

The Problem of Evil

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(I.) Introduction

The presence of evil in this world is a fact which has at all times taxed men's minds; so much so, indeed, that on this account many have turned away scandalized from God, or found it an insuperable obstacle to belief in His existence. Even Catholics at times seem to feel it as a shadow on God's goodness, a skeleton, as it were, in the cupboard; with the result that the suppressed doubts and uncertainty which accompany such an unrationalized fear produce a kind of creeping paralysis of faith. To escape such doubts a clear understanding of the force of the difficulty is required, and the first step to such an understanding lies in a correct statement of the problem. Half the difficulty, indeed, is caused by vague or incorrect statements which do not admit of an answer or confuse several quite distinct questions, or leave the mind a prey to uncertainty.

The simple and correct statement of the question at stake, then, is: Why does God permit suffering, mental and physical, and the moral evil of sin in this world which He has created and governs? As seen from this statement, there are two kinds of evil, pain, whether physical or mental, and sin. God permits both: He does not cause them directly, never, certainly, sin - and as a rule not even pain. There is no reason why He should not cause pain for a good purpose - and obviously God will always have the best of purposes - but usually the pain we see around us comes from causes other than God, from natural secondary causes and the will of man. It will be noticed that the problem presupposes the existence of God - and rightly so. There is no problem if there is no God; and evil has nothing to do with the question of God's existence; as well might we oppose the fact of free will to the equally certain fact of God's Omnipotent Will.

It is thoroughly misleading, therefore, to state the problem as if it were a choice between two dubious assertions or facts, (God exists, evil exists,) one of which must be false if the other be true. Yet this is so common a delusion that the falsity of any such dilemma must always be sedulously pointed out. It is responsible for much of the distress of mind aroused by the Problem and it is responsible for many false theories. For not unnaturally we find, given this false start, that some have rejected God and joined the Atheist or Pessimist fraternity; or else they have tried a compromise by thinning down the notion of God to that of a Finite Person, superior indeed to man but subject to some higher power. In this latter hypothesis room is left for much variety of opinion as to the precise nature both of the Finite God and of the mysterious Power behind Him. One view sets Good and Evil over against each other as active principles constantly at war, with the universe as their battling ground. Another, against all evidence, would spirit away evil as an illusion, or, less extravagantly, declare without qualification that this is the best of all possible worlds. Akin to these latter are Idealists and Pantheists, who are forced to make evil a mere appearance or necessary factor in God's expression of Himself, a discord, ugly by itself, but contributing beauty to the theme as a whole.

(II.) - Criticism of Wrong Answers

These, then, are the chief fundamentally false answers to the problem of evil, answers which usually proceed from an inaccurate statement of the question. They are, however, one and all defective also on other grounds. Pessimism, for instance, is more often a mood than a philosophy, a feeling that luck is against one, that Providence is strangely silent or that the ideals and end of man are unattainable. Clearly such a mood is a consequence of an implicit denial of God and Providence and is met best by more careful reflection on the value of virtue in this life as well as in the next, on the immortality of the soul and the Providence of God in His dispositions for the after life. As a philosophy, Pessimism is self-destructive. The mind which conceives the good and the ideal is made in the same breath to deny their value - and thought cannot really do that. Hence we find paradoxically that a certain satisfaction is found in this very doctrine, a clear proof of the undying optimism of the soul and its inability to deny what is its birthright. The pleasure found in such an unprepossessing doctrine is traceable to an error very widespread - namely, that of making evil into something positive in itself.

Whatever is, has some value and is therefore to that extent good. Evil comes in when something is not or ceases to be what it ought to be. That is, we measure evil by the failure of some being to reach its proper perfection. A monstrosity is physically evil because it does not conform to type; a human being is morally evil because of his own free will he refuses to be what he ought to be. Hence when an organism is being destroyed, pain is felt; when we think of wrong doing, we are made sorrowful. From this simple truth certain important conclusions follow. First, Evil is not a positive reality comparable with good, nor a peer nor a rival. It presupposes good, as shadow light; it means subtraction, deprivation, failure.

Therefore it is idle to speak of a principle of evil; what is intended must be either good, or a loss of good. The fallacy, indeed, of thinking of evil as a positive thing is due to the ineradicable tendency of investing it with a reality of its own; for we cannot think in negatives alone, and more often than not we are really, like the Pessimist, praising some real thing for what is good in it when we say that we like it because, or although, it is evil. Even the Devil, as a being and power, is good; he is evil in so far as he is a fallen angel, a spoilt spirit with intelligence and will awry.

And this leads to a second corollary; a thing may be good and yet relatively evil, as matter may be rubbish when out of place. Good food may prove harmful to 'queasy stomachs'; a poet, Plato thought, would prove evil in a city-state. Following Aristotle, Catholic philosophers usually teach that we can desire only what is apparently good. Unfortunately the desire, say, for drink and power - two most estimable things - or pleasure, may be, relatively to the perfection of a nature as a whole, evil. In the light, then, of such an explanation of evil, we can see that there can be no principle of evil and that God cannot desire or choose what is evil. Being omniscient, so far from overrating the value of anything, He can and must create and dispose all things sweetly and harmoniously to their proper end. Nor can He blind Himself as man does or suffer Himself to be dazzled by the attractiveness of a part which should be admired only in its relation to the whole. God then, to repeat, cannot be the author of evil. What is, is good, and evil arises out of the abuse of what is good by a finite will.

The foregoing will make it clear why the conception of a Finite God is inadmissible. In this theory God is limited and struggles against evil like us. The evil is either an adverse principle or Fate. In the account, for example, of Mr. Wells, there is a mysterious background which he leaves, in agnostic fashion, unexplored. The use of the word 'God' in this theory is misleading, for really we have altruism with a tincture of mythology or 'daemonism.' God is simply left out and in His place

is staged a being as difficult to prove from evidence as an Archangel. Mr. Wells strains at a live devil but swallows a mysterious being, who is a blend of time-spirit, tribal god and Superman.

Clearly such a view is neither sound in itself nor illuminating in the Problem of Evil. It merely shirks the ultimate questions and is only a variation on the old Atheism and Agnosticism. The reason and justification of evil are not given, and we are not even assured of the ultimate triumph of this Finite God over the evil leagued against him. A frank denial of God would be more consistent, though to advocate Atheism on the ground of evil is desperately illogical.

And this brings us back to the misunderstanding of the nature of the problem of evil and the consequent false statement of it. It is illogical to question or deny God's existence because of a supposed incompatibility between His existence and that of evil. A difficulty doesn't make a doubt if we are already possessed of decisive evidence for a truth. We do not doubt the existence of mind and matter despite the difficulty of explaining their inter-play. If we are surprised to find roses in full flower at Christmas we will do well not to call them by some other name or deny the time of year. A doubt can only legitimately arise when we are not certain of our proofs; when our answer to an arithmetical sum does not tally with that in the book we examine again our working; if there be no flaw then we cannot doubt our answer. So too with God; there are arguments to prove His existence; when puzzled by the difficulty of evil we are within our rights to reconsider them, but the question must be settled finally by those arguments - not by the existence of evil. Now it must here be assumed that those arguments are valid. Hence we have two facts both certain and therefore undeniable, God and evil. At first sight they do not seem easy to reconcile. That is the problem, and the answer must admit and safeguard both facts.

(III.) - The Real Problem and the Possibility of a Complete Answer

It is essential therefore to make clear what exactly is the question at stake. To repeat, there is a God Who by His very nature is infinite, omnipotent and good. There is also dreadful suffering and much wickedness in a world which He has created. How and why is this so? That is the Problem of Evil.

Now before a solution is attempted we are bound to enquire whether we have the means to find that solution. This obvious preliminary question is often forgotten with unfortunate results. The answer is felt to be incomplete and the incompleteness causes anxiety to the well-disposed, while the dissatisfied take the incompleteness to mean failure. Nevertheless all those who believe in God and understand something of what His Nature must be are aware of the distinction between natural theology and the other departments of philosophy. In the former we are treating of one whose thoughts are not as our thoughts and ways not as our ways, whose nature escapes us at every turn, so that the very name God cries mystery and leaves us like Job with our hand before our mouth lost in wonderment.

In all regions of thought we can reach some truth, but whereas the objects of our experience are for the most part commensurate with the strength of the finite human mind, God is infinitely transcendent and the truths we reach concerning Him are reached through negatives - the denial of the fitness of any attribute we praise to belong to Him in the manner we know it. God indeed is of such a nature that we cannot comprehend His Mind or Purposes fully; if we felt we did do so then it would not be the true God but a being brought down to the level of our own nature and therefore finite. Those then are illogical who complain of mystery, who are scandalized when they cannot explain to their heart's content the co-existence of mercy and justice in God, or Immutability and

Solicitude, or Goodness and the Permission of Evil; while the logical thinkers expect mystery and are alarmed at somewhat facile answers where God is concerned.

What then can we expect in the way of an answer? Clearly not a solution which means that God has put all His cards on the table, that His innermost nature is revealed to us and sight substituted for faith. But as in all other questions of Natural Theology we ought to be able to show that there is nothing irrational in God's Action and that it does not run counter to the justice which is required in all relations between moral beings. That is, the answer must be in the main negative; a claim that God has satisfied all justice. "Friend, I do you no wrong."

When this is firmly established, it is permissible and possible to inquire further, to draw nearer to the burning bush and see how it behoved not only Christ but all human beings to suffer. But reason unaided cannot carry us very far, and as the greatest of the Catholic poets found, we must leave Vergil to follow after a Beatrice. This also is most certainly the teaching both of the saints and the Gospel. The saints inform us that high endeavour carries the mind with it from the valley of mists to mountain tops, whence the goodness and beauty of God shine clear; and that Agnosticism and blindness of mental sight are really diseases of the soul.

The same doctrine is found in the Gospel; darkness is a culpable state . . . the beam in the eye has as its effect the exaggeration of moles in those of other people. Be it noted too that Our Lord seldom if ever condescends to satisfy the curious. The would-be philosopher receives no ready-made answer but is told to take up his cross and follow Christ if he would acquire true wisdom. God, then, being what He is, the mind of man unaided must find Him encompassed in mystery. The same conclusion is forced upon us if we look honestly at the actual working of human judgement. In few is reason allowed to work uncoloured by temperament, passion or prejudice - and particularly under provocation or when stung by resentment. Now pain, whether personal or endured by those we love or even by mere strangers, is the greatest disturber of serene judgement. We can with difficulty look at a far-off end when the present is filled with suffering or distress. If then children misjudge parents, and citizens misjudge long-sighted statesmen and each and all find themselves almost constitutionally incapable of trusting their own judgements save in very impersonal matters, how can we expect God, whose plans gather up in one the thousands of years of the earth's existence and the countless lives and actions of succeeding generations, to be circumscribed by the judgement of men, especially when they are tempted to expect nothing but immediate blessings from His Hand.

The disproportion therefore between the Infinite and the finite mind ever at the mercy of passing emotions is too great to allow of a comprehensive answer to the Problem of Evil. The philosopher in his library should indeed by looking before and after be able to justify the ways of God to men, but the practice of the Sermon on the Mount invites mankind to a better school of wisdom. Really it does not concern us to know all; our own particular life and destiny are what have been committed to our care; the common weal is in other hands. When, then, we grow inquisitive of the fate of others or alarmed at the misfortune and pain of others it is good to remind ourselves that no one appointed us judge in Israel - that we are quite incompetent to give a verdict. True wisdom is it, after doing what is in our power, to leave without question the ultimate fate of others and the world to God. God is in His heaven so far as each of us is concerned. He does not reveal His particular providence for each soul to all the world. Quid ad te? Tu me sequare; (why be inquisitive in what does not concern you? Your task is to follow me).

To sum up then.

The Problem of Evil is the problem how to reconcile suffering and sin with God's goodness. God being what He is, and man so finite, we cannot expect to escape mystery. Mystery however does not debar us from reaching an answer, which will point the direction and give a right perspective. And this is enough of itself to take away that anxiety, which arises not from the mystery but from the misgiving that all is not well with God and His Providence. This lurking fear it is which weakens our conception of God and like some internal disease saps the strength of Faith.

For this rational inquiry the two sources are reason and Revelation. The former vindicates God; the latter tells us what God is really like and shows us how to live according to His grace. Remark however again that Revelation is concerned primarily with conduct and supernatural life and not with speculative answers to speculative questions. "It is not for you to know," Our Lord answered to the merely curious, while with the educated and too reflective Nicodemus He is gently and almost banteringly ironical. To the heavily burdened however He gives the supreme answer, Himself.

Nevertheless, Revelation contains in it both the clue and the solution to the problem in so far as God wishes us to understand His Nature and Handiwork. The Doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin shows what God's purposes were and why we have evil and are evil; and the Cross and Redemption show us how and what God thinks of mankind and in what manner sin can be called, even, a 'felix culpa'.

It will be convenient then to distinguish three stages in the answer to the problem. In the first, which is mainly negative, God must be freed from any suspicion of injustice and cruelty. In the second we advance further and ask can we find any positive reason why, given this creation, God should in His goodness have permitted evil; in the third stage, using Revelation to the full, we may ask why God so loved this world as to create it and make it a work of predilection meriting praise and love from us in return.

As a beginning certain arguments sometimes brought forward must be dismissed as quite wrong or unsatisfactory. It is not true that this creation or any creation is necessary to God. St. Thomas Aquinas developing a favourite principle of his that good tends to diffuse itself (*bonum est diffusivum sui*) uses language at times which might seem to imply that God had necessarily to create. But he is only using for his purposes a 'tag' well known to antiquity, which no one but a complete stranger to his thought and that of medieval scholasticism would interpret strictly. The word necessary can scarcely indeed be applied to God the purest of Spirits without impropriety; He is essentially free, whereas necessity connotes the impersonal and in the relation of Creator to Created, . Pantheism.

Again, it is incorrect to call without qualification this universe 'the best of all possible worlds.' We limit God if we deny Him the power to create any other world than this; just as - though this is more subtle - we limit Him if we deny Him the right to create a world which was not the highest conceivable. As a matter of fact our mind soon loses itself in these suppositions. It is only our fancy that can fashion these better worlds and not our intellect, that sees a space beyond the end of space, and eternity as extended time. It is fancy too that holds God to be a kindly Prospero who can with a wave of his wand make everything ugly disappear, or abolish our own limitations and leave us still the self-same persons. A positive possibility is not attained by merely removing from the actual what we do not like and turning ourselves into half men and half angels.

Our mind therefore must be content with just the bare assertion that a better world is possible. But we must be careful not to confuse the better world with our own Utopias. It would, on the contrary,

be a totally different world; because it is impossible to have another which in its totality would be relatively more perfect. To make a plea then for a better world is to petition for our death-sentence, since we would not be the same. In short, the universe, if not the best conceivable is relatively best, relatively to us and to the end God had in view. A garage in itself may be less beautiful than a cathedral, but for its purpose it may be perfect, and we have to judge the excellence of a work by the harmony and proportion of the means to the end. An Abbey is not a 'Campo Santo' and Westminster does not gain by being the burial ground of famous men whose tombs and monuments are often not even "santi". And moreover so intricate is the interconnection of part with part in this world of ours that any attempt to rebuild it in better fashion might bring the whole building down upon our heads. This world with its possibility of evil is the one and only setting for human lives.

An argument sometimes used in defence of God's permission of evil is drawn from free will. Free will, it is said, necessarily carries with it the possibility of sin, so that God cannot create free beings without the risk of their freely choosing sin.

There is here, as in the preceding argument, an ambiguity. Freedom means power of choice, and choice may be said to imply the possibility of choosing wrong - though this might well be questioned. But the actual possibility may be reduced to a minimum, because creatures might so love good that they would never dream of offending against it; or God might in His Providence have given special protection. In fact the sinlessness of the Human Nature of Christ and of His Mother prove conclusively that freedom does not necessarily connote sin. Nevertheless the view does contain an important truth. The Sacred Humanity was sinless because of the function it served as united to the Godhead, and the privilege of being the Mother of God would fittingly bring with it sinlessness. But for other human beings there is no such sufficient reason apparent. The end for which mankind was created was to be secured by a certain kind of freedom, the right use of which would give a particular glory to God and a definite form of happiness, and call for definite kinds of virtue. That God should make exception to this rule in the Sacred Humanity and the Mother of God in order to help mankind is surely befitting, but the very exceptions go to prove that in the general rule freedom should imply the risk of sin.

Hence we may sum up this difficult question of the relation of freedom to sin by saying that freedom does not necessarily connote sin, but, where free persons have to win their own perfection by means of their freedom and by the right use of it acquire virtues only won through effort against difficulties, there, in these circumstances, the freedom and the perfection do imply the risk of sin.

A. - God's Justice and Goodness

The object in this, the first stage, of the answer is to show that God's goodness is not infringed by the existence of evil. The conclusion is a negative one. just as in theology the task is to prove that a mystery is not against reason, so here the philosopher has to prove that the two truths, God is Good and evil exists, are compatible.

The virtue which is required as a basis for relations between rational beings, that is persons, is justice, and the contrary vice will be unfairness or cruelty. Has then God been unfair or cruel? Cruelty would imply the infliction of pain for the pleasure of the act, without any adequate motive to justify it. Justice, on the other hand, would be rendered where the creature or subject received his due. If we turn then to man we find a creature possessed of intellect and will, with a desire for his happiness or well-being, and with a free will enabling him to work for his own well-being. In return for the right use of that free will we find God giving him a measure of happiness in this life,

constant assistance and a reward of immortal life wherein he will taste of joy to the full capacity of his nature. (I leave out for the moment the extra and quite undeserved gift of the supernatural life). In other words, God has provided an end and sufficient means to attain that end. So far from being cruel He has fulfilled all justice. No one can fail of his end save by his own deliberate fault, and if man chooses evil then he can only blame himself and not God.

There is, however, a backwash to this objection of cruelty which is often more troublesome than the main difficulty. Man's free will and the nature of his end, it will be said, may explain moral evil, but why should there be such suffering, such cruel instincts in the animal kingdom? They have no certainty of a future life; they do not profit by pain. They are in no way responsible for the evil they suffer, and yet nature is 'red in tooth and claw', their instincts are often savage, they prey on one another and suffer continually.

Well, it is very difficult to answer this grievance satisfactorily, and for two reasons. First we are born sentimentalists in what concerns animals, and secondly we have no means of giving the best answer; namely, the answer of the animals themselves. It is remarkable how little we know of the experience of these creatures. We are bound to read our own feelings into theirs, and yet there is an abyss between the two. Our experience is always human it is penetrated through and through with mind and rational desire. Eliminate these two factors and we are left with scarcely anything on which to depend for interpretation. The less mind enters into our own pains and aches the less are we conscious of them, and though it is true that philosophy may help us to endure them it is no less true that the cultured person is more sensitive, that anticipation intensifies them while the activity of consciousness gathers up the passing discrete moments of pain into one acute experience of agony. Moreover if we discard all the sorrows that come from brooding on the past or present or future, the dissatisfactions and distress that accompany human beings in their spiritual experiences, we will agree, I think, with lovers of nature who see in its life an overwhelming joy.

It is said often enough indeed that children suffer more acutely than their elders, but if this is so - and it seems very doubtful - the explanation is not that they lack intelligence, but that they have intelligence in an undeveloped state. Their fears are soul-fears and the mind is not yet strong enough to allay them. We see the same condition in those whose reason is affected. Evil therefore in the realms below man is an unknown quantity. Instinctively we read our own wishes and feelings into animals' lives, indulge in the 'pathetic fallacy' and forget the mistake. Then, too, for some reason difficult to analyse, men and women are incurably sentimental where animals are concerned. A cinema film which depicts the devotion of, say, a dog always draws. The tender feelings thus aroused become easily a grievance against the scheme of things when some anti-religious pamphleteer emphasizes the suffering entailed in evolution and the struggle for existence.

And yet reflection should bid us go slowly, for, as has been said, we know so little of the actual suffering of natures below us. A frog though dead will, if pricked, contract itself as if in pain, and we know well that bodily expression is no sure index of inward feelings. Furthermore, to speak of Nature as 'red in tooth and claw' is surely a gross and wicked exaggeration. The first and last impression of life is joy - it is good to be alive, whether we think of a bee sucking in a flower or a blackbird singing in a lane, or a dog frisking about when let out by its master. Certainly death is everywhere too in nature; but many a tiny winged creature has only a few hours to spend, and the death, whether natural or violent, may matter little. We talk of one species devouring another, but in reality death may be as swift and instantaneous as it is unsuspected. The fly dancing in the sunlight to be devoured next instant by a swallow, what is this but a passing away after a few hours of

rapturous life? The very nature of this life is to be fleeting and unreflective, and who will say that it were better for such creatures never to have existed at all?

But there is another consideration which I think will appear more profound the more we apply it to questions of this kind. This Universe of ours is no haphazard whole made up of bits which have only an accidental relation one with another. To the reverent inquirer it will reveal itself as a marvellous creation in which everything is interconnected, ordered and significant. Now man, we will assume, is the centre round which all has been constructed - or, to change the image, the terminus towards which all is directed. Take him away and the world becomes a blank; take the world away and man can never be himself, never grow in knowledge and goodness. And since man is a creature who has to learn by sensible experience, the objects of his perception have to be myriad-sided, and the pure spiritual realities have to be figured, embodied and seen analogously in all kinds of experiences.

Hence the great scholastic philosophers, and the mystics as well, are emphatic in their belief in a hierarchy of being, an ascending order where the smallest is seen in the greatest and the greatest in the smallest.

Now let us ask ourselves a question. If the world were not as we have it, could man be himself or realize the various possibilities in his nature or ascend to the ideal? The answer is certainly in the negative, and one has only to pick up any of the classics of the world's literature to see that the Universe as we know it has been man's primary educative force.

First, the infinite variety of nature with its thousand-and-one forms of beauty, which, be it marked, could not exist without change and death; and then the infinite multiplication exhibited which manifests concretely the moral order man must realize in his own being. He sees with repugnance qualities which though innocent in creatures would be vices in him, and to take the most divine examples he learns his lesson from the so-called cunning of the serpent, the grossness of the toad, the cruelty of the shark - while, on the other hand, the simplicity of the dove, the strength and courage of the lion, the fidelity and patience of the horse are visible illustrations from the book of nature of virtues which might be belied too often by man's own conduct. To what extent we rely on our thought on such images and examples of the world around us may be learnt by consulting any dictionary of our language. The moral of a dictionary is not that we use our sensible experience as vehicles for description of spiritual truths, but that these very truths come to life in our sensible experience.

Still further, not only are we taught by nature, but we would have no means of developing many activities of the perfect human character without a suffering travailing nature to help us. For instance, tenderness, sympathy, industry are evoked by witless creatures that need our help. And in larger matters just as the steady persistent investigations into Nature's secretaries have been an important factor in making man what he is to-day, so too the discovery of the strange order and hierarchy in the kingdom of living things should have enlightened man on his own station and his destiny. In himself he can find the various layers, the purely physical, the animal and the rational, and by comparison of himself with the lower orders where free will is ousted by necessity or reason by passion or mistrust he is enabled to praise God for his inheritance and make proper use of that god-like reason which is his prerogative.

Lastly, if there is this order in the inanimate and animate world so wondrously co-ordinated and also so carefully arranged as to provoke the reactions in man which are essential for his development,

and if too it is reason which makes man godlike and lifts the shadows from our otherwise dark and uncomprehended Universe, it is perfectly legitimate to argue that God should have preferred the lesson animals may provide to the suffering they may have to endure. Being without reason and therefore personality they cannot be said to have rights to a painless existence; they have been given life, and life is no mean gift, and in turn they serve man's ends; they sustain his bodily life; they are his companions; they minister to his needs whether for recreation or travel or research, and they are the objects which serve to increase his knowledge, satisfy the craving for beauty and the exercise of many virtues. They exist therefore for the use of man, and the good sense of mankind has always recognized this; only the 'crank' is troubled because we feed on flesh meat as well as vegetables, and where conscience condemns cruelty and unmotivated infliction of pain and is uneasy about cock-pits and bull-fights, it freely allows sport and wild-game hunting and fishing.

B. - Sin and Human Suffering

The charge then that a world with evil in it cannot come from God is based on misunderstanding and false sentiment. The misunderstanding lies in thinking that only one form of creation is possible to Him; the creation, that is, of the best of all possible worlds. On this supposition any universe with various levels of beauty and goodness would be forbidden; there must be no flowers because an animal is more perfect; there must be no animal, no human being, not even, perhaps, an angel, because they are all inferior to the best God might do. Nor let it be said that the argument fails because a flower can do no wrong, but a man can and does. It is of a man's essence that he should grow and struggle by his own efforts to his end. He cannot enjoy and appreciate his special form of goodness which constitutes his perfection without the risk of failure. One might as well invite the athlete to enjoy a certain peculiar glow of bodily health without the preceding exercise, or expect the pedestrian on Ludgate Hill to have the sensations of a climber in the Himalayas. The only retort possible to this is that the gift of freedom is not worth the pain; to which the whole world makes answer that it is freedom and adventure which make life worth living. Only the tactics of the ostrich can prevent us from drawing the obvious moral from the facts that men have braved revolutions and given their life for freedom.

But now the second question rises to our lips. Admit that God's works are good and that He has acted fairly and generously, nevertheless why has he permitted so much evil to happen? Why do the wicked flourish and the just suffer? How account for the diseased, misshapen lives of so many - the slums, the sweating, the waste, the despair to which suffering and wrong have driven numbers? It is here, perhaps, that many are most sensitive to the Problem for in every day experience what is called Fate seems so impersonal and haphazard and harsh. Exasperated and beside themselves with resentment, some have gone to the desperate expedient of denying God - desperate because surely the denial of a loving God makes worse chaos of our intelligible universe than the admission of Him. In truth, trouble so blinds the reason that we know not what we do or ask. We kill the thing we love in rejecting God and cut ourselves off from the one possible source of hope. We ask for change and forget that the change we demand would have to be so far-reaching that all the landmarks in life we treasure, all homely and tender memories and affections would be removed. Here we approach the same answer as before, only the application is not so clear.

Before each case of suffering we call upon God to interfere, forgetting that miracles must be rare, otherwise the general order of Providence would be disturbed. Were the slums, the hospitals, the dens of sin to be abolished by a miracle the world might indeed be a better place, but it would involve a change equal to that of the Deluge; and clearly the Deluge is not a catastrophe that can be

repeated indefinitely or even many times by God. And also, we know only too well from the Scriptures that a new world rising on the ruins of the old commits the same sins and that in a short while its state is no better than that of its predecessor. God has chosen a better way, which is to draw good out of the evil. When we are no longer face to face with some sad heart-rending spectacle, and our balance of mind has returned, we realize in our heart of hearts that sorrow is not sheer evil. The actual endurance of pain is horrifying, but it takes us into a world which we could not appreciate without the previous purification. And this is recognized in nearly all genuine utterances of art. The common theme of fiction and epic is victory won through trial and suffering, and life without suffering would be the play of Hamlet without the Prince of Denmark.

Certain is it that many of the virtues are developed by conflict with pain and vice - courage, temperance and humility to mention but a few examples - and human character seems to lack some quality if untried by experience. How often is it said of youth that time and suffering will teach him to be a complete man! Long before Christianity, Aeschylus laid down a law that sin works towards suffering and suffering works towards wisdom.

This latter thought brings us to what is so much more serious than suffering that by many it is regarded as the only evil, namely, sin and original sin. Of original sin we need say little; but it is a clear witness that God had designed the happiest of lots for men, and that the refusal to accept His plan threw man upon his own devices and thus opened the gate to all the wilful desecration of his own nature that followed. For men dependent on themselves, possessed of free will to make or mar their lives without the special grace of God, have made the world in great part what it is. Nothing is more evident than that ours is a fallen race, that the misuse of our impaired free will is responsible for the cruelties of war, slavery and all the hideous practices which deface civilized as well as savage countries. But the worst effect of individual sin is that it can never remain individual; for it is part of the economy of God, part of the very constitution of mankind, that human life is corporate and that through its inter-dependence the evil of one member infects and destroys the well-being of other members. Here, in fact, lies a very far-reaching explanation of why suffering should be so much in excess of what might have been expected and why many lives are so handicapped from the beginning.

And yet out of this mass of suffering and evil God has drawn good - working into coherence what has been made incoherent, by new and strange ways, by manifesting His justice and power and making of suffering the very means of reconciliation. For suffering, so far from being necessarily evil, becomes the most sublime sign of human dignity and Divine love, and is embraced ardently by the saints as the most desirable gift life can offer. This is in accord with the teaching of the New Testament - where Christ gave a new interpretation to suffering in the Beatitudes, reversing old values and insisting that this life is not its own answer.

To sum up this part; we can argue from the fact of freedom as it is found in this world to the conclusion that God rightly permits evil instead of always interfering miraculously to prevent it. Secondly, all will admit that suffering which produces the kind of character we admire and love, is not only not regrettable but most precious. In other words only suffering that is loveless and meaningless scandalizes and makes us question God. But if this truth be once admitted as a principle all argument against God ceases, for we have never any right to assert that any suffering is meaningless. When we make such assertions we do so because we do not see the purpose and value before our eyes; but clearly it is absurd to say because we do not see the purpose that therefore there is no purpose. As well might we pretend that a child when disciplined by its parents is right in

complaining against them because it cannot see the good which will result. The sceptic and scoffer who harries our feelings with grim stories of wretchedness and pain is trading on our ignorance. For the principle above stated holds good here. Only purposeless suffering offends our moral sense, and we can never prove any suffering is purposeless.

C. - The Purpose of Creation

An exception to the preceding statement may however occur to our minds, and the question involved takes us to the last stage of the Problem. Christian Revelation teaches us of the existence of Hell and the possibility, at least, of a soul's perpetual damnation. Here, then, it would seem, is final failure. God's plan is wrecked and God could have prevented the disaster. The difficulty, be it noted, arises not so much from the fact of there being a Hell as from the creation of a world by God in which such a disaster is foreseen and permitted. In the Providence that guides and governs this world, Hell is not a superfluous evil, but a necessity.

Two reasons amongst others will show this. Given man with the nature that he has, fear is an absolutely essential motive. In our pride we are apt to deny this and one hears often enough remarks to this effect, 'that I don't believe in a religion of fear - I don't consider a man a man at all who is driven by fear to keep good.' Such remarks show an extraordinary blindness to the facts of life. There has never been a successful system of education, a constitution, a civilization or a religion which has maintained itself without some appeal to this motive. And I do not believe that any man who will candidly make an examination of his own conduct will deny its efficacy and value in his own life and the folly of trying to do without it. Man without it must either be an angel or at least a saint, and a saint is unfortunately the exception and not the rule. Now if we consider what the effect in life would be to take away all risk of an eternal punishment after death for wickedness, or substitute for it even a long period of purgatorial pain, we shall be forced to admit, I think, that the world would become a very evil place and no fit inhabitation for the just. The apprehension, vague or explicit, of God as the avenger of the good and of an exorable penalty has been more or less effective in all societies of men, and when less, as in decadent and over-sophisticated periods, the appalling increase of wickedness has been a witness to its need.

The self-same point may be reinforced by another argument. One can put it best by saying that even were Hell not a revealed fact, reason would be impelled to invent it. This order of creation must have its perfect co-ordination of causes and effects, praise and blame, reward and punishment. Now man is a being with reason and will, self-determining and responsible for his choices. Those choices are concerned with man's true end, God, and therefore are no more temporal than the truth or falsity of human judgements. They have, in other words, final values or demerits which not all the perfumes of Araby can wash away. It is our material imagination which makes us think of indefinite punishments, but really we are aware that our decisions are irrevocable, that our end as spiritual beings is everlasting and that the manner of that end depends on what we as free persons make of ourselves. No doubt we imagine God could save us from ourselves and transform the red into what is whiter than snow, but there must be a limit to such an interference by God, and the more we study Catholic theology the better shall we see that God, with His Grace and Redemption, has done everything to save which is compatible with ordinary Providence, that is, the preservation and direction of the Universe as this Universe.

The second reason is that God must reveal Himself truly, and were there no final punishment for evil then our conception of God would be inadequate and even misleading. Our moral nature

requires a proportion between guilt and punishment, and though our sentiment at times anthropomorphizes God or wishes to exhaust His Infinity in one attribute, Mercy, we know really that no one virtue, as we understand it, can bear the strain of supporting the plenitude of God and that it is only by the attribution of all absolute values to Him that we form a just idea of His Nature. Now were there no Hell, we should have no conception of God's hatred of sin and of His justice, and so man would have been left with an impaired conception of infinite Truth and Goodness.

The one big difficulty, therefore, is not why there is a Hell, but why God chooses a world in which there should have to be one. Now is this difficulty so big in the light of all that has been said so far? This Universe is good. God has given the means of happiness. He has given free will and of such a kind that the possessors of it by their own efforts can merit and acquire and enjoy a distinct and unique virtue. Suffering and the possibility of sin are entailed, but both are so bound up with the good that they cannot be eliminated without a change of the whole scheme of the Universe. Suffering also can never be shown to be meaningless, and it is only meaningless suffering that stirs our indignation. Alone, then, impenitent sin and its penalty make blotches on the Universe. But now in the preceding paragraphs it was argued that they, too, are bound up with this creation of order and Providence, hence those who accept all the good and rejoice in free will and their power to merit for themselves cannot quarrel with the consequences of this freedom. Life, they must admit, is better than play acting, and to gain the reward of peril and adventure, the risk must needs be real and not fictitious. The question therefore why God chose this world in preference to another can be met tranquilly. It has ceased to be troublesome and has passed into the region of the speculative, of 'faith seeking knowledge.'

We may conclude then with some general considerations on the purpose of this world. I have called the question speculative - and the adjective mysterious might be added - for here, everyone will agree, we are surrounded with mystery. We are asking for an explanation of God's inner counsels and supposing we know something about alternative worlds, whereas we only know the fact of their possibility. Of their nature and constitution we know and can know nothing.

Again we are asking for an explanation of the purpose of this world before that purpose has been fully accomplished; we want to turn to the end of the story when we are only half-way through; to stand outside time and space when we are still in time and space; we are attempting, as a well-known writer has said, to get Heaven into our heads instead of our heads into Heaven. And again, we know little about Hell and nothing of the number who go there. But this we do know, that it is quite wrong when speaking of the latter to talk of God's failure. God succeeds and attains his end; it is individual men who pronounce themselves failures in Hell. And in parenthesis, this very fact is sufficient to demolish the objection that their suffering at any rate is meaningless. They chose the sin and with it the consequences. These consequences are not arbitrary, but the inevitable reaction of goodness to what is bad. God would not be God and personified Perfection if He showed Himself indifferent or treated evil in the same way as good. Hence, understood rightly, it can be said that Hell manifests His Nature and redounds to His Honour.

For the rest, as St. Augustine says, 'God Almighty would in no way permit evil in His works were He not so omnipotent and good that even out of evil He could work good.' He works good out of wickedness because His Nature becomes more intelligible to mankind by His response to it and the more intelligible He becomes the closer is man's union with Him. He makes use also of that wickedness to point the moral to men and helps them to happiness by a salutary fear. Again, out of suffering He works good. The presence of ugliness and pain in the world must not blind us to the

fact that the good far outweighs the evil. It is ugliness which strikes the eye because it is glaring and exceptional, but goodness is normal and ordinary and the very staple of common life. Were it otherwise, family, education, laws and institutions could have no permanence and civilization would be nothing but a survival of the strongest.

What we do find is a life where pity, gentleness, mercy and courage are everyday affairs dominating evil and enhanced by it, and the pathos and the heroism that are the outcome are so far from being regarded as a grievance or reproach that they have been emphasized in fairy tale and romance, and given typical expression, for example, in a Song of Roland. Only the jaundiced mind, then, would grumble at life as a whole. Or, to put this truth in another way, the recognition of value is, to some extent, proportionate to the nobility of the onlooking mind. 'Two men looked out from their prison bars, the one saw mud, the other stars.' For a true estimate of life, as of art, a stern discipline is needed. To the sensualist the purity of an Agnes or a Joan of Arc conveys nothing, just as the Gospel of the Cross was folly to the self-satisfied Athenians. Now if we consult those who have tested life whole-heartedly, those who can be ranked as its highest examples and most attuned, so to speak, to its message, their answer, we shall find, is almost unanimous in proclaiming it good and fruitful and happy.

Can we, then, in face of the Problem of Evil, not merely excuse God, not merely defend the goodness of the world and vindicate His ways, but build a song of triumph such as we find in the Psalms of David and the liturgy of Christendom? These latter immediately supply the answer, for in the poetry of Israel, and still more in the Christian spirit, is the attitude of praise verified.

To attain it we must put aside fear and grasp the nettle of evil firmly. Appreciation, as has been said, depends on discipline and effort, on substituting for downcast thought a soaring desire for life and that more abundantly. 'Seek and you shall find.' And straightway in the midst of us is found the solution of all difficulties - Jesus Christ, the most intimate Revelation of God's goodness and of His dealings with men. For while it is true that Christ does not explicitly argue the goodness of God in creating this particular world and in permitting evil, nor prevail over adversaries with philosophical arguments, He gives, nevertheless, a more significant answer in the portraying of God as the Father and Himself as the suffering Redeemer. Before this vision the hard surface of the Problem of Evil disappears. No longer can we harbour the suspicion that God's choice of this world was a light one, seeing that it involved the agony and death of the Son of God Himself. The Cross of Christ takes away the sting of suffering and transforms resentment at the inexplicable pain into reverence and affection, for it bears witness to the companionship of God in suffering, to His being the supreme victim of sin and its physician through self-sacrifice.

May it not be said, then, that it was excess rather than defect of love that led to God's choice of this world? Love is found most strong where weakness is its object - the lost sheep calling for more care than the ninety-nine safely herded. This pathetically weak world has, at any rate, this glory, that it has served to manifest the infinite resources of divine love. And it is characteristic of this virtue, as of all other virtues, to be its own reward, to be independent of success or failure; in fact, it is seen in its most sublime form where it meets with rejection. This we know to be true from the many heroic acts of devotion in history, which profited nothing save that they left an imperishable memory. It is the spirit of such acts which we value, not the recompense - the cause, not the effects. Dimly, then, we may discern creation and still more the Incarnation as the service of love. This was the supreme and, in a sense, only motive which led God to act. It mattered not that this love might be foiled;

there could be no excuse for its rejection, for killing it, and the blood would be on the head of the slayer.

No blame, therefore, can rest on love for the utter folly of those who reject it. They could be saved by coercion alone and coercion is incompatible with love, which is of the nature of an offering, a pleading through self-sacrifice. We see this in human life, where the union of free spirits is attained not by force, but by sympathy, the mutual shouldering of burdens and glad co-operation. And just as a federation of mankind can be expressed only in terms of freedom and mutual affection, so too the Divine scheme is a Heaven constituted by love, where God can point to His own Cross as the symbol of His unsparing solicitude and goodness. If this be so, we can understand in part why this inferior world was chosen and why evil casts no shadow on God, but rather - 'where sin abounded there most of all did Love abound.'