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.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“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?

* Three Essays on Religion, p. 28.

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.’”
Jesus on a cross and Caesar in a places; truth on the scaffold and wrong on the throne; the just suffering while the unjust prosper. How explain all this in the face of a good and powerful God? If the universe is rational, why is evil rampant within it? If God is all powerful and perfectly good why does he permit such devastating conditions to befall the lives of men? Why do the innocent suffer? How account for the endless chain of moral and physical evils?

These are questions which no serious minded religionist can overlook. Evil is a reality. No one can make light of disease, slavery, war, or famine. It might be true that God is in his heaven, but all is not right with the world, and only the superficial optimist who refuses to face the realities of life fails to see this patent fact. Evil is not rational, on the contrary it is non-rational. It is a "principle of fragmentariness, of incoherence, of mockery." It is not logical; evil is the Satan that laughs at logic. It is in this great inescapable conundrum that we find the "theistic dilemma." I must hasten to say, however, that the theists have not been content to pass over this problem as just another problem with no serious import; theists of all shades of opinion have been willing to face the problem with all the intellectual equipment that the human mind has afforded. At this point we may turn to a critical discussion of those solutions most often set forth in the modern world. In conclusion I will present what I feel to be the most adequate solution to this pressing problem.

Modern Answers

(1) First there is the position that moral evils result from the human misuse of freedom. Certainly this position has much weight, and cannot be easily cast

2. Davis corrected "places" to "palace." King often quoted this James Russell Lowell poem in sermons and speeches throughout his life, including "Facing the Challenge of a New Age" (1956) and "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution" (1968) (see James Washington, ed., A Testament of Hope [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986], pp. 52, 141, 207, 243-244, 277, 507). The section of the poem favored by King is:

Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,—
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and, behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.
(The Present Crisis [1844, stanza 8]).

3. The quotation and the phrase "evil is the Satan that laughs at logic" are from Edgar S. Brightman, A Philosophy of Religion (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1940), p. 259.
aside. Nevertheless, human freedom leaves many aspects of evil, even of moral evil, unexplained. With Dr. Brightman we would have to raise the following questions. Why are there in the nature of things, independent of human choice, so many temptations and allurements of evil choices? And why are the consequences of some evil choices so utterly debasing and disastrous? Is it just to ascribe all of the sins and vices of poverty-stricken refugees or unemployed families to their own freedom, or even to all human freedom put together?* This seems to be putting too much weight on the back of human freedom. Freedom may explain much of moral evil, but it fails to explain physical evil. Moreover, it does not explain the force of temptation or the debasing consequences of moral evil.4

(2) A second view explains physical evils as a punishment for moral evils.5 Such a view rests in the principle of retribution. This view goes back to the old Deuteronomistic idea that prosperity follows piety and righteous, while suffering follows sin. Even in the days of Jesus we find traces of this theory. Hence the question is put to Jesus: “Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind.”† The most rigorous expression of this viewpoint is found in India’s ancient doctrine of Karma. Karma means literally deed. Suffering is explained as the consequence of a man’s deeds, whether committed in this present life or in some previous existence. Views of this variety continue to exist in the modern world. But such views are repugnant to the ethical sense of modern idealist.6 Does a good God harbor resentment? Does perfect love achieve its purpose in such cruel ways? This crude theory was rejected long ago by the writer of the book of Job and by Jesus (according to John

* Brightman, A Philoso-

† John 9:2

4. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 260–261: “Moral evils may be explained as a result of human freedom. Much weight may be granted to this argument. . . . Nevertheless, human freedom leaves many aspects of evil, even of moral evil, unexplained. Why are there in the nature of things, independent of human choice, so many temptations and allurements to evil choices? And why are the consequences of some evil choices so utterly debasing and disastrous? . . . Is it just to ascribe all of the sins and vices of poverty-stricken refugees or unemployed families to their own freedom, or even to all human freedom put together? . . . Freedom, we repeat, explains much of moral evil, but it does not explain either the force of temptation or the debasing consequences of moral evil.”

5. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 261: “Nonmoral evils are sometimes viewed as a punishment for moral evils.”

6. Davis corrected “idealist” to “idealism.” Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 261: “Yet it is repugnant to the ethical sense of modern idealists.”
9:3). The whole theory of punishment as a solution of the problem of evil collapses with a series of ethical objections.2

(3) A third view explains nonmoral evils as disciplinary rather than penal. Here the purpose of evil is to reform or to test rather than to punish. It is quite obvious that this view cannot be totally rejected. Who can deny that many apparent evils turn out in the end to be goods in disguise. Character often develops out of hardship. Unfortunate hereditary and environmental conditions often make for great and noble souls. Suffering teaches sympathy.8 But is this the whole story? We must answer with an emphatic no. Character is not always developed through hardship. Unfortunate hereditary and environmental conditions do not always make for noble spirits, they more frequently make for resentful, depressed and hopeless living.

A more serious criticism of this view is pointed out very cogently by Dr. Brightman. He argues that if discipline is the purpose of all evil, and God is both omnipotent and just, then disciplinary evils should meet at least two conditions, viz, (1) they should appear wherever they are needed and only where they are needed and (2) they should be perfectly adapted to their ideal end. It is perfectly clear that neither of these conditions is met.9 Says Brightman: “Disciplinary evil fail to appear for the moral education of the world’s worst characters; and the innocent and already overdisciplined victims of these very characters receive repeated superfluous and unjust disciplines. Even if all evils were wisely and justly disciplinary and none were wasted unjustly, the second condition would remain unsatisfied. When one contemplates the actual evils of a wind storm at sea, the experiences of freezing and starving, or the symptoms of syphilis or arteriosclerosis, it would be most extravagant to as-

---

7. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, pp. 261–262: “This crude theory of punishment was rejected by the writer of the book of Job and by Jesus (according to Jn. 9:3). . . . The whole theory of punishment as a solution of the problem of evil collapses of its own weight.”

8. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 262: “Nonmoral evils, if not penal, may be regarded as disciplinary. Their purpose is then to reform or to test. . . . It cannot well be denied that many apparent evils (disvalue-claims) turn out to be goods in disguise (true values). Hardship often develops character. . . . Suffering teaches sympathy.”

9. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 263: “If discipline is the purpose of all evil, and God is both omnipotent and just, then disciplinary evils should meet at least two conditions. First, they should appear wherever they are needed and only where they are needed. Secondly, they should be perfectly adapted to their ideal end. It is clear that neither of these conditions is met.”
sert not only that these experiences may be disciplinary, but also that they are the most perfect means to the ideal ends of personal and social development that an infinitely good and powerful imagination could devise. As a philosophical explanation of evil, the appeal to discipline entails incoherences so far-reaching that it cannot serve its purpose.**

In the final analysis we must reject the disciplinary theory because it fails to give a true picture of the whole. It only faces the problem piecemeal. Any explanation of the problem of evil must (at least any adequate explanation) present evidence that fits all the facts and is contradicted by none.

(4) There is a fourth position which explains evil as incomplete good. Absolute idealist like Hegel and his followers have been strong proponents of this view. They have insisted that the true is the whole, and that a partial view of anything is inadequate and irrational. Many patches of color within a painting are ugly; but the entire painting is beautiful. This argument on the surface seems quite cogent, yet if we probe deeper we find that its cogency depends on whether or not every whole is necessarily good. From incompleteness alone, the goodness of the complete cannot be derived. In fact such a view boils down to inane speculation. It is as logical at some points to argue that good is incomplete evil as it is to argue that evil is incomplete good.† The question of whether the whole is good or evil must therefore be settled on other grounds than the incompleteness of our experience.** Moreover, even if the whole could be proved to be good, the question would still remain as to whether destructive means justify constructive ends. As Dr. Rall laconically states, "the Christian faith which follows Jesus in his belief in the sacredness of a moral personality cannot let even God (God, indeed, least of all) use human beings as mere means to some supposedly higher ends."††

---

* Brightman, op. cit., p. 263.
† Brightman, op. cit., p. 264.
‡ Rall, Christianity, p. 316.

10. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 264: "Evil, it is said, is incomplete good. Absolute idealists like Hegel have dwelt on the principle that the true is the whole, that a partial view of anything is inadequate and irrational, and that the whole alone is truly good. . . . Many patches of color within a painting are ugly; but the entire painting is beautiful. . . . Yet [this argument from synoptic logic] is cogent only if we know in advance that every whole is necessarily good, or that this is true of the universe as a whole. From incompleteness alone, the goodness of the complete cannot be derived. In fact, it is as true in some cases to say that good is incomplete evil as to say that evil is incomplete good. . . . The question of whether the whole is good or evil must therefore be settled on other grounds than the incompleteness of our experience."

11. Rall’s final word is “end,” not “ends” (Rall, Christianity, p. 316).
(5) Another view, quite similar to the foregoing, advances the idea that evil is needed as a contrast to good. Proponents of this view argue that no one would appreciate the goodness if all were good; indeed goodness could not even be defined if there were nothing by way of contrast. So from this point of view evil is not an unfortunate blot which the finished can’t help having; the blot is essential to its beauty; the artist deliberately put it there; it is an element contributing to the perfection of the whole, like those momentary discords in a symphony which enhance the total harmony. Presumably, then, in the eternal order of things pain and sin are nothing to worry about; they are as necessary to its perfection as are beauty and joy and virtue. Like the dark places in Rembrandt’s pictures, they make the high lights possible.

There are many objections to this view, in fact they are too numerous to mention at this point, but at least we may allude to two. First, this theory implies that God not only permits evil (which is obviously true), but that he deliberately creates it; He purposely does evil that good may come. Now we may ask as we did in our criticism of the theory of the absolute idealists, does the means justify the end? We must conclude that the argument that the end justifies the means is as morally unjustified for God as for men.

Again, if the existence of evil is necessary to the good of the whole, will it not be a mistake to try to get rid of evil? To lessen evil would surely be to lessen the good of the whole; presumably the universe would be less perfect if its evil were removed; and therefore suffering men need not strive to change anything; all their high moral aspirations all their dreams of betterment, are vain; which is absurd. This theory defeats its own ends.

(6) In sharp contrast with the view which justifies all evil as good is the view that evil is unreal. It is “maya” or illusion; it is “error of mortal mind.” This view has its strongest proponents in Christian Scientists and Hindus.

Objections to this are obvious, but two must suffice

---

12. Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 265: "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. A monotonous world, it is held, would be wearisome; and if all were good, no one would appreciate the goodness; perhaps no one could even define it if there were nothing by way of contrast."
here. First: if the natural order in so far as it seems evil is nonexistent, the next step is to deny the existence of the natural order as good. If all nature is illusion there is no good reason for believing anything to be objective. Second: even if evil is error it is just as harmful as it would be if it were objective; the problem is not solved, it is merely pushed one stage further back. "Errors of mortal mind" would still be a problem clamoring for solution. As Dr. Whole so cogently states in a criticism of this theory, "To say that all suffering is a delusion of man's mind would be to make the existence of the mind the worst of evils; there is not much to choose between pain that is objectively real and mind which necessarily imagines the pain that tortures it."*

The Doctrine Of A Finite God

We may consider in a special group those who have found a solution to the problem of evil by setting forth a limitation of the power of God. They believe that in the face of evil God must either be lacking in power or goodness; they choose the former. The historical root of theistic finitism is to be found in Plato. For him God's will is confronted by limits set by the uncreated discordant and disorderly aspects of being. "God is not the cause of all things, but only of the good things."† This is explained more fully in the Timaeus, where divinity is represented, not as omnipotent creator of all, but simply as a good God who desires "that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil." What is the meaning of "so far as possible?" It simply means that God's will did not create the conditions under which it worked, but "took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest, but in a state of discordant and disor-

---

14. Whale, Christian Answer, p. 21: "The other objection is that if one of the fundamental elements of human experience is an illusion, this fact is itself an evil; the problem is not solved, it is merely pushed one stage further back."
15. Davis corrected "Whole" to "Whale," both in this footnote and in the text above.
16. Rall, Christianity, p. 317: "We may consider in a special group those who in one way or another have set forth a limitation of the power of God as the answer to this problem. It is their reply to the old alternative: in the face of the fact of evil, God must be lacking in either goodness or power."
derly motion," and "he brought it into order out of disorder."\textsuperscript{17}

Plato's view of God is then clear. God is a will for good, not infinite but finite, limited on the one hand by rational principles of order and control (Philebus) and on the other by "discordant and disorderly motion" (Timaeus) which he finds in existence.\textsuperscript{18}

We find something of this view in Nicholas Berdyaev, who was the great modern exponent of the theology of the Orthodox Church. His system seems to be through and through dualistic. He sees a duality in man, in the world and even in God Himself. This duality has a non-rational basis, an element of the inexplicable. Speaking in mystical language, he declared that God himself is born out of the divine Nothing, the Ungrund. The duality in God is not that of good and evil, but rather a conflict between equally good values; yet there enters in an uncreated, non-rational element which is basic or elemental in the universe. In the resultant conflict is found the source of evil in the world.\textsuperscript{19}

Berdyaev's views of freedom are quite important in his overall explanation of evil. In his The Meaning of History Berdyaev argues that history is a product of three factors: human freedom, natural necessity and divine Grace. Now the usual teaching of "positive" theology is that the first and second factors are derived from the latter; i.e., God made nature and man, giving to man the power to use nature's re-

\textsuperscript{17} Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 288: "Plato... puts into the mouth of Socrates the principle that 'God is not the cause of all things, but only of the good things.' This is explained more fully in the Timaeus, where divinity is represented, not as omnipotent creator of all, but simply as a good God who desires 'that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil' (30A). So far as possible! His will, then, did not create the conditions under which it worked, but 'took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest, but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion,' and 'he brought it into order out of disorder.'"

\textsuperscript{18} Brightman, Philosophy of Religion, p. 288: "Plato's picture of God is now before us. God is a will for good, not infinite but finite, limited on the one hand by rational principles of order and control (Philebus) and on the other by 'discordant and disorderly motion' (Timaeus) which he finds in existence."

\textsuperscript{19} Rall, Christianity, p. 318: "Nicholas Berdyaev, modern exponent of the theology of the Orthodox Church, shows the influence of Plato and of the mystics, Eckhart and Boehme. His system has a strong emphasis on duality, which appears not only in man and the world but in God himself. This duality has a non-rational basis, an element of the mysterious, the inexplicable. In terms gained from the mystics, he declares that God himself is born out of the divine Nothing, the Gottheit or Ungrund. The duality in God is not that of good and evil, but rather a conflict between equally good values; yet here there enters in an uncreated, non-rational element which is basic or elemental in the universe. In the resultant conflict is found the source of evil in the world."
sources and his own faculties well or ill, as he chose.

This theology, thinks Berdyaev, is a prolific source of atheism, for freedom is admitted to lead to sin and, for at least a great proportion of mankind, to eternal punishment; and yet God, foreseeing these terrible consequences, bestowed this fatal gift upon his ignorant and unsuspecting creatures! In contrast to this teaching of "positive" theology, according to which God the Creator himself is eternally born out of a dark abyss of deity or divine Nothingness; and man and universe are then created by God out of the same ultimate, indeterminate metaphysical stuff from which he himself proceeds. Since non-being is of the very essence of the primal stuff, freedom is uncreated, co-eternal with God, and man may be described as the child of two parents: God, the formative agent in the process, and "meonic freedom," the passive stuff which simply "consented" to God's creative act. The element of uncreated freedom in man's nature is the source of his instinctive urges and creative powers; it is also the source of his ability to rebel against God and resolve himself back into the chaos of non-being. So that freedom is here with its noble possibilities as well as its tragic elements. But so also is "fate or destiny, i.e., nature, the solidified, hardened outcome of the dark meonic freedom." Thus we have a God who is limited by a nonrational ultimate which is the source of tragedy and suffering.²⁰

We also find the idea of a finite God in the thinking of John Stuart Mill. Says he, "If the maker of the world can do all that he will, he wills misery, and there is no escape from the conclusion . . . Not even on the most distorted and contracted theory of good which was ever framed by religious or philosophical fanaticism, can the government of Nature be made to resemble the work of a being at once good and omnipotent. The only admissible theory of Creation is that the Principle of Good cannot at once and altogether subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral; an incessant struggle with the maleficent powers, or make them always victorious in that struggle, but could and did make them capable of carrying on that

²⁰. Rall, Christianity, pp. 318–319: "Freedom is here, rich in noble possibilities, as well as in tragic elements. But so also is 'fate or destiny, i.e., nature, the solidified, hardened outcome of the dark meonic freedom.' Thus we have a God who is limited and a world that is conditioned by a non-rational ultimate, not unconquerable, it is true, but the source of tragedy and suffering."
fight with vigor and with progressively increasing success.”*21

In recent times this idea of a finite God has been set forth by E. S. Brightman and W. P. Montague. For both God is the creative power working through the evolutionary process. But for both it is equally clear that this power is limited or hindered. For Montague God is not an omnipotent monarch, but “an ascending force, a nisus, a thrust toward concentration, organization, and life.” But there is a world of finite existences “that in God which is not God,” in God yet each with “its measure of a self-affirming spontaneity or primary causality, and also its inertia or passivity.” God’s will is pure and good, but it is finite. As a mind God is infinite, extending through the whole universe. As will he is finite, “a self struggling to inform and assimilate the recalcitrant members of his own organism or the recalcitrant thought of his own intellect.”†22

For Brightman the problem of evil is especially acute. Holding that the only existent reality is personal (finite persons and the infinite), he can account for moral evil by the freedom given to men, but not for evil in the physical universe. From this point Brightman comes to the conclusion that the will of God is pure and good, but there is something within God that hinders the expression of his will. God finds

21. Rall, Christianity, p. 319: “John Stuart Mill was first among the moderns to suggest the idea of a finite God. ‘If the maker of the world can [do] all that he will, he wills misery, and there is no escape from the conclusion. . . . Not even on the most distorted and contracted theory of good which was ever framed by religious or philosophical fanaticism, can the government of Nature be made to resemble the work of a being at once good and omnipotent. The only admissible theory of Creation is that the Principle of Good cannot at once and altogether subdue the powers of evil, either physical or moral; could not place mankind in a world free from the necessity of an incessant struggle with the maleficent powers, or make them always victorious in that struggle, but could and did make them capable of carrying on that fight with vigor and with progressively increasing success.’” Rall cited Mill’s Three Essays on Religion, pp. 37–39; brackets, italics, and ellipses are in Rall’s original.

22. Rall, Christianity, pp. 319–320: “Two interesting and more recent discussions develop this suggestion of Mill: The Problem of God, by E. S. Brightman, and Belief Unbound, by W. P. Montague. For both the idea of evolution is important and both find in this developing world a creative and directing Power. But for both it is equally clear that this Power is limited or hindered. For Montague God is not an omnipotent monarch, but ‘an ascending force, a nisus, a thrust toward concentration, organization, and life.’ But there is a world of finite existences, ‘that in God which is not God,’ in God and yet each with ‘its measure of a self-affirming spontaneity or primary causality, and also its inertia or passivity.’ God’s will is pure and good, but it is finite; . . . As mind God is infinite, extending through the whole universe. As will he is finite, ‘a self struggling to inform and assimilate the recalcitrant members of his own organism or the recalcitrant thoughts of his own intellect.’” Rall cited Montague’s Belief Unbound, pp. 74, 83, 84, 91.
within himself, as a part of his nature, a "Given," an element that is irrational, passive, and resistant. To clarify this point we may refer to Brightman's own words. Says he: 'God's will, then, is in a definite sense finite. But we have called him 'finite-infinite.' Although the power of his will is limited by the Given, arguments for the objectivity of ideals give ground for the postulate that his will for goodness and love is unlimited; likewise he is infinite in time and space, by his unbegun and unending duration and by his inclusion of all nature within his experience; such a God must also be unlimited in his knowledge of all that is, although human freedom and the nature of The Given probably limit his knowledge of the precise details of the future.'

There are numerous criticisms that have been raised against these theories of a finite God, but three will suffice at this point (1) Its anthropomorphism. Here it is argued that belief in a finite God humanizes him too much. (2) Its failure to absolve God of responsibility for creation. This is probable the strongest objection to the theory of theistic finitism. Here it is argued that if God is regarded as a creator, however finite his power, he must still be held responsible for having created man, knowing that man would necessarily suffer from surd evils. (3) Its dualism. Each of these theories break down into dualism. Brightman and Montague might escape a cosmic dualism, but they fall right back into the dualistic trap by setting forth a dualism in the nature of God. But dualism affords no real answer to the problem of evil. With such a view faith in a supreme God is endangered and the triumph of good left uncertain.

Toward a More Adequate Solution

After a brief resume of the most frequently discussed views on the problem of evil in the modern world, we now turn to a discussion of the view which

23. Rall, *Christianity*, p. 320: "For the personal idealism which Professor Brightman represents, the problem of evil is especially acute. Holding that the only existent reality is personal (finite persons and the Infinite), he can account for moral evil by the freedom given to men, but not for evil in the physical universe. . . . the will of God is pure and good, but there is something within God that hinders the expression of his will. . . . So he holds that God finds within himself, as a part of his nature, a 'Given,' an element that is irrational, passive, and resistant."

24. Rall, *Christianity*, p. 321: "Both he and Brightman escape a cosmic dualism by introducing a dualism into the nature of God."
I feel to be a more adequate solution to this difficult problem. In this view I have attempted to look at the problem in all of its complexity, avoiding as far as possible any piecemeal solutions. I have attempted to deal with both moral and physical evil, feeling that any discussion of one without the other is inadequate and fails to meet the philosophical demand for coherence.

Our first task in any adequate solution of the problem of evil is to give a new consideration to the ideas of goodness and power as they refer to God. It seems that at this point philosophers have often been as shallow as popular writers; and that often the high insights of the Christian faith have been lacking in the discussions of theologians.

(1). What do we mean by the goodness of God? The word "good" is not limited here, as it often is in the popular speech, to mean kind, or gracious. It affirms that God possesses every excellence that can belong to a personal spirit, unmixed with evil, unweakened by defect, unsurpassable in degree. The goodness of God is, indeed, as tender as that of a mother, as patient as a father's love. But this love is ethical, redemptive, creative. Dr. Rall has written something at this point that is quite significant. Says he: "His goodness is good will, that is, it is a high and fixed purpose aiming at the supreme good of man. It is redemptive and therefore set against all evil. It is creative: It is goodness at work, active, unswerving, sparing no toil or pain in itself or in its object, seeking to give its own life to this creature man, not intent or granting pleasure and sparing sorrow, but rather on the creation in men, and the sharing with men, of its own life, the life of truth and wisdom, of holiness and love."* If we are to deal adequately with the problem of evil we must come to some such view of the goodness of God.

(2). What, we must ask next, is our conception of the power of God? Probably in all our thinking about God our thoughts at this point have been most shallow. So careful a philosopher as C. E. M. Joad settles the question in such an offhand manner as this: "Pain and evil are either real or unreal. If they are real then God, who, being omnipotent, was bound by, no limitations and constrained by no necessities, wilfully created them. But the being who wilfully creates pain and evil cannot be benevolent." If evil is due to man, he argues further, remember man is a creature of God. If man was not evil to begin with but wilfully generated evil, then how can man coming from God

---

* Rall, op. cit., p. 323.
have a will of his own which is not also a part of God's will?*25 Such a view of God's power certainly needs clarification. It seems to imply that power is abstract, irresistible, and externalistic.

How then are we to think of God's power? We are never to think of God's power in terms of what he could conceivably do by the exercise of what we may call sheer omnipotence which crushes all obstacles in its path. We are always to think of God's power in terms of his purpose. If what he did by sheer omnipotence defeated his purpose, then, however startling and impressive, it would be an expression of weakness, not of power. Indeed, a good definition of power is "ability to achieve purpose. This applies to the power of a gun, or a drug, or an argument, or even a sermon! Does it achieve its end? Does it fulfill its purpose?

We must realize that God's power is not put forward to get certain things done, but to get them done in a certain way, and with certain results in the lives of those who do them. We can see this clearly in human illustrations. My purpose in doing a crossword puzzle is not to fill in certain words. I could fill them in easily by waiting for tomorrow morning's paper. Filling them in without the answers is harder but much more satisfying, for it calls out resourcefulness, ingenuity, and discipline which by the easier way would find no self expression.

Similarly, to borrow an illustration from William James, eleven men battle desperately on a field, risking falling and injury, using up a prodigious amount of energy, and when we ask why, we learn that it is to get an inflated, leather covered sphere called a football across a goal. But if that is all, why doesn't someone get up in the night and put it there? Football games are not played to get a ball across a goal, but to get it there under certain conditions, in a certain way, with certain results in the lives of those concerned. Power to get the ball across the goal is to be interpreted in terms of purposes and only makes sense in the light of those purposes. Action, then, which defeats purpose is weakness. Power is the ability to fulfill purpose. No one knows what it cost God to refrain from intervention when wicked men put his beloved Son to death. But the restraint was not

25. This quotation appears in Rall, Christianity, p. 324.
weakness. The Cross became the power of God unto salvation.

And now the outline of our problem begins to grow clear. We cast aside as inadequate all naive puerile conceptions of God's goodness and power. Our problem now is to discover the purpose of God and see if that purpose is being carried out in the world of our everyday existence. Now it seems that any theist would accept the fact that God's purpose is to achieve the good in the world and in the lives of men. If the good can never be handed over as a finished product to a passive recipient, if it can only be an achievement, then a good world will be one which is adapted for such attainment. Then our great question is: What kind of world is fitted for the attainment of God's purpose?

(1). In a world where good is to be achieved, there must be freedom. This is most obvious in the case of man. In reality the whole idea of morality and religion presupposes the existence of freedom. Thomas Huxley once said that "if some great power would agree to make me think always what is true and do what is right on condition of being turned into a sort of clock, I should instantly close with the bargain. The only freedom I care about is the freedom to do right; the freedom to do wrong I am ready to part with."26 But freedom to do only what is right is not freedom; it is mechanical coercion. A being incapable of wrongdoing is also incapable of right; he is not a human being at all but an automatic machine. Huxley's hypothesis nullifies his conclusion, because it sells the birthright of human personality. A much more profound remark is that of Lessing: "If God held in His right hand all truth, and His left only the ever-active impulse to search for truth, even with the condition that I must always make mistakes, and said to me 'Choose!' I should humbly bow before His left hand and say, 'Father, give me this. Pure truth belongs to Thee alone.'"27 Freedom is necessary for human personality.

---

26. This quotation appears in Rall, Christianity, p. 329.
27. Whale also cited Huxley but did not quote him. Whale, Christian Answer, p. 49: "Huxley's hypothesis nullifies his conclusion, because it sells the birthright of human personality; a being incapable of wrongdoing is also incapable of right; he is not a human being at all but an automatic machine. . . . This, surely, is the meaning of Lessing's profound remark: 'If God held in His right hand all truth, and His left only the ever-active impulse to search for truth, even with the condition that I must always make mistakes, and said to me, 'Choose!' I should humbly bow before His left hand and say, 'Father, give me this. Pure truth belongs to Thee alone.'"
It is from the misuse of this freedom that the dark shadow of moral evil appears. The necessity of freedom brings the possibility and practical inevitability of sin. Most of the ills in the world today could be eliminated if knowledge was the only factor needed. We could conquer poverty, for there is “enough and to spare” for all. We know enough, if we would only work together, to wipe out all plagues. We could have decent living conditions for all if we used only the means that went into one item, the preparation of war. The difficulty, however, does not lie here. It is selfishness, pride, greed, lust for power and love of pleasure—in a word it is the sin of man that is the source of our ills and much of our unhappiness.28 Yet if God’s purpose is to be achieved freedom must be maintained. Just as a child cannot learn to walk without the possibility of falling, man cannot learn the ways of God without the possibility of going wrong. Dr. Whale has put this whole idea in words well worth our quoting. He says, “freedom—though it involves grievous error and pain—is the very condition of our being human. There can be no other way for men and women called of God to vindicate the moral order. We cannot have it both ways. It is only in a world where the horror of war, slavery, and prostitution can happen, that the learning of self-sacrifice, fellowship, and chivalry will happen. Indeed if God were to suppress the possibility of moral evil, He would be doing evil, for He would be preferring the worse to the better.”*

(2) A world fitted for the achievement of life must be one of order, and an order that is universal and dependable.29 By order we mean that all things have their own specific nature and behave accordingly, and that they will always and everywhere behave the same way. H₂O, for example will always be water. Water will always be water. Water will always become gaseous with heat; it will always condense as it becomes


28. Rall, Christianity, p. 330: “We could conquer poverty, for there are resources enough for all peoples. We could furnish decent living conditions for all if we used only the means that went into one item, the preparation for war and the prosecution of war. We know enough, if we could all work together, to wipe out all the great plagues. The difficulty does not lie here. It is the indifference, the selfishness, the greed, the lust for power and love of pleasure—in a word, it is the sin of man that is the great source of our ills and that prevents our working together for their abolition.”

29. Rall, Christianity, p. 332: “A world fitted for the achievement of life must be one of order, and an order that is universal and dependable.”
colder; becoming still colder and solidifying, it will expand as ice. Upon that order depends fertile fields, pleasant streams, equable climate, power for man’s use, and indeed the very existence of life. At the same time its inevitability may mean tornados and flood and destruction in which the good suffer with the evil.30

But such a universal order is the sine qua non of a moral world, it is the only basis on which moral achievement can be built.31 If our environment were a chaos rather than cosmos, and if we never knew within reasonable limits what was going to happen next our lives would be a nightmare, not merely because it would be unpleasant but because it could have no moral meaning. Moreover if there were no order in the world reason could not develop in man, for man’s reason develops in response to the reason, or order, that is in the universe. Again without this order science could not be possible, for science is simply the discovery of order and its setting forth in terms of what we call natural laws.32 And finally it is the presence of such order that, while it brings certain evil, at the same time makes possible their overcoming. So that destructive floods may be part of the order of nature, but the knowledge of this same order of nature makes it possible to halt forest destruction, impound waters, and change the process from destruction to service.33 Now we can see that the gains of an orderly universe far outweigh the losses. The possibility of physical evil is necessary for the existence of order, while the existence of order is neces-

30. Rall, Christianity, pp. 333–334: “[Order] means that all things have their own specific nature and behave accordingly, and that they will always and everywhere behave the same way. Water, for example, will always follow a given course: become vaporous with heat; as vapor will expand and rise; will condense as it becomes colder, as when struck by a cold-air current; will then be heavier, fall to earth, and seek its lowest level; becoming still colder and solidifying, will expand as ice. Upon that order depend fertile fields, pleasant streams, equable climate, power for man’s use, beauty of rainbows and clouds, and indeed the very existence of life. At the same time its inevitability may mean tornados and flood and destruction in which the good suffer perchance with the evil.”

31. Davis replaced “quo” with “qua.”

32. Rall, Christianity, p. 334: “But such a universal order, which makes our world cosmos instead of chaos, is not only necessary for physical existence; it is [sic] the indispensable condition of the achievement of all higher life. (1) Only in such a world could reason develop in man, for man’s reason develops in response to the reason, or order, that is in the universe. (2) Only in such a world is science possible, for science is simply the discovery of this order and its setting forth in terms of what we call natural laws.”

33. Rall, Christianity, p. 334: “The floods may destroy, but we can halt forest destruction, impound waters, and change the process from destruction to service.”
sary for the achievement of all higher life. So it seems that while freedom is responsible for moral evils, order is responsible for physical evils; the possibility of moral evil is necessary for the existence of freedom while the possibility for physical evil is necessary for the existence of order. This is not to say that evil is really good, or that the existence of evil is necessary to God.

Conclusion

The existence of evil in the world still stands as the great enigma wrapped in mystery, yet it has not caused Christians to live in total despair. The Christian religion has offered men a way for the overcoming of evil through insight and faith and a life in right relations with God and man.34

It is right and inevitable to attempt to come to an intellectual solution of this problem. Men of all ages and all religions have set out on this difficult venture. Yet some of the proposed solutions are no solutions at all. To deny the reality of evil is all but absurd. To posit the existence of another cosmic power opposed to God is taking a speculative flight which can have no true philosophical grounding. To suggest a finite God as a solution to the problem is to fall in the pit of humanizing God.

The discussion which we have offered above on this dark problem seems to me to shed more light on the problem than most of the familiar theories; it maintains the triangle of the sovereignty of God, the goodness of God, and the reality of evil, attempting to shed new light on each of these old corners of the triangle.

Yet with all of the new light that has been shed on the old problem we still come to a point beyond which we cannot go. Any intellectual solution to the problem of evil will come to inevitable impasses. 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. But this leap is not a leap of despair, for it eventually cries with St. Paul, "For now we see through a glass darkly; . . . but then shall I know even as I am known."35 The Chris-

34. Rall, Christianity, p. 343: "And it offers to men a way for the overcoming of evil through insight and faith and a life in right relations with God and man."

35. 1 Corinthians 13:12.
tian answer to the problem of evil is ultimately contained in what he does with evil, itself the result of what Christ did with evil on the cross.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


“War and Pacifism”

[20 February–4 May 1951]

[Chester, Pa.]

In Kenneth L. Smith's course Christianity and Society, each student chose to speak on one topic from the course syllabus, distributing a short summary of his argument to other class members. King kept eleven of these summaries, only two of which are of known authorship. Although this essay has often been attributed to him, internal evidence raises questions about King's status as its author. Several lines at the top of the page identifying the course, presumably written by the author of “War and Pacifism,” are not in King's handwriting. His handwriting does appear elsewhere on the document—he conjugated three French verbs on the reverse of the second page and wrote at the bottom of that page, “See Crozer Quarterly, Jan. 1949 on artical on Pacifism”—but he also wrote comments on other outlines for this class. A plausible explanation for these marginal comments is that King received the outline during a classmate's presentation, wrote a note to himself to check the article referenced in the talk, and practiced French during a break in the presentation.

Whether or not King was the author of this essay, the views presented herein are consistent with those he expressed in *Stride Toward Freedom*. The author of “War and Pacifism” criticizes “absolute pacifism” on the grounds that it ignores the essentially sinful side of human nature and the need for coercion to avoid anarchy. The author questions the applicability of Gandhi's example to the world: “That Gandhi was successful against the British is no reason that the Russians would react the same way.” This argument reflects both King's class notes on Smith's lectures and the assigned readings of Reinhold Niebuhr's works. In a later article, Smith recalled that as a student in 1951 King had argued that “Niebuhr's emphasis upon 'original sin,' the ambiguous nature of historical