ested in social action, he has a fine theological and philosophical basis on which to promulgate his ideas and activities. He is particularly interested in philosophy and has done fine work in it both at Crozer and at Penn. He is a real leader as evidenced by the confidence his fellow students have in him by electing him president of the student body.

THFmS. CRO-NRCR.

Graduate Record Examination
Scores for Martin Luther King, Jr.

6 March 1951
Princeton, N.J.

King took the examination on 3 February. A table enclosed with the test report indicated that his verbal aptitude score was in the second lowest quartile and his quantitative score was in the lowest ten percent of those taking the test. In the advanced test in philosophy, King's score (on a scale of 100) placed him in the lowest third, while his other scores (on a scale of 800) were in the lowest quartile in all the subject areas except literature, where he placed in the top quartile.

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TFm. CSKC.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“A Conception and Impression of Religion
Drawn from Dr. Brightman's Book
Entitled *A Philosophy of Religion*”

[28 March 1951]
[Chester, Pa.]

King wrote this essay as the first paper for the second term of Davis's Philosophy of Religion course. Although the essay derives largely from Brightman's Philosophy of Religion, King grapples with various conceptions of God, a topic he would later discuss in greater depth in his dissertation. In contrast to his firm adherence
to theism in early 1950, King, after reading Brightman's book, admits to being "quite confused as to which definition [of God] was the most adequate." King's conclusion to this essay vividly illustrates Brightman's impact: "How I long now for that religious experience which Dr. Brightman so cogently speaks of throughout his book. It seems to be an experience, the lack of which life becomes dull and meaningless. As I reflect on the matter, however, I do remember moments that I have been awe awakened; there have been times that I have been carried out of myself by something greater than myself and to that something I gave myself."

Davis gave King an A and commented, "Well done."

After reading Dr. Brightman's most scholarly work entitled, A Philosophy Of Religion, I find that religion is a universal phenomenon involving a set of beliefs about reality in addition to attitudes and practices of various sorts. More specifically, religion seems to be "concern about experiences which are regarded as of supreme value; devotion toward a power or powers believed to originate, increase, and conserve these values; and some suitable expression of this concern and devotion, whether through symbolic rites or through other individual and social conduct." Religion, then, seems to be a total experience which includes this concern, this devotion, and this expression.

Dr. Brightman makes it very clear that religion is not to be confused with magic, science, morals and art. Religion differs from magic in being devoted to the power that is the source of values, whereas magic is a kind of mechanical compulsion of that power. Religion differs from science in being concerned about values, while science ignores the value of its facts and confines itself to objective description. Religion resembles morals and art in being concerned with values, but differs from them in its primary devotion to the power or powers that originate the supreme value of life, as well as in the use of ritual for its expression.

Interestingly enough I find that religion is a characteristically human experience. From all known facts, the lower animals have no religion. Religion is man's concern about his own value and destiny. From this I get the impression that if there were no men, and if there existed only pure intelligences with no

1. In a final examination for Davis, King wrote: "I feel that the most valid conception of God is that of theism. God, for me along with other theist is a personal spirit immanent in nature and in the value structure of the universe" (see Examination answers, Christian Theology for Today, 13 September 1949–15 February 1950, p. 290 in this volume).
3. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 17: "Religion, then, is a total experience which includes this concern, this devotion, and this expression."
4. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 17: "Religion differs from magic in being devotion to the power that is the source of values, whereas magic is a kind of mechanical compulsion of that power. Religion differs from science in being concerned about values, while science ignores the value of its facts and confines itself to objective description. Religion resembles morals and art in being concerned with values, but differs from them in its primary devotion to the power or powers that originate the supreme value of life, as well as in the use of ritual for its expression."
ideal save that of scientific knowledge, physics and mathematics would be as true for them as for men, but they would have no religion. 5

From my reading of this interesting work by Dr. Brightman, I find that there are certain essential religious beliefs which underlie the whole phenomenon of religion. These essential religious beliefs, according to our author, have been found to pervade every religion. What then are these essential beliefs? 2

The first essential religious belief is that there are experiences of great and permanent value. 6 In the above definition of religion it was revealed that every religious experience is an experience of value. Science is objective, disinterested description. Religion, according to our author, is never merely disinterested, however objective it may be. It is “interested,” that is, it takes sides for value as against disvalue. Religion is definitely for the good and against the evil, whereas science is interested only in knowing the facts of good and evil, their causes and their effects. 7

Our Author makes it quite clear that religion is an experience of value in two senses. In the first place, as has been said, it is a choice of value, an appreciation or adoration of value, or the source of value. But in the second place, it is also a faith in the friendliness of the universe to value. The first point means that value experience can be created by human enjoyment, choice, or appreciation; the second means that value experience will somehow be preserved in the universe, because there is in the very nature of things an unfailling source of value. 8

The belief in gods or God is the second essential religious belief. According to our author most religions from the start rest on belief in divine beings, or a divine being, viewed as a source of value, if not the source of all value. Even those religions, like Jainism, Buddhism, and Communism, which begin with atheism tend to develop a belief in some objective source of value, that is to say, a god. 9

5. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 342: “Religion is a characteristically human experience. As far as we know, the lower animals have no religion. If there were no men, and if there existed only pure intelligences with no ideal save that of scientific knowledge, physics and mathematics would be as true for them as for men, but they would have no religion. . . . Religion is man’s concern about his own value and destiny.”

6. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 81: “The belief that there are experiences of great and permanent value.”

7. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 85: “The survey of the facts of religion (its phenomenology, as such a survey is called) has revealed the fundamental fact that every religious experience is an experience of value. . . . Science is objective, disinterested description. Religion is never merely disinterested description, however objective it may be. It is ‘interested,’ that is, it takes sides for value as against disvalue. Religion is definitely for the good and against the evil, whereas science is interested only in knowing the facts of good and evil, their causes and their effects.”

8. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 86: “In two senses, religion is an experience of value. In the first place, as has been said, it is a choice of value, an appreciation or adoration of value, or the source of value. But in the second place, it is also a faith in the friendliness of the universe to value. The first point means that value experience can be created by human enjoyment, choice, or appreciation; the second means that value experience will somehow be preserved in the universe, because there is in the very nature of things an unfailling source of value.”

9. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 81: “The belief in gods or God. Most religions from the start rest on belief in divine beings, or a divine being, viewed as a source of value, if not the source
I was amazed to find that the conception of God is so complex and one about which opinions differ so widely. There have been at least nine conceptions of God in the history of religious thinking which have been quite prominent. The first conception of God that we might refer to is that of Polytheism. Here there is a belief in many gods, each god regarded as a vaguely personal (or impersonal-mana) spirit which is the source of some energy which brings value to man. There are gods of rivers, springs, trees, rains; of fertility, of motherhood, of fatherhood, and of love. It is believed that even when man sees disaster, some one of these gods is at work or may be called on. According to our author polytheism is religiously important as a phenomenon which has continued for centuries and still persists in some sections of Asia and Africa.\(^{10}\)

A second conception of God that has arisen is referred to as Henotheism. This term is used to describe belief in and worship of one god as supreme, accompanied by recognition that others exist.\(^{11}\)

A third conception of God sees him as “Supreme Personal Creator.” This is the view of monotheism. Here it is held that there is only one God, and that this supreme personal spirit is the source of all value and the creator of all that exist other than himself.\(^{12}\)

A fourth conception of God sees him as the “Whole of Reality.” This is known as the pantheistic view. In this view God is not a spirit separate from nature and man, who creates them and imparts value to them. Rather God is conceived as the whole of which nature and man are parts.\(^{13}\)

A fifth conception of God sees him as the Unknowable source of all being. Our author refers to this view as agnostic realism. Here it is held that God exists, but he is essentially unknowable. Those who hold such a view point out that religion does not pretend to be a matter of human knowledge, scientific or philosophical. It is rather an aspiration toward the infinite but unknown source of our experience of values, and of nature. Religion is humble, and religion moves in the atmosphere of mystery.\(^{14}\)

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\(^{10}\) Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 137–138: “What we are sure of is that we find man for a long time in his history believing in many gods, each god regarded as a vaguely personal (or impersonal-mana) spirit which is the source of some energy which brings value to man. There are gods of rivers, springs, trees, rains; of fertility, of motherhood, of fatherhood, of love; . . . It is believed that even when man sees disaster, some one of these gods is at work or may be called on. . . . Polytheism is, however, religiously important as a phenomenon which has continued for centuries and still persists in some sections of Asia and Africa.”

\(^{11}\) Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 139: “The term henotheism is often used to describe belief in and worship of one god as supreme, accompanied by recognition that others exist.”

\(^{12}\) Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 140: “More or less independently, there grew up the idea of one supreme personal spirit, the source of all value and the creator of all that exists other than himself.”

\(^{13}\) Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 141: “God is not a spirit separate from nature and man, who creates them and imparts value to them. Rather, these thinkers hold, God is the whole of which nature and man are parts.”

\(^{14}\) Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 142: “Those who hold such a view point out that religion does not pretend to be a matter of human knowledge, scientific or philosophical. It is
A sixth view of God sees “Him” as human aspiration for Ideal Values. This view is often referred to as Humanism. The essence of this view is that God is to be found in man’s highest social experiences, not in any reality beyond man.\(^\text{15}\)

A seventh conception of God sees him as the superhuman and supernatural revealer of values. Our authors refers to this view as deistic supernaturalism. According to this view, God is not found in human experience at all except in so far as he chooses to reveal himself; when he reveals himself it is not as the highest man can think, but rather as something “totally other” than everything human, of a radically different quality from human hopes and strivings—as different from our best as eternity is from time.\(^\text{16}\)

An eighth conception of God sees “Him” as the system of ideal values. This view is referred to by Brightman as impersonal Idealism. The members of this group go back to Plato, and think of God as the eternal Forms (or Ideas) of Justice, Truth, and Love. Since the Forms are thought of as eternally valid ideals or principles, God is not a person or conscious mind for members of this group, and their view may well be called impersonal idealism.\(^\text{17}\)

A ninth view of God see “Him” as the tendency of Nature to support or produce value. This view is known as religious naturalism. Here God is seen as the tendency of nature to support or produce movement toward perfection. God is the name for “the growth of meaning and value in the world.”\(^\text{18}\)

After reading so many different definitions of God, I found myself quite confused as to which definition was the most adequate, only to find as I continued to read that the question of whether God is finite or infinite raises a whole new problem. The former view is referred to as theistic absolutism. The latter is referred to as theistic finitism. Our author seems to deal with this problem of the finite or infinite God mainly when he comes to a discussion of the problem of evil. For this reason we may reserve our discussion of this

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15. Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 144: “In America, . . . there has arisen a movement known as religious humanism, the essence of which is the view that God is to be found in man’s highest social experiences, not in any reality beyond man.”

16. Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 145: “According to this view, God is not found in human experience at all except in so far as he chooses to reveal himself; when he reveals himself it is not as the highest man can think, but rather as something ‘totally other’ than everything human, of a radically different quality from human hopes and strivings—as different from our best as eternity is from time.”

17. Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 147: “Hence this group defines God as the system of ideal values. Its members go back to Plato, and think of God as the eternal Forms (or Ideas) of Justice, Truth, and Love, although Plato himself never identified God with the Forms. Since the Forms are thought of as eternally valid ideals or principles, God is not a person or a conscious mind for members of this group, and their view may well be called impersonal idealism.”

18. Brightman, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 151, 152: “Thinkers of this sort would agree in defining God as the tendency of nature to support or produce values. . . . the same general formula applies equally well to Wieman’s God and to Alexander’s: God is the tendency of nature to support or produce movement toward perfection. . . . For Wieman, likewise, God is the name for ‘the growth of meaning and value in the world.’”
problem until we come to a discussion of the existence of evil as an essential religious belief.

In bringing this section on belief in God to a close, I cannot avoid being impressed by the variety of opinion about God. Yet what the author said at the start is now seen more clearly to be true; that in all variety of opinion there is one common insight about experience coming to expression, namely, that the object to which all religions have directed their worship and service is a divine source and conserver of values.19

The third essential religious belief is that man is a soul or spiritual being, and not merely a physical organism. All religions, according to our author, have found the chief meaning of existence in man's spiritual nature and attitude, rather than in any purely material condition or possession. The most crude idolatry is always regarded as a relation of the human spirit to a divine spirit.20

The belief in man as a spiritual being leads us inevitably to the problem of personality. Dr. Brightman goes to great pains to deal with this question. He concludes that a person is a self that is potentially self-conscious, rational, and ideal. That is to say, when a self is able at times to reflect on itself as a self, to reason, and to acknowledge ideal goals by which it can judge its actual achievements, then we call it a person. The question immediately arises at this point as to the personality of lower animals. Dr. Brightman answers this question by saying that there is no reason on the basis of known evidence to draw the line sharply and say that only human beings are persons; pigs, dogs, apes, and horses seem to be at least elementary persons. But this consideration, he continues, is of no vital importance to a philosophy of religion, for the very good reason that, as far as is known, human persons are the only ones who have religious experience.21 Such a fact reveals the spiritual nature of man.

A Fourth essential religious belief is that there is purpose in human existence. This purpose is thought of as being for the group, and in higher religions, also for the individual; it is not merely man's purpose, but also God's. Thus religion is always a relation of man to the whole of existence or at least to the whole which he believes to be supremely important and worthy of his
purposive devotion. Says our author, even when belief in purpose is faint or absent, its effects abide in the form of belief in man's membership in a larger whole on which he depends.²²

A Fifth essential religious belief is that there is valid religious experience. This is the conviction that there are experiences, such as sacraments, conversion, worship, mystical moments, and prayer, when the religious person comes into actual and immediate relation with the divine being.²³ More specifically our author speaks of religious experience as any experience of any person taken in its relation to his God. Religious experience is not a unique kind or quality of experience; it is rather a unique way of apprehending experience. There are therefore many degrees of religious experience according to Dr. Brightman. The experience of believing nature to be a deed (or creation) of God is a religious experience; so is the experience of prayer. But the latter, being less apparently impersonal than the system of nature and being more directly concerned with spiritual values and hence with the essential nature of God, is more intensely religious.²⁴

A sixth essential religious belief is that the human soul is immortal. This belief has been so widespread that some have called it universal. Traces of it may be found in almost every primitive tribe, as well as in almost every developed religion. Dr. Brightman makes it quite clear that there are some religions (such as Old Testament Judaism) in which belief in conscious, personal immortality is inconspicuous, and others from which it is entirely absent (such as Hinayana Buddhism). But, like belief in the personality of God, he argues, it tends to develop in the later stages of a religion, even if it was lacking from the earlier.²⁵

I was interested to find our author speaking of the great religious value of

²². Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 82: "The belief that there is purpose in human existence. This purpose is thought of as being for the group, and in higher religions, also for the individual; it is not merely man's purpose, but also God's. Thus religion is always a relation of man to the whole of existence or at least to the whole which he believes to be supremely important and worthy of his purposive devotion. Even when belief in purpose is faint or absent, its effects abide in the form of belief in man's membership in a larger whole on which he depends."

²³. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 82: "The belief in valid religious experience. This is the conviction that there are experiences, such as sacraments, conversion, worship, mystical moments, and prayer, when the religious person comes into actual and immediate relation with the divine being."

²⁴. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 415–416: "Religious experience is any experience of any person taken in its relation to his God. Religious experience is not a unique kind or quality of experience; it is rather a unique way of apprehending experience. There are therefore many degrees of religious experience. The experience of believing nature to be a deed (or creation) of God is a religious experience; so is the experience of prayer. But the latter, being less apparently impersonal than the system of nature and being more directly concerned with spiritual values and hence with the essential nature of God, is more intensely religious."

²⁵. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 387: "Belief in the survival of bodily death is so widespread that some have called it universal. Traces of it may be found in almost every primitive tribe, as well as in almost every developed religion. There are, it is true, some religions (such as Old Testament Judaism) in which belief in conscious, personal immortality is inconspicuous, and others from which it is entirely absent (such as Hinayana Buddhism). But, like belief in the personality of God, it tends to develop in the later stages of a religion, even if it was lacking from the earlier."
this belief in immortality. His argument may be summarized thus. The good life is a life of goal-seeking; it is a life of forward-looking purpose. Immortality symbolizes the faith that good purpose never fails to all eternity. The taproot of all human endeavor is in the hope that purpose can achieve values. Those who deny immortality continue to strive largely because they believe that they are laying foundations for the next generation. If courage and meaning are imparted to life by a short (look) into the future, how much more dignity, hope, and perspective arise from the faith that every life capable of purposive development is eternal. Immortality symbolizes the intrinsic value of the individual person, the intrinsic value of shared, cooperative living, and the goodness of God.26

A seventh essential religious belief is that there is evil as well as value. All religions, according to Brightman, have recognized that there is something in the universe to be opposed and feared. In primitive religion, it is hard to distinguish good from evil in the taboo; but the belief in demons, Satan, Ahriman, sin, the need of redemption, longing for individual conversion and social reform all imply recognition of something evil. Even a religion like Christian Science, which denies the reality of evil, recognizes it in the fact of "error of mortal mind" and in "malicious animal magnetism."27

It seems fair to say from an interpretation of our authors conclusions that good is a principle of totality, of coherence, of meaning; evil is a principle of fragmentariness, of incoherence, of mockery. Hence there is no immanent logic in evil; "evil is the Satan that laughs at logic. Yet many religionist believe that there is logic in thought about evil, and from my reading I find that many more or less logical solutions of the problem have been proposed. Those most often discussed in the modern world, according to Brightman, are as follows:

1. Moral evils may be explained as a result of human freedom.
2. Nonmoral evils are sometimes viewed as a punishment for moral evils.
3. Nonmoral evils, if not penal, may be regarded as disciplinary.
4. Evil, it is said is incomplete good.
5. Some adherents to the foregoing theory, as well as some who do not hold it, advance the idea that evil is needed as a contrast to good.
6. It is sometimes argued that nonmoral evils, as well as moral ones, are a result of...
freedom. (7) It is often argued that even though certain evils may be intrinsic surds so far as man is concerned, it may be that those very evils are needed in the universe as instruments to beings rather than men. (8) The theory just stated often takes a more general form in the proposition that all evils intrinsic or instrumental—serve an unknown good. (9) In sharp contrast with the view which justifies all evil as good is the view, held by some Hindus and by Christian Scientists, that evil is unreal. (10) There remains as a solution of the problem of evil the one which is most popular among nontheistic and nonidealistic thinkers, namely, the view that good and evil are the outcome of processes or entities which are axiologically neutral.

As Dr. Brightman continues his discussion on good-and-evil he makes it very clear that his solution to the problem resolves around a positing of a finite God. Here God is described as a self struggling with recalcitrant factors within himself. He is a personal finite God whose finiteness consists in his own internal structure: an eternal unitary personal consciousness whose creative will is limited both by external necessities of reason and by eternal experiences of brute fact. These limits Brightman calls The Given. In short he concludes that God's Power is Finite, while his Will for Good is infinite.

After being introduced to this all pervasive phenomenon called religion I am now convinced that it is one of the most fruitful adventures that man can take. With H. G. Wells I might now say that "if a man is not religious he begins at nowhere and ends at nothing." It is religion that gives meaning to life. It is religion that gives meaning to the Universe. It is religion that is the greatest incentive for the good life. It is religion which gives us the assurance that all that is high noble and valuable will be conserved. Such fruits of religion I find to be its greatest virtues, and certainly they cannot be ignored by any sane man. I must now conclude that any atheistic view is both philosophically unsound and practically disadvantageous. How I long now for that religious experience which Dr. Brightman so cogently speaks of.

28. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 250–260: "Good is a principle of totality, of coherence, of meaning. Evil is a principle of fragmentariness, of incoherence, of mockery. Hence there is no immanent logic in evil; evil is the Satan that laughs at logic. Yet there is logic in thought about evil, and many more or less logical solutions of the problem of evil have been proposed. Those most often discussed in the modern world will now be briefly stated and criticized."
throughout his book. It seems to be an experience, the lack of which life becomes dull and meaningless. As I reflect on the matter, however, I do remember moments that I have been awe awakened; there have been times that I have been carried out of myself by something greater than myself and to that something I gave myself. Has this great something been God? Maybe after all I have been religious for a number of years, and am now only becoming aware of it.

AHDS. MLKP-MBU: Box 112, folder 14.

"Religion's Answer to the Problem of Evil"

[27 April 1951] [Chester, Pa.]

In this paper for the second term of Davis's Philosophy of Religion course, King examines the explanations of ancient and modern philosophers for the existence of evil in the world. He follows Harris Franklin Rall's analysis of the problem of evil in Christianity: An Inquiry into Its Nature and Truth, concluding that "the ultimate solution is not intellectual but spiritual. After we have climbed to the top of the speculative ladder we must leap out into the darkness of faith." Davis gave King an A – and commented, "Well done."

The problem of evil has always been the most baffling problem facing the theist. Indeed, it is belief in a personal God which constitutes the problem in all its known acuteness. At the heart of all high religion there is the conviction that there is behind the universe an ultimate power which is perfectly good. In other words the theist says: the power that is behind all things is good. But on every hand the facts of life seem to contradict such a faith. Nature is often cruel. "Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another," says John Stuart Mill, "are nature's every day performances. Nature kills, burns, starves, freezes, poisons."* Not only that, but the world seems positively immoral. If we look through the pages of history what do we find?

1. Harris Franklin Rall, Christianity: An Inquiry into Its Nature and Truth (New York: Scribner, 1940), p. 313: "That is what faith in God means: the power that is back of all things is good; goodness has ultimate power. But on every hand the facts of life seem to contradict that faith. . . . Nature is cruel. 'Nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another,' says John Stuart Mill, 'are nature's every day performances. Nature kills, burns, starves, freezes, poisons.'"