of its mythological representations, and from the notion that it can occur only within the Christian religion. In order to avoid some of the implications that the term "redemption" has had in the past, I would prefer to speak simply of "healing" from evil, "resolution" of evil, or "recovery from evil." The term "justification" of evil I would also like to leave behind, because this now seems to imply that what is wrong can somehow be seen as in accord with justice, or somehow seen as right, perhaps through calculating consequences, or "rising to a higher viewpoint." Higher viewpoints do exist, but they include rather than violate any of the simple truths that exist within ordinary viewpoints.

Healing From Evil

Obviously, if all evil is resolved, such resolution is not always done within the framework of one lifetime alone. People do undergo evil as victims, and sometimes they never release that evil and never find peace in regard to it. People also impose evil as perpetrators, and sometimes they never come to an understanding that they have even *done* evil, let alone come to regret it or grow beyond it.

In my view, this in itself means that there is no theodicy if there is no life after death. But then, the western theistic tradition has posited a life beyond death. The critical question is in what sense conditions of the soul or conditions beyond death are such as to permit the healing of evil and the discharge of negative psychic values. One can say that this happens through purgatory, or one can hold to the idea of a Kingdom of Heaven, while remaining vague on the details, as Hick does. However, my own approach would be to speak of these larger issues of the healing of evil in terms of “creative karmic resolution.”

The full development of this notion of healing evil through karmic resolution will have to await a fuller treatment of what the soul is, how it relates to personality and how karma functions. More background for these concepts will be presented in the next chapter. For now, however, we can begin to explore the notion of release from evil by separating it from

mythological events like the sin of Adam and Eve, and by seeing instead how such release from evil occurs all the time in daily life.

The essential dynamics of release from evil don't need to be referred to a future kingdom of God. From a spiritual standpoint, such resolution of evil not only happens on earth, it is one of the most important reasons why we undergo this form of experience here on earth.

A very simple preliminary example might be made in terms of a fight or feud between two people. Suppose wrong things are done on both sides, that there is hatred, jealousy, and even violence. Sometimes, during the course of such a conflict, a kind of grudging admiration is built up for one's opponent. First a kind of odd respect grows, then a trigger incident of some kind occurs, and finally, the two former enemies become friends.

The hatred which once did such harm is now "taken up" into a new scheme of values, and through this process, it becomes transformed. The hatred plays a very small role in a new scheme of values which comes about. That is, the new friendship has a unique shape or dimension of depth, just because it includes the overcoming of a prior hate. This friendship differs from other friendships in an important way. The friends here have a bond that comes precisely from having gone through something negative together, from having been joined in the task of overcoming negativity.

But must we say, as Griffin apparently insists we must, that the fact of a positive resolution means that the former hatred and violence was not really bad? On the contrary, the two friends recognize that their hatred was wrong, that it was destructive when it happened, and they *also* recognize that it was later taken up into a new scheme of values. They know that the time spent hating was not spent loving. Had that time spent hating been spent in friendship instead, no doubt, a different type of “value set” would have emerged. They might have become friends through some other mechanism. If so, important values would have manifested then, too. There is little that can be known about such lost possibilities.

But once hate has been transformed through the power of forgiveness, new judgments and new kinds of interaction become real. The former hatred in this case no longer acts to poison the values that can be created in the present moment. And this is important, because the present moment is the *only* time when love can manifest. Here again, Hick loses something important by always speaking of the Kingdom as something that *will* occur, as something *in the future*. Many important issues can only be understood when the Kingdom is seen in terms of the manifestation of love and creativity in the present moment.

Griffin wants to insist that anything that can be seen as leading to good “from a more inclusive standpoint” must be regarded as only having

been apparently evil in the first place. The problem here is the suggestion that there exists some more inclusive viewpoint which sees evil as contributory to the good, even at the time during which the evil remains untransformed. On the contrary, while evil is occurring, any “all inclusive standpoint” will simply register that evil is occurring.

While the two persons were embroiled in hate, the set of “more inclusive values” that could transform the evil had not yet been brought into being. Bringing them into being was a *task to be accomplished*. An inclusive viewpoint would have simply registered that nothing creative, nothing of worth, had yet been accomplished.

However, once forgiveness and love have transformed the set of values created between these people, then a good does exist. So only at this point would any “more inclusive viewpoint” be able to declare that the evil of the hatred had been instrumental, or at least a necessary preliminary to the accomplishment of a good. Yet even at this point, it is not “really good” that the hatred and violence occurred, and they are not justified by the fact that, later on, there was love. Hatred and violence are not justified, not when they happen, and not later. No “more inclusive viewpoint,” and certainly no “objective viewpoint” can ever posit that they are justified.

The escape from evil is a psycho-spiritual event that involves releasing or transforming the set of values and judgments which surround highly

negative occurrences. It is not a remote affair that must await conditions in the kingdom of heaven, and it is not the type of thing that God will accomplish while we sit by and watch. If the enemies wait for God to accomplish a reconciliation *for* them, they will be embroiled in their hatred forever. However, if they *do* decide to work toward forgiveness, and having done their best, are simply *incapable* of forgiveness, they may turn to God and find that they are given a help that enables them to succeed.⁴¹

Still, this is a simple example, and the process in real life is infinitely varied. In this example, both parties were guilty of wrongdoing, both fully realized their errors, both asked for forgiveness, both received it, and a further positive relationship was possible. Often in real life, only certain fragments of this archetypal process can be carried out.

A victim, for example, is often faced with a dilemma in which they need to manifest forgiveness in order to gain release from evil themselves, that is, in order to be free of hatred, resentment, anger, frustration, and fear. But the perpetrator may no longer exist, may be unknown, or, as happens quite often, may still be in a brutish and callow state. In cases where the perpetrator has had no growth, hasn't even taken the first step of fully

⁴¹ Acknowledging this is all that is necessary to prevent the charge that my view of redemption is Pelagian. We do have to "reach beyond" (transcend) ego limits in important ways during the recovery from evil. The immanent view reveals a God who is the partner in all acts of creativity or idealism.

realizing what they've done, they feel no sorrow, and won't ask for forgiveness. It can also happen that the perpetrator has been caught, and in order to avoid consequences, seems to ask for forgiveness, but the victim has reason to doubt the sincerity of the plea.

The word forgiveness is an interesting one to examine in this regard. In the Greek, it is ἀφίημι. It primarily means to send forth, to send away, to discharge, to set loose. It can mean to dissolve, to set free.⁴² The common interpretation of this is often misleading however, for in forgiveness it is not primarily the perpetrator who is set free. The forgiveness of the victim functions to set the *victim* free, it enables the *victim* to be free of the hatred, resentment and the fear that can so profoundly mar their present ability to experience value. As different from the common understanding, it is only in a very secondary sense that forgiveness sets the perpetrator free.

The forgiveness of the victim cannot set the perpetrator free from the crime, and neither does it cancel the consequences of the crime. This release is a complex process, involving realization (an inevitably *painful* process of *fully* realizing what has been done), guilt, self-forgiveness, karma (which means a facing of consequences, not avoidance of them), and also rehabilitation, or the inculcation of new habits. There is no way to "short

⁴² See Liddell and Scott's *Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th Edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford, p. 138.

circuit” this process, and the victim has neither the power nor the obligation to “speed the process up” on behalf of the perpetrator.

What the victim does in forgiveness is simply to “send the perpetrator forth” to go *experience* this healing process, to send them on their way towards a divine resolution of the negativity. By forgiving, the victim is expressing a confidence that God knows how to handle the perpetrator, that karma will provide that person with appropriate opportunities for a fundamental change of perspective, and that it is urgently important for everyone involved to gain freedom from the event.

This does not mean that in forgiveness the victim is saying “I send you forth to go experience *punishment* for what you have done.” That represents vengeance, not forgiveness. Forgiveness has faith that justice will be served, yet it also has an element of loving intent. “Loving intent” does not mean the victim must be “in love with” the perpetrator, of course, or even want to have a future relationship. Loving intent means simply that the victim is willing to recognize that the perpetrator is a human being, a human who is “stuck” in a particular phase of their growth, a human who is lacking certain basic sensitivities and values. Conjoint with this recognition is the hope, or genuine wish, that the perpetrator grow beyond this sticking place, that they grow into the kind of person who would no longer do such things, that they will indeed be enabled to “rise above” the negativity or the evil.

Loving intent indicates only that the perpetrator is not “off-limits” as a human being, and one would, in principle, be willing to welcome this person back into the human race, *after* their growth process is complete. It also means that one releases the particular act in the sense that one will not continue to hold obsessive resentment.

But whether or not the perpetrator has completed the growth process to such an extent that one would want to have a further relationship is a purely practical judgment. We can never know to what extent inner processes of growth have really taken place in other people, and the victim has every right to be cautious, just as anyone else has a right to be cautious.

Forgiveness is not the same as gullibility. The biblical injunction to forgive seven times seventy times means simply that our obligation to forgive others is absolute. That is, whenever we are wronged, we need to manage to make a genuine act of forgiveness. It does not indicate that we should foolishly set ourselves up to be a victim, or that we should take no precautions against the predatory behavior of other people. On the contrary, we should make every effort to not be victimized. But if we are victimized anyway, despite our best efforts, then we have no choice but to forgive. If we don't, our resentment will only damage us, and increase the impact of the original evil.

These considerations put us in a better position to appreciate a point made earlier about the importance of being able to see our suffering in terms of an overall set of values. Obviously, if the victim has no sense of karma, no sense of cosmic justice, no sense of a God who has set up a universe in the best way possible, they are going to be in a poor position to engage the positive act of forgiveness just described.

It is difficult to gain release from evil as a victim if one believes that the world is a place of random events, where anyone who can “get away with” a crime in the sense of avoiding punishment by civil authorities has nothing else to worry about. One can hardly “send a person forth” to meet their karmic growth process if one doesn’t believe that there is such a process in the first place. The sense of violation the victim undergoes in experiencing evil is absolute and unrelieved on any materialistic viewpoint where no subtle dimensions of cause and effect are recognized as efficacious in personal experience.

In this respect, an experience with evil can also represent a challenge to the victim in terms of attaining new realizations. It is commonly thought that only the perpetrator needs to learn new things in order to grow beyond an evil which has occurred. But the victim, too, may often be faced with a task of growth. Even though the victim is innocent of wrongdoing, they cannot be passive in the process of recovery. They need to take steps, they

cannot leave things as they are, they must use initiative. No one can be wronged without feeling resentment and hatred, and no one is justified in leaving themselves in a state in which they allow resentment and hatred to ruin their capacity to experience life's fullness. If the victim lacks a world-view in which forgiveness is possible as a positive creative act, then they need to acquire such a world-view as part of their own process of healing.

The perpetrator has a double task in escaping evil, for the perpetrator is in a very basic sense also a victim. Actually, dividing lines between these roles are often not as clear as they seem. Often, because of an evil we have suffered, we become a perpetrator ourselves. Such phenomenon as family violence and sex abuse demonstrate this mixing of roles between victim and perpetrator, where the one who is victimized during their childhood can grow up and perpetrate the same form of evil against others. Sadomasochism shows another kind of blending or mixing of the roles, where the one who inflicts pain can easily become the one who wants to feel pain, and the whole thing occurs because of very complicated and twisted motivation.

Yet despite this possible merging, it still makes sense to separate out the two roles, to speak of two different archetypal patterns within the escape from evil. The perpetrator is a victim, and will ultimately have to accomplish all the tasks that the victim has to accomplish. But the perpetrator has a unique set of issues in addition. Even attaining the full realization of what

they have done is a formidable task, a task often taken too lightly. If it is taken lightly, however, then all growth stops right there. When it is not taken lightly, it is incredibly painful, and brings on the full dynamism of guilt and remorse.⁴³ The process of release from this guilt is a second issue that can be quite painful and difficult, and many growth processes also abort at this stage. The self-forgiveness necessary here is fully as difficult as the forgiveness which the victim must accomplish, and yet the perpetrator still has the tasks of facing consequences and creating new habits.

As if even all this were not enough, just because the perpetrator has done wrong, they tend to inspire angry reactions from others that can complicate the process in various ways. The victim often gets at least some measure of sympathy and support for their predicament, but the fact that the perpetrator is also in a predicament is almost never recognized, especially in our society. But the perpetrator is ignorant, in a very basic sense, and there simply are no resources within ignorance that even allow for the recognition of knowledge. No one can pull themselves out of the role of perpetrator without help, and yet part of the dynamism of the perpetrator is that they have already violated reciprocity. As a consequence, they rarely seek help and are rarely offered help.

⁴³ See part 1, chapter 3 of Paul Ricoeur's, *The Symbolism of Evil* for a helpful treatment of the often crippling dynamics of guilt.

The idea of helping a perpetrator may seem weak or foolish at first, but Plato was right in a very basic sense when he declared that no one does wrong knowingly. Wrong is always done because the individual doesn't know better. This is a biblical teaching as well, "forgive them *for they know not what they do.*" But the ignorance of a perpetrator is not a lack of knowledge that can be resolved by simply telling them or informing them. A perpetrator is "in lack" in a much more basic sense. What they lack is absolutely essential, not only to their own happiness, but to their very participation in humanity. A perpetrator has a lacuna in an area where a real human being has a sense of love and empathy, and the fact that they are unaware of that lacuna only shows how incapable they are of extracting themselves from their predicament.

Actually, the perpetrator needs help to even gain a glimpse of the fact that they are in an important sense outside the boundaries of the human community. For the perpetrator, by violating reciprocity, has separated himself or herself from the very scene in which important human values can be created. To recognize this predicament, a shock is often necessary.

Punishment can have a role in this regard, but the role of punishment in the resolution of evil is often misunderstood. Punishment as such has very little power. All it can do is force the perpetrator to be a victim (the victim of the punishment), and thus provide the occasion where the perpetrator can

feel what it is to be a victim. Punishment cannot force real empathy for others, for that is a function of love. But if the perpetrator feels what it is like to be a victim, this is at least a real feeling, and it creates a potential for them to realize how wrong it is to impose such unpleasant feelings on others.

Punishment can only “set up” realization by making empathy *possible*, but even this can only happen if punishment is applied with an educational purpose, with some form of positive intent. When it is applied as an ill-disguised act of vengeance, as it so often is in our society, it simply reinforces the perpetrator’s belief that everyone is out for themselves and locks them more rigidly into their negative pattern.⁴⁴

Until a healing process is complete, the perpetrator cannot be trusted, by themselves or by others, and the restriction of their freedom is entirely appropriate. Yet the healing process itself carries a full degree of unpleasantness, and there is no need to artificially add in more unpleasantness in order to balance the books. The restriction of freedom will be unpleasant, the realization and guilt will be unpleasant, the retraining of habits will be unpleasant, but the greatest factor is that the perpetrator’s mindset has put them in a position where they cannot know love or

⁴⁴ The real problem involved in the death penalty is that because the state engages in the act of killing humans, there is no one involved in the procedure who themselves realizes that the act of killing humans is intrinsically wrong. There is no one to pull anyone else out of the quicksand of ignorance, because everyone is involved in the same ignorance.

experience real happiness in any event. The twisting of perception will cause a frustration of values that will itself be an adequate degree of punishment until there is a growth past the brutish mind-set.

So if a genuine process of recovery from evil is indeed underway, there is no reason the perpetrator cannot be treated kindly during the process, and in fact it is important that this be done. It takes no merit at all to love someone who is lovable, but it is a very great accomplishment to love someone who is at their most unlovable. Such a form of love will provide an example of what is possible within the human community to one who lacks such a knowledge, and it is this form of love alone that has redemptive value.

Conclusion

When it comes to the twofold analysis of escape from evil, the escape as a victim and the escape as a perpetrator, philosophy and theology come very close to a handshake with psychology. This is not to be regretted -- in fact, such a recognition is greatly overdue. When theology is able to set redemption free from its exclusive presentation in literalistic and mythological forms, it must begin to address the release from evil as it occurs in everyday life. When philosophy properly defines evil, so that it is clearly seen that it refers to phenomenon like sex abuse, then philosophy is in a

position to recognize that those who have successfully dealt with the victims and perpetrators of sex abuse, have successfully dealt with evil.

Any example in which a person goes on from an involvement with horrendously negative occurrences and later finds peace proves that escape from evil is possible. People do recover from being sex abusers, they do recover from involvement with war, they do recover from lives of crime. Escape from the evil of war is what is being treated when psychologists deal with "post traumatic stress syndrome," and there is a considerable body of practical knowledge concerning how this can be accomplished.

Making the connection explicit can be useful for all the disciplines involved. In fact, psychology has already recognized the influence of religious beliefs, both as a potential help and as a complication in the recovery process. For example, notice how well in the following quotation a psychologist deals with the "ha, ha, I'm saved" syndrome:

The "formula" for many offenders is a religious one, and religious conversions among convicted offenders are common. Such offenders often refuse treatment, insisting that it is both degrading and unnecessary. Instead, they insist that they will rely on God for guidance. The reliance on God or on a recently awakened sense of morality serves only to protect offenders from treatment and, of course, does not reduce the risk of reoffense.

...Those religious conversions that do not have as a primary goal the evasion of treatment will not lead the offender to refuse treatment. Such offenders will take seriously the saying "God helps those who help themselves," and will attempt to prove their sincerity in asking for divine forgiveness by their behavior in treatment. ...They will not expect God to do the work of treatment for them, but simply to assist them in doing the work.

They will be more aware of temptation, rather than less, and will feel that they are at risk to reoffend. ...They will not feel that religion gives them immunity from reoffending.⁴⁵

Yet we need not fear that psychologists own the field, and that theology and philosophy will have nothing of their own to contribute to the understanding of the resolution of evil. So far, the discussion has been mostly restricted to the boundaries of daily life and the dynamisms of the ego personality. Yet the full discussion will inevitably involve the soul as well, for the ego personality will sometimes find that, although it tries, it cannot forgive, and although it would like to have greater realization, it cannot obtain it. Some evils are so vast, and their impact is so horrid, that the ego personality simply cannot face up to them.

If the ego personality cannot release and resolve evil within the framework of its one life, if it becomes overwhelmed either as perpetrator or as victim, the evil then becomes, from the standpoint of the soul, an item of "unfinished business." The task of finishing this business then must *necessarily* be played out somewhere within the more grand framework of the soul's overall possibilities. And this is where the much misunderstood and misrepresented doctrine of reincarnation comes in. The fuller development of these ideas will be our subject in the next chapter.

⁴⁵ From *Treating Child Sex Offenders and Victims*, by Anna C. Salter, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, 1988, p. 106-107.

CHAPTER 4. AUROBINDO AND THE INDIAN VIEW OF THE SOUL

The first step in solving any problem is to identify what the problem is, and this truism applies especially to the task of theodicy. Yet it can be hard for us to assess the Christian tradition, since we as Westerners are immersed in it. Whether we accept it or rebel against it, Christianity has shaped our thoughts in too many ways for us to be capable of objective analysis.

For this reason, it makes sense to look at critiques of Christianity which come from thinkers with other philosophical and religious orientations. Thinkers who view the soul differently, see God in different terms, view the act of world-creation differently, and have various perspectives on other surd issues can help us attain to new views of Christianity, including a new sense of which issues are most important relative to the problem of evil.

Thinkers from India have often pointed out that the view of the soul Christianity has adopted creates important problems relative to divine justice and the question of evil. The Christian view is that the soul has one lifetime only, and that the qualities of a person's character are radically created by God either at the point of conception, or at birth. But if God gives a person the characteristics that make them who they are, it is unjust for God to then *blame* the individual for what is bad or reward them for what is

good within their character. This can be called the *problem of imposed characteristics*. Aurobindo Ghose (1872-1950), commonly referred to as Sri Aurobindo, put the problem this way: In the Christian view,

Humans are made to assume “a ready-made mass of combined qualities, virtues, vices, capacities, defects, temperamental and other advantages and handicaps, not made by them at all through growth, but made for them by arbitrary fiat... yet for which and for the perfect use of which they are held responsible by their Creator.¹

A related difficulty of the Christian view of the soul can be called the *problem of unequal origins*. This refers to how one person is born into fortunate circumstances, with loving parents and educational opportunities, whereas another is born into poverty, exposed to abuse, and given no real opportunities for education or spiritual knowledge. Here again, the problem is that God is the one who places the soul where it is born. For God to give so much to the one and so little to the other, when there is no previous background to account for the preferential treatment, can only be seen as arbitrary and unfair.

This Christian interpretation gives the soul no way to *consent* to the main circumstances, limits, and incidents that will occur during life. But if the soul does not consent to the format of life, including the incidents of suffering, the final word must be that the suffering is *imposed*. It occurs

¹ LD, p. 744.

because God *wants* it to occur. In other words, when God is made into the author of fate, God has ultimate responsibility for all human suffering.

These problems are intensified, and a second range of problems occurs as well, because on the Christian view, the soul has only one lifetime to live. In many Christian formulations, both Catholic and Protestant, the soul is then *judged* and goes on either to eternal salvation or damnation, depending upon the degree of moral stature or spiritual growth it has attained.

The problem with turning God into a Judge is that judgment is obviously in tension with God's main function of love. As the parable of the prodigal son emphasizes, a human parent often will not do what sheer justice requires, and this occurs simply because the parent loves the child. No parent wants to see a child permanently harmed, no matter what has occurred. If a child has done something wrong, the parent may want to see the situation corrected, but not at the cost of imposing terrible suffering.

The most basic metaphor for God in the Christian tradition is supposed to be that of God the Father, and the most basic quality of God is supposed to be love. Why then, does the tradition insist that God would act in unparental and unloving ways? Why would God make such absolute judgments and impose such horrific penalties on human souls?

This whole format of judgment can only be retained at the risk of elevating the claims of Justice over those of Love. Yet if God *is* to be made

into a Judge, at least God must be made into a *fair* judge. Since the penalties and rewards are so great and absolute, it heightens the requirement that at least every human should have an *equal* opportunity to do what is required. But, as we have seen, it is just not believable that people *do* have equal beginning points, either in terms of nature, or nurture.

As Kant observed in another context, the very brevity of life would scarcely seem to leave enough time and opportunity for moral growth in any case. God apparently spent untold eons forming the stars and setting up the conditions for life on earth. Evolution proceeded throughout untold millennia as God patiently built up the biological forms of life. God would appear to be in no hurry, and to gain all goals through slow development. But then a child is born, lives for some twenty years perhaps, and now all of a sudden God rushes into judgment based upon the level of moral stature attained in these few years. Then endless eons unfold again -- but now the eons are devoted to imposing terrible punishment or blissful reward -- all based upon what happened in those few, short years. Is this not arbitrary?

I would assess these as genuine and deep problems, problems that have been vastly underestimated in the Western theodicy literature. Such a doctrine of the soul in itself makes the problem of evil insoluble. If God really proceeds in this way, God is not even just, and God certainly cannot be seen as good or loving if God is not at least just.

It is, of course, no small matter to suggest that Christianity is in need of a new view of the soul. However, this seems, to me at least, to be a change of far lesser dimensions than the one suggested by David Griffin, that God no longer be seen as a Creator God of infinite power. There are many passages in the Bible where God appears as an all-powerful creator, but none where it is clearly taught that the soul has but one lifetime to live, or that it is created by God at the time of conception or birth. Doctrines of the soul are secondary interpretations, which were added into Christianity as the centuries developed. They came from the peculiar mix of Greek and Hebrew thought that influenced the early Church fathers.

At one time, many Christian groups such as the Cathars did believe in reincarnation, and did have alternate views of the soul. But these people were put to the sword during the Inquisition. This would hardly seem to be the ideal way to settle such an important doctrinal dispute.

It has been argued that the Christian view of the soul is useful because it gives momentous importance to each decision, and so helps to stress the need for moral behavior. However, one could also argue that the attempt to impose morality by threats of eternal damnation is counterproductive. If God is portrayed as arbitrary and unjust, how can people be condemned so radically when *they* act in unjust ways?

By contrast, the Indian view of the soul proclaims that the soul has many lifetimes to live, which means that moral growth can proceed gradually. In its best formulations, the idea of karma eliminates both the problem of imposed characteristics and the problem of unequal origins. The soul is born into circumstances which appropriately reflect its previous background and current needs. The soul is the author of its own fate, and cannot complain that the world is unjust. Events happen for a reason, and are not imposed by either God or Chance. For these reasons, it is sometimes said that there is no problem of evil in Indian thought, or that karma solves the problem of evil all by itself.²

Such claims cannot be accepted at face value, but they do bear more close examination than they often receive. To consider these issues more deeply, let us review the philosophy of one of India's greatest thinkers.

Sri Aurobindo

Sri Aurobindo, was one of those great mystic philosophers India has produced with such amazing fertility. Like Gandhi, Aurobindo combined the qualities of teacher and statesman, and his ideals had a strong influence on the world around him. Aurobindo was a Bengali Brahmin. His father, an

² See for example, Herman, Arthur L., *The Problem of Evil and Indian Thought*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1964, and Nayak, G. C., *Evil, Karma, and Reincarnation*, Santiniketan Press, West Bengal, 1973.

English-educated doctor, was determined to give his son a completely European education, and sent him to a convent school at five and to England at seven. He studied in England until he was twenty at Cambridge university, but when he returned to India he studied Sanskrit and turned his attention to Indian philosophy and politics. Eventually, he became an adept at yoga and also a popular leader in the cause of Indian nationalism.

Aurobindo's philosophy is presented primarily in his monumental work, *The Life Divine*, and is called *Purnadvaita*, from *Purna*, which means whole, total, integral, and *Advaita*, non-dual. This philosophy was so named to distinguish it from two other great traditional philosophies of India, those of Sankara and Ramanuja. Sankara's *Advaita* philosophy held that Brahman was the sole reality, and that the world was relatively unreal, an expression of maya.³ Aurobindo rejected what he considered to be the illusionism of Sankara. For Aurobindo, Brahman is real, the world is real, and Brahman becomes manifest in and as the world through an involutionary process which is also real. This is what Aurobindo considers to be the true message of Vedanta.

³ I'll follow Aurobindo's own usage in regard to the transliteration of Indian terms. Specifically, he treated maya as a philosophical term which was known well enough to be presented in English without Indian diacritical marks. He also presents *upaniṣad* as upanishad, *vidyā* as vidya, *ānanda* as ananda, *śakti* as shakti, and *Saccidānanda* as Sachchidananda.

Aurobindo can contribute to our study of evil in many intriguing ways. As was the case with David Griffin, Aurobindo's philosophy presents a "global argument," a complete metaphysical portrait of being. Also similar to Griffin is Aurobindo's effort to preserve both being and becoming, permanence and change, in a single, non-dual vision. Both philosophers also present reality as a hierarchy composed of different interacting levels, both posit creativity as a fundamental characteristic of being, and both insist upon a forward, evolutionary movement, driven by the divine spirit, in which lower forms rise both biologically and spiritually into higher forms of expression.⁴

An interesting correlation can be made between Aurobindo's views of perception and the distinction in process thought between perception in the mode of causal efficacy and perception in the mode of presentational immediacy. Aurobindo recognizes the mode of presentational immediacy, of course, which is sense perception. But he also insists "It is possible for the mind... to take direct cognizance of the objects of sense without the aid of the sense organs."⁵ So Aurobindo's idea, that all experience is in its secret nature knowledge by identity, comes very close to the view in process thought

⁴ The recognition of evolution is also an important aspect of John Hick's revision of Augustinian thought and his treatment of Adam and Eve.

⁵ See *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, edited by Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and Charles A. Moore, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1987, p. 580. See also p. 582, the "foundation of intuitional knowledge is conscious or effective identity between that which knows and that which is known."

that knowledge of the outer world can come in the mode of causal efficacy, by means of direct knowing. Both philosophies give an accounting of how the phenomenon of ESP is possible, rather than taking a posture of dogmatic denial that ESP exists.

I also see many similarities between Griffin's presentation of the notion of prehending, and Aurobindo's view of karma and rebirth. In both cases, we have the causal efficacy of the past being absorbed into a new and creative, forward-looking gestalt that will define the structure of personal experience. The issue as to how, exactly, past sets of circumstance can have formative influence relative to present sets of circumstance is the main question for karma, and this issue is addressed by prehension in the Whiteheadian system.

Karma and prehension are both attempts to answer the question, "How is experience formed?" When the Whiteheadian occasion of experience is reborn, moment by moment, it takes up the past, there is a creative divine input, and there is also choice by the occasion itself. Experience is formed through the confluence of all these factors. The whole thing is done so as to be appropriate to the total situation; both the total situation of the world right then, and the total situation of the person forming experience.

In my view, the best formulations of karma also have similar implications. As we shall see, for Aurobindo, if karma is understood as the

carryover of past conditions into the present, it is not the sole factor involved in the creation of experience. As in process thought, God is always an active influence, so divine creativity is always a factor. Also as in process thought, acts of personal choice and belief are also formative. So the person shapes their own experience, though this factor alone does not totally determine the outcome in every instance.

However, in sharp contrast with Griffin's "naturalistic theology" in which every effort is made to eliminate elements of the supernatural, Aurobindo does recognize the existence of angels, and gives detailed descriptions of many dimensions of spiritual being higher than the level of personal ego, and the ordinary mind. These are Higher mind, Illumined mind, Intuitive mind, and Overmind, and they represent not so much ways of knowing, but planes of existence to which the ordinary ego can rise as it transcends its limitations. Each stage of ascent is an entry into a new way of knowing and a new power of existence.

Spiritual realms can also be thought of as descending upon the limited ego and changing its entire orientation in various ways. Griffin's limitation of divine power and his characterization of the finite world as eternally self-existent contrasts with Aurobindo. Aurobindo does not believe in *creatio ex nihilo*, but his God is definitely a creator God, unlimited in power. The

phrase “God can’t” would simply never apply in Aurobindo’s world, as it does for Griffin.⁶

It is also interesting to compare Aurobindo’s views with those of John Hick. In regard to creation there is a difference, because for Aurobindo *creatio ex nihilo* implies that the manifested world came out of nothing and must therefore contain nothing as a continuing component. Aurobindo thinks this implies that the material world has a precarious status and is constantly teetering on the verge of nothingness. Instead, Aurobindo emphasizes that Brahman lends Its own Substance to creation, and provides the ultimate material basis of what comes to exist in the finite world.

However, the force of Aurobindo’s comments here is somewhat limited, because not all Christian theologians want to build nothingness up to the status of an ontological event of some kind, so not all of them are subject to Aurobindo’s criticism. In particular, John Hick does not treat nothingness in this way. For Hick, *creatio ex nihilo* does result in a permanent material universe that does have its own integrity.⁷

⁶ Aurobindo does recognize certain forms of divine self-limitation, of course. As God manifests in the finite world, there is a veiling and a self-forgetfulness, and some things may no longer seem possible. But for Aurobindo, God as such is omnipotent. There is no pre-existing world that sets a limit to what God can accomplish.

⁷ Reams of theological and philosophical debate could be bypassed just by noticing the “*ex*” in *creatio ex nihilo*. This is a doctrine about how being *originates*, not a description of how it is *constituted*. To say that because being comes from nothing, nothing must continue to be a component of being, would seem to be a simple example of the genetic fallacy.

Both Hick and Aurobindo emphasize that the human identity must undergo a slow and gradual development that begins in a condition where instinctive and vital expression dominates. Both of them see evil as almost inevitable at the beginning stages of development, and both of them trace evil to the vital personality's concern for survival at any cost, its ignorance, its ego-centered point of view, and its immature level of spiritual growth. Personal development on both accounts can only occur gradually, as spiritual latencies come to the fore, and the evolutionary process ultimately culminates in a condition of spiritual maturity. Both thinkers look forward to a future condition for humanity as a whole where evil is overcome and there is a full manifestation of spiritual conditions and powers. Hick and Aurobindo also agree on the idea of universalism, or the eventual salvation of all humans.⁸

However, by contrast with Hick's rather generalized descriptions of the soul and its destiny, Aurobindo presents a detailed look at the soul's capabilities and its relationship to the ego personality. Aurobindo also provides a mature and creative form of the traditional Indian doctrine of karma, which we will contrast with the traditional Christian notions of

⁸ For a treatment of Aurobindo's position in this regard, see *The Philosophy of Integralism*, by Haridas Chaudhuri, published by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, India, 1954, p. 142-143.

redemption in regard to the issue of how evil is overcome. We are in a somewhat fortunate situation as to the general possibilities of interaction between Hick and Aurobindo's points of view because in *Death and Eternal Life*, Hick makes a detailed assessment of the contribution which Indian thought can make to Christianity. He points to a number of positive features and also makes objections to the doctrines of karma and rebirth from the Christian perspective. Aurobindo also makes some very relevant assessments of Christianity.

In addition, although Aurobindo would not usually be thought of as presenting a theodicy, we do find in Aurobindo a detailed and insightful approach to the issue of evil. There can be great benefit in reviewing a treatment of evil based upon a different approach to the surd issues from what we commonly find in the Western tradition. In many cases, these insights represent valuable correctives or potential compensations to the Western view. Because of Aurobindo's doctrine of involution, he has a firm grip on the notion of divine immanence which can function as an important corrective to Christian thought, which has become badly unbalanced in its emphasis on transcendence. His yogic background also gives valuable perspectives on pleasure and pain that will be helpful new additions to Western discussions.

To briefly comment on the complex issue of cross-cultural studies in general, I would emphasize that each culture and each philosophy has an integrity of its own, and there can be no question of simply adopting or taking over the views of another. That would be neither possible, nor desirable. Yet what can occur is an adaptation, in which an idea is changed as it is brought into a new setting, and the new setting is altered as it accommodates a new series of insights. This kind of positive growth occurs all the time, and cross-cultural studies do have the potential to stimulate this kind of development.

As Hick points out, reincarnation is not and has never been an orthodox Christian belief.⁹ But, as Hick also points out, it does not follow from this that it could never *become* an orthodox Christian belief. The history of Christianity shows a number of instances where important ideas were simply introduced for one reason or another. In many cases, we can see now that the usefulness of the new ideas, and the criteria for accepting new ideas had more to do with enhancing the authority of the growing church, than with more exalted motives. The emphasis on transcendence, and the

⁹ See John Hick's *Death and Eternal Life*, (Westminster/John Knos Press, Louisville, Kentucky), p. 365, and his note 2, on p. 392). The historical question is whether Origen, the great early Christian thinker, believed in reincarnation. Personally, I agree with Geddes MacGregor, who in chapter 5 of *Reincarnation in Christianity* suggests that Origen did believe in reincarnation, but the passages where he spoke of it clearly were later deleted by scribes who wanted to make Origen less controversial.

positing of God as outside, above, authoritative, and male was built upon the metaphor of God as King, and coincided very conveniently with the adaptation of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century. In the last twenty years, feminist theologians have documented this process thoroughly, and presented a strong case for revising the androcentric and hierarchical character of the Western religious tradition.¹⁰

I can only express sympathy for the entire project of the feminist thinkers in this regard. However, relative to the problem of evil, the primary difficulty I see with the “God as King” metaphor and the positing of God as an external authority is that it has led to a notion of Christ as a savior who overcomes evil *on behalf of* everyone else, and has done so either in the past or the future. Such a presentation undermines personal responsibility by suggesting that the personal escape from evil consists simply of making a sincere appeal to an external authority figure or savior. This often results in a simplistic approach to “salvation” which discourages any deeper examination of the more subtle factors at work in human destiny. Likewise, the notion that evil is overcome simply through the profession of faith in an external authority leaves little room for turning within and exploring the

¹⁰ To give but two examples of this kind of analysis, see Sallie McFague, *Models of God*, page 6, and Rosemary Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk*, p. 85.

powers and potentials of one's own inner being. Yet our thesis is that the locus of evil is personal, so subjective factors cannot be avoided. We do need to turn inward in order to understand the impact of evil, and also to engage the escape from evil.

It is in this regard that I see Aurobindo as a valuable resource. He is the inheritor of a long tradition where "spiritual psychology" was worked out in great detail, and where the ego personality was posited as part of an overall Self. In the Western tradition, the emphasis upon transcendence discouraged any real "look inward" and a divine Self has not generally been an accepted part of human psychology. Yet in India, a dipolar model of the human psyche has been worked out in great detail. Aurobindo can help us acquire the vocabulary and conceptual tools needed to assess the subjective impact of evil, and to describe the psycho-spiritual dynamics of the personal escape from evil.

Aurobindo's Overall Philosophy

Aurobindo's view of God is based upon a notion he calls the "three poises of Brahman." In the first poise, Brahman is the utterly transcendent Absolute Reality. This is the feature of the divine which had been emphasized by Sankara, and embodied in the Upanishadic phrase that Brahman is one without a second. This Absolute is beyond any relationships and is unknown. Any possible predicates or descriptions will misrepresent

this Reality to an extent. Aurobindo captured this insight by placing, at the supreme summit of his system, “a pure existence, eternal, infinite, indefinable, not affected by the succession of Time, not involved in the extension of Space, beyond form, quantity, quality, -- Self only and absolute.”¹¹ If all forms were to disappear, this would remain.¹²

In the second poise, Brahman appears as a personal God. Here, Brahman is a dynamic and immanent power manifest in all of nature. This second poise of Brahman relates to the personal God of Ramanuja. Aurobindo captured this aspect of the divine by insisting that the Absolute could also appear to us as Satchitananda, meaning a combination of Sat (Being), Chit (Consciousness), and Ananda (Delight). To the ordinary mind Sachchidananda appears to embody three discrete and self-existent aspects, but from a higher perspective, they are united. In this respect, there are some similarities between Aurobindo’s treatment of Sachchidananda and the Christian treatment of the Trinity. Each formulation attempts to preserve a unity within a threefold differentiation in characterizing the Godhead.¹³

¹¹ LD, p. 78

¹² The *lack* of such an Absolute expression of the divine is a marked and controversial feature of process thought.

¹³ There are many differences as well, and Aurobindo’s own attempts to correlate the elements of *Satchitananda* with the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were probably naive.

Each of the three elements of Sachchidananda is posited or manifested in some way within the world of creation. As this occurs, a differentiation from unity to multiplicity also occurs. So the Sat element creates and is aware of Matter as a single existence, which is yet diversified into the countless physical forms of the material world. In this regard, the world is infused with the substance of Brahman:

Brahman dwells in all, indivisible, yet as if divided and distributed... It is indivisible and gives, not an equal part of itself, but its whole self at one and the same time to the solar system and to the ant-hill. To Brahman, there are no wholes and parts, but each thing is all itself and benefits by the whole of Brahman.¹⁴

The Chit element of Sachchidananda projects and knows Mind, as a unity which is expressed on lower levels in terms of countless individual minds. However, we must not uncritically use our usual image of ego consciousness as the standard in understanding Chit as consciousness. Ego awareness is not even an adequate representation of the whole of human consciousness -- for this also includes dream consciousness, the subconscious, and the deep unconscious. Consciousness as formed, limited, and shaped by the human nervous system is only a specification of consciousness as such. Consciousness as Chit is simple awareness, which can manifest in many

¹⁴ LD, p. 72

ways on many levels, even within matter. Aurobindo sees matter as a form of Spirit, organized by mind:

The nature of the action of cosmic Mind is the cause of atomic existence. Matter is a creation, and for its creation the infinitesimal, an extreme fragmentation of the Infinite, was needed as the starting point or basis.¹⁵

Matter is Sachchidananda represented to His own mental experience as a formal basis of objective knowledge, action, and delight of existence.¹⁶

There is a contrast between Aurobindo and process thought relative to matter. Aurobindo speaks of the material world as a manifestation or specialized function of divine consciousness, whereas Griffin and Whitehead see it as independent, uncreated, and self-existent.

Aurobindo would probably agree with Griffin and Whitehead that a primal kind of awareness prevails on all levels of being, so that the electron “knows” what it needs to know in order to participate in the atom, the atom “knows” what it needs to know in order to participate in the molecule, and so forth. It is true that Aurobindo speaks of matter as the most extreme extent of the principle of Inconscience, which would indicate that matter “knows” very little. Aurobindo clearly makes a difference between *sat* and *chit*. Yet the primal and rudimentary type of awareness process thinkers assign to

¹⁵ LD, p. 238.

¹⁶ LD, p. 239.

material elements would still be Inconscient in Aurobindo's sense -- unaware of the divine.

The Ananda aspect of Sachchidananda projects and knows Life as a singular unity, which is diversified on lower levels into countless forms of life. A demand to attain the supreme and total delight of existence pervades the whole makeup of physical being, and manifests in the body consciousness as a need for pleasure, fulfillment and content, in the mind as a need for mental delight, and also in the spiritual mind's call for peace and divine ecstasy. Aurobindo gives considerable emphasis to Ananda, calling it the very essence of the Brahman and the supreme nature of the omnipresent Reality.¹⁷ Ananda is in a special sense the beginning point of the manifestation process; it is the spiritual matrix from which all creation emerges, and also the goal towards which it aspires in its growth.

So far, we have seen that Brahman has one poise as the Absolute, and a second poise as Sachchidananda. In Brahman's third poise, Brahman manifests in the individual and is immanent in each individual. In general, Aurobindo lays great stress on the individual, emphasizing his/her reality, value, persistence and eternal validity. Aurobindo gives to all humans the high dignity of divine incarnations, and, as different from process thought, he

¹⁷ LD, p. 990.

explicitly builds an assurance of immortality into his system from the beginning. Potentially, the individual human person participates in all three poises of Brahman, and can know Brahman in all these roles, even that of the Absolute.

Past, present, and future are not final orientations to the human individuality as such. To the mind and to the ego personality, time is a dominant factor, but there is a higher level of consciousness in which past, present and future are all a unified, simultaneous, experience. It is, for Aurobindo, an error to make an unbridgeable gulf between the Absolute and the relative, an error to extend the law of contradiction too rigidly and too far, an error to try to reduce things eternal to the categories of time in every respect. The logic of the individualized mind takes the law of contradiction as final, and proceeds in terms of either/or distinctions, but Aurobindo emphasizes that spiritual awareness posits a both/and type of thinking. In this approach, two polar qualities are not mutually exclusive and contradictory, but rather they each have their own truth and can be applied by the synthesizing awareness in intuitive ways to appropriate issues at appropriate times.

Aurobindo saw the universe as consisting of various planes of being, linked in a graded continuity from the lowest matter to the highest spirit, so as to form an integral whole, a single non-dual Reality. This universe has

seven main components, which he speaks of as the Sevenfold Chord of Being. Six of these have already been introduced: there is Existence, Consciousness and Bliss above, and Matter, Mind, and Life below. Both the upper and the lower hemispheres are real, and interconnected.

The principle of Supermind, also called Truth Consciousness or Real-Idea, is the seventh factor, the mediator between the upper and lower worlds. It is the mediator because it has a certain identity or affinity with both worlds. In the upper world, Supermind differentiates the threefold Sachchidananda out of the Absolute. In the lower world, Supermind holds all the possibilities of differentiation within itself, focuses the energy of the whole into each possibility, and projects those possibilities into actual existence. These are called by Aurobindo the comprehending, apprehending and the projecting poises of Supermind.¹⁸ Supermind is the link between the One and the Many. From the One, it draws the multitude; yet it manifests the many without losing its own link with unity.

¹⁸ The threefold functions of Supermind correspond to the threefold *Satchitananda*, and, in another sense, to three major streams of Indian philosophy. The comprehending consciousness gives knowledge of the Absolute as the unqualified Reality, and corresponds to the Advaita philosophy of Sankara, the apprehending consciousness gives knowledge of the Absolute as a whole containing many dependent manifestations, and corresponds with the Vishishtadvaita system of Ramanuja, and the projecting consciousness is knowledge of the Absolute as an interacting system of distinct individuals, corresponding to the Dvaitadvaita system of Madhava. We shall have to bypass many of the subtleties of Aurobindo's system because of our particular focus here.

Supermind is also called Real-Idea because at this level of mind, knowledge is a direct knowledge by identity, which projects what is known into manifestation by the very act of knowing. Energy and awareness are one in Supermind, knowledge and will are united. Supermind is the creatrix, the means or power through which Brahman gives the *entirety* of divine being to *each* manifestation, and holds that particular manifestation in focus as powerfully as if it were the only creation that had ever occurred.

Yet Supermind also holds an infinity of other manifestations in focus in precisely the same manner, lending infinite value and validity to each. Supermind then juggles the interactions between all manifestations so as to form an interacting multiple community which expresses a new form of balance, and a new holistic value in each moment. This is the state of “each in all,” which corresponds in many ways to the highly interdependent vision of individual beings which we see in process thinking.

Maya or illusion affects the two hemispheres differently. In the upper hemisphere a higher maya causes the Absolute to appear within true forms. That is, Existence, Consciousness and Bliss, are not illusory or deceptive, they are the true forms of the Absolute. Differentiation occurs, but not distortion. But in the lower hemisphere, there is a lower maya which is not essentially connected to knowledge or truth (Vidya) but rather to Ignorance (Avidya). The lower hemisphere is affected by the principle of division,

which is a power of Avidya by which the essential unity of the upper world is made to appear as fragmented into a series of isolated and separated manifestations. This division begins in Mind, is expressed in Life, and comes to extreme expression in Matter.

For Aurobindo, Avidya is an important factor in the explanation of evil. Evil is essentially linked, in the Indian fashion, to ignorance and a false sense of ego separation.¹⁹ Aurobindo was opposed to the element of world-negation that he saw in Hindu thought and also in certain forms of Christianity. He wanted to avoid any implication that the world was unreal or that evil was an illusion. He attributed evil to maya, but for him this does not mean that evil is unreal, or is but a happenstance within a world which itself is unreal.

Supermind possesses the truth by nature, and can be compared in some ways to Whitehead's notion of God's primordial mind. Supermind not only functions as a reservoir of ideas, but provides an actual energy-impetus that impels each idea into manifestation. Critics have complained because they found precisely this function missing in Whitehead's system.²⁰ Various

¹⁹ There is a tremendous difference between seeing evil as a Malevolent Empire, from which one must be "saved," and seeing evil as a type of ignorance or limitation which can be overcome with realization. The contrast of salvation in the West with realization in the East only goes so far, but it is a good basic contrast. My definition of evil is more on the side of the Indian approach, as should have become clear in the last chapter.

²⁰ See "God and Evil in Process Theology," by Michael Peterson for a discussion of how the presentation of purely ideal possibilities in Whitehead needs to be supplemented by a

attempts have been made to modify Whitehead so as to provide the kind of energetic impetus for ideas and ideals which Aurobindo built into his system from the start.

But no mere modification of Whitehead's primordial mind of God could capture all the functions and subtle correspondences of Aurobindo's Supermind. Aurobindo provides a whole range of gradually ascending consciousness that links the human mind to Supermind, namely, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Overmind. Overmind is the most important, but Aurobindo describes each of these levels in great detail, addressing the issues of knowledge and will on each level.

The human mind is not a different kind of thing than Supermind. For Aurobindo, the human mind itself *is* Supermind, though it functions as limited and diminished, and partly blinded when it functions within the world of ego identity. The possibility of awakening from ignorance is built into the human mind, because the very mind that the ego uses in its limited vision is one with Supermind, and has hidden Supermind potentiality.

This view that spiritual resource is internal, and is present in everyone, is very close to the Pelagian standpoint mentioned in the last

concept of imparted energy. Nancy Frankenberry has also been active in this discussion. (PT, p. 128).

chapter. Each person has all the spiritual resources needed to overcome evil, and can gain access to these resource by *turning within*.

Supermind has both ascending and descending functions, and is closely related to the issues of evolution and devolution. The descending movement is the process of creation in the temporal order, by which the superior principles in the upper hemisphere become limited, diminished, or hidden during the process of manifestation. In devolution, or “evolution downward,” all that is fully present in Sachchidananda is summarized into a seed, and then posited within the finite world of Mind, Life, and Matter so that it can slowly grow, develop, and unfold. We see immediately the emphasis on immanence. God is *in* the world; the world is God-infused in the most literal of terms. All potentials for natural growth are also spiritual potentials.

Evolution, or the forward and ascending movement into higher forms, is the progressive self-revelation of spirit, and the sequential unfolding of these latent spiritual potentials. Matter is the last step during the process of descent, and the first step during the process of ascent. Life was inherent in Matter all along, but historically there came a point where what had been merely atoms, molecules, dirt and rock first manifested the latent power of Life, and the first bacteria, or primal organism was born. Likewise, Mind was inherent in Life all along, yet Mind is deeply hidden in the plant

kingdom, and still cloaked in the animal kingdom, and only becomes a dominant factor at the stage of human life.²¹ So Life, Mind, and even Supermind were always present in the atom, and continue to be so, though in a hidden way. The spiritual qualities are the most deeply hidden of all, and are the driving force behind the entire unfoldment. What is of greatest value is the last to manifest, and the process of manifesting spiritual potentials is still far from complete.

Evolution thus includes social, intellectual, political, and spiritual growth as well as the development of physical and biological organisms.²² But as a new stage is reached, the previous stage is not left behind. It is rather taken up into the new whole, and given a transformed aspect.

As growth proceeds, each new and higher development exercises a certain dominion. For example, the world of matter did not cease as soon as Life manifested. Rather, as Life manifested, matter continued, but some parts of matter became integrated within living bodies, and began to function in new ways, functioning as Life directed them to function. As Mind

²¹ Let us leave aside for the moment the question of whether there are other intelligent species such as dolphins on earth, and also the question of possible evolutionary patterns on other planets which may have produced intelligent life long before the earth was even formed.

²² Because Aurobindo's conception of evolution in time is a historic conception, he is committed to the questionable position that the most advanced point in time is the point of highest development.

developed out of Life and attained to a new stage of manifestation in the human mind, human beings did not leave behind either matter or life. Humans are real, material beings, and they are also living organisms, fully possessed of an animalistic or instinctive nature. Yet the human mind has a certain dominion, an ability to comprehend the process of life and of the material world. This it has despite the limitations which accrue from the ego's somewhat fumbling way of using the vast and divine potentials of Mind.

Spiritual potentials and Mind potentials are currently latent in the human psyche, and evolution will eventually culminate in an unveiling of Supermind and an overcoming of the limitations of ego vision. Life on earth is an evolutionary unfolding of an infinite diversity of spiritual potentials.

Aurobindo's Approach to Evil

In contrast to much of Christian thought, in which evil is an unexpected intrusion so radical that God must take human form and be sacrificed to eliminate it, Aurobindo insists that evil was foreseen:

Since all this that is the Brahman, such phenomenon cannot have come in as a chance, an intervening accident, an involuntary forgetfulness or confusion of the Consciousness-Force of the All-Wise in the cosmos or an ugly contretemps for which the indwelling Spirit was not prepared...²³

²³ LD, p. 598.

In general, Aurobindo's views concerning evil are much more in accord with the project of theodicy than are the Christian position that evil is a malevolent Empire. It is true that Aurobindo has the difficult task of explaining how evil can fit into the divine scheme of things, but he has escaped the even worse problems of explaining how an all-powerful God could have overlooked the possibility of evil or been surprised by it.

Aurobindo explains how evil fits into the scheme of things by approaching the topic of evil from three major points of view: 1) in relation to the Absolute, the supreme Reality 2) in regard to its origin and place in the cosmic workings, and 3) in regard to its action in the individual.

To consider evil in relation to the Absolute, Aurobindo first emphasizes that evil has no direct root in supreme Reality. It is a creation of Ignorance and Inconscience, not a fundamental nor primary aspect of being. Falsehood and evil are not polar to truth and goodness, for the relationship of polarity would put the two on a par, and give the same ontological status to falsehood and evil that are rightfully enjoyed by truth and goodness.²⁴

²⁴ Here, Aurobindo makes a point often neglected in the treatment of the Chinese principles of yin and yang. When the female principle of yin is treated as the principle of darkness and this is interpreted as moral darkness or evil, which frequently occurs in the symbolism of the I Ching and elsewhere, good and evil are indeed posited as polar and as enjoying equal ontological status. This happens "automatically," because yin and yang themselves are defined as polar and of equal ontological status.

Aurobindo insists that evil has no power of infinity, no eternal being, and no self-existence. There can be no absolute of falsehood, no absolute of evil. Falsehood and evil cannot exist in the realms of pure spirit, or even the higher realms of mind, where there is no ignorance. Falsehood and evil can be outgrown both individually and collectively during the course of evolutionary advance.

Like Gandhi and other Indian thinkers, Aurobindo closely associates evil with falsehood. Lower mind always works by approximation, and so relative truths are its mainstay. "It might almost be said no mental statement of things can be altogether true," Aurobindo writes, "It is not Truth bodied, pure and nude, but a draped figure -- often it is only the drapery that is visible."²⁵ He sees the human values of truth and error, good and evil, as relative. They change with the place and the time and the perspective. In the arena where true and wrong consciousness mix, acts also become a mixture, and good can produce evil, or evil deeds can sometimes have good results.²⁶

However, such relativity of good and evil isn't the fundamental truth. There is also a form of truth that comes by direct intuition or by identity, and this is the mode of the Supermind, which can descend upon the human

²⁵ LD, p. 599.

²⁶ As we saw in the last chapter, this is the basis of the greater good defense in the West.

intellect in the form of inspired intuition. Intuition, for Aurobindo, has a role and function that can be higher than that of reason.

The fact that good and evil are not polar also follows from the observation that good and evil are not mutually dependent. Good does not need evil in order to exist, but evil does need good in order to exist. Evil is parasitic on the good. The relation between good and evil is actually one of mutual contradiction. They function like light and darkness, to which they are frequently compared symbolically. Where light is present, it completely banishes darkness. Darkness is not a thing in itself, but rather an absence of light. In saying this, Aurobindo is in accord with the modern theories of light, in which light is a thing -- either waves or particles called photons, whereas darkness is simply the absence of such positive forms of energy.

The involution process involves a "forgetting" or a "veiling" of divine attributes, which is what ultimately makes evil possible. The first emergence from Inconscience is matter, but falsehood and evil cannot exist here, for there is no system of conscious knowledge. Water, for example, is neutral. It is simply a natural substance with certain properties. We think water is good if we are thirsty and we think it is evil if we are caught in a terrible storm at sea, but in a deeper sense water is neither good nor evil. In general

then, nature is below the duality of good and evil, just as spirit is above it.²⁷

The realm in which evil can manifest is a narrow and particular range within the hierarchy of being.

The vital mind, with its emphasis upon desire and sensation, is the first creator of the sense of evil. In animal life, there can be found violence, suffering, even the beginnings of cruelty and deception, but moral evil as such is absent. In a similar way, animals exhibit instinctual expressions of nurturing love or courage, but the full development of moral virtue is also absent.

It is on the human level and on the level of human mind that evil first appears. Evil is the fruit of the tree of *knowledge*. The human mind works in terms of polar ideas, which are often simplistically misapplied to create divisive judgments. Yet it is only on the lower levels of mind that evil is a category. In Supermind, where ignorance is absent, there is no evil. Each human mind has the potential to function with the full force and power of Supermind. So in this way too, we can see that evil has no genuine inevitability, and is not the result of some necessity or law. There are no

²⁷ Aurobindo here provides arguments that reinforce the Augustinian position that there is no such thing as "natural evil." Christianity reifies evil and dramatizes it by making it into a malevolent empire, but Aurobindo takes the opposite tack of showing the limits and contingency of evil. It is obviously far easier to conduct the free will defense when evil is of limited dimensions than it is when evil is seen as an absolute law or permanent principle.

inherent, unconquerable barriers that prevent the individual from having a mind without evil or that prevent the existence of a world without evil.

Aurobindo insists that there is no absolute validity to either pleasure or pain, and that both pleasure and pain are currents of a more general flow of sensation called *rasa*. Pleasure and pain thus have a hidden identity, and pleasure can be converted into pain, and pain into pleasure. A hidden subliminal self within us takes delight in both pleasure and pain equally:

Behind in our self and spirit is the All-Delight of the universal being which takes its account of the contact, a delight first in the enduring and then in the conquest of the suffering and finally in its transmutation that shall come hereafter; for pain and suffering are a perverse and contrary term of the delight of existence and they can turn into their opposite, even into the original All-Delight, Ananda.²⁸

This theory comes from Aurobindo's yogic experiences, and represents a valuable addition to the problem of evil discussion in the West. We have become a pill-taking population in this country, and might be inclined to dismiss the idea that mind control could have a major effect on our reception of pain and painful stimuli. But Gandhi underwent surgery for appendicitis without anesthetic, using only a few moments of yogic meditation to prepare himself. Aurobindo took advantage of an unjustly-imposed prison term to have sublime spiritual experiences. In fact, he first developed this idea that

²⁸ LD, p. 404.

pain could be controlled or converted to such a large extent when he was attacked by large warrior ants while in prison.

But if pain can really be converted into its opposite by mental discipline, it is simplistic to blame God for the pain in human life. In the problem of evil debate, critics often charge that God is blameworthy because the biological format of life is such that pain is always a possibility, and in some cases it can be so intense as to be horrific. Yet, when injury first takes place, there is often a shock reaction that dulls the pain, and there are also a number of natural anesthetics that are very effective for the control of pain. If humans misuse these drugs, or fail to cultivate the type of mental discipline that can transform pain, this is due to their own freely-chosen actions. So here again, a complaint which originally seemed to clearly relate to natural evil turns out to have a strong component that relates to human decision.

Aurobindo recognizes the existence of angels, who he identifies as powers and forms of vital life and mind. Some of these are attached in their root nature to ignorance, darkness, perversity and evil. They have been represented in traditions of myth and religion the world over as devils and demons, and at the level at which they function, Aurobindo tells us, the

struggle between the powers of light and darkness is real.²⁹ Humans can, upon occasion, be an instrument in the hands of these unseen agencies. Yet this does not just occur when people are involved in some overt form of devil worship. It can happen in more subtle ways. Through subliminal reinforcement, hateful emotions or perverse thoughts can more easily become compulsive, or be magnified in their effects.

Yet, Aurobindo tells us that though the powers of such malevolent immaterial beings is considerable, their powers are not absolute. An absolute evil would destroy everything. Since everything is not destroyed, we know that there is no evil being with absolute powers. Likewise, there is no such thing as absolute pain. Pain always has a limit. When pain goes beyond measure, it ends. The capacity of excess pain to weaken and finally destroy the body it afflicts is but one of many examples that can be given of evil's parasitic relationship to the good and its lack of self-substance.

In regard to the question "How does evil arise?" Aurobindo's answer is similar to that of John Hick. As the evolutionary process begins, spiritual

²⁹ I don't think theodicy can endorse the idea of devils and demons, at least under the traditional interpretation that these are angelic beings with a *permanent* affiliation with evil. If they really *cannot* change their evil ways, devils and demons make evil just as permanent and inevitable as does the doctrine of hell. The "lost" status of demons and devils shows that God has failed to save these beings, and hence lacks omnipotence. It is true that many people throughout history have reported experiences with devils and demons, but the human psyche is complex, and theodicy can say that those who report such things have projected their own negativity outwards or, because of their beliefs, have misinterpreted certain negative psychic events as the doing of a devil.

consciousness is present, but buried beneath a set of insistent vital and practical demands. Consciousness manifests within a separated form of life which has to affirm itself, rise above inertia, self-express, survive and procreate, all within a world that has many dangers. So growth begins on an animal level, with a self-affirming vital and physical individual, but for Aurobindo, divine guidance is always available during the process of growth. This guidance comes through intuition, which derives from Supermind. But the surface ego consciousness “hears” the infallible voice of spiritual intuition only indirectly, and often with distortion. The sense organs bring in a kind of knowledge which is urgent and distracting. Because of this, the “evolving mind trails constantly error as its shadow,” and a rapid development of truth consciousness is not the intention of nature for us.³⁰

Rather, the method chosen by nature is a slow and difficult evolution of Inconscience developing through various forms of Ignorance and mixtures of Ignorance and Knowledge before it can be ready for transformation into a higher Truth-Consciousness and Truth-Knowledge. Aurobindo’s treatment of Inconscience recalls Hick’s concept of epistemic distance. Both positions address the issue of how we can be ignorant of something -- God’s presence or Spiritual Reality -- which should, in one sense, be overwhelmingly obvious

³⁰ LD, p. 615.

because it is said to be the most fundamental reality. Aurobindo again comes close to Hick when he declares that error is a necessary accompaniment, almost a necessary condition and instrumentation, an indispensable step or stage in the slow evolutionary process.³¹

For Aurobindo, the ego is an almost inexhaustible source of the distortion of truth, and is the primary cause of the falsification process. A wrong consciousness will by necessity act wrongly. Through the limitations of the ego's outlook, a will to domination arises. The ego wants its desires satisfied. It doesn't care about truth or right or good. It wants control. It wants a life space, a place in the sun. This desire for dominance by the self-affirming vital being is a main source of wrongdoing and evil.

But the vital personality is not evil by nature. It has a spontaneous passion for joy and beauty. It affirms everything that is a part of experience, both the good and the evil. It delights in all things, delights in truth and delights in falsehood, delights in life and delights in death, celebrates pleasure and also celebrates pain. All of life is self-affirmation to the vital personality. The life ego has a will to expand by embracing everything and by entering into everything. Evolutionary nature also makes use of

³¹ LD, p. 617.

everything, both good and evil alike. Good and evil have a use, they teach humans what to seek, and what to avoid.

Yet the time will come when the entire realm of good and evil will be left behind by the further progress of the evolutionary advance. As Hick also declared, though in a different context, the true and ultimate human state is one of absolute good. Evil is also limited in the sense that it is temporary and to be left behind as evolutionary advance proceeds:

If we could grasp the essential nature and the essential cause of error, suffering and death, we might hope to arrive at a mastery over them which should be not relative but entire. We might hope even to eliminate them altogether and justify the dominant instinct of our nature by the conquest of that absolute good, bliss, knowledge and immortality which our intuitions perceive as the true and ultimate condition of the human being.³²

Aurobindo presents an interesting analogy for theodicy when he insists that our thoughts about evil need a Copernican revolution wherein God becomes the center. Then our judgments concerning evil will be transformed and corrected. Our concepts of evil have a certain practical validity, just as there is a practical validity to the notion that the sun goes around the earth, rising in the sky during the morning, and declining during the afternoon. But real knowledge shows us that it is the earth that goes around the sun. Likewise, for the mental consciousness God goes around the

³² LD, p. 57

personal ego and all His works and ways can be judged by the judgment of our egoistic sensations, emotion and conceptions. By this view, evil is a terrible problem, and can be laid at God's door since God created the world. However, such awareness does not represent the highest possible state of human knowledge, which would reverse this judgment and declare that the Divine is the center of experience. In transcendent knowledge is a new order of truth, in which the ego finds all its values transformed and corrected.³³

Western discussions of evil tend to be very moralistic, and Aurobindo can provide a valuable corrective in this regard. Aurobindo insists that any approach to evil through the injunctions of morality is inadequate. The judgments of morality are always one-sided and partial. Morality contains half-truths and by itself, morality can never cure evil. It can never get to the main issue. To attempt to select the good and reject the evil is not a plan that will ever end evil. To merely judge what is wrong or to exhort people to do what is right is futile. This is the intellect's notion of escape from evil, but in reality, there is no escape apart from growth into more encompassing spiritual being. Altruism, the conscious attempt to do good, cannot provide a solution. Our ego divides us from other beings and when the ego has not

³³ LD, p. 55.

been sufficiently broadened and transformed, even altruism will be tainted with self-righteousness and the expectation of reward.

Aurobindo declares in traditional Indian fashion that only spiritual realization provides the final answer to evil. There can be no final solution until we have turned our Inconscience into the greater consciousness, made the truth of self and spirit our life-basis and transformed our ignorance into a higher knowledge.”³⁴ To be liberated from ego is our first necessity, and everything else will follow. This is why for Aurobindo the spiritual call must take precedent over all other claims, intellectual, ethical, or social. Here we can notice how the Pelagian view that humans do *have* the internal resources needed to overcome evil translates directly into a moral imperative that they get on with the process of spiritual growth and achieve this goal.

But Aurobindo warns us that in this process of spiritual growth, there can be no artificial escape, no short cut. A complete and radical transformation of our nature is the only solution. Self-realization involves three major steps. The first is to discover the soul and to enthrone it, rather than the ego, as the primary expression of selfhood. The second is to know our inner self as the self of all others. And the third is to know the divine

³⁴ LD, p. 627.

being as both immanent and transcendent.³⁵ For Aurobindo, evil is indeed a law of imperfection which has been laid upon us at certain stages of our growth. But it is also a law that we should shun evil and rise to spirituality. Evil is the fruit of spiritual ignorance, and will disappear only by the growth of a spiritual consciousness and the attainment of spiritual knowledge.

The Soul and the Ego Personality

Aurobindo distinguishes himself from the Western view, because he does not take the constantly-changing formations of the apparent ego as the final expression of human identity. As is commonly the case in Indian thought, he recognizes a depth dimension to the personal "I" of the mind-body complex, an inner Person or true Self which stands behind all experiences and which is a persistent reality, an eternal portion of the eternal spirit.

It is this basic notion of including the Self and the ego personality together in a dipolar description of personal identity that I think should be adopted by Christian thought or Western thought. The closest we have had to such a dipolar view of personal identity has been in the Jungian tradition, but Jung's model of the psyche has not generally been accepted as the norm

³⁵ In general, it would appear that immanence and transcendence are both valid modes of divine activity, and hence that theology and theodicy should strive to keep an *equal* emphasis on the two aspects.

in psychological, philosophical or religious discussions. The use of Jung's model would be problematic in any case, however, because Jung wanted to avoid religious implications, and didn't carry out a description of the Self in terms of spiritual energies or categories.

The main point is that it is difficult to discuss the process of healing or recovery from evil, if we have to work with a psychology where the ego personality is seen as the only factor in identity, and where the ego is not located in some way vis-à-vis energies of spirit or higher mind. Because Christianity has so emphasized transcendence and so posited that the escape from evil must occur the appeal to an *external* authority, there has been no positing of a divine spirit within, and no need to work out the relations that might obtain between this inner divine Self and the ego.³⁶

The inadequacy of Western orthodox psychology relative to spiritual applications has been noticed before, and has been extensively documented by Ken Wilbur in *The Atman Project*. Wilbur points out that Western psychologies have concentrated exclusively on the issues of uroboros, body, persona, and shadow, all the factors involved in the integration of the ego

³⁶ The Hebrew Calallah is one of the few Western systems that provide a detailed "map" of human individuality in which psychological aspects are rooted or embedded in the energies of spirit. The commentarial tradition here is not as rich as in the Indian systems, but it could be worked with and enriched.

personality.³⁷ Yet *all* of this development belongs to what in Eastern thought has been seen as the “gross realm,” the realm that takes the gross physical body and its constructs of ordinary space and time as its final referent. In Hinduism, the gross realm is called the *sthula-sarira*. Aurobindo correlates this realm with the gross mind, the physical ego or ego personality. In orthodox Western psychology, this gross realm is taken as all there is. As Rene Guenon puts it, modern Western psychology, “deals only with a quite restricted portion of the human individuality, where the mental faculty is in direct relationship with the corporeal modality, and given the methods it employs, it is incapable of going any further.”³⁸

But Aurobindo insists that our real psychology is much more complex. He endorses the ancient Indian view, presented in the Taittiriya Upanisad and elsewhere, that besides our gross body, we also have a subtle body, and a causal one. This psycho-spiritual model easily explains a variety of paranormal events that bewilder orthodox Western psychology and force it into a posture of dogmatic denial:

The oldest Vedantic knowledge tells us of five degrees of our being, the material, the vital, the mental, the ideal, the spiritual or beatific and to each of these grades of our soul there corresponds a grade of our substance, a sheath as it was called

³⁷ See Wilbur, Ken, *The Atman Project*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill, especially chapter 8.

³⁸ Wilbur, Ken, *The Atman Project*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, p. 65.

in the ancient figurative language. A later psychology found that these five sheaths of our substance were the material of three bodies, gross physical, subtle, and causal, in all of which the soul actually and simultaneously dwells, although here and now we are superficially conscious only of the material vehicle. But it is possible to become conscious in our other bodies as well, and it is in fact the opening up of the veil between them and consequently between our physical, psychical and ideal personalities which is the cause of those "psychic" and "occult" phenomena that are beginning to be increasingly examined...³⁹

For Aurobindo, the Self is "the true soul secret in us," a "flame of the Godhead always alight within us," inextinguishable even by that dense unconsciousness which obscures our outward nature.⁴⁰ It is the concealed witness, the hidden guide, the inner light or inner voice of the mystic. It is that which endures and is imperishable in us from birth to birth, untouched by death, decay, or corruption.⁴¹ This inner Person puts forward a psychic personality which changes, grows, and develops from life to life. The Self can at first exercise only a concealed, partial and indirect influence through the

³⁹ Radhakrishnan, Sarvepalli, and Charles E. Moore, *A Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1957, p. 603.

⁴⁰ I follow Aurobindo in adapting a flexible terminology. The Self can be called the Soul, the Inner Person, the Purusha, or the Divine Spirit within. This Self and the ego personality represent the two components of the bipolar model of selfhood. The one is an inner Self, the other a surface manifestation. There are certainly ambiguities and difficulties with this model of human identity, but I regard them as no worse than the legion of problems that beset any of the other attempts to define human identity. (By contrast, Hick speaks of the ego as the inward or private "I," and personality is his term for the mask or psychic formation that deals with the outer world. I speak of "ego personality" as a single entity, the surface self. This surface self functions both to turn inwardly and to deal with the outer world, but just because it turns inward, this does not make it identical with the deeper Self, the Soul.)

⁴¹ DL, p. 226.

mind. But in the saint, the sage, or the seer, the Self is seen in full bloom. When this larger and purer psychic entity comes to the surface, we say of a person, “they have a real soul,” and when it is absent that we say they have no soul. The Self is open to the universal knowledge of the cosmic mind, and aware of the universal force of cosmic life. Aurobindo tells us that “the malady of the world is that the individual cannot find his real soul.”⁴²

The ego personality is the external and superficial form of our identity. The ego is a “translation of the secret self into the terms of the surface consciousness, or a subjective substitute for the true self in our surface experience.”⁴³ It is a manifestation of the real Person, its expression within the material world, its living representative. It is a particular bundle of characteristics, but the real Person has far greater potentials than can be expressed through any one frame or any one mode:

The Person puts forward the personality as his role, character, *persona*, in the present act of his long drama of manifested existence. But the Person is larger than his personality.⁴⁴

So far, I would say that Aurobindo’s characterizations of ego personality and the self have been acceptable for adaptation into a Western setting. However, Aurobindo also repeats certain strains of thought

⁴² DL, p. 221.

⁴³ WW, p. 237.

⁴⁴ WW, p. 238.

concerning the ego personality which are traditional in Indian thought, but which I would not want to adopt. These strands basically center on the notion that the ego personality is only a temporary manifestation of identity, one that must be abandoned or dissolved as spiritual growth proceeds. Aurobindo goes to great lengths to establish that the self is not merged into the Infinite as part of the process of spiritual growth, but he takes far less care to preserve the ego against dissolution. He says:

A certain ego-centrism is our rock of safety against the cosmic and the infinite, our defense. But in our spiritual change we have to forego this defense; ego has to vanish, the person finds itself dissolved into a vast impersonality.⁴⁵

There is also in Indian thought a tendency to see the ego as essentially flawed, as having no real positive purpose. Ego perception is often presented as essentially separative, essentially ignorant, the seat of all selfishness and the focal point of moral evil. As this theme is developed, the ego appears to be some kind of inexplicable blot on creation, a kind of accident or mistake that really doesn't belong here. Aurobindo at times comes close to this position:

The nature of the ego is a self-limitation of consciousness by a willed ignorance of the rest of its play and its exclusive absorption in one form, one combination of tendencies, one field of the movement of energies. Ego is the factor which determines the reactions of error, sorrow, pain, evil death; for it gives these

⁴⁵ DL, p. 229.

values to movements which would otherwise be represented in their right relation to the one Existence, Bliss, Truth and Good.... The limited ego is only an intermediate phenomenon of consciousness necessary for a certain line of development.⁴⁶

These ideas present something of a mix, and there are some valid points included in among many distorted ones. I would agree with Aurobindo that the surface personality or ego is an expression of an underlying identity, and as such, it has no separate reality, no basic independence. Ego personality is not the entirety of human identity, and is not independent and cut off from the rest of the psyche. Yet the ego personality may see itself this way. One of ego's "games" is to play at being the sole factor of identity, to see itself as self-contained and autonomous. Ego does have the ability to shut itself off, to attempt to make a self-enclosed "world" of identity, consisting of its own beliefs. Ego functioning in such a way is self-limited.

I would also agree that when ego attempts to set itself up as the sole expression of identity, it tends to see everything only in relation to itself and to reduce everything to its own purposes. Thus, ego is responsible for the mode of interaction we identify as egotistical and selfish, and this mode is indeed the focal point of moral evil. Moral evil certainly traces to the separatist ego personality, rather than to any other portion of identity.

⁴⁶ DL, p. 58.

Where I differ from Aurobindo is that I see separatism, egotism and selfishness as mere *modes* of ego personality functioning. The ego personality is not limited to this one mode -- wrong functioning. It also has healthy and normal ways of functioning, and perfectly valid roles to play in the overall drama of psychic growth and development. The ego is a normal and healthy part of the psyche. It is a major expression of identity, a permanent center of identity within the whole Self, and no such expression of identity is ever left behind, dissolved, undermined, or betrayed by the process of spiritual growth. By Aurobindo's own account, spiritual growth summarizes, incorporates, includes, and transforms previous elements, rather than trampling them underfoot or abandoning them. Ego personality should not be left as the sole *exception* to Aurobindo's own fine observation that the way of evolutionary advance is always to take up and transform the lower, rather than abandoning it or destroying it.

So in my view, the ordinary ego personality has an eternal validity. I feel this point is not sufficiently emphasized by Indian thought or by Aurobindo, and I would want to modify this before taking the dipolar model of identity over and using it in the Western world.

The ego will always be limited to an extent. It is not infinite consciousness. The ego's concerns are not with the entirety of Reality, but rather with how Reality looks from this particular center, this particular

time and place. The ego is that portion of the overall Self who has the job of looking outward into a particular space/time situation. It must describe the world, form beliefs, make decisions, and choose goals. In order to do these jobs, it has been given the tools that it needs, especially the tools of perception, the five bodily senses. The ego must manipulate within the world, and it has the tools necessary for this purpose as well, the hand, the fingers, the feet. It must form beliefs, and for that it has been given the mind and the ability to understand.

The problem is not that ego personality is limited. Limitation is important to achieve focus, and the focus upon a particular range of perception that the ego maintains is an incredible achievement. Focus on the material world is what makes self-expression within the material world possible. The real problem with ego limitation is that ego personality often chooses beliefs that limit its awareness even more than is necessary.

The ego often has a habit of not considering everything that it could consider. Many aspects of selfhood lie around unattended in the psyche because the glorious and self-absorbed ego doesn't choose to bestow its attention upon them. Many of the contents of the subconscious mind, for example, are there simply because the ego has shoved them into obscurity or refused to believe in their existence. This is done because the contexts do not fit in with the ego's self-image, which is a special group of beliefs the ego has

about itself. The self-image is just ego's own conceptual self-portrait. It is not necessarily accurate.

The ego has the power to choose beliefs, and these include beliefs about self, beliefs about others, beliefs about the world, and beliefs about spirituality. The ego looks inward, towards the subjective mind, and outwards, towards the world. It looks up, towards the divine, and down, towards the earth. It looks left and right, forming social beliefs and beliefs about the cultural world. It forms beliefs in all these basic directions, and these beliefs can easily become a "box," or a complete belief "set" that separates the ego from everything else. The ego is often like someone who chooses to live in a single room, never daring to go outside and see the real world. It can be like a prisoner who has so painstakingly decorated his prison cell that he identifies with each and every picture on the wall, and cannot bear to leave the room, or even to see a single item on the wall rearranged.

The irony is that the ego's entire project of *seeking* identity is fundamentally flawed. The ego personality already *is* identity. It doesn't need to seek identity or create identity. In trying to create identity, the ego is trying to create something that has already been created. Ego attempts to create identity by identifying with its own beliefs. It wants to take its beliefs and invest them with identity, to pull the beliefs into the circle of selfhood

and say, “Yes, here is what I am, specifically. I am this belief, that belief, and that.” So the ego will insist, for example, that if one of its ideas is attacked, it has been attacked. Yet beliefs can’t create identity, any more than social roles can. Beliefs can’t create identity. On the contrary, it is the identity that creates beliefs. Identity is prior to belief. The ego’s job is to choose appropriate beliefs, but it can’t even do this right as long as it wants to identify with its beliefs. When the ego identifies *with* beliefs, it always chooses the wrong beliefs.

So the immature ego certainly goes around in circles, and ties its own shoe laces together. It not only makes a spectacle of itself, but often does great harm to itself and others. Yet the point is to stop the nonsense, not to kill off the ego. The ego is not there by accident. It is not some temporary psychic function that will be here today and gone tomorrow. Rather, the nature of ego is to be here today and *also* here tomorrow. The ego is the center of identity that is in *charge* of those forms of perception and valuation that occur *in terms of* “today and tomorrow.” If the ego weren’t attending to today and tomorrow, no one would.

Not only does the overall Self need someone to do the precise job that ego personality does, the overall Self created a small miracle when it manifested the ego personality. The overall Self can’t do anything without bestowing the entire wonder of its own uniqueness and energy. All the

overall Self can do is posit the fullness of itself into various different packages, again and again, and then maintain contact with all those packages. When it manifested the ego personality, it manifested something of great value, and created a center of identity-expression that has eternal validity.

So there is a value to the expression of identity in ego that will not be betrayed. The ego personality will not be undermined, destroyed, dissolved, or left behind during the course of spiritual advance. The ego personality may be making certain mistakes; if so, then these mistakes are what will be left behind. Certain modes of ego functioning may be incompatible with spiritual progress; if so, it is these modes that will cease. If the ego has been doing a bad job of being a center of identity, then as spiritual progress occurs, it will start doing a good job. If it has been trying to overextend its rein of identity, then as spiritual progress occurs, it will settle into normal boundaries. If it has been on a futile journey trying to seek identity or bestow identity, it will realize that it already has identity, relax and cease the frenzied search.

As spiritual progress proceeds, the ego personality will cease to be a prisoner of its own separatist beliefs, but it will not cease to exist, and neither will it cease to be in charge of selecting beliefs. So not only won't ego cease to exist, it won't even have its task snatched away from it. Even the

more expansive, more enlightened ego that results from spiritual growth remains a chooser of beliefs. Even the “mature ego” lives in a “room of beliefs.” The “enlightened ego” simply lives in a room of beliefs that is much larger, and has windows and doors. Instead of being rigid, the enlightened ego is flexible. Instead of being isolated, the enlightened ego is in commerce with other portions of identity equally valid as itself.

One of the great fears that causes the ego to choose beliefs that shut out the dimension of spirit is the kind of implication that we find in Aurobindo, the implication that spiritual progress will ultimately destroy ego. The ego is meant to be flexible, and its great problems come when it is locked up in fear. It is easily subject to fear, and most of its rigidity is due to fear. The ego rightly considers any spirituality that requires its own nonexistence as a simple threat, and such teachings only serve to lock ego up even more rigidly into negative patterns.

The primary advantage of the dipolar model of the self is that it represents spiritual resource as internal, as “built in” to selfhood. In overcoming evil, there is no appeal to an external authority figure. In spiritual growth, there is self-integration. The psyche must be seen as “coming together,” rather than as being “rescued from without.” Each person is, as Aurobindo insists, an incarnation of a spiritual identity. If this model of the psyche were taken up and used as a norm in Western religious

discussions, the same divine Self that was in Jesus would be seen as in each of us, and Jesus would be taken as a model to be emulated, rather than as an external authority who will solve all our problems for us in response to our requests.

Immortality

The relation between the Self and the ego is also important in regard to the question of immortality. Aurobindo clearly believes that the inner Self is immortal:

The truth about the mode of being of the Individual Self is that it is a concrete Person who enjoys immortality... The Individual Self is in its deepest essence a poise of being of the Absolute, just as cosmic universality and supracosmic transcendence are other poises of the same Absolute... Each Individual Self is a unique center of action and medium of self-manifestation of the Absolute.⁴⁷

Yet, Aurobindo gives a rather ambiguous account of how and to what extent the ego personality may participate in immortality:

Normally, when we insist on the soul's undying existence, what is meant is the survival after death of a definite, unchanging personality which was and will always remain the same throughout eternity. It is the very imperfect superficial "I" of the moment, evidently regarded by Nature as a temporary form and not worth preservation, for which we demand this stupendous right to survival and immortality. But the demand is extravagant and cannot be conceded; the "I" of the moment can only merit survival if it consents to change, to be no longer itself but something else, greater, better, more luminous in

⁴⁷ WW, p. 240.

knowledge, more molded in the image of the eternal inner beauty, more and more progressive towards the divinity of the secret Spirit.⁴⁸

Here again Aurobindo presents us with something of a mix, for valuable ideas are here mingled with some unfortunate phrases. In the first place, the ego personality is not unchanging, and never has been. The ego personality knows that it was one expression at age five and quite another at age fifty-five. This is a marvel that will never be explained. We don't know how a thing can be in one sense the same and in another sense be able to change so radically. This is why I include human identity as a true surd in my list of surds, along with such imponderables as the nature of God and radical creation.⁴⁹ Yet this marvel of permanence amid change is something that the ego personality is used to. Ego has changed before, and is willing to change again. What it doesn't want is to be obliterated. The ego does not expect death to involve no changes at all, it just wants those changes to be somewhat like the changes already undergone.

In my view, the ego personality is quite sensible in insisting that immortality won't mean a thing if it is just the immortality of that Inner Self

⁴⁸ DL, p. 821.

⁴⁹ I will make apologies to John Locke, and to the huge modern literature on human identity if necessary, but I just don't believe they have quite succeeded in explaining what it is to be an "I," or in telling us how an "I" can change and yet remain the same. Still, I don't think most of the participants in this debate themselves regard the issue as solved. This is what a surd is, something that you can elucidate in many, many respects, and yet never quite comprehend.

over there, the identity who really owns the immortality in such a way that it can't be taken away. It is also understandable that the ego personality gets a little nervous at the idea that the Immortal Self may or may not pick up the ego personality to take it along for the ride into eternity, depending on how well ego has certain realizations, selects proper beliefs, asks Jesus for salvation according to a good enough formula, or manages to meet and link up with hidden shadow elements in the subconscious. Nobody wants to be on an obstacle course where you get obliterated if you don't do well. In their eagerness to drive home the seriousness of spiritual pursuits, religions have often portrayed spirituality as a set of moral tasks, and browbeat the ego to go accomplish those tasks by threatening ego with oblivion unless they are properly completed.

Such threats of obliteration are not only counterproductive, but in my view, they are essentially false. The ego personality is a center of identity with eternal validity. It will get "carried along for the ride into eternity" whether it thinks it will or not. It is, to put it boldly, immortal, whether it likes it or not. The ego personality has plenty of things it should be worrying about; whether or not it will survive the experience of death is not one of them.

The view that the ego does survive the experience of death is suggested by the modern phenomenon of the "near death experience," which has been

extensively documented in recent years. In these experiences, many people who have experienced clinical death have an experience of survival. They report an experience of hovering above their own inert bodies, that is, they report being in what Aurobindo would call their subtle bodies. They are amazed to find that the pain is gone, and they are still intact. They didn't expect to survive, but now they find themselves with their own minds and their own awareness, functioning in a quite new context. This happens to religious people, atheists, adults and children, men and women. It occurs with people who have done radically wrong things as well as with people who have tried to do right. It happens to people from all cultures. These visionary experiences at least raise the possibility that ego personality is immortal, whether it thinks it is or not.

When Aurobindo says above that the ego is a temporary "I" of the moment that Nature regards as not worth preserving, I believe his polemical purpose has overcome his usually-accurate intuitive sense. When he speaks as if the ego will be "no longer itself," but something else, he again raises the question as to whether he believes the experience of death brings transformation, or obliteration, to the ego. Transformation is changing form, lifting form into a higher expression. Obliteration is the ending of form, as when a building is knocked down by a steel ball. Of course, the line between transformation and obliteration may not always be clear. When the

caterpillar changes into the butterfly, the transformation is so profound, and the new form so much more beautiful, the caterpillar almost appears to have been replaced. Yet it has not been obliterated, but transformed. The teaching that I see as essential is that death is a transformation and not an obliteration for ego personality. It may be a profound transformation like that of the butterfly, but it is not an obliteration.

One objection that can be made to the dipolar model of identity is that it appears to contain a central, blatant contradiction. The Person or the Self is supposed to be the "I" and it has one set of properties, and then the ego personality is said to be the "I," and it has a different set of properties. These two "I's" don't even seem to be conscious of each other, yet it should be obvious that identity is supposed to imply union or oneness. There can't be two identities that are both one identity, it would seem, and yet the dipolar model of identity seems to say just this.

In answering this, one must begin with the observation that human identity is not mathematical identity, and the sense of oneness is more complex. The distinction between Self and ego personality operates in terms of functional distinctions involving foreground/background, and conscious/unconscious. Usually, the ego personality will experience itself as in the foreground, and will be relatively unconscious of the Self. Hick's concept of epistemic distance actually implies a dipolar model of human

identity, for if God's presence is such a fundamental reality, then each human identity must be aware of it. If ego personality is to have a mode of awareness where God is *not* directly perceived, then the ego must distance itself from the portion of its own selfhood which *does* remain aware of God's presence. In fact, epistemic distance is the distance between ego and Self. It is the un-awareness of ego personality, which can be complete unawareness, or else manifest in many partial or temporary ways.

Thus, when the ego experiences religious insight, mystical vision or spiritual influences, this can be taken as a sign that epistemic distance is lessening, the psyche is unifying. The ego personality is "merging" with the Self. The Self may normally be hidden, but it functions as an inner resource for ego. If the ego needs to "reach beyond itself" in order to accomplish forgiveness, for example, it can draw on the power of the Self at such a moment. If the ego needs insight, it can ask the Self for that insight. When the ego is functioning at the height of its powers, and exerting a magnanimous influence -- whenever it seems wise, mature, peaceful, expansive and "great-souled," this is a sign of psychic integration. It means that the ego personality is under the influence of the Self, or that the two have been drawn into a commonality of self-expression.

However, if enlightenment occurs, the Self has not suddenly become conscious of ego personality. The Self is *always* aware of the ego personality.

Rather, what has happened is that the ego personality has become more conscious, its awareness has now expanded so as to include the Self. This is not just an Indian view. In many places, we can find Western correlates to the basic idea that spiritual growth is a process by which the ego becomes more conscious. For example, in the Bible, the kingdom of heaven is compared to leaven, which is the yeast that makes bread dough expand. The expansion of consciousness is also expressed in the idea that there must be growth from the merely personal to the truly universal. Expansion of consciousness also takes place when the ego stops taking the surface of things as final, and begins to comprehend the reality of spiritual concerns.

. Everything that happens to the ego personality happens also to the Self. One of the reasons we can't readily understand the Self is that the Self functions in a state of complete consciousness, whereas the form of consciousness we know as ego personalities is always limited and partial. The Self can be aware of many things at once, and do many things at once, and can also compartmentalize identity functions in a way that the ego personality finds quite baffling. But the Self has projected itself into a variety of ego personalities, and is fully absorbed in each role. These roles are usually compartmentalized, such that one ego expression doesn't know much about other ego expressions, yet all are connected to the Self and there are no fundamental divisions. Any partition within the self is a temporary

barrier, like a screen that can be put up. While it is up, it will block vision, but it can be taken down again, and then vision is restored.

Human identity is more flexible than is usually realized, and as we seek to understand it, we need to move in the direction of becoming more flexible as to what is and isn't possible. The cases of multiple personality in psychology are quite revealing in regard to the partitioning function of human identity.⁵⁰ Under the stress of severe abuse, especially childhood sexual abuse, a personality can split into one section which has the job of remembering the abuse, and another personality, who is able to go on with the business of daily life precisely because they don't remember the abuse.⁵¹ This is actually a rather creative way of dealing with experiences so horrid that they cannot be faced directly. This phenomenon demonstrates that human identity can create partitions within identity, dividing into sections or fragments, all of which have a certain claim to be "I." In most cases of multiple personality, there are interactive relationships between the

⁵⁰ My wife is a psycho-therapist who specializes in sex abuse, and she has found a surprisingly high percentage of her clients afflicted with Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). This is a recognized mental illness, listed in the DSM-IV, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders published by the American Psychiatric Association. There is a growing knowledge of how to apply therapy for this affliction, which is now often called Dissociative Identity Disorder.

⁵¹ This is a simplification. The splitting occurs in all kinds of ways. But it does seem to occur for the purpose here described.

partitioned sections, and the partitions can come down again, through therapy, such that unity is restored.⁵²

Reincarnation posits similar relationships among the various ego personalities that all belong to one soul. If there has been a horrible impact of evil in one particular lifetime, and the person dies before it is resolved, the psychic energies and values which have been brought into being cannot simply vanish. Instead, those values become encapsulated, they are reduced into seed form, and those seeds grow up and find expression within some other lifetime. A most creative aspect of the Self is seen in this partitioning and encapsulating function. No particular ego is given more than it can bear. The issues are faced, but they are faced in a context that is potentially creative. The impact of horrible events such as murders or wars are discharged within lifetimes where they appear along with some positive values, and where the resources are present which will make some form of creative growth past the obstruction at least possible.

One metaphor for the overall psyche that helps to grasp this partitioning aspect of identity has only been made available in the last few years. This is the comparison of the Self to a giant computer network, like the Internet. There is the “whole system” of the Internet, but within it are

⁵² Usually, any ambition to be integrated must come from the patient themselves. If they don't care to achieve integration, it should not be imposed as a goal by the therapist.

many local computer systems which are relatively autonomous. The internet “as a whole” is continually changing and expanding, like the self, and the individual computer systems within the internet are like the various ego personalities. The systems are linked to one another in all kinds of different ways, and there are various rules of access that govern how one center may or may not link up to another. No computer loses its own identity because it is part of the network. Rather, by virtue of its connections to the whole, its capabilities are expanded. All of the components of the system could, in theory, be in touch with all the others. But in practice, the links that develop between certain of the members is much stronger, so that complex sub-systems are formed within an overall unity.

Along with this modern metaphor, one can also consider the ancient one by which the Self and the ego personality are compared to a house with many rooms. The Self is like the house itself, the ego personality is like a room within that house. This is why it is said that nothing happens to the ego personality that doesn't also happen to the Self. It is like saying that nothing can occur within a particular room of a house that does not occur within the house itself.⁵³ Relative to immortality, the analogy would be that

⁵³ In another ancient metaphor, one can say that anything that happens to the leaf happens also to the vine. If the leaf is burnt, the vine is burnt. The leaf is the expression of the vine, it is the vine as it exists in this particular manifestation.

if the house itself remains standing, so do all the rooms in the house also continue to exist. This is why I want to modify Aurobindo and emphasize that positing immortality for the Self *is* positing immortality for the ego personality. The house will never come to a point of development where it no longer contains the room. There are add-ons to the house, but they occur on the outer edges of the house.⁶⁴ There is also redecoration, where partitions of one kind or another might be put up or taken down within a room. We can also change the color of paint or the style of wallpaper in a room. We don't want to get bored with the room, we can allow the room to change, but if our question is whether the room will still be there, the answer is yes, it will continue to be there because it is part of the house.

Death, in this metaphor, could be compared to a point of development where the one who formerly was locked up in the room, and took that room to be the entirety, finds that a door opens. They go through that door, and discover that the room didn't exist all by itself, and never has. The room was always a part of a greater house. If we could speak of the ego as the consciousness of the one aware of the room, and the Self as the consciousness that was always aware of the entire house, we might be tempted, as

⁶⁴ Likewise, in the internet, there is no need for the net to drop an existing computer server site in order to add a new one. The system just keeps expanding and becoming larger and richer as new sites are added. In regard to the vine analogy, there is no need for one leaf to fall off for every new leaf that grows. The vine can just keep getting bigger.

Aurobindo does, to say that at death, the ego has expanded, or “merged” with the consciousness of the Self. But this merging or expansion doesn’t mean that the room is destroyed. Neither does it mean that the ego can’t go back into the room, and enjoy things as they were before. It simply means that the ego is now aware that there is an entire house there to be explored. It has a new freedom, it hasn’t lost a thing.

Karma and Rebirth

So strong is the applicability of karma to the problem of evil that, as we have mentioned, a number of Indian thinkers have seriously and urgently put forward the idea that karma solves the problem of evil all by itself. However, such “solutions” usually turn out to be flawed, because they begin with the traditional idea that karma is a law of cause and effect that dispenses punishments for bad deeds and rewards for good deeds. If an evil deed is not punished in this lifetime, then karma sees to it that the person is punished in some future lifetime. So if we see someone suffering, we never have to believe that their sufferings are unjustified or represent evil. All instances of suffering can be explained by the idea that the person is being punished for bad deeds which they did in some previous lifetime.

It is not hard to demonstrate the problems with this approach to karma and rebirth. For one thing, this explanation gives too much emphasis to punishment. All suffering is explained as punishment for prior misdeeds.

Yet if the enormous amount of suffering in human life is all necessary to serve the interests of justice, it is justice rather than love, creativity, or growth that provides the basis for the whole cosmic arrangement. A God who would set up such a system is more a scrupulous disciplinarian than a loving creator.

But the biggest problem is the identity issue. Punishment can only be just if the person being punished is the same person who did the wrong deed. If a person does a bad deed in one life, then to punish another person in another life who has no memory of the wrongdoing can scarcely be seen as just, or as having an educative possibility.

Aurobindo appreciates these problems, and his notion of karma is different. Aurobindo rejects the idea that the essence of karma is that good actions are rewarded and evil actions punished. This is a bold move on his part, because this idea has long been the heart of the theory of karma.⁵⁵ The theory of rebirth in some ways simply functioned to broaden the scope of life's extent so that this basic idea could appear more plausible. That is, since good actions were not obviously rewarded in this life, and since evil actions often went unpunished, rebirth provided further and future lifetimes in

⁵⁵ I regret being unable to include a historical review of the idea of karma in Indian thought. However, I have made such a review in two previous papers, "The Theory of Karma," and "Buddhist Contributions to the Theory of Karma."

which such rewards or punishments could be administered. In fact, in the traditional Indian notion of *samsara*, the whole universe was described as driven by karma and karmic processes of cause and effect. The soul was caught on a vast wheel of cyclic experience, bound there by its karma, to undergo life after life, until through the process of *moksha* or liberation, it was finally released.

Aurobindo assigns only a very limited and partial validity to the reward-punishment view of karma. Cause and effect are realities, and to an extent, the world does respond to the quality of our intents and actions. But he actually ridicules the notion of *samsara* that would exaggerate this role of karmic balancing and make it fundamental:

These are very summary popular notions and offer no foothold to the philosophic reason and no answer to a search for the true significance of life. A vast world-system which exists only as a convenience for turning endlessly on a wheel of Ignorance with no issue except a final chance of stepping out of it, is not a world with any real reason for existence. A world which serves only as a school of sin and virtue and consists of a system of rewards and whippings, does not make any better appeal to our intelligence.⁵⁶

Aurobindo points out that “to saddle the new personality with the rewards or punishments of the old looks like a purposeless and purely mechanical procedure.”⁵⁷ He also makes the Kantian point that systems of

⁵⁶ LD, p. 805.

⁵⁷ LD, p. 811.

reward and punishment cannot result in moral progress anyway, since if we are to act morally, we must do what is right because it is right, and not because we seek a reward or want to avoid a penalty:

But the truly ethical being does not need a system of rewards and punishments to follow the path of good and shun the path of evil; virtue to him is its own reward, sin brings with it its own punishment in the suffering of a fall from his own law of nature: this is the true ethical standard. On the contrary, a system of rewards and punishments debases at once the ethical values of good, turns virtue into selfishness, and replaces the right motive of abstinence from evil by a baser motive.⁵⁸

Aurobindo says we have little evidence that life is just in the sense that there is some strict, point by point, karmic balancing process. In fact, we observe that in life, often the prize of the race goes to the one who is swift, the victory in battle goes to the one who is brave, strong and skillful. The good man who is sluggish or weak or stupid will not attain life's benefits simply because he is righteous or respectable.⁵⁹ If this is what we see within the boundaries of one life, there is little reason to think additional lives, or more scope for life, changes this fundamental fact.

Yet, if karma does not enforce moral education, and is not a law that states that justice must be done in human relationships, then what exactly is it? For Aurobindo, the essential point concerning karma is that human

⁵⁸ LD, p. 812.

⁵⁹ LD, p. 811.

experience does not just happen in a haphazard and random manner.

Humans are the creators of themselves, and they also create their own fate:

Man's being, nature, circumstances of life are the result of his own inner and outer activities, not something fortuitous and inexplicable; he is what he has made himself: the past man was the father of the man that now is, the present man the father of the man that will be.⁶⁰

So for Aurobindo, humans are self-created, and experience is self-generated. The past can indeed have an important influence, and laws of cause and effect are real. But the fundamental truth of our being is spiritual and so a mechanical process like karma cannot be considered the sole determinant of circumstances. It is the individual soul that determines its own evolution, and this is a fundamentally creative process. The law of karma is but a tool that helps to make this form of creativity possible.⁶¹

We can approach the notion of karma in two ways. The first is in regard to the process of rebirth or reincarnation. Aurobindo's emphasis upon rebirth follows from his general evolutionary scheme. Evolution is a slow process, and one brief life upon earth is simply insufficient for the soul's evolutionary purpose.⁶² As we saw earlier, Aurobindo endorses the

⁶⁰ LD, p. 806.

⁶¹ LD, p. 808.

⁶² Kant also recognized that one brief lifetime was insufficient for the purpose of making moral or spiritual progress, and this is why he posited immortality as a postulate of the practical reason.

traditional Indian view that the soul is a psychic reality that exists first and foremost in a subtle body. At the point of birth, this subtle body simply adds on a physical form, like a sheath or a casing that surrounds the subtle counterpart. At the point of death, the physical body is shed, and the soul dissociates from the material world and begins to function again in the subtle body.

Between lifetimes, the soul undergoes various forms of development. It may relinquish various aspects of the mind sheath and the life sheath that derive from the former lifetime, yet the essence of the personality remains as a kind of dynamic potency that will again seek expression. So there is a rearrangement and reformulation of psychic factors as the soul assesses its past growth, and plans out its new lifetime. The actual formulation of a new life seems to be done in conjunction with some kind of wise guidance from the Self, with assistance from what Aurobindo calls Divine Wisdom or the cosmic Consciousness-Force.⁶³ At any rate, the influence of the past, or karma, is but one of the factors taken into account as the main outlines of this new lifetime are decided:

If a certain amount of results of past Karma is formulated in the present life, it must be with the consent of the psychic being which presides over the new formation of its earth-experience

⁶³ LD, p. 815.

and assents not merely to an outward compulsory process, but to a secret Will and Guidance.⁶⁴

So the new birth does not simply take up development exactly where it stopped in the last lifetime, and the new personality will not be a mere repetition of the personality format from the last life. Each new birth is a genuinely new start, and the soul draws potentialities from a vast bank of prior lives in constituting each new venture.

As the soul incarnates, the new personality has no memory of former lifetimes and no memory of this between life planning process. Such lack of memory was embarrassing to the reward and punishment view of karma, as we have seen. But in Aurobindo's formulation, the inability to remember all the prior events is an important requirement, for it is what makes a genuinely new start possible. A clear and detailed memory of past lives, hatreds, and attachments would just bind the new personality to a useless repetition of the past personality, and prevent the emergence of new possibilities.⁶⁵

But why does the soul incarnate at all? Aurobindo's answer here is very similar to John Hick's notion of soul-making. The soul needs to generate experience within a material world because it needs to grow, to

⁶⁴ LD, p. 808.

⁶⁵ LD, p. 819.

define itself by making choices and decisions within a context where important values are at stake:

All the secrets of the circumstances of rebirth centers around the one capital need of the soul, the need of growth, the need of experience; that governs the line of its evolution and all the rest is accessory.⁶⁶

The critical point from the standpoint of theodicy is that the qualities of the personality and the main events of life are not simply imposed by God. Rather, they are *self-chosen*, including the difficult or horrific experiences. For the soul does not simply choose pleasure and good fortune for itself during its life-planning process. What the soul needs is experience, and “joy and grief, pain and suffering, fortune and misfortune can all contribute to that experience. The soul needs growth, and “the soul may accept or choose poverty, misfortune and suffering as helpful to its growth,” or as stimulants to help achieve rapid development. The soul may also “reject riches and prosperity and success as dangerous and conducive to a relaxation of its spiritual effort.”⁶⁷

The influence of karma is not restricted to the between-life setting, however. Karma also operates during ordinary life as part of the general process of experience-formation. This is the second main function of karma.

⁶⁶ LD, p. 815.

⁶⁷ LD, p. 815.

Even during ordinary life, event by event, karma continues to guarantee that the past is not simply forgotten. Yet here too, karma is not the whole explanation of how experience is formulated, but only one factor. Karma is always subordinate to a deeper creative organizing power that operates synergistically with Divine Wisdom to provide whatever is needed for the next step of personal growth.⁶⁸

In this sense, if karma is to be seen as a “law,” it might be formulated as a law of “appropriate experience.” What it means is that *despite appearances*, our experiences are appropriate to our overall needs. But our overall needs are *spiritual* needs, and emphasize the necessity to grow, deal with sharp contrasts, and evolve. Intense suffering and even death may at times be part of what is “appropriate” in this admittedly special sense.

Hence, in practical terms, karma can be associated with a kind of faith in the face of adversity, faith such as Jesus expressed when faced with torture and death on the cross.⁶⁹ Although he could not understand how or why such horrific events were “called for” as part of his destiny, Jesus still declared that his opponents could have no power over him unless this power

⁶⁸ LD, p. 815.

⁶⁹ The role of evil as a test of faith is, of course, the theme of Job. I emphasize that we can recognize that evil can function as a test of faith without on that account being committed to the idea that God invented evil, or that evil exists *in order to* test our faith. That is, the fact that evil has this particular role does not necessarily give us an account of the origin of evil or represent an entire explanation as to why evil exists.

had been given by the Divine Wisdom that oversaw his life. Even torture and death, strangely enough, were not regarded by Jesus as a disproof of Divine Providence -- the Christian equivalent of karma as a law of appropriate experience.

Plato

The argument that the soul plans out its own lifetimes, and that it chooses events of suffering may seem to be entirely new, at least within the Western tradition. However, this is not really the case. In fact, Plato is one of many prominent Western philosophers who at least suggested similar viewpoints towards the soul and human destiny. Plato, of course, had great respect for rational argumentation, but whenever he wanted to discuss issues that were so deep, or so basic that reason alone could not approach them, he would often simply tell a story or present a myth.

This is what Plato did at the end of his greatest work, the *Republic*. As is well known, this dialogue explores the question of what the soul is by pursuing an extended metaphor in which the soul is compared with a political society. Yet after all the rational arguments have been presented, Plato goes into a mythological mode. In so doing, he presents one of the first examples in Western literature of a “near-death experience.” He tells the

story of a warrior bold, Er, son of Armenius, from “the tribe of Everyman.”⁷⁰ Er was slain in battle, and for twelve days lay with the other corpses, but he miraculously came back to life even as he lay upon the funeral pyre. Er declared that he had returned from the dead to be a messenger to humankind, to tell them the uttermost secrets of the next world. When his soul went forth from his body, Er said, he journeyed with a great throng of souls to a mysterious region, where judges promptly sent each soul off to either suffer or enjoy reward for a thousand years, depending on the quality of the deeds they had done during the life just ended. Bad deeds would be punished tenfold, but good deeds would be rewarded tenfold.⁷¹

Once all of the newly-dead had been sent off to their recompense, Er saw another throng arrive. These were souls who had just been discharged from their thousand year sentences, souls now ready to return to earth for new lifetimes. Plato’s description of the rebirth process is very noteworthy, however, for even though the three fates or μοίρας oversee this process, they do not impose the conditions of the future life. Rather, the patterns (paradigms or παραδειγματα) for a great variety of lifetimes are laid out

⁷⁰ Er was a “Pamphylian,” a phrase which can be translated “Everyman.” See the Loeb edition of the *Republic*, translated by Paul Shorey, Harvard University Press, 1935, p. 491.

⁷¹ Plato in many ways was a moralist, deeply interested in promoting right conduct. He was not content with simple retribution when it came to moral wrongdoing. His view was not “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” For Plato, if you knocked one tooth out of your opponent, God would knock ten teeth out of your own mouth to teach you a lesson.

before the throng -- lifetimes as tyrants, as ordinary citizens, as great athletes, and even incarnations as lions, swans, and other animals.⁷² A random factor is introduced, for the souls do draw lots to see who will be first to choose. But there are many more potential lifetimes available for choice than there are souls about to incarnate, so even the soul who comes forward last can have an acceptable life, not an evil one, if he makes his choice wisely and lives strenuously (619B).

As it happens, the very first soul who chooses does so foolishly, and selects the life of a tyrant, and thus gets entangled in evil for the sake of riches and power. The soul of Odysseus draws the last lot of all, but having been through so many trials already, Odysseus is more than satisfied to seize upon the lifetime of a quiet citizen who merely minds his own business. The general trend is that most of the souls who have just been punished are sober, and choose good lives, whereas the ones who have just come from a thousand years of reward more readily involve themselves with lives where they will choose evil deeds in order to obtain wealth, honor, or power. Plato clearly believed that suffering had at least one positive function -- the ability to make wise those who have been foolish.

⁷² The myth of Er is definitely Pythagorean in its general view of reincarnation, as the possible forms of transmigration from human to animal form, or back again, testify.

After all the choices have been made, the souls drink from the river of forgetfulness, fall asleep, and during the night are sent off one by one, like shooting stars, to their new births. Er himself was not allowed to choose a new life, nor to drink from the river of forgetfulness, for his function was to observe these events, and then return to his former body so he could describe all that he had seen as a warning and admonition to those who dwell on earth.

So Plato, like Aurobindo, felt a need to at least point to a reincarnational context, and to outline a format in which the soul could be seen as itself choosing its own personal characteristics, and the main events of its upcoming life. God is innocent of imposing evil upon the soul, and neither does evil occur by accident or whim. The soul makes its own determination as what proportions of good and evil, suffering and pleasure it will experience.

- The greatest difference between Plato's presentation and that of Aurobindo is that Plato did not emphasize the idea that suffering could be chosen for positive and educational reasons. Plato's myth portrays the choice of suffering as coming about primarily through spiritual immaturity, greed, and foolishness. In Aurobindo's view, the soul seems so closely allied with divine wisdom or angelic guidance as it makes its life-planning choices, it

always selects a plan for life which is basically good and represents a positive developmental option.

For Aurobindo, the soul could choose a difficult or even horrific incident because that suffering would lead to an important realization or some other positive spiritual benefit. Aurobindo would not deny that some suffering could occur because the incarnated personality makes bad choices. But when this occurs, the ego personality has gone astray from its life plan. The life plan itself is always basically well-chosen.

By contrast, Plato's myth implies that the soul can make wrong or immature choices between lives. The soul, in planning a life, can in effect bite off more than it can chew, and thus set up its personality for a life of suffering because the whole life task and the whole life pattern was badly chosen to begin with.

Like Aurobindo, Plato recognizes a role for karma, or the influence of the past, for he observes ruefully that the choices most souls made were determined by the habits of their former lives (619E6). And again like Aurobindo, Plato insists that karma is not the only factor. The past is a factor, a certain degree of divine guidance is involved, a role is reserved for chance, but the most dominant factor is clearly the soul's own choice. Plato can say, as did Aurobindo, that humans are the creators of their own selves, and that they forge their own fates.

At Republic 617E7, there is summarized a long-forgotten theodicy argument, one that would also make perfect sense within the view of the soul that Aurobindo elucidated. This argument could be revived even today if different notions of the soul were adapted within the context of Christianity. Here, Lachesis, the maiden daughter of Necessity, solemnly announces to the assembled souls who are about to choose the features of their upcoming lives:

Αιτια ελομενου. Θεος αναιτιος.
The blame is his who chooses: God is blameless.

Conclusion

As we saw in our discussion in chapter 1, it is of the essence of what is called “dysteleological evil” that events of suffering be seen as randomly imposed or as happening because of chance.⁷³ Dysteleological evil is described as “gratuitous” to indicate that as people live out their life patterns, they are vulnerable to random, chaotic, and unforeseen violation. Dysteleological evil is a denial of providence, a denial that any law of karma, self-choice, or divine wisdom could possibly influence how experiences are formulated in human life.

The whole concept of dysteleological evil is based on the assumption that the events of life are not planned, they just happen. Suffering can come for no reason, mean nothing, and lead nowhere. Gross violations can be

⁷³ See chapter 1, page 21.

imposed on any of us by the whims of others, and there is no deeper meaning to any of the events of life. This is one way that evil becomes ultimate, by having “the last word” in the sense that works of destruction are taken as final, and horrendously negative events are in no way seen as subordinated to or incorporated within any divine plan.

Theodicy has the task of refuting this format of interpretation, and this is one of the main reasons we have turned to Aurobindo. There are not many places within the Western tradition where we find notions of the soul, human destiny, and spiritual evolution broad enough to provide a format by which events which certainly *appear* to be highly negative and destructive can be interpreted as really part of a hidden divine plan. In adopting a modified form of Aurobindo’s ideas that the soul plans out its *own* lifetimes, and that suffering is deliberately *chosen* for positive and educational purposes, Western theodicy could forge a new and important argument.

CHAPTER 5. TOUGH QUESTIONS

For the most part, the method we have employed so far has been one of critical review. This means that we have presented the positions of various thinkers, and then added in our own commentary and critical responses. To avoid confusion, it has been necessary to pass over a number of questions that could easily be expected to arise concerning our own theodicy position as it slowly developed through this process. In this chapter, we will deal with a number of issues that might not otherwise have received sufficient attention.

Question 1:

You mention that it is helpful to maintain as much continuity with traditional Christianity as possible. Yet you eliminate the role of Christ as savior, which would seem to be the essence of Christianity. You change the view of the soul, the Last Judgment, the idea of heaven and hell, and want to introduce karma and rebirth. Where is *your* continuity with Christianity?

It is greater than Griffin's, a bit less than Hick's. My project has been to make the fewest modifications possible that will enable the Christian view to face the problem of evil. The main continuity I posit is to preserve the traditionally omnipotent and omniscient creator God. Griffin and the process thinkers want to make the changes there in order to solve the problem of evil. But the doctrines I propose changing, concerning the nature of human identity and destiny, are not central to Christianity in the same way that the creator God and the omnipotent God are central. Jesus did not teach that the

soul has but one lifetime to live, or that the soul was created at the time of conception. Those doctrines were adopted for a variety of reasons, many of them clearly secular, hundreds of years after Christ's death. Hick also feels free to work with such secondary doctrinal issues.

In relation to the general topic of the compatibility of reincarnation and Christianity, I defer to the excellent and extensive discussions which can be found in Geddes MacGregor's *Reincarnation in Christianity*, and also in Quincy Howe Jr.'s *Reincarnation for the Christian*.

Still, it isn't accurate to say that my theodicy requires the elimination of Christ as savior. Reincarnation is not a statement concerning Christ, it is a statement concerning human identity, and the pattern of human spiritual growth. I think Christ is honored best when looked upon as an example to be followed, but no view of Christology is essential to theodicy. There might be many ways of accommodating the ideas that *are* essential to theodicy, such as the soul's *gradual* development and *personal* responsibility for the escape from evil, with a view that Christ is a savior. I haven't pressed the issue of Christology beyond criticizing a few views that present definite problems for theodicy. Surely, not all views of Christ's salvific role are as open to objections as are the ones criticized here.

Theodicy does require that a doctrine of salvation must acknowledge that conversion to Christianity or acceptance of Jesus does not result in

instant spiritual maturity or in the direct elimination of evil. This does not occur either in the life of a person who has just become a Christian, or in the life of a nation that thinks of itself as Christian. But common sense tells us that much. If acceptance of Jesus as savior did all of these things, there would have been no Inquisition, a Christian nation would not have perpetrated an unjust war in Vietnam, and the church would not sit on vast wealth today while so many people starve in the third world. So whatever professing belief in Jesus does accomplish, it doesn't eliminate evil or result in instant spiritual maturity.

Christ could have a role as savior even when spiritual growth is seen as gradual and requiring many lifetimes. In many ways, the idea that the soul evolves is parallel to the general idea of evolution as presented by science. Christianity resisted that idea too, but many branches of the church have today made progress in accepting the scientific picture of evolution.

Question 2:

Christianity cannot accept reincarnation because Christianity believes in *creatio ex nihilo*. This means that the soul is made by God, whereas reincarnation teaches that the soul is inherently eternal and has always existed. Your comment?

It would not be necessary for Christianity to give up *creatio ex nihilo* in order to accept reincarnation, as is often said. Only by the accidents of

history was *creatio ex nihilo* linked in the West with the Gnostic idea that creation happened through emanation.

There is no necessary conceptual link between reincarnation and any particular mode of creation. Personally, I am cautious about any of the doctrines concerning radical creation. I don't think we know how radical creation happened. For me, this issue is beyond the reach of reason. Radical creation is a surd issue, and can only be approached through using a variety of metaphors, none of which is absolute.

But those who do believe in *creatio ex nihilo* don't have to reject reincarnation on that account. There is no particular reason the soul could not have been "made all at once" by God, on the *creatio ex nihilo* model, and also have been made to be the kind of thing that is destined to have an unending series of lifetimes.

It is important to attend to the "ex" in *creatio ex nihilo*. This should be seen as a doctrine about where being itself, including the soul, *comes from*, not as a doctrine about how it is *constituted*. If *creatio ex nihilo* is correct, it means that before being existed, there was nothing at all. But this doesn't imply that nothingness was part of the *material out of which being was made*, such that nothingness is molded into the structure of being. Neither does it imply that being now precariously teeters on the brink of nothingness. Neither does it imply that being must ultimately return to nothingness.

In general, there has been much nonsense written about nothingness in both philosophy and religion. I would suggest that the world of becoming is not best thought of as a mix of existence and nothingness. The world of becoming does exist, and it exists completely. It simply exists in an ever-changing way. It's not infected with nothingness just because it changes.

Creatio ex nihilo was formulated to deny the kind of idea that is found in process thought, the idea that there was a pre-existent material substratum that God only gave a new shape or form. It is also meant as a repudiation of the kind of idea we find in Aurobindo, that being came about because "God-stuff" was molded into a new form. *Creatio ex nihilo* means that being didn't have any *precedent*. It means there was no *process* in radical creation, no series of steps, no pre-existent materials. Rather, the manner of creation was instantaneous and absolute.

Relative to the soul, *creatio ex nihilo* means that the soul was created all at once, from the ground up, so to speak. It was not formed by giving a new shape to some pre-existent material, as a pot is made by giving a new shape to clay. It also means that the soul isn't literally a "spark of God." But this isn't to say that the soul is shot through and through with nothingness and is likely to return to nothingness.

St. Paul did teach that souls aren't inherently eternal or immortal. He wanted to insist that a soul couldn't be immortal unless it "put on"

immortality through embracing Christ. For him, the soul was constantly on the brink of nothingness, and without Christ, it would indeed quickly return to nothingness. In thinking this way, he was also following a strand of Hebrew thought that emphasized that the soul (*nephesh*) was made from dust, and so must return to dust.

But to interpret *creatio ex nihilo* as meaning that the soul is made from nothingness and so must teeter on the brink of nothingness, or be in danger of suddenly returning to nothingness, is to insult God's ability as a creator. Any craftsperson is less skilled if what they make is marred to begin with, and also fragile and transient. They are more skilled if they make something that is excellent to begin with, and also permanent and durable. So an excellent creator wouldn't just make effervescent souls that pop up for a second and then disappear. An excellent creator would make excellent souls, souls that have the power to endure forever.

The interpretation of *creatio ex nihilo* which fits in with St. Paul's view of the soul as teetering on the verge of nothingness makes a metaphysical mistake by actually elevating nothingness into a pre-existent material, and then insisting that God is *limited* by this material. It implies that because God had to work with nothingness, and to make things out of nothingness, then God was unable to make anything permanent or eternal. This degrades the process of radical creation.

On the other hand, to interpret *creatio ex nihilo* as meaning that the soul is inherently eternal, despite its instantaneous and absolute manner of creation, makes a tribute to God's excellent powers as a creator.

Also, the teaching that the soul is inherently eternal does have some precedent within the received body of Christian teaching. The whole doctrine of hell arose largely from the logic that souls were eternal, and had to endure forever, even if they had rejected God. So relative to hell, Christianity taught that, despite creation out of nothing, souls are inherently eternal. But if this idea can be accepted relative to such a negative doctrine as hell, it is hard to see why it couldn't be accepted relative to a positive doctrine that makes God into an excellent creator and helps to solve the problem of evil.

Question 3:

Reincarnation is a dualistic doctrine. It proposes that the soul and the body are not essentially linked – that the soul can just shrug off one body and then go get another. Isn't this why reincarnation has *already* been rejected by the Church fathers?

The link between reincarnation and a dualism or divide between spirit and matter is due to the historical way that the Gnostics thought of reincarnation. The Gnostic version of reincarnation *was* dualistic. It taught that the soul was the real thing, the only important factor, and that it was sent to earth as a kind of trial. The body was to be despised, and for the soul

the experience of incarnation was like being in a prison. This link of reincarnation with a spirit/body dualism is unnecessary and unacceptable.

The formulation of reincarnation proposed here is not dualistic. Rather, it says that because there is *no* separation between soul and body, the soul is always able to grow a new body. The soul is *meant* to express materially, hence it has the inherent power to express in new bodily forms and new material formats. The ability to grow a body is just one of the powers that every soul has, but it is an essential power, and it is necessary for the soul's self-expression. The soul always has many levels of embodiment, many "subtle bodies" whether it lives in a material world or not. So it is never "unembodied." Further, experience on earth is not degrading or unnatural, but rather educational and creative. Life in this world is *chosen*, for positive and important reasons, by the soul itself.

When reincarnation is seen this way, it is not dualistic. It means that the soul is *so naturally* linked with the body and the material world that it has been given an inherent power to grow a new body so that it *can* express within a material world. Soul always changes; so does body.

On the other hand, the "one life only" doctrine of the soul is *inherently* dualistic. If the soul lives but one life in the material world, this must imply that the link between the soul and matter is accidental, and that the "real home" of the soul is in some heavenly realm. If the soul takes on a physical

body one time only, this means that the journey onto earth must be some kind of inexplicable descent. Incarnation is a one-time event that happens quickly, and then the soul goes on to its real destiny, which is in an eternal and immaterial realm. There, either eternal punishment is applied or eternal reward is enjoyed. Since the soul is judged forever depending on its behavior while in this physical body, the material world must be seen as a place of trial and travail, just as the dualistic Gnostics asserted.

When the early church bought into this rather pessimistic line of thought, it was taking up a dualism that came from Greek sources, from the Pythagorean and Orphic sources that Plato absorbed and then passed on. From Plato, this line of thought went on to infect *both* the Christian church *and* the Gnostic philosophers who were promoting reincarnation.

Since both the doctrines of the soul that were available in the ancient Western world were dualistic, I would suggest that both of them be rejected. Christianity could become non-dualistic today if it adopted a form of reincarnation that is based on the idea that the relation between the soul and the material world is so intimate and natural that the soul can grow a body any time it wants to, and that there are many good and positive reasons why it would *choose* to go have experience in a material world.

As for the decisions of the Church fathers being unquestionable, the only time reincarnation was decisively rejected by Christianity was at the

Second Council of Constantinople in 553 A.D., when Origin was anathematized. Yet the central role here was played, not by some pious monk or great teacher of the Christian faith, but by the Emperor Justinian, whose political motives have been extensively documented.

It is naive to think that all Christian doctrines were shaped on the basis of a prayerful and meditative attitude, as part of a sincere effort to find out God's will and set forth truthful representations of spiritual reality. That may have happened in some cases, but in other cases the process was transparently secular. To me, it does make sense to stick to Church doctrines that were created by devout Christians who were prayerful, meditative, and sought to set forth truthful representations of spiritual reality.

This is why I would suggest that the great church father Origin should be more authoritative than the Emperor Justinian, and this would point us towards reincarnation. No one can deny that Origin was a great and pious Christian teacher who was seeking truth, whereas Justinian was concerned to unify an empire and maintain political control through the manipulation of theological doctrines. I personally believe that Origin did teach a version of reincarnation, but even if he only taught the preexistence of the soul in some other spiritual world, this still solves the problems of imposed

characteristics and unequal origins.¹ From the standpoint of theodicy, this is all that is required, and John Hick has already moved this far.

Christianity has always grown and changed, and always borrowed doctrines from philosophy. It will continue to do so in the future. The whole question is which changes ought to be made now so as to preserve what is most basic in Christianity, eliminate contradictions, and help to resolve the many aspects of the problem of evil.

Question 4:

Dysteleological suffering is widely regarded as the greatest challenge to any theodicy. Dostoevski makes a case that a good God would not create a world in which a young child could suffer the horrors of being torn apart by hounds. How can you interpret this event such that it does not reflect a lack of love on God's part?

Dostoevski's story of the general who sets his hounds on a small boy is so eloquently presented that it has emerged in the modern theodicy discussion as *the* classic instance of dysteleological evil. John Hick made his attempt to answer Dostoevski in *Death and Eternal Life*.² I think the view of surd issues I am proposing has many greatest advantages relative to the

¹ As mentioned in note 9 of the last chapter, Hick's position on Origin is explained in a long footnote on page 395 of *Death and Eternal Life*, and MacGregor's treatment occupies all of chapter V of *Reincarnation in Christianity*. All in all, I agree with MacGregor. Origin's supporters probably purged many passages that directly taught reincarnation, but there are still a few passages which seem to me to teach it outright. For example, see *On First Principles*, book 4, paragraphs 9 and 10, which for some reason never seem to be quoted in these discussions.

² DEL, p. 161. Hick argues that once the general has engaged a long process of soul-making, he will be a different person, and that at this point, it would be appropriate for the mother to forgive him.

interpretation of dysteleological evil, so I'm glad to address this question, even though the answer here will have many similarities to the discussion of Roland Puccetti's examples in chapter one, and to the treatment of reincarnation in chapter four.

To begin, I would emphasize that emotional solidarity with those who suffer is an essential requirement in regard to the problem of evil. Any view that attempts to minimize the sense of violation involved in such examples is unacceptable. There is no way to justify such horrors, and there are no considerations that make it somehow "right" that such things occur. This is the reason I have rejected the Greater Good Defense, and said that evil cannot be "justified." The only question is whether it can be healed.

However, full emotional solidarity does not, in itself, dictate a particular world-view or a particular interpretation of the surd issues. Suffering takes place within a universal context of some kind. The suffering, the horror, and the violation do not themselves tell us anything about this ultimate context. The fact that the child's life is cut short in this example is tragic. This does not testify, however, to either a vision of reincarnation, or a vision of one lifetime only. The only thing that can be said is that the horror is doubly tragic, if one assumes the one lifetime standpoint, and thus *assumes* that this horror robs the child of his one and only chance for happiness or possible self-expression. The horror is just as vivid and

unacceptable, but is less *ultimate* if there will be other lifetimes and other opportunities for expression.

Likewise, the fact that the child did not consciously choose or consent to this experience is obvious. The child is certainly a helpless victim in terms of all immediate criteria. But this doesn't establish the *ultimate* criteria. Even though the ego personality did not plan or consent to the event, it is possible that the lifetime was planned, and in this planning, the boy's *soul* gave consent.

If so, additional possibilities open up for interpreting the event. The child would still be a helpless victim in terms of how the event was perceived and undergone on the level of ego, but perhaps not a helpless victim in all respects. This would be good, because the role of helpless victim has no real dignity. It inspires neither respect, nor hope. It would again be *doubly* tragic if we have to say that this child is a helpless victim in *all* respects.

Part of our sense of outrage in regard to such incidents centers on the role of the perpetrator. The general who sets his hounds on the child to tear him to pieces in Dostoevski's example undergoes no punishment. This means that life is unjust, but then everyone in the theodicy debate seems to agree that life is unjust. We have a double outrage, however, if our view of the surd issues is such that there is also no reckoning after death. If we assume that the general has no soul, or that there is no life beyond death, we have

assumed that the general evades consequences for his crime in *all* respects. Thus, the injustice is never compensated in *any* way and becomes absolute.

On the other hand, by traditional Christian outlook, the suggestion is that as a result of this deed, the general will be tortured forever in hell. But this outrages justice in the other direction. The general didn't torture the child forever, so why should he should be tortured forever himself? To do justice doesn't mean exposing him to a draconian, wildly excessive, never-ending stream of horrors.

The two extremes are the atheist, who posits that the general will pay no price at all, and the traditional Christian, who wants to see him pay a wildly excessive price by frying in hell forever. But what would satisfy my sense of justice would be a mid-point. I want the general, after death, to be forced to face the *full implications* of what he imposed on this child, to feel the terror, the horror, the violation, the pain -- exactly as the child felt it when it happened. Yet the general must retain enough of his own sense of selfhood to realize that *he* was the one who had done this. And he must, as a result of this experience, turn in revulsion, adopt new standards, and become the kind of person who would never again do such things.

For me, one of the remarkable things about the modern phenomenon of the near death experience is the idea that something like this may actually occur. In near-death experiences, it is commonly reported that after death, a

person undergoes a life review in which they experience all the events of their lives, and do so in such a manner that they themselves experience the feelings and reactions of other people involved in the events. People are deeply changed by this life-review process. When they come back to life, they are different people. If they can make restitution, they do. They make permanent changes in their values, outlook, and subsequent behavior.

Whether one believes that near-death experiences are only visions or represent genuine glimpses into the way things are handled in the next world, the fact remains that they outline a *possibility*. They suggest at least one way in which there *could be* some form of reckoning in the post-death environment in which love and justice are *both* expressed. Justice is done -- in fact, a very exact form of justice. The perpetrator is forced to experience the *exact* measure of pain or horror which they have imposed upon others. Yet the claims of love are also held intact. The offender is not destroyed by the experience. Rather they are helped to make creative growth, to attain new realizations, and become a better person.

When we hear Dostoevski's story, righteous indignation causes us to separate ourselves from the general's plight. But a God of love would love the general. The general, too, is involved in a growth process. The horrific incident Dostoevski describes could only be "redeemed" if it somehow becomes a step on the way of progressive growth by which the general leaves

a brutish and callow state and grows in the direction of love and empathy. Undergoing this event must also represent some type of positive act on the part of the child, some act that reflects nobility and courage. Only such an interpretation could possibly reconcile this kind of incident with the presence of a loving God, who is also a competent creator.

If the general did undergo a life-review after his death, he would feel a deep sense of regret. Nothing so trivial as saying "I'm sorry" could satisfy. Neither could the general be instantly "washed free of sin" by making an appeal to the blood of Jesus -- not if there were no understanding, no growth, and no resolution of the psychological values. Life is a drama, and the undone issues in life are undone because they lack a resolution which is *emotionally* satisfying. What we know must be "acted out" to gain authenticity.

Even in ordinary life, when a person has had a terrible loss, or undergone a horror, one can see this drive to resolve what has happened, to make it meaningful. Usually a person can only work creatively and get past a horrible incident in life if they take steps to help others who in the same situation. For example, a mother whose daughter is killed by a drunk driver might go out and commits herself to a MADD campaign. She redeems what has happened by *taking actual steps* to see to it that no one else ever has to go through what she went through.

At the initial stage of grief, she might wail, "My daughter's death has no meaning!" But at a more mature stage of grief, she goes out and *creates* that meaning. She *makes* her daughter's death meaningful, by taking steps to help others. Through this process, the mother herself heals. This is how she prevents her grief from destroying her, how she transforms her grief.

If the general is to authentically deal with the horrors he imposed, he would need to go *help* some other individual who has tendencies towards cruelty. But that means the general would need some specific format, some way to *act* on his new realization. He can't do this floating around in heaven. He has to enter into life, to embody his new realizations amid all the strife and distraction of the material world. He has to make a correction right in the same place where he made the mistake.

So, I think this general might be willing, indeed eager, to go back into the material world. He might plan one lifetime, or many lifetimes, where he played the role that we would conventionally understand as "victim," for this would allow him to help shape the experience of a perpetrator. Life planning implies that souls need to consent to all interactions, especially those that involve pain. So no one can play the role of perpetrator unless some one else makes the apparently inexplicable decision to play the role of victim.

But the general's decision to play the role of victim would not be inexplicable. By doing so, he could help to create an occasion for someone

else to come to important realizations concerning cruelty. This would be his way of bringing the “unfinished business” of his prior lifetime back onto the stage of life, so that the meanings could all be rewritten. His sacrificial action could not *force* anyone else to gain realization, of course, but it would give them an opportunity they might not otherwise have.

So he might plan a life where he himself, perhaps, could possibly die as a child of seven, because of the brutal actions of someone else. Within the framework of that life, and to an outside observer of that life, this would appear to be a wasted life, one in which he was *violated*, one in which he was a helpless victim. On a superficial interpretation of karma, someone might say that in this new life, he is suffering because he has to “make up” for the former lifetime, or “balance the books.”

Yet, by the interpretation we are suggesting, he is not being punished and he is not a victim. Rather, he *chooses* the suffering, and he is doing so for a good reason. What he does is an act of courage, a sacrificial act, one deliberately done to help others.

This interpretation gives a positive format for interpreting the awful dilemma of great suffering in a young or innocent victim. We no longer have to conclude that they are a helpless victim in all respects, or that they are being punished for prior misdeed. We can believe that they may be like the Buddhist Bodhisattvas. They may be a very advanced soul with great

spiritual maturity and insight, who has courageously chosen suffering for important and positive reasons. No Christian can deny this is possible, because a Christian must interpret Christ's suffering in this way.

No interpretation can be "proven," including the ones that see suffering as an imposition upon a helpless victim or as punishment. However, I believe this is a much more positive interpretation of the events of dysteleological evil than those which are possible based on alternative assumptions about the soul, life after death, and the other surd issues.

Question 5:

But what about God? Why this whole format of suffering? Surely these realizations could take place without any horrors being perpetrated at all!

No, *these* realizations couldn't take place without *these* experiences.

But it would be a positive development if the human race would indeed choose to get on with developing all those wonderful kinds of realization and forms of value that *don't* involve inflicting suffering or undergoing suffering. I believe that we humans investigate such "heavy" forms of value as constitute the problem of evil because they fascinate us. This format of value is in some ways set up by our biological heritage. But in *exploring* the values we go beyond our biological heritage, and we do this of our own choice.³

³ According to the recent book by Marlo Martin, *Mutant Message Down Under*, part of the sacred beliefs of the Australian aborigines is that the Great Spirit plans out no suffering for

It takes courage to explore such values, but these are not the only values that have a biological base, or that can be explored, or that have merit. When we are done choosing such heavy forms of value, we will be done experiencing them. We can indeed move on, both individually and as a species, but only when we choose to do so.

Of course, it is valid to ask why God should allow us to fool around with such negative forms of value in the first place. On the traditional view of creation, God actually imposes our lives within this material world by the act of creation. Creation is done without “asking” us, so God *forces* us to have a biological form, which means that God makes us be vulnerable to intense pain, experience death, and limits us in many important ways.

But perhaps an alternative view is possible. Perhaps God created many “worlds,” and in some of them, significant values can be created without pain and conflict. Perhaps there are worlds where the exploration of pain and negativity are simply not part of the menu. If so, then it is possible that the souls who incarnate on earth know what they are doing, and do have other choices. They know that incarnation in a physical body, on earth, can involve intense pain and suffering, but they choose to do so anyway because they want to work out the kinds of values that can only be worked out here.

anyone, other than whatever suffering they themselves choose. This is a summary of the theodicy argument posed here, the essence of the free will defense in a single sentence.

Here again, this gives a positive format to interpret an issue that often is seen in negative terms. It seems to me an advantage of viewing the soul in terms of karma, rebirth and life-planning that we can see the very decision to incarnate on earth as a self-chosen and knowing act, also as an act of courage. Because all souls are here by choice, each human being can be said to have the "courage to be."⁴ In this sense, there could be no cowards among those who are alive, for it takes courage just to incarnate.

As for God's role, let us consider one kind of parent who is very protective. This parent says to a boy, "You may learn to play the violin. This is the only outlet you can have. I don't want you playing football, I don't want you playing baseball, I don't want you going outside and wrestling with your friends, because you might get hurt."⁵

Another parent might be too permissive. They might buy a seven year old boy a shotgun, let him swim in a contaminated pond, let him take up boxing, and do anything else he wants. Here the child has complete freedom, but there is no sense of parental oversight or protection.

⁴ . Of course, I am here giving the phrase "the courage to be," a drastically different meaning than does Tillich.

⁵ I apologize if the example seems sexist. Little girls may also want to do things that parents might consider dangerous. I just found it too awkward to try to carry on two sets of metaphors at once. Also, I don't mean to imply that there is anything wrong with playing the violin. This *is* a form of creativity, but it might be constricting if it was the *only* form of creativity that a child was allowed to have.

A third kind of parent might tell the boy that if he wants to play baseball or football, he can do so, as long as there is not too much chance of injury. He can also play the violin, or choose other forms of recreation that don't involve possible injury. He has freedom to do what he wants in general, but the absolute minimum limits that come from a concern for his safety will be imposed. I argue that God is most like this parent. God allows humans in general to pursue the kinds of value they want to pursue, but does impose the minimum restrictions that come from a concern for the soul's safety.

In this regard, my definition of evil as a "flesh wound" to the soul is critical. God knows we can get "flesh wounds" through our experience of life in a biological form, but not "fatal wounds." The worst conceivable things, the "mega-evil" events, cannot occur. The "mega-evil" events, what would be *really* fatal, are 1) destroying our own souls, 2) ending creative growth, or 3) becoming separated from God. Humans are in no danger that any of these events can happen, and it is in this sense that the world is safe.

If this is so, God is actually more scrupulous than the parents in the third example. They let the child play football because they calculate that *probably* the child will only receive a few bruises, a broken leg or arm -- nothing that can't be fixed. In the interest of letting the boy be adventurous and do what he wants to do, they ignore the possibility that he could get permanent damage from playing football -- be paralyzed or even die.

But God takes no such risk. The worst that we *can* do to each other, what we call evil, is only a “flesh wound” to the soul. All such wounds can be healed, and the nature of the psyche and the nature of existence is such that they *will* be healed. So when God allows us to explore these forms of value we call “evil,” there is no “risk” of the worst.

Critics in the problem of evil typically would give no meaning at all to the notion of mega-evil events. They give no meaning at all to the idea that God’s thoughts are not our thoughts, and that spirituality implies a different set of values. For them, God is irresponsible simply for allowing the amount of damage and the amount of suffering human life does involve. But the Western religious standpoint insists that spiritual values are real.

Thus, the theistic and atheistic sets of judgment cannot coincide, because they are based upon two different frameworks. When critics take the boundaries of this lifetime as ultimate, any damage or suffering in this lifetime also becomes ultimate. God does allow fatal wounds from this perspective, and so, if God exists, God must be irresponsible. Such critics would actually only be satisfied if God were like the parent in the first example. They would only accept a God who allowed the exploration of one form of creativity only -- creativity with no possible suffering. They want a God who says, “Go play the violin.” They want a God who imposes a limit on what values can be explored, because of the fear of consequences.

However, if evil is not ultimate, there is no *need* for God to restrict humans to the exploration of forms of value that don't involve suffering. Preventing all suffering would impose an unnecessary restriction of freedom. The two perspectives on suffering simply trace back to the two different outlooks in regard to the surd issues, especially disagreement about whether there is an afterlife, and what are the most important values.

The critic is correct to think that statements made from within the religious perspective often make no sense when transplanted into another framework and analyzed in terms of foreign assumptions about the surd issues. But this is not what is at stake in the problem of evil. The issue in the problem of evil is whether statements made from within the religious perspective are self-contradictory when considered from within their *own* framework. That sometimes *is* the case, but it *need not* be the case. I do not believe it is the case relative to the view presented here.

Question 6:

Your whole theology seems to be nothing but an exercise in wish fulfillment. You seem to have just gathered together any possible indication that events of suffering are not what they clearly seem to be, and any possible consideration by which God can be seen as innocent of wrongdoing. Don't you have any concern for the truth, for what is true, as opposed to what we might wish is true?

Yes, I differ very sharply from a view which has become fashionable, which is that the more negative a standpoint is, the more likely it is to be

true. We have a tremendous delusion today that to be “tough minded” and critical and to use our minds responsibly, we must do the opposite of what you suggest, and simply dream up the *worst* possible interpretations.

The problem of optimism verses pessimism is not so easily settled. Of course, things are not true just because we find them pleasing, or because they correspond to deep needs. Optimism or pleasant feeling is no mark of a statement’s truth. However, the equally valid point that is not so often made is that neither does a pessimistic orientation particularly enhance the truth value of a statement. Pessimistic interpretations are not, by definition, more true than optimistic ones. Nor is it the case that if a statement could avoid both optimism and pessimism, it would be more true on that account.

You would be right if you said that in my theodicy, I have simply exercised the imagination, and come up with a certain theoretical description that *could* be true of the world, or the afterlife. I haven’t proved anything. No, positive imagination doesn’t prove anything. But it may well be better than negative imagination, which also doesn’t prove anything.

If you want to see what the world looks like when large numbers of people exercise negative imagination, look at the world around you. If you want to see what things look like when you exercise positive imagination, you’ll have to do an experiment. A lot of people will have to join in that experiment, if we are to see what the world looks like on that basis. I think it

would be great if we *did* start fooling around with positive possibilities for a change. Imagination always gives us hints of what is possible, and every philosophy is basically a web of rationality wrapped around an act of imagination.

Question 7:

Like all theodicies, yours places too low a value on human pain. You always emphasize that the avoidance of pain is not the highest value. Well, for a person who is in pain, it is the highest value!

The pain involved in seeing the dentist has no place in a child's scheme of values. Such pain appears to be dysteleological, pure suffering that occurs for no reason at all. One child talking to another child about the pain would characterize it in this way.

Now, this suffering does occur for a reason, but the child cannot grasp that reason. Actually, the child does not even want to know the reason. The idea that "healthy teeth are important" just doesn't register. The child's scheme of values is simply "pain is bad, and needles hurt."

The parents have a broader scheme of values in which avoiding pain is a value, but not the highest value. Having healthy teeth also has importance. So parents impose this painful experience on the child, even though the child cannot understand. The child may well complain to a friend, "My parents don't love me! They made me go to the dentist!"

The two children could discuss this, but it would be hard for them to have a very profound discussion. They could use the biggest words they know, but this would not make their discussion profound. Nothing would make any real sense until they “grew into” the broader scheme of values in which the pain becomes only one factor to consider among many.

We can't escape being like these children in our discussion of the problem of evil. We know God has a broader perspective than ours, and that our outlook and set of values is limited. We know that what may be painful and dysteleological according to a narrow view of values may be painful and yet important and creative in terms of a more broad view.

So we can never conclude, based on “evidence,” that pain is dysteleological and that God doesn't love us. The issue is never the evidence; the issue is the values in terms of which the evidence is judged. We can never know that our scheme of values is absolute, final, or ultimate enough. Some broader view by which the “evidence” of human pain has a different significance might always be possible.

It is a mistake to try to reduce the problem of evil to a purely intellectual or rational question. It is a question of emotions, values, trust, and self-appraisal. Like the child, we at some point either have to trust our parents and trust that a “wider view” is available, by which parental love and dentist pain go together (despite appearances), or we have to say no, I trust

my current system of values more than I trust my parents and so I believe they do not love me.

As mentioned in the last question, the imagination always gives hints as to what is possible. That can be of value when the problem is a “locked system” of values and beliefs, like the child’s. If the child says, “I honestly can’t even *imagine* how my parent taking me to the dentist could possibly be an expression of love,” then we can say, “Why that’s silly. Sit down. Let’s talk it over. There are *many* ways to imagine such a thing.”

Question 8:

You said in chapter one that you endorse a strong version of free will, yet your explanation of life planning indicates that if a person who is discarnate plans to have a certain experience in an upcoming lifetime, then they will in fact have that experience inevitably. But that means the experience would be fated. So which do you believe in, fate or free will?

The effect of life planning is to broaden the scope of free will choices, such that many factors, such as the circumstances of birth, that otherwise would be seen as imposed by fate, are seen instead as having been chosen. That is, they were chosen by the person themselves while they were planning the lifetime. So this view of reincarnation and life planning expands free will. It erodes the idea of fate as an imposition from without.

However, there is no reason to conclude that life-planning choices would operate in a deterministic manner. When discussing Dostoevski

earlier, I suggested that the general and the child may have agreed, during life planning, to create a situation in which the general could play the role of perpetrator. This would mean only that at a certain point in that lifetime, the general would be confronted with a situation in which he *could* make a cruel response. The general needs to work on the issue of cruelty, given his previous karmic background. So he is given an occasion, a life situation in which the issue of his cruelty will be the main theme. He will have a position of power, and will be provoked to anger through the inadvertent actions of *this* young child. In Dostoevski's story, this happened because the general had a favorite hound, and the boy inadvertently injured it.

The life-planning choice is that this provocation *will* occur. But the general's *response* to the provocation would not be fated, or preplanned. There would be the hope that in his life development prior to that point, the general would have acquired a sense of compassion, learned how to deal with his rage, and so forth. The whole point of the lifetime, in fact, would be for him to mature in his psycho-spiritual development to such an extent that when confronted with the "provocation," he would *not* respond with cruelty.

In other words, what is planned is simply a test. The outcome of the test is *not* planned. If the child were a soul of great spiritual maturity, as I have posited, then he agreed to help the general by making this test possible, which meant that *if necessary* his life might be ended at that point as a

result. If the child had no other main purpose for this incarnation other than this agreement, and if the general “passed” the test by *not* killing the child, then the plan might well be for the child to die of a disease a few months later, since the purpose of the incarnation was accomplished. The mother, and everyone else concerned, would have also agreed to all the conditions surrounding the test, and the purpose of the incarnation.

This version of reincarnation fits in with Hick’s view of life as an educational process. Education means both learning and testing.

Theodicy must argue that experience is ultimately self-chosen and appropriately formulated, rather than just happening in a haphazard or random manner. I have posited that many factors help to form experience: 1) choices and agreements made in pre-life planning, which represent the reworking and selection of the soul’s “background” issues or karma, 2) the free will choices, beliefs, and the expectations of the ego personality during life, 3) the free will choices of other people, which are “negotiated” in subliminal ways, and 4) an element of divine creativity.

In any experience, all these elements would be involved to some extent. However, in any particular experience, any one of the elements could come into the foreground and dominate. If what dominates is 1), for example, then the experience seems to show “fate” or “karma” operating, and conscious free will choices seem irrelevant. If what dominates is 4), then the

experience would be mystical in nature, and again conscious choices may seem swept up by greater factors. Only if what dominates is 2) would the experience seem to demonstrate a classic exercise of free will.

A symbol of how this would work might be one of those round security mirrors one sees in convenience stores. They have a fisheye lens, such that whatever is closest to the mirror appears very large, and all the rest of the room is squashed into a tiny area around the rim. So any one of the four factors mentioned above could come up to the mirror of experience, and loom large. This forces the other factors to occupy a tiny space around the rim. So even in the most profound mystical experience, where divine initiative dominates, free will, karma, and the influence of other humans would not be entirely absent. They just would not dominate. Divine initiative would shape the experience and everything else would seem irrelevant.

This view of experience formation has the advantage of acknowledging that the kinds of events people have always reported could actually occur. It does not become necessary to dogmatically deny people's actual experiences in order to hold to one's philosophical view of experience formation.

Question 9:

Suppose that you have "solved" the problem of evil or "won" the debate with the atheistic or atheologian concerning God's responsibility for evil. What has changed? Auschwitz still happened, war is still real, we still have issues of child molestation and nuclear devastation, and we still have our basic questions, "Why is this

occurring?” So even if your explanations succeed, isn’t human life still as big a mess as it was before you began?

Nobody writes on the problem of evil in order to solve all world problems and to free everyone in the world from evil right on the spot. That would be a wonderful thing to do, but I don’t think Jesus did it, and I don’t see how even the most helpful and accurate analysis could ever accomplish it.

However, if you are lost, an accurate map *is* what you need. All the efforts you make to escape using a bad map, or no map at all, are wasted. For me, the tendency to blame God for evil is basically a false map, a byway, an unproductive approach to our problems. To abandon a false approach is a positive act and represents progress. Once we are free from ideas and interpretations that don’t do the job, we can put our time and attention into approaches that *will* work.

The “vertical move,” the attempt to pass responsibility for evil onto God, must stop before the possibility of a “horizontal understanding” of evil, evil as a person to person issue, becomes possible. Even if the theodicy I present here has merit, it would only cancel the vertical move. It would only place us at the *beginning* of a new task of analysis. By all means, it is important to take that next step, to explore the “horizontal” dimension, to assess evil as a purely human phenomenon, to identify the most negative,

damaging beliefs we hold, as individuals and as a society. We also need to find out how to replace defective beliefs with beliefs that are productive.

But once we accept responsibility for evil, we have taken the most important step towards “solving” it. Evil can’t be overcome if it is a mighty empire, or if it is an affair of angels, or if it is a law to which we are subject. But if evil is a set of “harmful habits” or “bad practices,” then we can approach those beliefs and practices one by one, issue by issue, and solve them. Once we accept responsibility for evil, we will be for the *first time* on the road towards recovery from evil.

Question 10:

Then what specific recommendations do you have? What are some examples of what you think are harmful beliefs that we can change?

It is harmful whenever evil is represented as inevitable, as ultimately powerful, or as supreme over human destiny in any way. Ideas or attitudes that convey despair are damaging. When human life is said to be meaningless, empty, futile, a curse or a burden, sharply negative beliefs are involved. Any analysis of human pain that leaves people feeling hopeless or lost is damaging because it robs the one who suffers of a context of values. The entire train of thought that portrays economic struggle, political struggle, and war as inevitable, that portrays human nature as corrupt or

fundamentally selfish and destructive is actually a self-fulfilling type of prophesy. Such beliefs actually create the very difficulties they describe.

Our world today *is* a mess, and the dominant systems of social and cultural belief portray human life as a Darwinian struggle in which each is pitted against each in competition for scarce resources. This is not a coincidence. These beliefs inspire fear, fear leads to greed and hoarding, and greed and hoarding make the resources *really* scarce. If it wasn't for greed, hoarding, fear and competition, there would be plenty of resources on earth for everyone. We could feed the world with a fraction of our war budgets.

We always think that we first observe human history, and then form our beliefs according to how people actually act. But that explanation is backwards. What is prior is the harmful Darwinian framework of belief about human nature. This is what causes the negative behavior. The Darwinian view of competition does not give a true picture even of the animal world. It ignores vast areas of co-operation and peaceful conduct in nature. The view of Darwinian struggle focuses upon one aspect of animal behavior, and then makes it into a lens for viewing all animal behavior. This view filters out other aspects of animal behavior that are essential to a rounded grasp of life's purpose. Then this distorted perspective that emphasizes struggle and competition is applied to human life, as if it

“proved” that human nature is violent, that we are selfish, that we are in competition.

It will not be until more hopeful views of human nature become dominant that we will see more positive forms of human behavior. But we need to change the beliefs first. We will wait forever if we want to sit with our negative beliefs and declare that we will only change them when we see some “evidence” that they are wrong. No, we must first change the beliefs, then we will eventually see changes in the “evidence.”

Great disservice to public belief structures also came about through the entire Freudian movement. Here the damage was primarily in the implication that the inner self was dangerous and untrustworthy, a mere repository of repressed factors. One needs the help of a professional to even approach this dark and dangerous inner area, according to the Freudian perspective, especially as it was popularized. When human subjectivity is viewed with such deep suspicion, people are afraid to turn inward, and afraid to trust their own instincts. The only “safe” course is to look always outward, and deal only with tangible factors and material forms of security. Here too, the belief structure itself causes the very problems that it describes, for when the inner self is repressed with such vigor, it *does* become unreliable.

There are many other aspects of how we have related to mechanization, industrialization, and the world of science that are related to

the Darwinian and Freudian issues just mentioned. But basically, the modern world has lost touch with a lot of the simple truths, and an overall change in intellectual fashion would be quite helpful.

Optimism and positive thinking today are often made to seem naive and foolish, whereas pessimism and despair are made to seem realistic, discriminating, and practical. But it is wrong to constantly emphasize the most petty, violent, untrustworthy aspects of human nature. Hope is by no means impractical. On the contrary, it is doctrines of despair that are impractical. Human nature is a good thing, and we do wrong to constantly think the worst of each other.

Question 11:

It sounds very utopian for you to say that evil has no necessity or permanent root in human nature. By this thesis, there could be human life here on earth without evil. But there is an awful reality to the forces that drive people to do dark deeds. There have been wars and abominable activities in every age. On what basis could you possibly look forward to a time when there is no evil on earth?

I don't wish to be reductive, or to compare all evil to cigarette smoking, but it might be helpful to discuss the question, "Could there be a world without evil?" in terms of another, similar question, "Could there be a world where no one smoked cigarettes?" When I say there could be a world without evil, I mean something similar to what would be involved in saying that there could be a world where no one smoked cigarettes.

First, the appearance of even one person who doesn't smoke cigarettes proves that it is possible for human beings to exist, and not smoke cigarettes. There is already a great percentage of people who don't smoke, and while it is true that this bad habit may be passed on from generation to generation for a lot longer, I am simply saying there is no inherent reason it couldn't be eliminated. Even today, the percentage of smokers in the population changes all the time. Just as there is no external factor that keeps the percentage at 40% or 32%, there is no insuperable obstacle that keeps the percentage from being 9%, 2% or 0%.

As fewer and fewer people began to smoke, as we approached the 0% figure, we would not find that tobacco plants suddenly began running out of the ground to tackle people and make them into addicts so that the percentages could rise again. The land in Virginia would be perfectly content to grow tomatoes. If people did not smoke, the sun would still rise. There would be no volcanic eruptions, no lightning bolts from the sky.

It is all a question of personal and collective habits, of economic perceptions, cultural emphasis, and belief structures. With the right forces at work in all these directions, a society could emerge in which cigarettes were not manufactured, people did not smoke, and did not *want* to smoke -- a society in which smoking was largely a forgotten issue.

There have been at least a few human societies which never discovered smoking, there have also been some where people only smoked wisely and for ceremonial reasons. I believe there could also be societies that have discovered smoking and then decided to reject it simply because it is harmful. Likewise, relative to every form of evil you can mention, I could find at least one human society where historically that evil was not an issue. I could also find a human society once afflicted with the evil, that ultimately developed methods or beliefs that lessened the evil and lowered the number of people afflicted by it -- in some cases, lowering the percentage to zero.

How freedom works in relation to evil can be illustrated by the smoking example. People in a society that chose not to smoke would still be free to smoke, in a certain theoretical sense, but they would be well acquainted with the health dangers, and there would be no impetus of factors such as seeing other people smoke, or seeing smoking put in a glamorous light by the movies or advertisement. Cigarette smoking is a stupid, counterproductive possibility for us, and this factor can be mobilized and translated into motive just as the addictive quality was mobilized and translated into motive. It takes *energy* to lie about cigarettes, to induce people to harm themselves. Without this input, the whole thing would collapse of its own. There would be no reason to begin smoking. Smoking would then fall into a condition of widespread neglect, or total neglect.

I think the phenomenon we call moral evil could be put more or less on the same footing -- be put into a condition of widespread neglect. Evil could be reduced to a series of forgotten, largely theoretical possibilities, and this would occur if there was a large enough engagement with positive and creative types of belief and value.

Even now, something like this keeps many odd forms of evil at bay. Today, for example, you had the freedom to plunge a knife into your hand, but you didn't do it. You didn't do it yesterday, or last year, either. Why not? It has always been possible. But you refuse this possibility consistently, because you recognize that it is damaging, meaningless, and futile.

Yet *all* evil is damaging, meaningless, and futile. If your vision were improved to the extent that you could accurately recognize every exercise of your freedom for what it is, you would automatically not engage any evil possibilities. This wouldn't require some great, massive effort of willpower, either. It doesn't take "willpower" for you to not plunge a knife into your hand. On the contrary, it would take effort to lie and make this seem like an attractive possibility. We would avoid all forms of evil as automatically as we avoid plunging knives into our hands, if we only saw them for what they are.

Truth *does* have power; vision *is* protection. Right forms of vision can be taught and passed on even more readily and reliably than the way we

pass on distorted vision in today's world. Positive beliefs do have positive payoffs, and social beliefs do change and grow.

If you say it would take quite a change of social belief to get a situation where there was really no smoking in an advanced, industrial type of human society, I would agree. A much larger change in personal belief and social belief would be necessary for there to be no war in an advanced, industrial type of human society. A larger change yet would be required to eliminate all evil whatsoever. Today, we don't have a world free of cigarette smoking, and we don't have a world without evil. But the problem is never with an external fate, to which we must submit. The problem is not "the human condition." It is our beliefs. It is how we view things.

The great error of the 18th century optimists was the idea that social engineering could bring about the world-without-evil condition. The error, however, is the notion that ideals in society or institutions can change the individual. That is not the direction of progress, that is not the hope at all. The hope, rather, is that individuals will change and grow spiritually. As this occurs, social changes will take care of themselves. Because humans can grow spiritually, they can eventually jointly create a world without evil.

Today, cynicism is faddish and views that disparage idealism are fashionable. Indeed, the power and depth of our current cultural belief in evil can be measured by the scorn and contempt we pour out at the mention

of the idea that evil is *not* inherent, *not* absolute, *not* necessary, *not* an essential and important part of human nature. To call a world without evil “utopian” is itself a telling phrase, for utopia means “no-place.” We think a world without evil would be no place at all, that there could be no such place. But this is simply a measure of the strength of our current belief in evil. We believe in evil so strongly that we cannot even *imagine* human life without it.

But the strength of that belief is precisely what is creating all the “evidence” to support it. All belief tends to be reflected in behavior. Our negative beliefs cause negative behaviors, so the right way to proceed is to adopt new and positive beliefs. Then we will eventually produce new evidence, evidence that will “prove” the validity of our new beliefs.

Our achievement of a world without evil, should it ever occur, would be a tremendous spiritual accomplishment, simply because it would involve such a thorough mastery and sublimation of the biological patterns out of which our ego awareness developed. Hick and Aurobindo are correct on this point, our biological heritage has encouraged a sense of ego division, competition, and separation. But just as a weight lifter is honored the more if they can manage to lift a tremendously heavy weight, so we humans will have made a significant accomplishment if we manage to “lift off” this weight of despair and self-seeking which presently so encumbers the human race.

Question 12:

On the one hand, you say that the ego is a surface personality and is the expression of an underlying identity. On the other hand, you say that the inner Self expresses in terms of a variety of ego personalities. Isn't this a contradiction?

Not at all. You are one ego personality now and you were another ego personality at age ten. Both of these ego personalities can be seen as expressions of the underlying Self that is timelessly you. This Self is present to, or latent behind, both of these ego expressions, and also is behind all the other "moments" of ego expression. In chapter four, I mentioned that it is a peculiarity of the Self that it is able to do many things simultaneously, and to keep track of many different centers of ego expression.

One could explain this perhaps by means of an analogy with a circle. The center of the circle is equidistant to many points on the perimeter simultaneously. Being ten inches from one point on the rim does not preclude the center from also being ten inches from another point on the rim.

To relate this to identity, an ego personality would be like a point on the rim of the circle, and an entire lifetime could be like a series of points that form an arc or segment along the rim. Reincarnation fits into the picture because the end of one arc is "joined to" the beginning of a new arc. Just as arc is joined to arc to complete the circle, so lifetime is joined to lifetime in order to complete the identity.

But all the “points” of ego expression, all the points that constitute the outer circle are equidistant from the center of identity. So the Self is something inner, like the center of the circle, and it expresses outward by forming many different ego personalities (the countless points within an arc). It is also the self of the other distinct series of ego personalities that constitute other lifetimes (the many arcs that form the circle).

Question 13:

When someone is deeply stricken by some form of suffering, it is insulting to tell them that somehow, in some hidden way, they really chose this experience. How can you tell a grief-stricken mother that she *chose* for her child to die of SIDS? It is insulting to suggest that the victim of Auschwitz somehow *chose* to be herded into a gas oven.

When a person is in great pain, they have special needs, especially a need for comfort. One’s primary job at such a time is to provide a sense of comfort, not to deliver a lecture on philosophy or prove the rightness of any description of reality. Simply because I propose a philosophical view, there is no reason to believe that I would attempt to impose that view at the wrong time and for the wrong reason. No, my choice would be to provide the needed sense of comfort to one who suffers. I would do so without making any reference at all to karma, destiny, or the spiritual structure of things.

Nobody wants to be a “Job’s comforter.” But there is considerable question as to how this can be avoided. In Rabbi Kushner’s book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, a Rabbi with many years of experience giving

advice to people in times of tragedy tells us how people often tend to blame themselves unnecessarily for the deaths of others, as when a mother blames herself for her child's death. He tells us that one should tell this mother, "There was no reason at all that your child died. God didn't make it happen. God couldn't help it. It just happened." This way of speaking reflects Griffin's process outlook, and Rabbi Kushner recommends it.

But saying that God could not help it is not the only way to combat the woman's sense of self-blame. The fact that the statements were seen as comforting does not necessarily testify to their truth or their wisdom.

We ought to relieve the mother's unnecessary sense of guilt, yes, but we also ought to be careful *how* we do this. If we comfort the mother by telling her that the world is a place of random events, and that she is a helpless victim, this may indeed help to relieve her false sense of guilt and false sense of responsibility.

Yet any comfort she derives cannot last long. At some point, she will realize that if the world really *is* a place where things happen randomly, she is utterly and permanently vulnerable. Horror upon horror could happen to her at any time, for no reason at all. She has no control, no rights, no advocate in the cosmos, no input, no ability to question or to shape her destiny. Her baby's death has no purpose, not even a hidden one, and this

means that she will *never* find a meaning for it. It is futile to even look for a meaning, not now, and not ever.

On the other hand, if she is told -- at the right time -- that there is a reason for all things, and that a hidden creative purpose of some kind is behind her suffering, this will provide a different context. She still doesn't know the meaning of her baby's death, but now she has the possibility that as she grows and develops, she may discover or create some meaning.

There is no reason her loss need be *compounded* by a sense that it proves a lack of divine love, or power, or proves that the world is a horrible place. It is possible that her loss happened because of *some* reason and purpose in the spiritual scheme of things. The mother may not now know what that purpose is, and perhaps neither can we tell her what the purpose is. But still, she may eventually discover it, or create it. One can hope that things are not entirely what they seem, hope that an infinite and good God can somehow provide a way towards healing, resolution or even reunion.

As to Auschwitz, there are those who believe that it does honor to those who died at Auschwitz to think of them as helpless victims. Such persons are entitled to think this. They may be right. Yet, to me, this role of helpless victim is not an admirable one. Obviously those who died at Auschwitz were helpless victims in *some* respects, but I choose to believe that they were not victims in *all* respects.

To me, it suggests a sense of self-sacrifice, and it ennobles their suffering if it is thought instead that these people planned their lives, and actually had the courage to take on a role that involved such suffering voluntarily. It would mean that they realized that, horrific as it was, Auschwitz would emerge as a tremendous modern symbol of evil, a testimonial to the extremes of man's inhumanity towards man. It would mean that they had a sense that the lessons involved would be very public ones. By dying this way, rather than some other way, they could educate others, they could make an impact on the world. For all time, when people heard of Auschwitz and what occurred there, they would stop and think.

I have always thought it odd that Auschwitz has been characterized as emblematic of lives that were thrown away and wasted for no purpose. There have certainly been billions of people who did suffer horribly, then die quietly, impacting no one. Many times, when suffering is solitary, it has no discernable public impact. But those who died at Auschwitz? These people helped to change the world! These deaths not only made an impact, they were the main inspiration in the founding of a modern nation. Those who died at Auschwitz literally helped to shape the thought forms and belief structures of the modern world. Many people today are a little wiser because of what happened there.

On my view, those brave people who died at Auschwitz are ennobled by the idea that, from a spiritual standpoint, they agreed during their life planning to participate in a collective event that would broadcast important lessons concerning evil to numerous future generations.

Question 14:

As John Hick suggests, karma does not really solve the problem of the inequality of human birth and circumstances:

For either there is a first life, characterized by initial human differences, or else (as in orthodox Hindu belief) there is no first life but a beginningless regress of incarnations, in which case the explanation of the inequalities of our present life is endlessly postponed and never achieved.⁶

How would you respond to Hick's objection?

It is true that karma doesn't solve the problem of radical origins -- it can't explain the radical origin of the world, the radical origin of the soul, the radical origin of evil itself, or the radical origin of personal involvement with evil. The problem that Hick mentions can actually be applied on any of these levels. In every case, we can always be confronted with a choice between an endless regress, which is unintelligible, or else a radical beginning point, which is also unintelligible. For example, if we say that God makes the soul, then God bestows all the soul's characteristics, and God is responsible for how we are. But if we say that we are self-created and chose all our own

⁶ DEL, p. 308.

characteristics, then how did we get our first characteristic and move out of the state in which we had no characteristics at all?

In my view, the problem is to think that there is a “solution” to the issue of radical origins. I have listed radical creation as a surd, meaning that we simply have no way of understanding it. No one was peeking over God’s shoulder at the time of the Big Bang, nobody was there to take notes, nobody is on an experiential basis with any of these problems. Whatever happened back at the Dawn of Time -- whether souls all came spilling out of the hamper like so many identical golden rays of light, or whether they came out all crusty and filled with idiosyncrasies, we simply don’t know. We have no contact with that event. We can’t speak of either possibility as being “what occurred” and still speak with authority. Neither karma, nor any other concept is going to put us on track towards “solving” the problem of radical origins for the world, for evil, or for the individual soul.

In my view, the problem of radical origins itself is a false one, generated by the act of trying to apply linear forms of thinking, time categories, and the laws of logic to eternity. The one thing I think we *can* conclude about eternity is that it is not logical. If creation is an eternal event, then it cannot be reduced to its time expressions, or understood in terms of logical categories. The concepts of radical beginnings and infinite

regress are both the result of trying to reduce creation to an event-in-time, rather than tracing time/space events themselves to an eternal matrix.

Still, even if we can say nothing concerning radical origins, this doesn't mean that we can't comment on immediate origins. Souls still are born into human life on a day to day basis. At this point, the question is, "Do the souls seem to have a background?" Well, to me at least, human souls *do* seem to be born already at a particular stage of evolution. They seem to have a certain history of talents, abilities, proclivities, an individuality and a set of characteristics that are quite specific. Without dealing at all with the issue of ultimate origins, we can still trace these *particular* circumstances to some type of inheritance of past conditions.

The only other alternative is to declare, as Christianity has done, that God has personally created all these qualities all at once, right on the spot, and then *imposed* them upon the soul. But this option is arbitrary, because it involves the claim that we *do* know something about radical origins. To explain things that way is to assert that we know that *radical* origins always take place right at the instant of conception or birth. But where did we get *that* information? I find it much more plausible to regard the question of radical origins as a bad question to begin with, and to just go ahead and deal with immediate origins by means of the doctrine of karma.

To be perfectly honest, I think it is equally true to say that God creates us, and that we create ourselves. Somehow, these two things don't contradict each other. As Aurobindo tells us, "both/and" thinking is more typical of eternity. To the extent we can't employ both/and thinking, we simply can't approach certain topics. The topic of radical creation is like that. Either use both/and thinking, or else declare it to be a surd and take refuge in the idea of mystery. But either response is better than declaring that radical creation takes place at the moment of birth or conception.

Question 15:

You say that the Self or the Soul presides over the formation of experience, and the ego personality also seems to be involved in "life planning." But the ego personality that is subsequently born into life is not aware of having made any life plans. So they hardly count as the choices of *this* ego, do they? So the circumstances and conditions of life are still imposed. Isn't the ego personality that lives life still a helpless victim, just as much under your formulation of karma as it is when life events are said to just occur randomly?

The ego personality as it lives life in the material world certainly does have to undergo experience that it is usually not aware of having chosen. When we encounter awful events, we are not aware of having brought them on through pre-life planning and of course we will do anything we can to avoid them. It can seem arbitrary to declare, in the complete absence of any *memory* of having chosen the event, that nevertheless a self that we somehow are, or once were, has chosen it.

But surely, there are both conscious and unconscious forms of choice. When we choose to eat a large meal, we think we are only choosing pleasure. To our conscious mind, this is all that is occurring. But at an unconscious, yet quite real level, we are choosing to become fat. We just don't know it.

We inherit the choices of a past self, even negative ones, all the time in life. Consider the situation of a man who is in the army. He is involved in a system of things that limits his options considerably. He has to get up at a certain time, do tasks he doesn't want to do, eat food he is told to eat, and so forth. How did his options become so limited? Well, they were limited by the "civilian self" he once was. The man may have been in the army so long he doesn't even remember what was on his mind so long ago, when he was a young man, first toying with the idea of going into the army. He is quite different from that younger self, who made the decision. That decision was made in some distant context, for reasons he may have forgotten, based on projections of army life that may have been quite mistaken. And yet the man must abide by the limitations, discomforts, and restrictions that accrue from this decision made by this distant "self." The past civilian self both is and is not the same as the man who is now in the army.

His army career could also have been imposed on him, perhaps by a judge or an overbearing father. So I could repeat your question to him. Does it really make any difference that you are in the army because of your own

choice, or if the experience was imposed upon you by your father? Whichever way it happened, you still are in the army. You still have to get up when you doesn't want to; you still face the same consequences if you try to run away. In one sense, it would appear to make no difference at all how he got there.

Yet, in another sense it does make a difference. If the man's situation came about by his own decision, then he can admit this and take responsibility for it. He will still have to face the same conditions, but in this case, as he does so, he will not feel like a victim.

I don't find that a minor difference. To feel like a victim is not pleasant. To consider oneself to be a victim is not a position of power. It does not encourage creativity or growth. It is a passive role, a role of complaint, a role that does not inspire respect. On the other hand, if he can see himself as a responsible person who made a decision, and is carrying it out whether it is pleasant or not, there is the possibility of self-respect and self-acceptance. This self-respect may make a great difference in how he accepts his present lot, and how he reacts to it. There is no resentment. He can develop a much better self-image, and even if he now undergoes negative experiences, he will use this suffering as an aid to help him make better decisions in the future.

I believe we face similar issues as we find ourselves here in this material world. We do have certain limits, discomforts, and dangers in this context. We can consider ourselves to be victims, who have had this situation

foisted upon us by God, or by Chance. Or, we can choose to believe that we entered this situation voluntarily, by means of a choice taken by a self we once were, a self which now seems remote and distant. Whichever way we look at it, we still face another day, we still have our physical bodies, we still have all the same limits -- and opportunities -- that human life brings.

Yet if we see ourselves as victims, we are sure to focus upon the limits of the present situation. Whereas if we see ourselves as being here by choice, we are more likely to focus upon the opportunities. I find that to be a very great difference.⁷

Question 16:

Even if the conscious ego does survive the experience of death, this still does not mean that ego is immortal and will never be annihilated. Would not rebirth, moving out of the death state to come again into this world (or some other world), possibly represent the *real* death? After all, at that point, you admit that the ego memories will be lost, there will be creative admixture, and the Self will create a genuinely *new* ego personality, which only picks up some strands from the old one.

This is a very abstruse issue. It is one thing to have a glimpse of the initial aspects of death, and quite another to try to describe the ripening aspects or the final stages in which a decision might be made to return to the material world. But if forced so far, my reply would be that within the

⁷ Another difference has to do with the issue of resenting the father. If the man thinks he is in the army because his father imposed it on him, he will never be able to have a positive relationship with his father.

multidimensional and ever-expanding forms of creativity that govern the realm of eternity, the ego personality would at that stage be able to be both reborn in some significant sense, and also to continue to conduct continuous existence in its own realm and continue to recognize itself as "I."

I know this sounds paradoxical, but this question again is a very specific one that concerns a deep aspect of a surd issue. Aurobindo has emphasized that logic breaks down and both/and thinking works relative to issues like eternity and the eternal Self. I have emphasized that identity is far more flexible than is usually realized, and that the overall Identity is able to compartmentalize and keep track of multiple lines of identity.

If such considerations are found boggling, then this would be a point where the appeal to mystery would be quite justifiable. Even if both/and thinking does work in the next world, everyone realizes that it hardly works as well in *this* one!

An interesting model of reincarnation for those of us here in Hawaii is that of the Banyan tree. This tree puts down "air roots," that is, fibers descend from the upper portions of the tree and take root in the ground. Once they take root, they fill with sap, get thicker, develop trunks, and become for all intents and purposes, mini-trees, which yet are linked and share the life of the main tree. The whole tree becomes somewhat like an ever-spreading interconnected system of trees, and it gains tremendous

stability, which is a great aid in preserving the tree during tropical hurricanes. There doesn't seem to be any real limit as to how large such a tree can become, and its longevity is legendary.

The point relative to the question just asked is that once an air root is put down and takes root, it never disappears. It just gets thicker and more substantial. That would be my response as to what happens to the ego personality when it incarnates again into a new set of material conditions. It just puts down a new air root. It seeks contact with the earth once more.

This doesn't erode its own distinct qualities, or rob it of its own sphere of expression. Rather, its own distinct qualities are enhanced and carried a step further as yet another new form of expression is germinated and slowly unfolds. The entire identity only expands and becomes more stable as this process of growth upon growth, articulation upon articulation, exploration upon exploration, continues.

APPENDIX: THEMATIC SUMMARY OF THEODICY

My intention in this dissertation has been to present an original theodicy. However, since I have used a methodology of “critical review,” it may not be entirely clear just what themes I intended to endorse and borrow from each of the various authors. The purpose of this appendix is to spell out, in brief form, the main themes that constitute this theodicy effort. I’ll make no attempt to argue for the points here. This is simply a summary of the main themes.

God’s Qualities and Attributes

God is not just “above, without, over, authoritative, transcendent, and male.”

God is equally “below, within, non-interfering, immanent, and female.”

Yet both lists represent “God as viewed” by human categories of thought.

God is “beyond” both lists. No description is fully adequate.

In our concepts, transcendence and immanence should have equal emphasis.

Love is God’s main quality, and anything that contradicts love must go.

Creativity is the next main quality.

God as King and God as Judge are bad metaphors and must go.

God is not the Great Moralizer.

God is not the Great Policeman.

God is not a player on the stage of human life, unless invited.

Even when invited, the role is not dictated by human expectations.

The process critique of God's power is largely correct.

God's power is not unilateral coercive force. It is persuasive.

God does not endorse -- or enforce -- human rules of morality.

The avoidance of pain is not the highest value.

Intervention

God does intervene, but not to produce a world with less evil.

Special intervention is not necessary because evil is not ultimate.

Special intervention to prevent evil would interfere with human autonomy.

God "intervenes" for the purposes of self-revelation.

God can self-reveal as well as "hide."

Radical Creation

Radical creation is unintelligible.

It is always pictured by some kind of metaphor:

Creatio ex nihilo is based on the metaphor of a magician making a rabbit appear from nothing.

Emanation is based on the metaphor of the sun's rays shining outward.

The Demiurge is based on a metaphor of God as craftsman.

Birth and other metaphors for radical creation also have value.

No one metaphor is final, and all of them together aren't sufficient.

The motive of world-creation is agapeic love.

God creates a person in such a way that the person also creates themselves.

The world is so structured that the worst events conceivable cannot occur.

Compensations, correctives and limits of evil are “built into” the world’s structure.

Despite appearances, the world is safe.

Evil

Evil is primarily a betrayal of values.

A horrific quality is typical of all evil.

There are as many types of evil as there are types of value to *be* betrayed.

Evil has no supernatural origin. It’s a matter of human choice.

Evil is not a mighty empire and it is not a law. It is not inevitable.

Evil is a series of specific human problems, each of which has an answer.

Traditional doctrines of devil and hell are not literally true.

The best metaphors for evil are: evil as a wound, evil as a debt.

The locus of evil is personal.

Evil always has a subjective component.

Evil cannot be understood as a series of objective events.

The Greater Good defense gives no justification of evil.

The question is whether evil can be healed, not whether it is “justified.”

All evil exists in terms of psycho-spiritual values, and can be healed.

All evil will be healed. There are subtle processes that see to it.

Evil is healed through love, forgiveness, and realization.

Evil is healed every day in human life, as well as in the world beyond.

Evil is healed when *full realization* comes as to what is wrong.

Evil is healed when one is a *changed person*, with new values.

Evil is healed when it no longer interferes with present creativity and love.

Evil can only be healed in the present moment.

If evil is not healed, it becomes "unfinished business" for the soul.

Both perpetrators and victims are caught by evil, and involved in evil.

But escape from evil is different for perpetrators and victims.

We can interrupt the cycles and habits by which evil is perpetuated.

The general causes of evil are egotism and fear.

Evil traces to ego personality and its fears.

Evil is a purely human creation, as the free will defense claims.

Yet evil is not ultimate. It cannot interfere with our ultimate good.

Evil is allowed by God because it is *not* ultimate.

Finitude is not evil.

Death is not evil.

Nature is not evil.

An appearance/reality distinction is important relative to evil.

Evil is self-chosen, though the processes are not always conscious.

Painful experiences can still express creativity and result in growth.

Pain can be *a* pathway of growth, but it is not the *only* pathway of growth.

Spirituality does not require prior suffering.

Evil is a “flesh wound” to the soul.

Evil is painful and incapacitating, but it cannot destroy the soul.

Human Identity

A bipolar, Self/ego model of human identity is needed in Western thought.

Ego personality is not dissolved, undermined, destroyed or betrayed.

Ego personality undergoes change, but not obliteration.

Ego personality is immortal, whether it believes it is or not.

Ego personality is immortal, whether it wants to be or not.

Ego personality and Self are in constant dialogue in subliminal ways.

The subtle body *is* a bodily form.

Reincarnation does not imply a mind-body or spirit-body dualism.

Epistemic distance is the distance between the ego and the Self.

Ego personality is what experiences epistemic distance.

Human identity is a true surd. No one can make a fully adequate model.

Death and the Afterlife

The ego personality survives death, with all memories and uniqueness intact.

It functions at that point in its subtle body. It is *not* “unembodied.”

Activities in the afterlife include self-appraisal and life planning.

There is no judgment after death, except self-appraisal.

Self-appraisal after death is not superficial ego rationalization, but true realization.

There are forms of social interaction and personal creativity in the afterlife.

The overwhelming feeling tone in the afterlife is one of peace and joy.

The afterlife provides opportunities for the healing of evil.

Eternity, or the afterlife environment, is not linear or bound by logical categories.

Human Destiny

Karma means experience is appropriate to the *total situation* of a person.

Karma is not a law of punishment or a mechanical recompense.

Karma exists to give regularity to experience and due weight to the past.

Karma also exists to make all experience creative and educational.

The ego's beliefs and expectations are formative of experience.

But they are not the only factor which is formative.

Decisions made in "pre-life planning" are also formative.

The decisions of others are also formative.

The weight of the past also has a formative influence.

The decisions of the Self and a creative Divine admixture are also formative.

Any one of these factors can dominate and form particular experiences.

If the Self or the Divine factor dominates, this is “intervention.”

If the influence of the ego dominates, there will be a sense of forging destiny.

If influences beyond ego dominate, there will be a sense of fate.

But normally there is a mix of all factors working together.

Even when one factor is dominant, all the others are present to some extent.

Karma prevents evil from being explainable as a *random* intrusion.

Karma precludes dysteleological evil, that is why it is important for theodicy.

Karma can involve experiences of pain, but is not simple punishment.

We may have to grow before we can appreciate the lessons of pain.

Theodicy must posit an appearance/reality distinction.

All experience is appropriate and educational, *despite appearances* to the contrary.

Faith is closely related to the understanding of karma.

The problem of evil is not an intellectual or logical exercise.

One’s entire world view determines how one will interpret evil.

The surd issues can only be approached through belief.

The surd issues are not a matter of demonstrative knowledge for anyone.

Theodicy must make religious beliefs more plausible than areligious beliefs.

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