An Analysis of the Problem of Evil

Part Two: Theoretical Dimensions

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I.

IN THE first article of this series (Winter, 1964), we dealt with the nature of evil. Evil may be defined as **any object, event, influence, occurrence, act, experience, or combination of these, be the source human or extra-human, which thwarts, disrupts, threatens, frustrates, or destroys the life of a human being or group of human beings, or jeopardizes what is valued or cherished by human beings.**

It was suggested further that there are evils of different kinds, e.g., natural and physical evil, moral and social evils, the evils of finitude (guilt, anxiety, meaninglessness, etc.). When man encounters evil of whatever kind, he thinks about it and tends to make some kind of adjustment to it. Hence, philosphers and theologians have discussed the problem of evil in its theoretical and practical aspects.

In this article, we propose to set forth some of the ways in which the theoretical problem is dealt with. In a third article, we shall consider some of the practical (religious) adjustments man makes to the presence of evil in his life.

II.

On the theoretical level, the problem of evil arises when one inquires about the origin(s) of evil and attempts to fit the reality of evil, in whatever form, into a larger view of reality. Philosophically, evil is explained with reference to the nature, orgin, and status of value. Are good and evil to be understood in terms of a unified or divided world-view? Will one outlast the other, or triumph in the end? Theologically, the question arises how evil can be explained in a world created by an omnipotent-benevolent Creator. Does God's nature include evil, allow it, struggle against it? Or is evil itself unreal? Or perhaps God is not God after all and human creatures struggle alone in an indifferent universe.

It has been suggested that the problem of evil in its most acute form exists for those holding a theistic view of some kind. The existence of evil becomes an ever deeper mystery in proportion as God is held to be omnipotent, all wise, all loving, the Creator and Disposer of events. Seen from this perspective, the problem of evil rests on several assumptions: 1) the reality of evil; 2) the sovereignty of God (e.g. "the Father Almighty"); 3) the notion of a world (or universe) created by and dependent upon God (e.g. "Maker of Heaven and Earth and of all things visible and invisible"); 4) the benevolence of God (e.g. "Whose mercy is over all his works); 5) the conviction that human life is of special concern to God (e.g. "Whose will is ever-directed to His children's good", or "we believe in the final triumph of righteousness and in the life everlasting").

With these major assumptions about the Creator and the creation on the one hand, and the affluence of evil on the other, we have the classical problem of evil, or theodicy. The concern of theology is to preserve the notion that God is an object of religious trust and devotion, in spite of evil. Put another way the theological task, relative to the problem of evil, to to set forth the ways in which "the God of all creation" be-

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comes "the God of our salvation" while admitting that human life and history are plagued with sin, suffering and death. This task, of course, includes both theoretical and practical considerations.

III.

Since our interest here is with the theoretical problem of evil, let us turn attention to ways in which this problem has been approached. There are two broad approaches to the problem of evil, cast in this framework, namely those which rest on **theistic** presuppositions, and those which assert a **non-theistic** point of view. The theist will attack the problem by explaining the existence of evil in terms of his God concept; the non-theist will either deny the existence of God, or assert that God's existence or non-existence is an irrelevant consideration. Within these two broad categories, there are many variations. We shall consider several positions representative of the two approaches to this problem. It may be helpful to refer back to the assumptions involved as we take up each point of view, beginning with the non-theistic approach.

As we have noted, the problem of evil is most acute for those holding a theistic world view. With his intellectual broom, the non-thesist has cleaned house has discarded all theistic assumptions. Having pronounced that God is dead, however, the non-theist grapples with the problem of evil nevertheless. Albert Camus makes the point quite well:

> When the throne of God is overturned, the rebel realizes that it is now his own responsibility to create the justice, order, and unity that he sought in vain within his own condition, and in this way to justify the fall of God. Then begins the desperate effort to create, at the price of crime and murder if necessary, the dominion of man.[1]

[1] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 25.

Let us briefly consider several non-theistic interpretations of the problem of evil: atheism, agnosticism, existentialism, nihilism, and positivism.

Atheism, of course, denies outright the existence of God. This may be done on several grounds, one of which is the abundance of evil. The very things we may not ascribe to an all-powerful and benevolent deity are the things we find in profusity. A God with supreme power and good intentions would never create the kind of world we live in. The atheist finds no reason to either postulate the existence of God or to believe in God in spite of the lack of sufficient evidence.[2]

Agnosticism follows the thrust of the atheist's argument but does not speculate on God's existence or non-existence. God may exist or not—who knows, who cares? John Laird provides the main lines of agnostic reasoning concerning the problem before us:

> As in the case of suffering it seems to me that the problem put is quite indeterminate and does not admit of an answer. How can we pretend to say how much sin there would be if God's common grace abounds, but does not always bring good out of evil? If we cannot say whether the actual universe favours human morality more than a secular universe would do, how could we say that a providence either should or should not be supposed?[3]

The agnostic avoids the choice between God and no God and takes upon himself the responsibility for living in a world blessed by goodness and fraught with evil.

Existentialism moves out of the agnostic orientation and places heavy emphasis upon man's immediate freedom

[2] For a review of atheism's main tenets, see C. B. Upton, "Anti-theistic Theories," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,* II (1910), pp. 173-83, and C. E. M. Joad, *God and Evil* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1943), pp. 24-62.

[3] Quoted by Bronstein and Schulweis, *Approaches to the Philosophy of Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1954), p. 263.

and responsibility. (There are Christian existentialists, e.g. Kierkegaard, Marcel, Tillich; here we are concerned only with "atheistic" existentialism). Rather than speculating about the "nature of things" in general or debating what God can or cannot do, the existentialist focuses attention on concrete aspects of the human situation. All interest in traditional ontology is set aside for the more immediate and productive and, therefore, realistic concerns of human life. Sartre, for example, denies that one can arrive at a unified concept of being. Even the assertion that God does not exist is, for Sartre, not a metaphysical conclusion but a postulate of radical freedom. If God does not exist, says Sartre, then there is at least one creature whose existence is of more concern than its essence, namely, man. Thus, one of the primary effects of existentialism is to put every man in possession of himself and to place the entire responsibility for his existence squarely upon his own shoulders. There is no Being or Realm of Values which provides sanction for what a man does. We have no justification or excuse for what we do; we are left alone. Man is condemned to be free.[4]

Hence, for the existentialist, there is no need to ask why God permits evil, or what he does in the face of it. The question is dead.

Nihilism is the vacuum created by the loss of absolutes. In a sense, both existentialism and positivism are outgrowths of the development of philosophic nihilism in the nineteenth century. Nihilism is implied in every rebellion, reflected in the story of Cain and in the Promethean myths. It takes extreme form as a protest against a personal God who has created everything and is responsible for everything, for only a personal God can be asked for an accounting.

In his book **The Rebel,** Albert Camus traces the development of nihilism from the beginning of metaphysical rebellion after the Renaissance (the revolt against moral and religious sanctions and absolutes), through historical rebellion against kings by "divine right", to the present manifestations of "counterfeit" absolutes in the form of totalitarian states. Hence, metaphysical rebellion begins with philosophers and poets, it grows into historical revolutions in the form of regicide, individual terrorism, and finally state terrorism which is sanctioned by absolute (Hegelian-Marxian) logic. It's not the death of God that bothers Camus so much as the horrifying absolutes which take God's place, e.g., the total embodiment of Ivan Karamazov's (Dostoyevski) "everything is permitted".

For the nihilist, then, the problem of evil is that of living in a world where God is dead. Whereas the "simple" atheist **solves** the problem of evil by denying the existence of God, the nihilist **raises** the problem by denying God's existence. It is the protest against an evil that cannot be justified which begins the rebellion ending in nihilism. But existence **must** be justified; there must be some sense, some unity to life. So the absolutes begin to creep back in, in forms of historical monsters which carry their own justification and against which rebellion is treason. Camus does not condemn rebellion, however. Indeed, the rebel is the pilgrim in a nihilistic age. He is looking for an explanation for the suffering and misery in the world. He is seeking, without calling it such, a moral philosophy or a religion. He is looking for a new God.[5]

Positivism, like the other non-theistic approaches to the problem of evil, represents another attempt to deal meaningfully with what has been called "the decline and fall of the Absolute." When men say "there is no Absolute",

[4] Morton G. White, *The Age of Analysis* (New York: The New American Library, A Mentor Book, 1955), p. 124; quoted from Sartre's *Existentialism and Humanism.*

[5] Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), parts II and III dealing with metaphysical and historical rebellion.

or "God is dead", the search for purposefulness and significance shifts to another level of concern. Positivism seeks to locate the problem in the closer scrutiny of the particular. Like existentialism, positivism asserts that all ontological questions, whether metaphysical or theological, are pointless. The positivist claims no interest in such matters and so shifts the search for meaning to an empirical base. His attempt is to separate meaningful from meaningless questions, using the criterion of verification. For example, the statement "This key is made of iron" is a proposition that may be examined and judged true or false. But the statement remains hypothetical in the sense that it can never be verified absolutely. However, such statements as "God is Love" or "killing is evil" do not asert anything which can be empirically examined; hence, they are meaningless.

We can see that the positivist would not deal with the problem of evil in its classic formulation since it is based on non-verifiable (meaningless) propositions. Religious and moral statements may express a mood or convey a feeling —they may have some emotional effect —but they do not assert any verifiable propositions and for this reason are meaningless or, as positivists are fond of saying, nonsense.[6]

These five "non-theistic" approaches to the problem of evil have at least one common element, namely, the assumption of God's existence is either denied, doubted, or called into serious question as a meaningful proposition. And so man's attempt to make sense of life in spite of evil is put on quite a different level from that of "searching out the deep things of God."

In a recent article, Richard R. Niebuhr suggested that the real task of theology is to wrestle with the problem of theodicy or what he calls the logic of reconciliation to divine omnipotence and divine goodness. I take it he means that at the center of theological concern there must always be an attempt to confront the problems of life and history in terms of God's own being on the one hand, and his intention or purpose for his creation on the other. In other words, the theist will in one way or another assert eternal providence and justify the ways of God to man.[7]

Theodicy means literally speaking for God by way of vindicating the divine government in light of the reality of evil. If one asserts or believes that God is at once powerful, wise, and good, then one will also find it necessary to defend the divine administration of the world. There are three general approaches that may be taken in dealing with the problem of theodicy: to qualify in some way the meaning of God's omnipotence, his benevolence, or to modify the concept of evil. In these ways the integrity of God's power and goodness is preserved. We may examine each in turn.

God is not good.—For Christian theology, the reality of evil is an enigma because the belief in the goodness of God is basic. Logically it would be possible to solve the puzzle, of course, by positing the existence of a malevolent deity. It is possible that God is morally depraved, as A. E. Housman suggests when he writes:

> We for a certainty are not the first,
> Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled
> Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed
> Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.[8]

One of the most comprehensive systems of thought expressing the "goodlessness" of God is that of Schopenhauer developed particularly in his **The World as Will and Idea.** Schopenhauer's pessimism is based largely on the approach to the problem of evil in Budd-

[6] For a concise discussion of positivism in its various forms see Morton White, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 ff.

[7] *Paradise Lost,* bk. i. l. 25ff.

[8] In C. E. M. Joad, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

hism, of which he was apparently a devoted student. Will (expressed in human life as desire) is the determining essence of nature. On the divine level, this will is blind and non-compassionate; on the human level, will manifests itself as insatiable desire. Life is a pursuit to gratify the appetites and the only respite from this path of red-hot coals is an ascetic existence.[9] The problem of evil in this system is that of escape from an inexorable fate rather than reconciling human suffering with divine goodness.

Spinoza approaches the problem from a somewhat different perspective when he rejects the notion that God designed the world with only human value in mind. In other words, our notions of good and evil are not adequate standards for God's creation. Spinoza insists that God is one ,that he acts only from his own nature which is infinite power, and that he is the free cause of all things. His creative initiative is not circumscribed by notions which conform only to human imagination. The problem of evil arises because men reckon the whole creation as a means for their own ends.[10]

The belief that God is both "mighty" and "terrible" is very much a part of Judaeo-Christian heritage. In the book of Job for example, Job's sufferings are permitted by God (who presumably might not have permitted them), and the resolution of his problem comes not from his dogged insistence that God is good (this produces only further agony as to the reason for his own suffering), but from his final submission to divine providence. One of the dominant themes in the Old Testament, of course, is that of God's covenant with his people which, when broken, brought the judgment of divine wrath in the form of flood, pestilence, drought and war. But even these were evidence of God's righteousness and justice rather than his innate malevolence. The idea of God's punishment for unfaithfulness is present in large measure in Christian theology. It is an attempt to objectify the problem of moral evil in terms of the divine-human covenant, presupposing a relationship of reverence and affection between God and man together with a strong sense of human responsibility.

These represent ways in which the notion of God's power is preserved by modifying or qualifying the meaning of his benevolence. This leads also to the possibility of qualifying the notion of his power as well.

God is not God. Omnipotent means "all-powerful." The concept of divine omnipotence implies that God is able to do all things, even those things which seem impossible to us. There is a story I recall hearing some time ago about a couple on their way one evening to a religious meeting of some sort when they discovered that the car was nearly out of gas. Being of devout minds, they reminded themselves that "with God all things are possible." A few moments of intense prayer resulted in a full tank of fuel, and they were able to continue their journey and meet their engagement. The notion of God's omnipotence is likely to suggest such "miraculous" occurrences.

Without discrediting the concept of miracle, however, the meaning of "omnipotence" as a divine attribute needs clarification, particularly when dealing with the problem of theodicy. Such words as omnipotence when used in connection with the divine are the focus of at least part of the continuing controversy between theologians and the analytic philosophers. It has been pointed out, for example, that the analysts have put the theologians in their debt by helping to clarify both forms of expression and terms used by the theologians. Very often, however, the

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[9] See John A. Mourant, *Readings in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1954), p. 377.

[10] Bronstein and Schulweis, *op. cit.*, pp. 239 ff.

meaning of a term such as "omnipotence" is taken for granted.

But philosophers and theologians and writers were struggling with the meaning of God's power long before the analysts, and in scanning the field we are able to pick up several approaches to the problem of theodicy which qualify directly the notion of an omnipotent God.

Plato gives this approach its classic formulation in his **Timaeus.** His "craftsman" theory of creation suggests that God (Demiurge) is limited by factors external to himself. He shapes the world by giving form to its substance; he patterns the visible world after the "real" world of Ideas. Again and again in the **Timaeus** Plato refers to a benevolent Demiurge designing the world to be as good as possible.[11] But, like the craftsman, he shapes materials given to him; he is confronted with all that is visible, with the chaos of un-creation which is in disorderly motion. Hence, he brings order out of chaos.

Although Plato's treatment of our problem does not exactly harmonize with the classic Christian approach to creation and omnipotence, it does resolve the dilemma of evil by positing a creator-god who, although not omnipotent, is at least responsible for the rational order and goodness of the world as it is. Plato would say, perhaps, that it is not necessary to have a weak God simply because we cannot have an all-powerful one.

In a sense, Plato's dualism sets the stage for later forms of dualistic and pluralistic world-views which also wrestle with the inevitable problem of theodicy. The Manicheans, a third-century movement branded heretical, resolved the problem by insisting that there is a hostile power at work in the world opposed, of course, to the benevolent God of faith. Augustine of Hippo, himself a Manichean before his conversion, summarized their position. They believe, he said, that God was driven to creation by urgent necessity of repulsing the evil that warred against him and that he mixed his god nature with the evil as a means of restraining and conquering it.[12]

Reflecting, in a sense, both of these positions, the renowned philosopher of Boston, Edgar Brightman, developed his theodicy. A proponent of philosophical idealism, Brightman asserted that all activity in the worlds of nature and man is the direct will of a personal God. He further insisted that it is not possible to attribute all evil to human sin and finiteness. Hence, there must be something within the nature of God himself which makes pain, effort, and suffering necessary. This Brightman calls "The Given." It seems that Brightman has chosen between a Manichean dualism and a finite God limited by restraints within his own nature. Rather than finding the cause of evils such as earthquakes, idiocy, insanity, cancer, unproductive pain, etc., in an external principle of evil, or in a theory of inert or chaotic matter as in Plato, or in the direct will of God, Brightman locates the source in this restraining factor not of God's making with which he must struggle eternally.[13]

Not unrelated to the absolute dualisms of Plato and the Manicheans, and the theory of a self-limited deity, are the various forms of pluralism, ancient and modern. The persistence of evil in the world may find one of its most plausible explanations in the lack of harmony and cooperation among several spiritual agents or gods or principles presiding over and governing it. We find this in primitive animism, in the ancient Greek theogonies, and to an extent even in Paul's letters (cf. the

[11] Plato, *Timaeus* 30, in *The Dialogues of Plato* (New York: Random House, 1937), II, p. 14.

[12] See Augustine's *City of God* bk. xi, 22, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* II, p. 217.

[13] E. S. Brightman, *The Problem of God* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), p. 113.

stoicheia of Gal. 4:9 and Col. 2:8; the angels and principalities of Romans 8:3; the thrones, dominions, principalities and powers of Col. 1:16).

There is a reluctance among pluralists (e.g., William James, John Dewey, F.S.C. Schiller) to search for a metaphysical unity underlying all things, as monists (e.g., Royce, Bradley, Spencer) are prone to do. For the pluralist, truth grows up inside finite experiences; emphasis is upon **becoming** rather than **being.** Pluralism does not begin with a closed system of terms and relations that encompasses everything. It begins rather with things and experiences as they are given and then draws out implications and generalizations that seem to follow.[14]

For the pluralist, then, evil comes in personal experiences dealt with as they arise. It does not constitute a broad metaphysical problem calling for a systematic theodicy, vindicating the Grand Originator of a unified world. "It looms up no longer so spectrally," says William James, "it loses all its haunting and perplexing significance, as soon as the mind attacks the instances of it singly, and ceases to worry about their derivation from the 'one and only Power.' "[15]

So far, then, we have been considering in brief various approaches to the problem of theodicy which modify in one way or another the presuppositions relating to the nature of God and the place human value occupies in the scheme of things. If God's existence, his omnipotence, his benevolence, his responsibility for the creation and control of the world can be qualified, or if the centrality of human value in the plan of creation is shifted to a secondary or incidental position, then the problem of evil on this level is quite different from that of the theist who accepts these presuppositions simultaneously.

Finally we turn attetion to theodicies which reinterpret the nature of evil leaving intact the other major presuppositions concerning the nature of God and his creation. It is here that the full meaning of the term "theodicy" is evident, for to the extent that God is believed to be absolutely powerful and benevolent, to that same extent the burden of vindicating God is felt. When the problem of evil is cast in this light, there are several approaches which lend themselves for consideration.

The best of all possible worlds.— Leibniz is credited with inventing the term "theodicy" and either praised or blamed for articulating one of the classic approaches to the problem. Using the arguments of the scholastic tradition, Leibniz reasons his way from the world of finite beings to a Being which is logically and metaphysically necessary. For Leibniz, this Being or God is absolutely perfect and filled with all power and wisdom. Imperfection in the created order arises not from some defect in the divine nature but from that imperfection resulting from the limitations of finite existents. God **knows** that to create a world involves evil, but he does not **will** evil: he wills that the world will be the best possible. In this way, Leibniz avoids the difficulties of Plato's craftsman theory, insisting that God is the originator not only of the form but also the substance of creation, and at the same time sidesteps the notion of a self-limited deity, while defending the idea of a God of absolute power and good will who, nevertheless, creates something less than a perfect world.

The problem of moral evil or sin is laid to human freedom. For Leibniz sin appears as a condition of finitude. Hence, it too is "metaphysically" necessary in the best of all possible worlds. This kind of world, argues Leibniz, is certainly not a world without evil. It seems unlikely that Leibniz was as nai-

[14] F. J. E. Woodbridge, "Pluralism," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics,* X, p. 68.

[15] William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans Green and Co., 1899), p. ix.

evely optimistic as his critics have charged. But even as a general of an army will prefer a great victory with a slight wound to a condition without wound and without victory, even so a possible world with evil is better than an impossible world without it. God displays his infinite wisdom, power, and goodness in creating such a world rather than creating no world at all.[16]

Evil stimulates moral accomplishment or attainment of larger good.—This approach characterizes the work of such men as Josiah Royce and John Fiske. Monistic elements are present in the philosophical theology of F. R. Tennant and in the theism of J. S. Whale. The social implications of this position are worked out in Herbert Spencer's thought.

As an Absolute Idealist, Royce, for example, maintains that the answer to the problem of evil lies in a God who is not essentially other than his creatures, but is the Absolute Being of which all finite beings are a part. Hence, God himself suffers in the sufferings of his creatures. And this suffering on God's part is in turn evidence of the growing achievement of a higher perfection. One of the outgrowths of this position is that moral and physical evil are occasions in the process of perfection. Without evil, there would not be struggle; without struggle there would not be growth; without growth there would not be perfectibility; without perfectibility there would not be the achievement of higher perfection. The goodness and power of God are solid postulates of this position. The diabolical reality of evil is limited by the larger inclusiveness of the Absolute.[17]

Evil is the result of man's creatureliness.—Here we step into one of the main hallways of Christian theology.[18] The view that evil is rooted in man's finiteness is part of most "Christian" approaches to the problem of evil, particularly with regard to moral evil or sin. Hence, the sinfulness of man has frequently been treated as a central problem if not, at times, **the problem** in Christian theology. The predominance of the evil of sin pervades the work of St. Augustine and sets the basis for the view that all evil is the result of man's creatureliness. Beginning here, Augustine condemns the Manichaen heresy which, as we have already noted, explains evil by positing a metaphysical principle opposed to God. Natural evil is traced to man's inability to comprehend and to come into an harmonious relation with the created world. But this is not God's fault, nor is it the result of a counter-god. Thomas Aquinas picks up this same theme in his treatment of natural evil, and we can detect here the rudiments of a "best of all possible worlds" theory.

But the burden of both Augustine's and Thomas's treatment of the problem of evil rests on the moral question. Sin is rooted in pride; creatures are miserable because they have forsaken God and turned toward themselves, diminishing their being by preferring themselves to God. Abandonment of the Supreme Being is the source of evil. Thomas follows Augustine's reasoning on this point and divides evil into two kinds: pain and fault. Fault is the greater evil because it is centered in the will of the creature. And this is the core of moral evil or sin which both Augustine and Thomas would judge the greatest evil of all.

Such fault can in no way be traced to the being of God. There is no source for the bad will of man: the bad will is itself the only origin of evil. Hence, the root of moral evil must be a volun-

[16] Mourant, *op. cit.*, pp. 383 ff.

[17] See Josiah Royce, *Studies of Good and Evil* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1898) and John Fiske, *Through Nature to God* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1900).

[18] For a more thorough treatment of this position, see R. Franklin Terry, *The Problem of Evil in the Theologies of Tillich and Wieman,* Dissertation, Iliff School of Theology, August 1961, pp. 102-110.

tary and free defect—a refusal of the will to use the rule by which morality is applied to free action. Freedom itself is the cause of moral evil, that is, the freedom to say "yes" or "no" to the application of the moral law.

Thus, by far the greatest evil in the world is that which man does rather than that which he suffers as a "natural" man. Here, of course, we are at the heart of the doctrine of the Fall which vindicates the supreme power and goodness of God in the face of evil by showing that evil is the consequence of human nature. And in one way or another, Christian theology has used this doctrine and its philosophical and theological development as a major component in the treatment of the problem of evil. In contemporary Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, for example, Jacques Maritain and Paul Tillich have given expression to the more philosophical aspects of this approach, while Karl Rahner and Karl Barth have dealt more exclusively with the Biblical concepts involved.[19]

Evil is punishment by a just God.—If sin is disobedience to God, then it is an exercise of divine justice that man should suffer for his rebellion. Augustine asserts that death is the just punishment God has ordained the penalty for sin. This theme is a major one in Reformed doctrine. Predestination is a doctrinal attempt to set forth this approach to the problem of evil. There are two elements to the doctrine of predestination: election and reprobation. Election implies that it is God's eternal purpose to save some of the human race through Jesus Christ. Reprobation means that God passes some men by with the operation of his grace and punishes them for their sin in exercise of his divine justice. Reprobation is the decree according to which God leaves those whom he has not elected to salvation in the mass of corruption to which they are heir, piling up sin upon sin; then, when they have become hardened by his judgment, to visit them with eternal punishments in order to display the glory of his righteousness.

If it is urged that a just God could not condemn some of his creatures to eternal punishment as a display of his righteousness, then it is answered that man, since he has fallen by an act of his own volition, has no right to the life of salvation and is brought thereto only by the grace and love of God. It is only just that all men should perish eternally: it is by the grace of God that some are saved.[20]

The ways of God are past finding out.—Calvin speaks of the "incomprehensible" providence of a just, powerful, and righteous God. In the closing portions of the book of Job we find a scriptural touchstone for this position. Job presents a theodicy of the inscrutable ways of God. The problem is resolved when Job repents of his pretentions to argue his innocence with God:

> . . . I have uttered what I did not understand,
> things too wonderful for me,
> which I did not know.
> 'Hear, and I will speak;
> I will question you, and you declare to me.'
> I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear,
> but now my eyes see thee;
> therefore I despise myself,
> and repent in dust and ashes.
> Job 42:3-6

Job's solution is one of resignation in faith ushered into his consciousness by the failure of his own search to find out the mind of God, to argue his case with the Almighty. Emil Kraeling, in an ex-

[19] See Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942); Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. I, pp. 253 ff.; Vol. II, pp. 44 ff.; Karl Rahner, *Nature and Grace,* (Sheed and Ward, 1963), pp. 107 ff.; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* "The Doctrine of Reconciliation."

[20] See Louis Berkhof, *Manual of Reformed Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1933), pp. 90-92.

cellent book on Job, suggests that the poet is telling us through the figure of Job that the infinite power of God clothes his subtler purpose which must not be questioned simply because we cannot see it at every point. The divine world government of a God infinite in power constitutes the only consistent theodicy, he says, and gives rise to the **doctrine deus absconditus.** It is rooted in the nature of religion, says Kraeling, that the deity should remain clothed in mystery and passing all understanding. The man who can set aside his quarrel with God is found to be at peace in an attitude of faith.[21]

If Job had yielded to unbelief, his problem would have vanished. Instead, Job persists. But his answer comes not through speculation in which God's ways are detected, even partially, but in the lonely depths of the divine-human encounter. Samuel Terrien observes that through his despair, the sufficiency of divine grace comes as an answer out of the whirlwind. Job learns that God stands beyond and above the traditions, the ideals, and the wisdom of men. So that in Job, the problem of evil is resolved through the submission of the intellect which cannot probe the **Mysterium tremendum,** and of the will which cannot overcome the power of God.[22]

Evil is the absence of good.—In his ontology, Augustine equates **being** with **goodness,** and the question of the fundamental reality of evil is dealt with in these terms. God is being itself, goodness itself. Therefore, evil has no being, but is the absence of being. If this is true, then necessarily, God can bring goodness out of evil, rather, he can put goodness in the place of evil. In this sense, evil has no real status in the world.

Nels Ferre is led to suggest on this basis that natural evil serves the function of bringing forth the good. Life is a training ground where in God makes the prodigal hungry that he might bethink himself, repent, remember his home, and more than before understand not only his father's bounty but his wonderful goodness. And in a similar vein, Jacques Maritain observes that the whole spectacle of things is that of a procession of things good, wounded by non-being but producing by their activity an indefinitely increasing accumulation of being and of good. But this accumulation of good always carries with it the wound of non-being and of evil.[23]

Evil is an illusion.—It seems likely that if the mind is overburdened with the weight of evil, it may reject the reality of evil altogether, As nihilism or atheism reject or deny the existence of God, Christian Science and related movements deny the reality of evil. This approach to the problem of evil on the theoretical level represents the opposite end of the spectrum in dealing with the presuppositions underlying the problem. The position is explained by Mary Baker Eddy:

> God is the Principle of divine metaphysics. As there is but one God, there can be but one divine Principle of all Science; and there must be fixed rules for the demonstration of this divine Principle . . .
>
> The fundamental propositions of divine metaphysics are summarized in the four following, to me **self-evident** propositions . . .
>
> 1. God is All-in-all.
> 2. God is good. Good in Mind.
> 3. God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter.
> 4. Life, God, omnipotent good, deny death, evil, sin, disease.—Disease, sin, evil, death, deny good, omnipotent God, Life.[24]

[21] Emil G. Kraeling, *The Book of the Ways of God* (New York: Chas. Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 252.

[22] Samuel Terrien, "Introduction" to Job, *Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1954), III, p. 890.

[23] Cf. Nels Ferre, *Evil and the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper Bros., 1947), p 67; Jacques Maritain, *St. Thomas and the Problem of Evil,* p. 3.

[24] *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures,* chapter VI.

Hence, matter and all evil, sins, sickness and death are contrary to the essential nature of the cosmos—God, Spirit, Mind—and are classified as "unreal" which means that they have only temporary existence in the experience of mortals. They are defined as error or illusion, the result of a false sense of existence, to be finally destroyed by Truth.

VI.

The task of theology is to point to, reflect upon, and bring into the realms of human life and history the existence, the Nature, and the meaning of God. If this is true then the problem of theodicy is among the primary concerns of theology itself. The analysis of the problem we are pursuing here is intended to define and clarify the nature of the problem and the ways in which it has been dealt with as a human concern. We certainly do not run our fingers through the catalogue of theoretical possibilities when confronting the tests of existence to see what particular approach is best suited to a given perplexity. Rather, as theologians and as religious practitioners we ourselves reflect upon and ponder the texture of life, the broad range of human difficulties, as well as the specific concerns of individual persons, and then from our own perspectives and in our own situations we speak and witness and work. And in that context a closer examination of the problem of evil may prove helpful.