Philosophy for the Masses:

Religion

David Bruce

DEDICATED TO MOM AND DAD

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Dedicated to My Sister Brenda Kennedy

Brenda wrote, "During COVID and when visitors were restricted from visiting their loved one in the assisted-living facility I worked at, a patient mentioned to me how much she liked spaghetti during a late-night conversation we had. She was a night owl like me. Her name was Dee. I called her "Gerdy." Then she would say, "Dirty Gerdy," and we'd laugh. Anyway, on my way to work I bought two spaghetti meals from Olive Garden. I left for work early that night. I went to work, set up outlet dinners in the dining room, went to her room and wheeled her down to the dining room where we had dinner together. At that time, the residents weren't leaving their room and had their meals alone in their room. It was nighttime and everyone was already in bed, so I didn't see a problem. She was so grateful and had enough food for three more meals. It was such a simple gesture, but during that time it meant so much to her and for me."

Brenda once bought a newspaper at a gas station on Thanksgiving and tipped the female employee $5, and the employee cried.

Brenda wrote, "I do remember that. I also remember when George tipped a TeeJays waitress $100, and she cried. Our family does a lot of good deeds all the time: I unload people's grocery carts when the people are in those electric scooters. If they are alone with a few groceries, I'll leave cash for the cashier to pay for the groceries. I've had a lot of good deeds done to me when I didn't have a lot of money. It feels good to pay it forward."

She added, "I just have one more thing to add and then I'm done. I've had a lot of people in my life do good deeds for me when I was at a low point on my life. I was at a low point for a very long time. David, you know what you've done for me, and I can never thank you enough. Martha paid for antibiotics for me when I had strep throat and didn't have money. Rosa bought me groceries. Carla has done so much, and she had us over for Easter just after Chad died. When I say US, I mean all of my kids. She was so sick and ended up at the Emergency Room that same night. Frank gave me a car. And George buys my gas for me whenever he's in Florida. And Mom and Dad were good people. I had a lot of good influences in my life that made me be a good person. At least I hope I'm a good person. I try to be someone Mom and Dad would be proud of."

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PREFACE

This book consists of a number of philosophical arguments that I find interesting and that I think that some other people may find interesting.

May you be struck by philosophical lightning.

My series of books on interesting philosophical arguments mainly consist of notes in essay form that I have made on the various books that I have used as textbooks in the philosophy courses that I have taught at Ohio University. These textbooks include various editions of the following:

• *Exploring Ethics*, by Donald M. Borchert and David Stewart

• *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, by David Stewart

• *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, by David Stewart and H. Gene Blocker

• *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, by Alburey Castell, Donald M. Borchert, and Arthur Zucker

I hope that other people find these notes in essay form useful.

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS

Chapter 1: David Bruce (born 1954): What is Philosophy?

What is philosophy? Usually, it is defined in two ways, neither of which tells the whole truth. First, philosophy is defined as the "love of wisdom." That's OK, but don't many people who aren't philosophers love wisdom? Scientists and teachers come to mind. Philosophy is also defined as the search for truth. Once again, that's an OK answer, but don't many other people also do this? Scientists, teachers, and many other professionals do this. What sets philosophy apart from these occupations?

Philosophy is different from these other occupations in part because of the questions it tries to answer. The questions philosophers ask are magnificent. Philosophers try to answer these questions:

> Are we immortal or mortal?
>
> Are we determined, or do we have free will?
>
> Are we just a body, or do we also have an immaterial mind?
>
> Is there something outside of nature?
>
> Does God exist?
>
> Do good and evil exist?
>
> If good and evil exist, how can we tell the difference between them?
>
> What ought we to do?

The questions a philosopher tries to answer are not empirical, that is, the philosopher cannot find their answers through use of the senses: sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. Instead, the philosopher has to use a method different from a scientist's observation and experimentation to discover the answers to questions of philosophy. This method uses arguments and logic. A philosopher uses arguments to make as strong a case as possible for his or her answer to a question of philosophy.

Since we cannot test the answers to questions of philosophy by observation and experimentation, how can we tell if the answers are adequate? Several ways exist. Logic provides a way to test arguments. We can certainly demand that a philosopher's argument follow the rules of logic. We can also demand consistency from the philosopher. If the philosopher believes two things that are contradictory, we know that there is something wrong with the philosopher's position.

But logic isn't enough, although it's a good start. The methods of philosophers include more than rational thought and logic. What do we do when two contradictory positions both exhibit good reasoning and consistency? A philosopher sometimes chooses between two positions on the basis of their consequences.

When writing, a good philosopher does certain things. When arguing for a position, the assumptions that the philosopher makes are clearly stated, the arguments that the philosopher uses are logically reasoned, and the consequences of the position are clearly derived.

In philosophy, clearness should be a virtue, as it is in other types of writing and in other types of communicating. Not all philosophers are clear, but often this can be attributed to the difficulty of the questions to which they try to find answers and to the specialized words and concepts that philosophers use.

We will look at some philosophers' answers to philosophical questions, and we will also look at how the philosophers arrived at these answers. In looking at these, we shall be able to learn what philosophy is, what philosophers do, and how they do it.

Chapter 2: Socrates (Circa 470-399 B.C.E.): The Examined Life

The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates (circa 470 B.C.E.-399 B.C.E.) was a model philosopher and so reading Plato's "Apology" is a good place to start a study of philosophy.

First, a little background information. Despite the name of "Apology" for this dialogue by Plato, Socrates did not apologize for anything. Instead, he offered a spirited defense in the Athenian law courts after being accused of corrupting the young of Athens and of not believing in the gods that everyone else believed in. (The Greek word used for the title of Plato's dialogue means "defense," not "apology.")

In addition to being a model philosopher, Socrates was a model teacher. He never took money for teaching, but among his pupils was Plato, who later became the teacher of Aristotle, who in turn later became the teacher of Alexander the Great of Macedon.

Students should be aware that Socrates did not write any of his ideas down. However, in most of the dialogues written by Plato, Socrates was the main speaker. Scholars disagree over how much of what the character "Socrates" in Plato's dialogues said can actually be attributed to the real, historical Socrates; however, scholars believe that the earlier dialogues state the historical Socrates' ideas. In the later dialogues, Plato built on the philosophical foundation of Socrates' ideas.

The "Apology" is probably an early dialogue. Note that Plato attended Socrates' trial.

The Wisdom of Socrates

To begin his defense, Socrates told the story of how he acquired his reputation for wisdom. Apparently Socrates was always a debater, for his friend Chaerephon went to Delphi to ask the priestess there whether Socrates was the wisest man on earth.

(The Delphi Oracle was dedicated to the Greek god Apollo and the priestesses there had the reputation of being able to foretell the future. Unfortunately, the priestesses acquired this reputation by being vague in their replies. When the king of Lydia, Croesus, asked the priestess whether he should attack Persia, she replied, "If you attack Persia, a mighty kingdom will fall." Croesus did attack Persia, but the mighty kingdom that fell was his own. Note: The word "oracle" means prophet or prophetess.)

The priestess replied to Chaerephon (in non-vague language) that Socrates was the wisest man on earth, thus shocking Socrates, who felt that he knew very little. To prove the priestess false, Socrates began questioning people, especially people who had a reputation for being wise. Unfortunately, Socrates discovered that these people did not deserve their reputation for wisdom. Although they often knew things that Socrates did not, they made the mistake of thinking that they knew things that they did not know. This is a mistake that Socrates did not make; when he didn't know something, he was aware of his ignorance. To show people that often they didn't know something although they thought they did, Socrates used the philosophical technique known as indirect proof.

Indirect Proof

Basically, the method of indirect proof works likes this. First you start with an assumption. Then through a series of logical steps you show that the assumption leads to a contradiction. If an assumption logically leads to a contradiction, we know that the assumption must be incorrect and therefore we are justified in rejecting it.

In Plato's dialogue "Euthyphro," we can see Socrates in action using indirect proof to show that Euthyphro, a reciter of poetry, has opinions that are incorrect. Socrates asked Euthyphro for a definition of piety, and after some wrangling, succeeded in getting this definition out of him: What is pious is pleasing to the gods, and what is impious is not pleasing to the gods. (The ancient Greeks believed in many gods, unlike today's Jews, Christians, and Muslims.)

Socrates then showed that this assumption logically leads to a contradiction by pointing out that what pleases some gods will not please other gods. For example, if you remember your Homer, you know that the Trojan War was fought between two groups of people: the Greeks and the Trojans. Some of the gods favored the Greeks, while others favored the Trojans. (Aphrodite, goddess of sexual passion, favored the Trojans, while Athena, goddess of wisdom, favored the Greeks.) Thus, a battle that the Trojans won would please Aphrodite but not Athena.

As you can see, Euthyphro's definition (his assumption) leads to a contradiction: the same action (the battle) is, at the same time, both pious (because pleasing to Aphrodite) and impious (because not pleasing to Athena). One fact of logic and of mathematics that cannot be disputed is that something cannot be what it is and, at the same time, not what it is. It is impossible for a triangle to be both a triangle and a square at the same time. It is impossible for a positive integer to be both a positive integer and a negative integer at the same time.

Socrates as a Critical and as a Constructive Philosopher

Obviously, Socrates was a keen critic of others' ideas, as we saw above in his criticism of Euthyphro's definition of "piety." An important function of philosophy is to show us when our ideas are contradictory or otherwise confused. However, Socrates was also a constructive philosopher. He performed a valuable function by showing people when their ideas were confused. After all, you are not likely to seek knowledge of something you think you already know. Only after you discover that you don't know something will you take steps to remedy the deficiency in your thinking.

After all, when Euthyphro thinks that he knows what piety is, he doesn't consider searching for knowledge about piety. Why try to learn something that you already think you know? However, once Socrates showed that Euthyphro was mistaken in his definition of piety, then Euthyphro may become willing to begin the search for knowledge about piety.

Why People Disliked Socrates

People disliked Socrates for at least two reasons. First, Socrates was like a stinging fly to the important people of Athens. In his dialogues with these VIPs, Socrates consistently showed that these people thought that they knew something when they did not really know much — if anything — at all. Even when Socrates found someone who knew something that he did not know, such as a potter, the person who knew something in one area thought that he knew something in an area where he had no knowledge at all. Socrates had the advantage over these people because at least he knew when he had no knowledge — Socrates was aware of his ignorance.

The second major reason that people disliked Socrates was because young people imitated him. Young people followed Socrates and learned his techniques of debate through watching him debate other people. The young people would imitate Socrates by engaging VIPs in debate and showing — in front of other people in public places — that the VIPs were ignorant.

It's no wonder that Socrates was so hated because both he and his followers used indirect proof to show that many people who were reputed to be wise were actually ignorant. At the trial, the accusers represented different groups of people who were angry at Socrates. Meletus, a poet, was angry at Socrates. Anytus, a politician, was angry at Socrates. Lycon, an orator, was angry at Socrates. All three accusers wanted Socrates to be condemned to death.

Socrates as a Defender of Free Speech

Greek trials had two parts. In the first part of the trial, the prosecutors and the accused presented their cases and then the jury voted the defendant either guilty or not guilty. If the defendant was found guilty, then the trial moved on to the second part, in which both the prosecutors and the accused proposed different punishments. Of course, the prosecutors would ask for a harsh penalty, and the accused would ask for a light penalty. The jury would then vote on which penalty would be given to the accused (who, of course, had already been found guilty).

Before the vote to determine his guilt was taken, although Socrates knew that he could probably get off by promising to stop engaging people in philosophical dialogue, Socrates declined to restrict his free speech; instead, he told the jury that he would continue to do philosophy just as he had done before the trial.

Socrates was found guilty, so the jury then listened to different penalties that could be assessed against Socrates. The accusers asked for the death penalty. Scholars believe that if Socrates had proposed exile as a penalty, that the jury probably would have accepted this. However, Socrates rejected exile: He said that if he left Athens and went to another city-state to live, he would continue to do philosophy and thus run into the same trouble as before. Socrates stated, "Athenians, I hold you in the highest regard and affection, but I will be persuaded by the god rather than you. As long as I have breath and strength I will not give up philosophy …." Indeed, Socrates believes that an unexamined life — a life without philosophy — is not worth living.

Socrates then spoke about how valuable he was to Athens. By engaging the citizens of Athens in dialogue and by showing them where their ideas were confused, Socrates involved the citizens of Athens in philosophy. Of course, some of the citizens did not like this process — at the end of the "Euthyphro," Euthyphro couldn't wait to get away from Socrates! However, Socrates compared himself to a stinging fly that won't let the citizens rest.

Because Socrates regarded himself as so valuable to Athens, after he had been found guilty and was asked to propose a punishment for himself, Socrates proposed that he be given free room and board at the public expense! However, some of his friends at the trial, including Plato, asked that he instead propose a fine of money, which these friends would pay for him.

Death

Because he declined to stop philosophizing, the jury rejected Socrates' proposal of a fine of money as penalty and instead condemned him to death. A month later Socrates was executed;

he was given poison hemlock to drink. However, Socrates' death was not for nothing — he died as a martyr to both philosophy and to free speech. (Without free speech, philosophy cannot flourish.)

Interestingly, Socrates was not afraid of death. He said at the end of the "Apology" that death is one of two things, neither of which is to be feared:

1) Death is like a long dreamless sleep. In this case, death is the extinguishing of consciousness. We will not feel pain or anything else, so we ought not to fear this kind of death.

2) Death is a journey to another place where we shall live again. There Socrates will meet the heroes of ancient Greece and engage them in philosophical dialogues. This, Socrates says, would be very good indeed.

Other dialogues of Plato, such as the *Phaedo*, make clear that Socrates believed in immortality. I encourage you to read the last scene of the *Phaedo*, which tells the death of Socrates.

Plato's "Apology" is one of the great books of Western civilization; it should be re-read annually.

Note: The quotations by Plato that appear in this essay are from his "Apology," translated by F.J. Church.

Chapter 3: Jay F. Rosenberg (1942-2008): The Character of Philosophy

I can definitely recommend Jay F. Rosenberg's *Practice of Philosophy: A Handbook for Beginners*, which is available in many libraries, especially university libraries. Rosenberg is a very clear writer who has many interesting things to say about philosophy. Rosenberg writes, "Philosophy as a discipline is perhaps thought of most fruitfully as being distinguished by its method rather than by a subject matter."

The reason for this is philosophers investigate so much. For nearly every subject that is studied, there is a "philosophy of" that subject. For example, at Ohio University (located at Athens, Ohio) you can study the Philosophy of Sex and Love! In addition, many universities offer courses in Medical Ethics, Business Ethics, Philosophy of Mathematics, Philosophy of History, Philosophy of Literature, etc.

First-Order and Second-Order Questions

We can make a distinction between first-order and second-order questions. According to the glossary of *Fundamentals of Philosophy*, by David Stewart and H. Gene Blocker, "A first-order intellectual activity (talking, thinking, describing) is one which is concerned with the things we experience in the ordinary world. A second-order intellectual activity is one which is concerned with a first-order activity; for example, thinking about thinking, talking about talking."

Philosophy is known as an area of inquiry that asks second-order questions. Practitioners of other areas of inquiry ask first-order questions, but as soon as these practitioners of other areas of inquiry ask about the basis for what they are doing, they are asking second-order questions and thus engaging in philosophy.

For example, a critic might ask, "Was her second novel more fully realized than her first?" In asking this question, the critic is engaging in a first-order activity and asking a first-order question; in other words, the critic is doing what a critic is supposed to do. However, the critic may also ask, "What does it mean to say that her second novel is more fully realized than her first?" In asking this question, the critic is engaging in a second-order activity and asking a second-order question; in other words, the critic is asking about the basis of criticism and thus engaging in philosophy.

Another example: Lawyers ask a first-order question when they ask, "Is the person guilty?" Examples of second-order questions about law that a philosopher could ask include "What does it mean to be guilty?" and "What is justice?"

The Cutting Edge

Rosenberg also writes about cases in which philosophy and other disciplines blend together: "For it is precisely on the frontiers of any discipline that the characteristically philosophical concerns of sense (What does it mean?) and justification (How could we tell?) arise with special force and immediacy."

Here's an example. One of the new areas of physics is quantum physics. One interpretation of the way quantum particles behave is that they behave randomly — that is, they are not caused

to move in a certain direction or with a certain velocity, but instead, their direction and velocity are random.

One of the most important questions that philosophers have been trying to find the answer to is whether we have free will or are determined. According to determinism, everything is caused and we have no free will despite our feeling that what we do is up to us. According to determinism, whatever decision I make has been determined by my heredity and environment (nature and nurture). Thus, I am not a center for the Boston Celtics today because of my heredity (I am short and old and have slow reflexes) and my environment (in the neighborhood where I grew up, the kids played lots of baseball and very little basketball).

On the other hand, according to indeterminism (the free will theory), I am not a center for the Boston Celtics today in part because I chose to devote my energies to education rather than athletics. (It's true that if I had chosen to devote my energies to playing basketball that I still would probably not be playing center for the Boston Celtics, but that does not refute indeterminism because indeterminism recognizes that we are each born into a certain situation; for example, I am not free to choose to grow until I am seven feet tall.)

So we see that on the cutting edge of physics arises the philosophical question of whether we are free or determined. After all, determinism says that everything is caused, and if quantum particles behave randomly they are not caused and thus determinism has been refuted. (However, this does not prove that human beings have free will because indeterminism may exist only at the quantum level and not at the level of human beings.)

Philosophical questions also arise on the cutting edge of medicine and doctoring. Abortion is such a divisive issue because people can't agree on such philosophical questions as "What is a person?" If agreement could be reached on when an embryo or fetus becomes a person, agreement would be reached on when — if ever — abortion is moral.

Criticisms of Philosophy

Many people complain that philosophy seems rarified and abstract, elusive and arbitrary in its methods, lacking in a firm sense of direction, that it fails to achieve results, and is generally detached from the real world. Rosenberg believes that part of the reason why people believe this is because philosophy is a second-order discipline. After all, philosophers do not share such things as the results of empirical experiments.

However, according to Rosenberg, one thing helps philosophers to stay on track: the history of philosophy. All contemporary philosophers have studied the great philosophers of the past — Plato, Descartes, Locke, Hume, Berkeley, Kant, etc. — and thus have a common heritage. By referring to this heritage, and finding out with which philosophers they agree and why, contemporary philosophers "can find the beginnings of a process which might resolve their disagreement in their diverse commentaries on and assessments of these views and the arguments mobilized in their support."

A Recommendation

I enthusiastically recommend that you read Jay F. Rosenberg's *Practice of Philosophy: A Handbook for Beginners, 2nd edition* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984. For one thing, he has very interesting things to say about George Berkeley, whose philosophy of Idealism many beginning students of philosophy find strange. (When I first heard about

Idealism, I asked, “Do people really believe that?”) Rosenberg shows that Idealism makes much more sense than first appearances indicate. Look for *The Practice of Philosophy: A Handbook for Beginners* in your local library, and if it’s not there, don’t forget why Interlibrary Loan was invented.

Note: The quotations by Rosenberg that appear in this essay are from his *Practice of Philosophy: A Handbook for Beginners*.

Chapter 4: David Stewart (born 1938): The Philosopher as Detective

David Stewart (born 1938), in his article “The Philosopher as Detective,” argues that detective fiction and philosophy share several characteristics. He writes, “What attracts me to detective fiction is also what attracts me to philosophy: dependence on reason, the search for moral order, the development of analytic skills, the desire to find things out.”

A Dependence on Reason

Certainly both detective fiction and philosophy share a dependence on reason. One important part of philosophy is logic — the analysis of arguments. Most introductory philosophy textbooks leave out logic; however, Stewart and his *Fundamentals of Philosophy* co-author H. Gene Blocker believe that logic is so important in philosophy that they included a section titled “Thinking about Thinking (Logic)” in their textbook.

Reasoning is also important in detective fiction, as the detective must logically figure out who is the culprit. Without a conclusion in which the solution to the mystery is explained, there cannot be detective fiction. Of course, in detective fiction there are two contests. The first contest is between the detective and the culprit. Can the detective solve the mystery? The second contest is between the reader and the author. In a good mystery, the author does not hide clues from the reader; the reader has the same clues as the detective and the reader must try to correctly interpret the clues and unmask the culprit.

The Development of Analytical Skills

Detective fiction also shares with philosophy an interest in the development of analytical skills. In unmasking the culprit, the detective uses a form of reasoning known as inductive reasoning. Stewart describes inductive reasoning as “reasoning backward (from effects to causes).” The detective is presented with a murder (the effect) and must reason backward from clues to unmask the culprit (the cause).

In addition, the detective must form hypotheses just as a scientist must form hypotheses. It is impossible to come up with a step-by-step method for the formulation of good hypotheses (creativity cannot be reduced to step-by-step methods); however, Stewart does mention a few pieces of advice that can be used in hypothesis formulation:

> 1) Sufficient factual detail is important. The detective must search for all available clues to arrive at a good hypothesis.
>
> 2) “[T]he detective should abandon a hypothesis when the facts no longer support it.”
>
> 3) “[O]ne should not abandon a theory that fits the facts no matter how improbable the theory may be.”

The Desire to Find Things Out

Of course, both the detective and the philosopher are engaged in a search for truth. The detective wants to find out who the murderer is. On the other hand, the philosopher is engaged in a search for the answers to important questions such as “Does God exist?” and “Am I immortal?” and “How can I tell right from wrong?”

The Search for Moral Order

Detective fiction also shares with philosophy a search for moral order. For example, let's say that a murder has been committed in a detective mystery. The moral order has been violated and the detective must restore the moral order by unmasking the murderer. An important part of philosophy is ethics, which is concerned with right and wrong. In detective fiction, the detective is usually a moral character. In hard-boiled USAmerican novels of the type Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett wrote, the detective may be the *only* moral character in the novel.

In addition, the philosopher Immanuel Kant believed that in a rational world morally good people would be happy and morally bad people would be unhappy. Of course, we know that the world in which we live is often not rational. In this world, drug dealers sometimes seem very happy (and very rich) indeed, and murder is often unpunished. In detective fiction, however, murder will out, and the murderer is always unmasked. In detective fiction we often find a world that is more rational than the world in which we live.

Aristotle and Detective Fiction

Stewart writes that detective fiction has "certain definite structural constraints. Among these are concern for plot development, the buildup of dramatic tension, and the final resolution of that tension. Or to use Aristotle's words, detective stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end."

In detective fiction, we can have what Aristotle calls a *catharsis*. This means that by feeling pity and fear we can somehow be purged of these emotions. *Catharsis* is felt to be beneficial to the person — whether a reader of detective fiction or a viewer of an ancient tragedy — undergoing it.

Hermeneutics and Detective Fiction

Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation. Originally, the term referred to the interpretation of religious texts; now, it refers to texts of any kind. For example, Wilhelm Dilthey believed that "human society should be investigated as a kind of *text* consisting of human actions, cultural creations, and so forth that stand in need of being interpreted." If Dilthey is correct, then detective fiction presents the detective with a text that needs to be interpreted. The detective is presented with a chaotic situation, which is made meaningful through an interpretation by the detective.

Conclusion

Stewart concludes his essay in this way: "While you read detective stories or see them unfold on television or the stage, look for philosophical themes yourself. Not only might you discover that you are a closet philosopher; you will also have enormous fun."

Note: The quotations by Stewart that appear in this essay are from his "The Philosopher as Detective," which appeared in *Philosophy: Paradox and Discovery*, 3rd edition, by Arthur J. Minton and Thomas A. Shipka.

PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

Chapter 5: Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910): To Know God is to Live

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) is a writer who is famous both for his classic novels such as *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina* and for his book on his religious beliefs, *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief* (translated by Aylmer Maude in 1921). In this book, Tolstoy tells how he made his "leap of faith" and believed in God.

An Eastern Fable

In his *Confession* Tolstoy tells the following Eastern fable:

> […] a traveler [is] overtaken on a plain by an enraged beast. Escaping from the beast he gets into a dry well, but sees at the bottom of the well a dragon that has opened its jaws to swallow him. And the unfortunate man, not daring to climb out lest he should be destroyed by the enraged beast, and not daring to leap to the bottom of the well lest he should be eaten by the dragon, seizes a twig growing in a crack of the well and clings to it. His hands are growing weaker and he feels he will soon have to resign himself to the destruction that awaits him above or below, but still he clings on. Then he sees that two mice, a black and a white one, go regularly round and round the stem of the twig to which he is clinging and gnaw at it. And soon the twig itself will snap and he will fall into the dragon's jaws. The traveller sees this and knows that he will inevitably perish; but while still hanging he looks around, sees some drops of honey on the leaves of the twig, reaches them with his tongue and licks them.

In the fable are many symbols. The Twig is life itself, which can snap at any moment. The White and Black Mice represent day and night; the Mice go around and around the Twig of Life, gnawing at it, until it finally snaps. The Dragon and the Enraged Beast, of course, are death. The Honey, finally, represents the pleasures of life — pleasures that divert us from the inevitable death all human beings will eventually face.

Aware that someday he must die, Tolstoy wonders about the meaning of life. Are humanly constructed answers to the meaning of life satisfactory? Unfortunately, Tolstoy's answer is no. Previously, the two drops of honey that had given him satisfaction were Family and Writing. But to Tolstoy, neither of these is an adequate meaning of life. He knows that each member of his family will eventually die. In addition, Writing is an adornment of life and an allurement to life. However, knowing that he will eventually die, Tolstoy realizes that life has lost its attraction to him; therefore, he cannot create art to attract others to life.

Four Ways Out of Our Horrible Predicament

Each of us is placed in a horrible predicament — we are trapped in a life that seems to have no meaning and will eventually end in death. Tolstoy — until he finds God — finds only four ways out of this predicament.

1) Ignorance: Being Unaware of the Problem. If we are ignorant of the predicament we are in, we are unaware of it and so can be happy. Tolstoy, however, is aware of the predicament and so this way is closed to him.

2) Epicureanism: Enjoying Life's Pleasures. Although we know that we will eventually die, we can yet enjoy the pleasures that life offers. This means licking the drops of honey while holding on to the twig above the Dragon. According to Tolstoy, this is how most people live

their lives — especially if they are fortunately blessed with material goods. Still, Tolstoy cannot forget the Dragon. The traveller in the Eastern fable takes the way of Epicureanism.

3) The Way of Strength and Energy: Committing Suicide. Strong people commit suicide. Knowing that life has no meaning, they end their life.

4) The Way of Weakness: Staying Alive Although Aware of the Problem. This is Tolstoy's choice (at first), although he is unhappy with it. He realizes that he will die, and he despairs because of this knowledge, yet he chooses — weakly, he believes — to stay alive.

The Answer: God is the Answer

Eventually, Tolstoy comes up with the answer to life and the meaning of life. This meaning is God. Tolstoy realizes that he feels alive — really alive — only when he believes in God and so he decides to believe in God. Tolstoy does not use his reason to choose to believe in God; instead, his belief in God appears to rest on nonrational grounds. (As you may know, love and music are nonrational, while math is rational. Sticking your hand in a blender just to see what it feels like is irrational.)

A Voice within Tolstoy tells him: "What more do you seek? This is He. He is that without which one cannot live. To know God and to live is one and the same thing. God is life. Live seeking God, and then you will not live without God."

And so Tolstoy believes.

Addendum

Tolstoy believed that Christians ought to live very simple lives. He tried to give away all his money, and he became a schoolteacher to peasant children. I disagree with the idea that one needs to live so simply to be a Christian. It would have been better for the world if Tolstoy had used his time to write classic novels and had used the money thus earned to pay someone else to teach the peasant children. I do believe that one ought to give part of one's disposable income to charity; however, I think that one can keep part of the money one earns honestly to keep oneself comfortable. (However, Jesus Himself may have wanted His followers to give everything to the poor.)

Note: The quotations by Tolstoy that appear in this essay are from his *A Confession and the Gospel in Brief*, translated by Aylmer Maude.

Chapter 6: David Bruce (born 1954): Mystical Experiences

Are mystical experiences common?

It wouldn't seem so; however, Andrew Greeley reported in "Mysticism Goes Mainstream," an article published in the January-February 1987 issue of *American Health* that "a full 35% of Americans reported they had had a mystical experience: feeling 'very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seems to lift you out of yourself.' And one seventh of those who have had such experiences — 5% of the whole population — have literally been 'bathed in light' like the Apostle Paul."

Apparently, mystical experiences are common. If so, then why aren't we hearing more about them? Why aren't they being talked about more?

One possible answer, of course, is that they are being talked about, though maybe not to you or me. Chances are, a Christian who has had a mystical experience would be willing to talk about it to another Christian. Thus, I wouldn't be surprised if those who are known to be religious — a priest or nun, for example — have heard other people talk about their mystical experiences.

In addition, if mystical experiences are being talked about, the people who have experienced them are probably relating them only to very close friends. In his book *Everyday Ethics*, philosopher Joshua Halberstam points out that Fritz Perls of Esalen fame has identified three levels of conversation. The first level is "chicken-talk," talk that is "small, light, and easy." As examples of questions at this level, Halberstam cites "Seen any good movies lately?" and "Been working hard?" The next level is "bull-talk," in which "we exchange genuine information and our questions are personal." As examples of questions at this level, Halberstam cites "Is your work satisfying?" and "Are you happy?" The deepest level is "elephant-talk," in which "the content is weighty, and the questions are accompanied by the body language of dramatic gestures." As an example of a question at this level, Halberstam cites "What do you *mean* by happiness?" Elephant-talk most likely will not be engaged in between people who are not intimates, and I imagine that talk of mystical experiences falls into the category of elephant-talk.

So, when talk of mystical experiences occurs, it probably occurs between intimates, particularly intimates who are both known to be religious.

Anyway, most of the time people are silent about their mystical experiences. There are probably many reasons why this is so — certainly people are afraid of not being believed. Here are some probable reasons why people do not often speak of their mystical experiences:

1) We live in the age of science. Science has been very successful, and we see evidence of that success in the many wonderful inventions around us: electric lights, stereos, televisions, radios, personal computers, etc. One assumption made by science is not to posit the existence of any supernatural (that is, outside of nature) being. A scientist would probably interpret a mystical experience as a psychological problem.

2) Sometimes, mystical experiences can be interpreted as a sign of insanity. Occasionally, people will hear voices telling them to do strange things, such as to take their children to the top of a high building and jump. Of course, when they jump, they do not float gently to the

ground safe in the hands of angels; instead, they are seriously injured or killed. Many people in mental institutions think God speaks to them.

3) Some people such as some television evangelists who have claimed to have had mystical experiences seem to be charlatans. Both Leroy Jenkins and Jim Bakker have spent time in jail. Oral Roberts claimed that unless he raised a large amount of money, God had told him that he would be taken to heaven. I remember that syndicated columnist Mike Royko wrote a column urging people not to give money to Roberts on the basis that if Roberts' prediction came true and he was taken into heaven, this would cause a great religious revival — something Roberts presumably would be in favor of. In addition, there's an interesting book titled *The Faith Healers* by James Randi that exposes some of the tricks of the faith healers.

4) Speaking of newspaper reporters such as Mike Royko, if a person went to a newspaper office and wanted a reporter to write about a mystical experience that person had had, chances are he would be dismissed as a kook. A few mystical experiences make it into newspapers, but usually they are reported on for their entertainment value. For example, sometimes people believe they see images of the Virgin Mary in the sky or other places. Cartoonist Berkeley Breathed of *Bloom County* fame made fun of these people by having one of his characters see the image of Elvis in the mildew growing in her bathroom.

5) One characteristic of mystical experiences is that they are ineffable or indescribable. Most people are not notably articulate, and mystical experiences are such that they cannot be fully articulated. No wonder people don't often speak of their mystical experiences.

6) Finally, most people who have had mystical experiences may be aware, as William James was, that "mystical states are … absolutely authoritative over the individuals to whom they come" but that "no duty emanates from [mystical experiences] which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically." In other words, mystical experiences are a source of revelation only for those experiencing them, and those who have not experienced them have no duty to listen to those who have. Why should I listen to what cult leader David Koresh says he has learned from his conversations with God? Of course, even when a sincerely religious person has had a real mystical experience, that experience has no force for me because I was not the one who experienced it.

Note: This short essay summarizes material found in various editions of David Stewart's *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*.

Chapter 7: William James (1842-1910): Mysticism

Before examining some of William James' views concerning mystical experience, we will look at some background information about the relationship between philosophy and religion.

Many people believe that a study of philosophy will make you lose your faith in God. This may happen, but it will not necessarily happen. Philosophers critically examine issues of human life and thought. Therefore, to philosophically examine religion, there must be a degree of detachment as we look at some of the problems arising from a particular religious viewpoint — the Judeo-Christian viewpoint.

I. Mystical Experience: Introduction

Mysticism turns out to be a hard term to define, as many people use it in many different ways. However, mystics wish to have an encounter with God — to experience the divine or the sacred.

The two major types of mysticism are union mysticism and communion mysticism. In union mysticism, the mystic has an experience of union with the divine or the sacred. The philosopher Walter T. Stace (1886-1967) further divided union mysticism into two types. Introvertive mysticism involves completely withdrawing from the world and being united with the transcendent. On the other hand, experiences of extrovertive mysticism involve a disappearance of all distinctions between the mystic and nature. In extrovertive mysticism, the mystic feels a oneness with nature.

Communion mysticism is more common in Christianity than union mysticism. In communion mysticism, one retains one's individuality, but one has a sense of communion with the divine or the sacred. Clyde Webster, the late father of a friend of mine, was a Methodist minister who had this kind of experience while walking in the woods. He came across a clear area that he likened to a cathedral. He sat on a log and experienced an overwhelming sense of peace, clarity of thought, and communion with God. "The Cathedral" became one of his most memorable sermons.

We may make the mistake of thinking that mystical experiences are phenomena of the past; however, they may be much more common than we suppose. Father Andrew Greeley reported in the January-February 1987 issue of *American Health* that "a full 35% of Americans reported they had had a mystical experience: feeling 'very close to a powerful, spiritual force that seems to lift you out of yourself.' And one seventh of those who have had such experiences — 5% of the whole population — have literally been 'bathed in light' like the Apostle Paul."

II. Mystical Experience: William James (1842-1910)

Now we turn to William James, famous American psychologist and philosopher, who identifies four characteristics of mystical experiences in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902). James' discussion of mystical experiences concerns union mysticism more than communion mysticism. According to James, the first two characteristics below are the most important:

1. **Ineffability**: The people who have had a mystical experience say that it cannot fully be described in words; instead, it has to be experienced. (A joke among philosophers is that one

ought not to try to eff the ineffable.)

2. **Noetic Quality**: The people who have had a mystical experience claim that during it they reach a state of knowledge that is lacking in ordinary experience. During the mystical experience, they achieve a state of knowledge — the content of this knowledge is forgotten after the mystical experience is over, although the mystic remembers that he or she had achieved a state of knowledge. ("Noetic" means "It is not perceived as mere 'subjective' experience nor an 'emotional' experience; rather, it is a valid source of knowledge," according to <http://tinyurl.com/kj8dknt>.)

3. **Transiency**: The mystical experience does not last very long: 30 minutes to an hour or two. After the experience is over, it cannot be 100% remembered, but a sense of continuity will be felt if the person has another mystical experience.

4. **Passivity**: A mystic may practice self-discipline in order to achieve a mystical experience; however, during the mystical experience, the mystic is passive. According to James, "[T]he mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power."

James describes some typical mystical experiences:

1. **Yoga**: According to James, "Yoga means the experimental union of the individual with the divine." A yogi practices self-discipline in order to attain a mystical state.

2. **The Buddhists**. Dhyâna is the Buddhist word for "higher states of contemplation." Buddhists recognize four stages in dhyâna:

1st stage: The mind concentrates on one point. The intellectual functions of the mind are still present.

2nd stage: Here "the intellectual functions drop off, and the satisfied sense of unity remains."

3rd stage: "In the third stage the satisfaction departs, and indifference begins, along with memory and self-consciousness."

4th stage: Here "the indifference, memory and self-consciousness are perfected." However, James points out that "memory" and "self-consciousness" must have different meanings than these words ordinarily have.

3. **Sufis**: Little is known about the Sufis, since the secrets of the sect are imparted only to initiates.

4. **Christians**: Mystics have been a part of Christianity, even though "many of them have been viewed with suspicion." Among those accepted by Christianity, their experiences "have been treated as precedents, and a codified system of mystical theology has been based upon them, in which everything legitimate finds its place."

James also considers whether mystical experiences are authoritative. In his discussion, he makes three points about mystical experiences:

1. "Mystical states, when well developed, usually are, and have the right to be, absolutely authoritative over the individuals to which they come."

A person who has had a strong mystical experience is certain of its truth. Another, more "rational" person is unable to convince the mystic that the mystic is mistaken. After all, the mystic has had direct personal experience with mysticism.

2. "No authority emanates from them which should make it a duty for those who stand outside of them to accept their revelations uncritically."

Should we who have not had mystical experiences uncritically accept the word of those who have? No, answers James. Why? Because religious mystical experiences are not unanimous. They vary quite a bit. Sometimes they are ascetic; sometimes they are self-indulgent. Sometimes they are dualistic; sometimes they are monistic. Sometimes they are pantheistic; sometimes they are not. In addition, some paranoid, insane persons appear to have a form of what James calls "*diabolical* mysticism, a sort of religious mysticism turned upside down."

3. "They break down the authority of the non-mystical or rationalistic consciousness, based on the understanding and the senses alone. They show it to be only one kind of consciousness. They open out the possibility of other orders of truth, in which, so far as anything in us vitally responds to them, we may freely continue to have faith."

According to James, "As a rule, mystical states merely add a supersensuous meaning to the ordinary outward data of consciousness." It is possible that mystical experiences give us new knowledge that we do not have in our ordinary lives. Mystical experiences may be, according to James, "indispensable stages in our approach to the final fullness of truth."

Note: The quotations by William James that appear in this essay are from his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902).

Chapter 8: Rudolf Otto (1869-1937): The Idea of the Holy

Rudolf Otto was a German theologian. Among his most influential books was *The Idea of the Holy*, which he first published in 1917.

"Numen" and the "Numinous"

Otto discusses the terms "holiness" and "the holy." Today, the words mean "completely good"; however, originally the words had a main meaning that was quite different. Originally "holy" meant something that was set apart from and unapproachable by human beings.

Because the word "holy" has taken on the additional meaning of "completely good," Otto proposes that we use a new term for what was originally called "holy." The new term will have the meaning of "holy," but without the emphasis on morality and without the emphasis on reason. (The philosopher Immanuel Kant felt that we use our reason to determine what is right and wrong.)

The new term is the "numinous," a word that Otto invented. The word comes from the Latin word *numen*, which means "divine power." The glossary of *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion* by David Stewart defines "numinous" as referring to "that which is experienced as the 'wholly other' or as the *mysterium tremendum*. Otto also referred to the numinous as *the holy*." Otto believed that since we made the word "ominous" from *omen*, we can make the word "numinous" from *numen*.

The numinous category of value and numinous category of mind "cannot be strictly defined," Otto writes. It is a mental state that is of its own kind and cannot be reduced to any other mental state — it must be experienced. However, we can talk of other things that are *not* the numinous but that are like the numinous. In Otto's words, the numinous "cannot, strictly speaking, be taught, it can only be evoked, awakened in the mind; as everything that comes 'of the spirit' must be awakened."

"Mysterium Tremendum"

The Analysis of "Tremendum"

How can we describe the experience of the numinous? Since it is something that has to be experienced, the only thing that we can do is to use ideograms — states of mind that are analogous to the numinous.

According to Otto, there is something that is "the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion." That element is not "[f]aith unto salvation, trust, [or] love." The element under discussion is something that can be experienced in "personal piety," during "rites and liturgies," and around "old religious monuments and buildings." That element is the *mysterium tremendum*.

Otto describes this feeling of the *mysterium tremendum* in this way:

> The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its 'profaner,' non-religious mood of everyday

> experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of — whom or what? In the presence of that which is a *mystery* inexpressible and above all creatures.

We can experience the *mysterium tremendum*, but what is the quality of those experiences? To answer that question, Otto proposes to analyze first the adjective "tremendum" and then the substantive "mysterium." The adjective "tremendum" has three elements:

> 1) the element of awefulness,
>
> 2) the element of overpoweringness ("majestas"), and
>
> 3) the element of "energy" or "urgency."

1. The Element of Awefulness

Otto points out that "tremor" means "fear." However, the experience of fear is only analogous to the feeling inspired by the *tremendum*. Indeed, Otto says that the experience inspired by the *tremendum* is "wholly distinct from that of being afraid."

In the scriptures, we read of the "fear" of God and we read of people "dreading" God. That is the element of *tremendum* captured by "awefulness" — being filled with awe.

A better word than "fear" to describe this feeling, Otto writes, would be dread — "a feeling of peculiar dread, not to be mistaken for any ordinary dread." According to Otto, in this element of the experience of the *tremendum*, "we have a terror fraught with an inward shuddering such as not even the most menacing and overpowering created thing can instil. It has something spectral in it …."

2. The Element of Overpoweringness ("Majestas")

We must add something to "awefulness," because we also experience such things as "might" and "power" and "absolute overpoweringness" when we experience the *tremendum*. Otto uses the word "majestas," or majesty, so that we have what we can call *tremenda majestas*.

What is our subjective response to the overpoweringness of the numinous? In Otto's words, "Thus, in contrast to 'the overpowering' of which we are conscious as an object over against the self, there is the feeling of one's own submergence, of being but 'dust and ashes' and nothingness. And this forms the numinous raw feeling for the feeling of religious humility."

3. The Element of "Energy" or "Urgency"

The third element of *tremendum* is "energy" or "urgency." We see this in scriptural passages of the wrath of God. However, it is also described as "vitality, passion, emotional temper, will, force, movement, excitement, activity, impetus." Otto writes that philosophers have tended to dislike this aspect of God; however, it is an important, nonrational aspect of the divine nature.

The Analysis of "Mysterium"

Now that Otto has analyzed the adjective *tremendum*, he turns toward an analysis of the substantive *mysterium*.

The "Wholly Other"

The first thing Otto points out is that the adjective *tremendum* by itself is not enough to explain the substantive *mysterium*; instead, the adjective *tremendum* adds something not contained in the substantive *mysterium*. (Definition: "Substantive" means noun.)

Once again, we have a subjective response to *mysterium* — our subjective response is "stupor." The word "stupor," Otto writes, "signifies blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute." (Just imagine trying to explain the Trinity!)

So what does *mysterium* — in its religious sense — mean? It means, Otto writes, the "'wholly other' …, that which is quite beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible, and the familiar, which therefore falls quite outside the limits of the 'canny,' and is contrasted with it, filling the mind with blank wonder and astonishment."

According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, "canny" means "Susceptible of human understanding; explicable; natural." Since the *mysterium* is not canny, it is no wonder that Otto writes, "The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other,' whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb."

When Otto tries to describe what it is like to have a genuine "numinous" fear or dread, he has to use an ideogram: the fear of ghosts, which he calls "that degraded offshoot and travesty of the genuine 'numinous' fear or dread." However, the thing about ghosts that captures our imagination is that they have no place in our world. Similarly, the numinous is "supernatural" — beyond Nature — and "supramundane" — "above the whole world order."

Rational and Nonrational

Otto points out that he has been "investigating the nonrational element in the idea of the divine." Indeed, the subtitle of Otto's book is "An Inquiry into the Nonrational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational," and so we have to enquire into the nonrational and distinguish it from the rational.

Otto writes, "We began with the 'rational' in the idea of God and the divine, meaning by the term that in it which is clearly to be grasped by our power of conceiving, and enters the domain of familiar and definable conceptions. We went on to maintain that beneath this sphere of clarity and lucidity lies a hidden depth, inaccessible to our conceptual thought, which we in so far call the 'nonrational.'"

"Rational" is the word that we use to describe mathematics and geometry. "Irrational" is the word that we use to describe someone who puts his hand in a blender and turns it on just to see what it feels like.

So what does "nonrational" mean? Certainly there is a rational element in the idea of the divine — we are able to grasp something of the divine through the use of our reason. However, Otto writes, in the idea of the divine there is "a hidden depth, inaccessible to our conceptual thought, which we in so far call the 'nonrational.'" When we feel "religious bliss," we cannot

“elucidate the object to which this state of mind refers” — therefore, the object of religious bliss (and of religious awe and religious reverence) is nonrational.

In Otto’s words, “… the object of *religious* awe or reverence — the *tremendum* and the *augustum*, cannot be fully determined conceptually: it is nonrational, as is the beauty of a musical composition, which no less eludes complete conceptual analysis.”

Note: The quotations by Rudolf Otto that appear in this essay are from his *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Nonrational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, translated by John W. Harvey (2nd edition, 1950).

Chapter 9: Martin Buber (1878-1965): *I and Thou*

Martin Buber is a Jewish theologian who is best known for his book *Ich und Du*. Buber is very concerned with what it means to be a human being; because of this, he is often classified as an existentialist theologian. (The existentialists were concerned with what it means to be a human being.) Buber's writing, therefore, is interesting to me, because understanding Humankind (and who *I* am) is one of my main concerns.

One important thing to do in this essay is to talk about the terms "thou" and "you" which can be used to translate the term *du*. *Du* in German is an familiar personal pronoun. By using *du* Buber used the personal pronoun that is used among family and friends. He could have used a more formal pronoun — one that is used when speaking in formal situations and to people you hardly know.

In the English language, we don't have this distinction between a familiar pronoun and a formal pronoun. However, the English language used to have two sets of pronouns. At one time, English speakers used "thee" and "thou" for the familiar pronouns, and "you" for the formal pronoun. When the King James Bible was being translated (it appeared in 1611), "thou" still had its familiar meaning and was used to refer to family and friends. It is interesting to note that the King James Bible used the familiar pronoun when speaking about God.

So how should we translate *du* in Buber's writing? We can make a case for either "thou" or "you." Today, "thou" has a formal connotation because we hear it only during religious rites. For that reason, someone may want to translate *du* as "you." However, if one is aware of the history of the word "thou" and knows that at one time it was used as a familiar pronoun, then one may argue that *du* should be translated as "thou."

That said, we can focus on two relationships that Buber writes about. For Buber, there are two primary words that focus on relationships. One such word (some of us may prefer "word-pair") is "I-It"; the other is "I-Thou."

I-Thou Relationships

I-Thou relationships are relationships of intimacy, mutuality, sharing, and trust. A good marriage is an example of an I-Thou relationship. Good friends have I-Thou relationships. Baking cookies to give to a friend because you like him or her is evidence of an I-Thou relationship.

In an I-Thou relationship between people, the two people having the relationship treat each other as ends, not as means. When you treat someone as an end, you treat that person with respect and dignity — you treat that person as being valuable. I would argue that everyone — simply by virtue of being human — is worthy of a certain amount of respect and dignity. Even a criminal in prison ought to be kept safe from harm. Criminals ought not to be tortured for the pleasure of other people.

We have many examples of I-Thou relationships throughout the World. If you are fortunate, your parents are involved in an I-Thou relationship with each other. If you are fortunate, you are involved in several I-Thou relationships with family, friends, and a significant and much-loved other.

Among the famous, I believe that Mother Teresa had an I-Thou relationship with other people. Many people dislike the poor, but she devoted her life to taking care of the poor. Albert Schweitzer also was involved with many I-Thou relationships. A famous concert pianist, he became a Christian and decided to help people. At that time, there were no hospitals in Africa, and so Schweitzer decided to start the first hospital there.

I-It Relationships

I-It relationships are those of exploitation. For example, if you make a lying promise that you will pay back money if it is lent to you although you have no intention of ever paying it back, you are exploiting the person you are borrowing money from. What you regard as valuable is the money, not the person lending you the money. All relationships of exploitation are I-It relationships.

Examples of I-It relationships can be multiplied. Crimes such as child abuse, murder, and robbery are examples of I-It relationships. Obviously, a rape is evidence of an I-It relationship.

I

The kind of person you are will be different according to whether you are involved in an I-Thou relationship or an I-It relationship. Imagine a person in an I-Thou relationship. Such a person gives his or her whole being — as does the other person in the relationship.

According to Buber, "The primary word I-Thou can only be spoken with the whole being.

"The primary word I-It can never be spoken with the whole being."

Now think of a person in an I-It relationship; for example, a slave-owner. Slavery degrades the slave, yes, but it also degrades the slave-owner — possibly worse than the slave is degraded. (The slave is the victim of evil, while the slave-owner is the perpetrator of evil. Which person would you think God regards as worse?)

According to Buber, "… the *I* of the primary word I-Thou is a different *I* from that of the primary word I-It."

Nature

People can have I-Thou relationships with nature. This is a relationship that many Native Americans, who spoke of Mother Earth and Father Sky, had with nature. In a famous oration, Chief Seattle said, "Our dead never forget the beautiful world that gave them being. They still love its verdant valleys, its murmuring rivers, its magnificent mountains, sequestered vales and verdant-lined lakes and bays, and ever yearn in tender, fond affection over the lonely-hearted living, and often return from the Happy Hunting Ground to visit, guide, console and comfort them."

Another example: A person who mourns because a tree on his property cannot be cut and sold for lumber because it is old and gnarled has an I-It relationship with that tree. A person who enjoys the shade beneath the tree and who enjoys looking at the tree's gnarled trunk and branches has an I-Thou relationship with that tree.

As shown above, people can also have an I-It relationship with nature. For example, people who litter are engaged in an I-It relationship with nature. In Athens, Ohio, I sometimes walk on

a sidewalk and discover that empty fast-food containers have been pushed into the shrubbery. A person who litters in this way regards a living shrub as a trash dump.

Buber's work is relevant to our understanding of Nature. Formerly, many people have regarded Nature as a thing — an It — to be exploited. However, if we are to survive on this planet for any length of time, we need to have more respect for Nature — to regard it as a Thou. In addition, a pet can be involved in an I-Thou or an I-It relationship. Some pets are a very important and loved part of the family; others are not.

I-Thou Relationships and God

Buber's main point is that if we are to have meaningful relations with God, we must have meaningful relations with other people. Indeed, Buber writes, "All real living is meeting." According to Buber, God is present in every I-Thou relationship. Even if one of the participants of the I-Thou relationship is an atheist and denies that God exists, God is still present in that I-Thou relationship.

Buber believes that God is the "Eternal Thou," and we can experience this Eternal Thou. To have an I-Thou relationship with God, it is necessary to have I-Thou relationships with other people. Buber writes, "Every particular *Thou* is a glimpse through to the Eternal *Thou*; by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*."

One can have an I-It relationship with God. The way to do this is to argue about God, to try to prove God's existence (something that Buber believes is impossible). Obviously, this is something that many philosophers do. However, having an I-It relationship with God at first may lead you to have an I-Thou relationship with God later. After all, our true friends were at first only acquaintances.

One consequence of Buber's thought is that anyone can experience an I-Thou relationship with God; all that is needed is an I-Thou relationship with another person or with nature. As philosopher David Stewart writes, "God is present in every genuine I-Thou relationship, and each genuine I-Thou relationship whets the appetite for a relationship with God as the Eternal Thou."

In conclusion, I think Buber would agree that these are the two most important commandments: Love thy neighbor as thyself, and love thy God with all thy heart.

Note: The quotations by Martin Buber that appear in this essay are from his *I and Thou*, translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (1958).

Chapter 10: Thomas Merton (1915-1968): What is Contemplation?

Thomas Merton wrote widely on the contemplative life. He graduated from Columbia University, and in 1941 he became a Trappist monk at Gethsemane Abbey in Kentucky.

His autobiography, *The Seven Storey Mountain*, was an immediate success when it was published in 1948, and for the next 20 years of his life, Merton divided his life between a contemplative and an active life. As a monk, he devoted himself to contemplation, prayer, manual work, and solitude; however, he also was active in social affairs and was a prolific author.

This may seem like a conflict of interests, but it can also be interpreted as a reflection of the awareness of God on two levels. First, God is transcendent — outside of the universe. Merton's life as a monk — at one time, Merton was a hermit — helped him understand God on this level. Second, God is immanent — God's influence is seen throughout the universe, which after all is His creation. Merton's life as a man of action involved in social affairs helped him understand God on this level.

In his book *New Seeds of Contemplation* (1961), Merton says what contemplation is, and what contemplation is not.

What is Contemplation?

According to Merton, "Contemplation is the highest expression of man's intellectual and spiritual life. It is that life itself, fully awake, fully active, fully aware that it is alive. It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being."

Often religion is seen as otherworldly, as being concerned with heaven and hell, and not with the World. This is incorrect. If God created the World and put us in the World, apparently there is something God wants us to accomplish here.

Indeed, religious people see human and other life as immensely valuable. It is a tragedy when a human life is cut short. Other people may be willing to needlessly risk human life — to build a car knowing that it may catch fire when rear-ended (the Ford Pinto). This is something that a truly religious person would not do. A religious person sees human life as infinitely valuable.

In addition, Merton writes of contemplation,

> It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source. It *knows* the Source, obscurely, inexplicably, but with a certitude that goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith. … It is a more profound depth of faith, a knowledge too deep to be grasped in images, in words or even in clear concepts.

In the above passage, Merton tells us what contemplation is "above all." It is awareness of God. When we contemplate, we become aware of God and know that He exists and that our being proceeds from Him. Contemplation is very much different from philosophical argumentation. A philosophical argument can treat God as an object, but contemplation knows God as a Person.

According to Merton, “Poetry, music and art have something in common with the contemplative experience. But contemplation is beyond aesthetic intuition, beyond art, beyond poetry. Indeed, it is also beyond philosophy, beyond speculative theology.”

Although contemplation seems to reject such things as poetry, music, art, philosophy, and speculative theology, actually it does not. What these things are trying to accomplish, contemplation actually accomplishes. Thus, contemplation fulfills all these things.

According to Merton,

> In other words, then, contemplation reaches out to the knowledge and even to the experience of the transcendent and inexpressible God. It knows God by seeming to touch Him. Or rather it knows Him as if it had been invisibly touched by Him. … Hence contemplation is a sudden gift of awareness, an awakening to the Real within all that is real. A vivid awareness of infinite Being at the roots of our own limited being. An awareness of our contingent reality as received, as a present from God, as a free gift of love.

Once again, Merton stresses awareness of God and awareness that our being is a gift of God.

According to Merton, “Contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from Him Who has no voice, and yet Who speaks in everything that is, and Who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of His.”

God created us, but God created us so that we may commune with Him. We can have a relationship with God, for God is a Person. God wants us to commune with Him as a Person.

According to Merton,

> It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation He answered the question, so that the contemplative is at the same time, question and answer.
>
> The life of contemplation implies two levels of awareness: first, awareness of the question, and second, awareness of the answer. Though these are two distinct and enormously different levels, yet they are in fact an awareness of the same thing. The question is, itself, the answer. And we ourselves are both. … And all is summed up in one awareness — not a proposition, but an experience: “I Am.”

I cannot say that I understand all of what Merton is saying here; after all, I do not engage in contemplation. However, Merton is saying that the experience of existing is very important. It is important that we experience “I Am.”

According to Merton,

> The contemplation of which I speak here is not philosophical. … It is the religious apprehension of God, through my life in God, or through ‘sonship’ as the New Testament says. … And so the contemplation of which I speak is a religious and transcendent gift. … Contemplation is the awareness and realization, even in some sense *experience*, of what each Christian obscurely believes: “It is now no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me.”

Several things are going on in the above passage. First, contemplation is not philosophical thinking about abstract concepts. René Descartes (1596-1650) and other philosophers do this when writing about God. In my opinion, arguing for God's existence and trying to determine His attributes is not necessarily bad (in fact, it is good), but it is not what contemplation is about.

Second, contemplation is a gift of God. True, a person can decide to try to contemplate, and can prepare him- or herself for contemplation, but what is learned comes from God and not from the person's own efforts. It's not a good idea to say, "Today is Thursday. I think today I'll contemplate and experience God." A person can put aside a time to contemplate, but the experience of God is a gift from God and cannot be scheduled.

Third, contemplation is awareness of Christ living in you. Christians speak of turning their lives over to God. They also speak of losing their life in order that they may save it. This is not a contradiction, although it sounds like one. A person can give up some of one kind of freedom in order to gain more of another kind of freedom. For example, take being in shape. To get or to stay in shape requires giving up some freedom. You are no longer free to gorge yourself on ice cream or to become a couch potato. However, by watching your diet and by exercising, you will be free to demand more of your body than the people who use their freedom to become overweight slugs. According to C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), a person who turns his life over to God becomes truly free.

According to Merton, "Hence contemplation is more than a consideration of abstract truths about God, more even than affective meditation on the things we believe. It is awakening, enlightenment and the amazing intuitive grasp by which love gains certitude of God's creative and dynamic intervention in our lives."

Once again, we find that contemplation is awareness of God and of God's playing a part in our lives.

What Contemplation Is Not

Merton also speaks about misconceptions about contemplation. However, according to Merton, "The only way to get rid of misconceptions about contemplation is to experience it. One who does not actually know, in his own life, the nature of this breakthrough and this awakening to a new level of reality cannot help being misled by most of the things that are said about it."

One consequence of this is that contemplation cannot be taught. Indeed, even though Merton writes a lot about contemplation, he admits that contemplation "cannot even be clearly explained."

The only thing that Merton can do in his writing is to hint at what contemplation is. The worst thing that someone could try to do is to explain contemplation scientifically. Psychology can look at the "superficial consciousness" of the "external self"; however, in contemplation, the external self "dies." Therefore, contemplation cannot be a function of your external self. What awakens in contemplation is a "deep transcendent self" — a self that is "the hidden and mysterious person in whom we subsist before the eyes of God."

According to Merton, "Our external, superficial self is not eternal, not spiritual. Far from it. This self is doomed to disappear as completely as smoke from a chimney. It is utterly frail and evanescent. Contemplation is precisely the awareness that this 'I' is really 'not I' and the

awakening of the unknown ‘I’ that is beyond observation and reflection and is incapable of commenting upon itself.”

Merton writes of two selves: our real self, and our superficial self. Our superficial self is the self that is in the World — buying and getting, concerned with things that are not eternal. Our real self, however, is concerned with eternal things. We may be able to think of the two selves as the superficial self in this World and the real self that is the ideal self that will eventually — if all goes well — reside in Heaven.

Christians believe that God wants us to be more than good people — God wants us to be new people. We are supposed to become “born again” as new people — to become children of God. As such, we will do the right thing because we want to, not because we are ordered to. C.S. Lewis describes Heaven as a place where everything is permitted because it is impossible to want to do the wrong thing.

According to Merton, “Contemplation does not arrive at reality after a process of deduction, but by an intuitive awakening in which our free and personal reality becomes fully alive to its own existential depths, which open out into the mystery of God.”

Doing philosophy is not contemplation, Merton writes. A philosopher such as Descartes attempts to prove the existence of the self and the existence of God, but the contemplative experiences the self and God. For the contemplative, “I Am” is experienced and does not need to be proved.

Merton also tells about several things that contemplation is not.

• “Obviously contemplation is not just the affair of a passive and quiet temperament.” Such a temperament is not to be despised, Merton writes, but contemplation is more than just sitting around, looking off into space.

• “Contemplation is not prayerfulness, or a tendency to find peace and satisfaction in liturgical rites.” The rites are “a great good,” Merton writes, and “they are almost necessary preparations for contemplative experience”; however, the rites are not contemplation itself.

According to Merton, both a person with a quiet temperament and a person with an active temperament can discover contemplation. Both have advantages. The person with the quiet temperament may be more naturally attracted to contemplation, but the person with an active temperament may be more willing to suffer “the inner struggle and the crisis through which one generally comes to a deeper spiritual awakening.”

• “Contemplation is not trance or ecstasy, or the hearing of sudden unutterable words, or the imagination of lights.” Such things can happen, but they are the work of the emotions. Although such things can accompany a religious experience — such as Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus — they are not contemplation.

• Contemplation is not “the gift of prophecy, nor does it imply the ability to read the secrets of men’s hearts.” Merton writes that such things can accompany contemplation, but they are not contemplation.

Merton writes, “There are many other escapes from the empirical, external self, which might seem to be, but are not, contemplation. For example, the experience of being seized and taken out of oneself by collective enthusiasm, in a totalitarian parade: the self-righteous upsurge of

party loyalty that blots out conscience and absolves every criminal tendency in the name of Class, Nation, Party, Race or Sect."

We can imagine the Nazis attending mass rallies. The Nazis were part of a Mass Society, and they were unable to attain any longer a "genuine spiritual experience." Their mass rallies were a poor substitute for contemplation.

Merton makes two more important points:

1) "Let no one hope to find in contemplation an escape from conflict, from anguish or from doubt. On the contrary, the deep, inexpressible certitude of the contemplative experience awakens a tragic anguish and opens many questions in the depths of the heart like wounds that cannot stop bleeding."

We see this, I believe, in Merton's own life. Merton was torn between becoming a monk and becoming active in social issues. He ended up devoting his life to both the contemplation of God and the carrying out of God's work in the World.

2) "In the end the contemplative suffers the anguish of realizing that he *no longer knows what God is*. He may or may not mercifully realize that, after all, this is a great gain, because 'God is not a *what*,' nor a 'thing.' … God is neither a 'what' nor a 'thing' but a pure '*Who*.' He is the 'Thou' before whom our inmost 'I' springs into awareness. He is the I Am before whom with our own most personal and inalienable voice we echo 'I am.'"

Note: The quotations by Thomas Merton that appear in this essay are from his *New Seeds of Contemplation* (copyright 1961 by the Abbey of Gethsemane, Inc.).

Chapter 11: St. Anselm (circa 1033 to 1109): *Proslogion*

St. Anselm lived from approximately 1033 to 1109. He was an Italian prelate, the archbishop of Canterbury, and the founder of Scholasticism (which is defined by the *Concise Columbia Encyclopedia* as the "philosophy and theology of Western Christendom in the Middle Ages"). In addition, he originated the ontological argument for the existence of God.

The ontological argument may perhaps best be described as a group of arguments, all of which claim to derive the existence of God from an analysis of the concept of God. ("Ontology" is concerned with the study of being.) Many philosophers, including René Descartes (1596-1650) and the 20th-century philosopher Norman Malcolm, have written versions of the ontological argument. Whether the ontological argument is valid is still being hotly debated today.

St. Anselm writes down the ontological argument in his *Proslogion*. He has one version of the argument in *Proslogion* Ch. 2, and a second version in *Proslogion* Ch. 3. We will examine these arguments separately.

The First Argument

St. Anselm begins this argument by stating what it is that we understand God to be:

> And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

This definition is understood by all, even atheists, whom St. Anselm calls fools:

> But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak — a being than which nothing greater can be conceived — understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

This understanding of God does exist, since both the believer and the atheist understand that this is what God is. However, we still need to discover whether God exists in reality or whether God exists only in the understanding.

To clarify the two kinds of existence, St. Anselm uses as an example a conception of a painting and a real painting:

> For it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

The atheist would say that a conception of God exists in the understanding; that is, even an atheist understands that God is "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived." However, an atheist would deny that God exists as an actual being. (Using the Latin phrases, an atheist would say that the conception of God exists *in intellectu* but that God does not exist *in re*.)

So far, we have established the existence of one thing: God as "a being than which nothing greater can be conceived" exists in the understanding. This is something to which both the

believer and the atheist give assent. St. Anselm writes:

> Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding.

St. Anselm will examine the consequences of this fact: the fact that a particular conception of God exists in the understanding of both the believer and the atheist. St. Anselm comes to his conclusion that God exists both in the understanding and in reality by the use of an indirect argument. He shows that denying what he wishes to prove leads to an absurdity.

St. Anselm's indirect argument starts with a premise that he has already established: Our conception of God is of a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. He also has showed that this conception of God exists in the understanding.

Next, St. Anselm examines the following statement: "*A being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the understanding alone and not in reality*." (This statement denies what St. Anselm wishes to prove; St. Anselm wishes to prove that "*a being than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in reality*.") On examining this assumption, St. Anselm sees that it leads to an absurdity. If the assumption is true, then this conception that exists in the understanding alone would be greater than the same conception that exists *both* in the understanding and in reality.

St. Anselm believes that something that exists in reality is greater than something that exists only in the understanding. Most of us would agree with this. We would much rather have a real $100 bill in our pocket than an imaginary $100 bill. We would also much rather have a real painting by Picasso hanging in our homes than an imaginary painting by Picasso.

In St. Anselm's words,

> And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.
>
> Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

The Second Argument

We can look at Ch. 3 of St. Anselm's *Proslogion* as explaining further that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Apparently, St. Anselm believed that God has necessary existence (though he did not use those words), which means that God necessarily exists. According to St. Anselm and many other theologians, God has always existed and always will exist. In St. Anselm's words:

> And it [a being than which nothing greater can be conceived] exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist.

If we are thinking of “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived,” then we are thinking of a being whose nonexistence is impossible; in fact, we are thinking of a being whose nonexistence cannot be thought of. After all, if we think of a being whose nonexistence can be thought of, then we can conceive of a greater being — a being whose nonexistence cannot be thought of.

Gaunilo: “On Behalf of the Fool”

Gaunilo was a monk who was a contemporary of St. Anselm. Gaunilo read St. Anselm’s *Proslogion* and thought he detected an error in St. Anselm’s argument. To illustrate the error, Gaunilo used another argument that he believed had the same form as St. Anselm’s argument.

Gaunilo said to think of the most perfect island. Because the island is most perfect, it therefore must exist. Of course, Gaunilo believed that this argument is faulty. However, if Gaunilo’s argument is faulty, then St. Anselm’s argument is also faulty because — according to Gaunilo — it has the same form as Gaunilo’s argument.

However, we can ask if Gaunilo’s criticism is correct. St. Anselm replied in effect that God has necessary existence (though, as stated above, St. Anselm did not use those words). Only God — if God exists — has necessary existence. No island, no matter how perfect, has necessary existence.

We can also ask if the most perfect island is truly analogous to God. The most perfect island is the most perfect among things of the same kind. (The most perfect island is the most perfect among islands.) However, we don’t think of God as the greatest among things of the same kind. (The Judeo-Christian God is not the greatest among gods.) Therefore, the two arguments are not truly similar.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me say that I leave it up to the reader to decide whether the ontological argument is a good argument.

Note: The quotations by St. Anselm that appear in this essay are from his *Proslogion*, translated by S.N. Deane.

Chapter 12: St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274): The Five Ways

One of the greatest geniuses of all time is Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), author of the *Summa Theologica*, which gave the Catholic Church much of its philosophy and theology. Certainly Aquinas is recognized for his valuable contributions to the Catholic Church, as he was canonized in 1323.

Aquinas believed in a twofold approach to knowledge of God. First, he believed in revelation: The Bible provides us with knowledge of God. Second, Aquinas engages in natural theology: Through our reason and our knowledge of Nature, we can arrive at knowledge of God. For example, Aquinas believed that there are five ways to prove the existence of God. Each of these five ways is based upon a fact found in Nature.

Aquinas assumes a principle of reason that we call the Principle of Sufficient Reason. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is an explanation or cause for everything. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, when something exists, we can ask for a reason sufficient to explain the existence of that thing.

The Five Ways

I. The Argument From Change

Take a look at Nature. What do you see? One of the things that you will see is that things change. The seasons change, an infant grows up into an old person, day succeeds night, and night succeeds day — change is constant. Therefore we can ask, "Why is there change? What is a reason to explain the existence of change?" According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is a reason sufficient to explain the fact of change.

Aquinas comes up with two possible answers:

1. We may refer to an infinite series of changes. This thing changed because that thing changed, and that thing changed because this other thing changed, etc. Saint Thomas rejects this answer because "then there would be no first mover, and, consequently, no other mover, seeing that subsequent movers move only inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover … ."

2. An Unmoved Mover, or Prime Mover, exists. The Unmoved Mover is itself unchanging, but it is the source from which all particular instances of change proceed. Since there are only two possibilities, and Aquinas has rejected the first possibility, the second possibility must be true.

In Aquinas' words, "Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, moved by no other; and this everyone understands to be God."

II. The Argument From Causality

The Argument From Causality works the same way as the Argument From Change. Take a look at Nature. What do you see? One of the things you will see is that things are caused. One thing causes another, and that causes another. The frost causes leaves to die and turn colors, and that in turn causes the leaves to fall off the tree. The weather in part causes the leaves to decompose and to return to the soil, from whence it fertilizes plants. Causation is all around us. Therefore we can ask, "Why does causation exist?" According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is a reason sufficient to explain the fact of causation.

Once again, there are two possibilities:

1. We may refer to an infinite series of causes. This thing was caused by that thing, and that thing in turn was caused by this other thing, etc. Saint Thomas rejects this answer because he believes that there must be a first cause that starts the series of causes. Without the first cause, there would be no effect that would be the second cause.

2. A First Cause, which is itself uncaused, exists. The First Cause is itself uncaused, but it is the source from which all particular instances of causation proceed. Since there are only two possibilities, and Aquinas has rejected the first possibility, the second possibility must be true.

In Aquinas' words, "Therefore it is necessary to admit a first … cause, which everyone gives the name of God."

III. The Argument From Possibility and Necessity

The Argument From Possibility and Necessity follows the same pattern as Aquinas' first two arguments. Look around at Nature: What do you see? Everywhere you see contingent being. Definition: A contingent being is a merely possible being; there is no necessity for it to exist. My existence is contingent. I am here because my parents exist. My parents in turn exist because of their parents. A desk is an example of contingent being. The desk did not have to exist — it exists only because someone decided to make it. Contingency exists throughout Nature. Therefore, we can ask, "Why does contingency exist?" According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is a reason sufficient to explain the fact of contingency.

Once again, there are two possibilities:

1. We may refer to an infinite series of instances of contingency. This thing is contingent upon that thing, and that thing in turn is contingent upon this other thing, etc. Saint Thomas rejects this answer because if everything is contingent, then at one time nothing existed. If that had happened, then nothing would exist today. But of course something exists today, so it is not true that everything is contingent.

2. A Necessary Being, or Prime Mover, which is itself not contingent upon anything, exists. The Necessary Being is itself not contingent, but it is the source from which all particular instances of contingency proceed. Since there are only two possibilities, and Aquinas has rejected the first possibility, the second possibility must be true.

In Aquinas' words, "Therefore we cannot but admit the existence of some being having of itself its necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God."

IV. The Argument From Gradations of Goodness

Once again, we have an argument with the same structure as the first three arguments. Look at Nature. What do you see? You see varying degrees of goodness. This being is better than that being. This being is truer than that being. This being is nobler than that being. On every hand, we see varying degrees of goodness. Therefore, we can ask, "Why are there degrees of goodness?" According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is a reason sufficient to explain the fact of varying degrees of goodness.

Once again, there are two possibilities:

1. We may refer to an infinite series of degrees of goodness. This being is better than that being, and that being in turn is better than this other being, and so on to infinity. Saint Thomas rejects this answer because there must be a standard — a "maximum" — according to which we judge things.

2. Perfect Being exists. Perfect Being has all manner of perfections, and through our knowledge of Perfect Being, we are able to recognize imperfect being, or varying degrees of goodness, in Nature. Since there are only two possibilities, and Aquinas has rejected the first possibility, the second possibility must be true.

In Aquinas' words, "Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God."

V. The Argument From Design

The fifth way of proving that God exists is a little different from the first four arguments. Look at Nature. What do you see? Everywhere you see design. For example, we need eyes to see, and we have eyes. Everything in Nature — including natural bodies that lack knowledge — seems to have an end; everywhere we see design. Therefore, we can ask, "Why is there design in Nature?" According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is a reason sufficient to explain design.

Once again, there are two possibilities:

1. All the design we see in Nature occurred by chance. In an infinite amount of time, the universe arrived at the stage of development we see today. Saint Thomas rejects this answer because Nature appears to be working toward an end — the end being the development of intelligent life that can become children of God. And nothing can work toward an end "unless it be directed by some being endowed with knowledge and intelligence."

2. There must be a Designer of Nature, and this Designer uses intelligence to achieve His aims. Since there are only two possibilities, and Aquinas has rejected the first possibility, the second possibility must be true.

In Aquinas' words, "Therefore some intelligent being exists by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God."

Conclusion

Put all the proofs together, and we know that God is unchanging (the First Way), uncaused (the Second Way), necessary (the Third Way), perfect (the Fourth Way), and providential (the Fifth Way).

Note: The quotations by Aquinas that appear in this essay are from his *Summa Theologica*, Question 2, Article 3, in *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Anton C. Pegis.

Chapter 13: René Descartes (1596-1650): The Most Perfect Being

One of the arguments for the existence of God that modern Humankind finds most difficult to understand is the ontological argument. This argument takes the concept of God, then argues on that basis that God must exist.

The first step in the argument is the assertion that the concept of God is innate within us. In other words, this is something that rational people recognize. (The historian of philosophy Frederick Copleston writes, "All clear and distinct ideas are innate. … for Descartes innate ideas are *a priori* [prior to experience] forms of thought which are not really distinct from the faculty of thinking.") The innateness of the concept of God means that we recognize this concept through a purely mental insight, the same way that we recognize the facts of mathematics and of geometry.

The next step is to say what the concept of God that we recognize is. According to Descartes, the concept of God that we recognize is that of "a supremely perfect being." In other words, God is the most perfect being. (Saint Thomas Aquinas would say that only through our awareness of the most perfect being can we be aware of the differences of quality among other objects and beings; for example, only because of our awareness of God, in whom all perfections reside, can we be aware that one horse is qualitatively better than another.)

Next, we must show what our clear and distinct idea of God can tell us about God. Descartes uses the example of geometric objects such as triangles and squares here. These geometric objects do not exist physically in the universe, yet we can talk meaningfully about them, and in fact, we can even develop theorems about them. One famous example is the Pythagorean theorem that "the square of the length of the hypotenuse of a right triangle equals the sum of the lengths of the other two sides" (*The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia*).

As Descartes points out, "… it follows, from my mere ability to elicit the idea of some object from my consciousness (*cogitatione*), that all the properties that I clearly and distinctly perceive the object to have do really belong to it." In other words, our mental conception of a triangle can tell us some of the qualities of the triangle. For example, when you conceive of a triangle, you conceive of a three-sided geometric figure. In addition, you can go on to understand the theorems, including the Pythagorean theorem, concerning triangles.

Now, as we have already pointed out, we have an innate conception of God, in which we clearly and distinctly perceive that God is "a supremely perfect being." By examining this concept of God, we can learn about God's characteristics.

If we were to list the qualities of perfection, which of course are the qualities that the supremely perfect being — God — has, we would have to list omnipotence, omniscience, and omnibenevolence. In addition, Descartes says, we will have to list existence, because existence is a perfection. Since a most perfect being has all perfections, God will have the perfection of existence.

But is existence a perfection? Descartes definitely thinks so. After all, imagine two artistic masterpieces: one is still in the mind of the painter, while the other is actually painted on canvas. Which would you rather have in your collection of fine art? (Another example: What

would you rather find in your pocket? A real, existing $100 bill, or an imaginary, non-existing $100 bill?)

Descartes believes that existence is a necessary part of the conception of God. When we think of a triangle, we must think of a three-sided geometric figure. Similarly, when we are truly thinking of the supremely perfect being, we must think of a being who possesses all perfections and who therefore must actually exist. According to Descartes, when we reflect on our innate idea of God, we clearly and distinctly perceive that existence is part of God's essence — that is, we clearly and distinctly perceive that God must exist.

In Descartes' words: "It is not within my power to think of God without existence (that is, of a supremely perfect being devoid of a supreme perfection), though it is in my power to imagine a horse either with or without wings."

In brief, this is Descartes' ontological argument for the existence of God:

> P1: I have a clear and distinct innate idea of the essence of God.
>
> P2: My clear and distinct innate idea of the essence of God is that God is a supremely perfect being.
>
> P3: Things that I clearly and distinctly perceive are true.
>
> P4: God's essence is that God is a supremely perfect being (from premises 1-3).
>
> P5: A supremely perfect being has all perfections.
>
> P6: God has all perfections (from premises 4 and 5).
>
> P7: Existence is a perfection.
>
> C: God exists (from premises 6 and 7).

This argument applies only to God because God is the only perfect Being. In God alone does existence belong to essence. (In God alone does essence prove existence.) Existence is not a part of the essence of a winged horse such as Pegasus; however, existence is a part of the essence of the supremely perfect being.

Note: The quotations by René Descartes that appear in this essay are from his *Philosophical Writings*, edited by Elizabeth Anscombe and Peter Thomas Geach (copyright 1971 by the Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc.).

Chapter 14: William Paley (1743-1805): Natural Theology and the Argument from Design

William Paley (1743-1805) believed in natural theology. He believed that by using our reason and what we know about Nature, we can achieve knowledge about God. The Argument from Design — whose classic formulation is by Paley — is a good example of natural theology.

Paley based his version of the Argument from Design upon an analogy. In Paley's example, you are walking on a heath and you stumble on a stone. If someone were to ask you why the stone was there, you could answer that the stone had always been there.

But suppose you discover a watch lying on the ground. In this case, you would not argue that the watch had always been there. But Paley asks why you couldn't say this about the watch as well as about the stone.

Paley's answer to his question, of course, is that since the watch is a complex machine — too complex to have been created by accident — you, of course, realize that a watchmaker had to make the watch. Obviously, the complexity of the watch implies that a watchmaker had to make it. The watch is much too complex to have just happened.

But what about the stone? The stone is a part of the World, and the World is enormously complex — much more complex than a watch. If the watch is much too complex to have just occurred, then the World is much too complex to have just occurred.

But more than complexity is involved here. The parts of the watch fit together in order to accomplish a purpose. When the watch is working correctly, it enables us to tell time. Similarly the parts of the World work together to accomplish a purpose. As a Christian, Paley believes that the World exists in order that people may live in it and become children of God.

Paley is using an analogy here. The watch implies the existence of a watchmaker, and the World implies the existence of a Worldmaker — Whom, of course, we call God. In addition, Paley is using the Principle of Sufficient Reason. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is an explanation or cause for everything. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, when something exists, we can ask for a reason sufficient to explain the existence of that thing. Design exists in the World, and we can ask for a reason sufficient to explain that design.

Eight Objections

Paley answers eight objections that could be made to the Argument from Design. Are we really justified in concluding that the existence of a watch implies the existence of a watchmaker? Analogously, are we really justified in concluding that the existence of a World implies the existence of a Worldmaker?

Objection 1: Suppose that we had never seen a watch being made and that we don't understand how a watch functions. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. The design present in the watch is enough to convince us that there is a watchmaker even if we have never seen a watch being made.

Analogously, although we have never seen a Worldmaker making a World, the design present in the World is enough to convince us that there must a Worldmaker.

Objection 2: Suppose that the watch sometimes malfunctions. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. The design present in the watch is enough to convince us that there is a watchmaker even if we cannot explain the watch's sometimes malfunctioning.

Analogously, although there is sometimes a lack of design in the World (birth defects, cancer, deaths due to hurricanes), the design that is present in the World is sufficient to convince us that there is a Worldmaker.

Objection 3: Suppose that we could not explain some of the parts of the watch, or suppose that some of the parts of the watch seemed unnecessary, as the watch was able to function without them. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. The design present in the watch is enough to convince us that there is a watchmaker even if we cannot explain some of the parts of the watch, or even if some of the parts of the watch seem unnecessary.

Analogously, although we cannot explain some things in the World (e.g., the presence of evil) and although some parts of the World seem unnecessary (the vast, empty expanses of the universe), the design that is present in the World is sufficient to convince us that there is a Worldmaker.

Objection 4: Suppose that we were told that the watch occurred because of chance, that it was just one of many possible combinations of its elements. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. The explanation that chance produced the watch is insufficient. The watch exhibits too much order to be produced by chance. A much better explanation is that the watch was made by a watchmaker.

Analogously, although someone may argue that the World was produced by chance, that explanation is insufficient. The World exhibits too much order to be produced by chance. A much better explanation is that the World was made by a Worldmaker.

Objection 5: Suppose that we are told that a principle of order produced the watch. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. We have never seen a principle of order make a watch. In addition, does it make sense to speak of a principle of order that is "distinct from the intelligence of the watchmaker"?

Analogously, although someone may argue that the World was produced by a principle of order, that explanation is insufficient. We have never seen a principle of order make a World. In addition, does it make sense to speak of a principle of order that is distinct from the intelligence of a Worldmaker?

Objection 6: Suppose that we are told that the design that is present in the watch is "only a motive to induce the mind to think" the watch was made. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. To be told that the design that is present in the watch is “only a motive to induce the mind to think” the watch was made seems ridiculous.

Analogously, to be told that the design that is present in the World is “only a motive to induce the mind to think” the World was made seems ridiculous.

Objection 7: Suppose that we are told that the watch was created by “the laws of *metallic* nature.” Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. To be told that the design that is present in the watch is only the result of “the laws of *metallic* nature” seems ridiculous.

Analogously, to be told that the design that is present in the World is only a result of the laws of Nature seems ridiculous.

Objection 8: Suppose that we are told that we lack understanding of watches. Would we still be justified in saying that a watchmaker existed?

Paley answers, yes. We know enough about the design found in watches to be able to say that a watchmaker exists.

Analogously, we know enough about the design found in the World to be able to say that a Worldmaker exists.

Paley’s Possible Response to the Theory of Evolution

First, let me say that evolution is a fact. This is something that no educated person today should doubt. There is some controversy about how evolution works; however, there is no controversy about whether evolution exists. It does.

Second, let me say that Paley was unaware of the theory of evolution. Charles Darwin wrote his great scientific works later. Paley died in 1805, and Darwin published his *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* in 1859.

Let’s get on with Paley’s ideas. Paley, of course, was aware that animals have offspring. A pregnant animal gives birth to an animal of the same species. This is analogous to a watch giving birth to another watch. Of course, the watch and the animal both show evidence of design.

Well, suppose that a watch did produce another watch. Would this mean there was no watchmaker? Paley answers no, for five reasons:

Reason 1: Suppose that a watch did produce another watch. Our immediate reaction would be an even greater admiration for the watchmaker. The watchmaker not only made a watch, but he made a watch that was capable of producing another watch.

Analogously, the Worldmaker created beings that are capable of reproduction to live in His World. The fact of reproduction should make us admire the Worldmaker even more than the creation of Adam and Eve does. Therefore, the fact of evolution should make us admire the Worldmaker even more than we did before.

Reason 2: Suppose that a watch did produce another watch. We could say that in one sense the watch did make another watch; however, in a more important sense, the watch did not make another watch. Paley uses an example here. The stream of water by a mill can be said in one

sense to grind corn; however, we would hardly say that the water created the mill in which the corn is ground.

Analogously, in one sense a pregnant mother produces a child. However, the pregnant mother did not invent sex and childbirth. In addition, the various species in the World did not invent evolution. Birth and evolution have to be explained, and an intelligent Worldmaker is the best explanation for them.

Reason 3: Suppose that a watch did produce another watch. Then it is probable that the watch that we found was produced by another watch. However, this fact does not affect the original argument. This fact does not explain the design that is found in the watches.

Analogously, suppose that a pregnant animal produces another animal. This fact does not explain the design that is found in the animals.

Reason 4: Suppose that the watch that we found was produced by another watch, and suppose that that watch was produced by another watch, and so on to infinity. This fact does not affect the original argument. This fact does not explain the design that is found in the watches.

Analogously, suppose that an animal we see was produced by another animal, which was produced by another animal, and so on to infinity. This fact does not affect the original argument. This fact does not explain the design that is found in the animals.

Reason 5: Suppose that a watch did produce another watch. We should say that the maker of the original watch is in reality the maker of all watches produced by that original watch and by the progeny of that watch. The watchmaker produced the first watch using one set of tools, and he then produced all the other watches using another set of tools.

Analogously, suppose that an animal did produce another animal. We should say that the maker of the original animal is in reality the maker of all animals produced by that original animal and by the progeny of that animal. The Worldmaker (of course, when the Worldmaker produced the World, He also produced all that is found in that World, including animals) produced the first animal using one set of tools, and he then produced all the other animals using another set of tools.

Conclusion

The Argument from Design is an argument whose conclusion is meant to be probable; it is not a proof of the existence of God. Let me conclude by saying that the reader should decide for him- or herself how strong the Argument from Design is.

Note: The quotations by William Paley that appear in this essay are from his *Natural Theology*.

Chapter 15: A.C. Ewing (1899-1973): The Argument From Design

The design argument is very old — it goes all the way back to Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). However, A.C. Ewing has a modern version of it in his book *The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy* (1951).

Another name for the design argument is the teleological (refers to ends or purposes) argument. The design argument is based on adaptation — the adaptation of animals in order to survive (that is, adaptation for an end or purpose). For example, a polar bear needs a thick coat of fur to survive in its icy climate, and it has a thick coat of fur.

William Paley

A modern person who used the design argument is William Paley (1743-1805), who believed that the design argument was based on an analogy. In Paley's formulation of the design argument, he asks you to imagine that you have discovered a watch lying on the ground. Since the watch is a complex machine — too complex to have been created by accident — you, of course, realize that a watchmaker had to make the watch. According to Paley, the watch implies a watchmaker. Analogously, the World — which is too complex to have been created by accident — implies a Worldmaker.

A.C. Ewing

A modern philosopher who defends the design argument — and who denies that it is based on an analogy — is A.C. Ewing. According to Ewing, there is much design in nature, and the fact of this design must be explained. For example, a lower animal loses a leg or a tail, and then it grows a new leg or a new tail. And, of course, we need eyes to see, and we have eyes. Eyes are very complex organs. Ewing writes, "The force of the [design] argument lies not in the analogy, but in the extraordinary intricacy with which the details of a living body are adapted to serve its own interests, an intricacy far too great to be regarded as mere chance."

According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is an explanation or cause for this design that is abundantly found in Nature. According to Ewing, the best explanation for this design is God.

Of course, another explanation for design may have occurred to many of the people reading this essay. That explanation is evolution. Certainly, all well-educated, rational people must regard evolution as a fact. However, we can ask whether evolution rules out the existence of God.

According to Ewing, it does not. A theist can believe in both evolution and God, because God may be using evolution to accomplish His ends. Ewing writes, "Evolution [is] just the way God's design works out." After all, for evolution to get started, a one-celled organism had to exist, and even a one-celled organism is so complex that it is unreasonable to suppose that it came into existence by accident. In addition, according to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there must be an explanation for why evolution exists; according to Ewing, God is the best explanation for the existence of evolution. A strength of Ewing's argument is that it recognizes the existence of evolution — evolution is a fact.

Some people might suppose that an “unconscious purpose” of the universe brought design into existence; however, Ewing argues that “unconscious purpose” is an oxymoron. If something has a purpose, that purpose must be conscious.

An argument that could be raised against the design argument is the fact of much disorder in the universe; after all, the existence of evil is as much a fact as is the existence of evolution.

Ewing first replies that the Problem of Evil is an attack against theism in general, rather than against the design argument in particular, then he makes two further remarks:

1) He asks, Is there really much waste in Nature? For example, someone may point out that of the thousands of eggs that a herring lays, only a few will mature into adult herrings. However, Ewing replies that the other herring eggs are not wasted. Most of them serve as food for other living creatures.

2) Ewing also writes, “The occurrence of elaborate adaptations to ends is a very much stronger argument for the presence of an intelligence than its apparent absence in a good many instances is against it.” Ewing points out that our relationship to God is much like the relationship of a dog to its human master. The dog cannot understand such activities as Ewing’s writing a book; likewise, we humans cannot understand some of the reasons God has for acting as He does.

I don’t like this last comment very much, as I am convinced by the Principle of Sufficient Reason that an explanation exists for everything. As a rational human being, I want answers — I don’t want to sit back and say, “Evil is a mystery. We’ll never be able to understand the presence of evil in the world.” However, because we are limited, finite human beings, we may never arrive at the answers to our questions.

One thing to notice about Ewing’s essay is that the design argument still has much life in it. Some people may want to say that God does not exist; however, many arguments for the existence of God are worth considering.

Note: The quotations by A.C. Ewing that appear in this essay are from his *The Fundamental Questions of Philosophy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951).

Chapter 16: David Hume (1711-1776): Doubts About Natural Theology

One of the greatest critical forces in modern philosophy is David Hume (1711-1776). Not only was he critical about such things as whether causality truly exists, he was critical about religion. In "On Miracles," in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, and in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume swung a wrecking ball against several arguments for the existence of God: 1) The Argument From Miracles, 2) The Design Argument, and 3) The Argument From First Cause. In nearly each instance, Hume first tried to show that 1) the argument is weak, and 2) even if the argument is allowed, it does not prove what it is supposed to prove.

I. The Argument From Miracles

To show that the argument is weak, Hume asks us what sort of evidence is needed to convince us to believe in miracles? Since a miracle is a violation of the laws of nature, it would take quite a bit of evidence — indeed, evidence sufficient to convince us despite all the weight of our lived experience. Such evidence is unlikely ever to exist. In fact, if such evidence existed, we would revise our notion of the laws of nature, and so there still wouldn't be a miracle. (Or we wouldn't believe our eyes. If someone thinks they see Lazarus rise from the dead, it is much more likely that they are mistaken than that Lazarus has truly risen from the dead.)

In addition, Hume believes that the historical evidence for miracles is poor:

1. Not enough men of good character have witnessed miracles.

We can ask why flying saucers never landed in Carl Sagan's backyard. Instead, they always seem to land in the backyards of drunk guys who did not graduate from high school. Similarly, not enough men of good character have witnessed miracles to make us think they are genuine.

2. Some miracles have been discovered to be fraudulent.

Some — maybe all — mediums are fakes. After all, the escape artist and magician Harry Houdini was famous for going into a town, seeing a medium, and asking about a particular late relative. After the séance, during which Houdini had communicated with the late relative, Houdini would reveal that he made up the late relative, who never existed.

3. Ignorant and barbarous people witnessed miracles.

The people who believe in miracles are often those who read *The National Enquirer*. (Come and look! The image of Elvis can be seen in the mold growing on my bathroom wall!)

4. The miracles of the various religions cancel each other out.

People who study comparative religions know that many religions have had a deity who died and then was resurrected. Are we willing to believe that all these religions are true? (For example, a South American religion that believed in human sacrifice also believed in a resurrected deity.)

5. Records of miracles in ancient times are not like other records of ancient times.

Some records from ancient times we do trust; for example, financial records and records of eclipses. However, these records are not like the records of miracles.

In addition, the philosopher T.H. Huxley went on to show that the argument does not prove what it is supposed to prove. After all, if we examine miracles from the Old and New Testaments, sometimes they do not show the existence of the Christian God who loves all his children.

For example, take the miracle of the Walls of Jericho. The Israelites came into Canaan, where they were faced with the walled city of Jericho. To conquer the city, a miracle was needed. The Israelites marched three times around the city, blew their trumpets, and the walls fell down. This miracle reveals a God who takes sides. He took the side of the Israelites against the Canaanites. Let us also remember that when God gave the Land of Milk and Honey to the Israelites, some people already lived there.

From the New Testament, we have the miracle of Jesus casting out demons from the body of a possessed man and putting them into a herd of swine that, maddened, killed themselves by hurling themselves from a cliff. This is unfortunate both for the swine and for the owner of the swine.

Since Hume's attack against the Argument From Miracles, many people have been trying to come up with naturalistic explanations for miracles. In one adult study class I was in, the class leader talked about Jesus curing a leper by telling the leper to go stand in a river for a period of time. The class leader suggested that minerals in the water cured the leper.

II. The Argument From Design

Hume believes that the Argument From Design is weak. After all, he believes that it is an analogy. We are familiar with houses and housemakers, so when we see a house, we know immediately that it was built by a housebuilder. According to the Argument from Design, when we see a World, we think that the World was designed, like a house was designed, and therefore there must be a Worldmaker, who of course is God.

But, Hume asks, Can we really use a causal analogy here? After all, I have seen people build houses, so I know that there are housebuilders. However, I have never seen a World being built, so I cannot be sure that there are Worldbuilders.

Besides, Hume asks, Why use this particular analogy of comparing the World to a house? Why not use other analogies? Why not say that the World is like a vegetable, a plant? In that case, a comet could be a seed going numerous times around a Sun, until it is sufficiently ripened and sprouts into a new World.

Or why not say that the World is like an animal? In Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and his friend Jim are lying on the raft at night wondering where all the stars came from. Huck finally decides that the Moon must have laid them; after all, he has seen a frog lay almost as many eggs as there are stars in the sky.

Of course, you will say that these analogies are ridiculous. Hume would agree; however, he would add that they are no more ridiculous than saying that the World is like a house.

Hume also says that the argument does not prove what it is supposed to prove. Suppose we allow the argument to stand. What then? Well, if the World is like a house, then there must be many Deities. After all, it takes many men to build a house, so it must take many Deities to build a World.

In addition to that, can't we say that the Deity is (are?) incompetent? When we judge whether a housebuilder is competent, we take a look at the houses he has built. Well, what about this World that the Deity has built? What is it like?

Look around you, and you will see evil. No rational human being can doubt that evil exists. All anyone needs to do is to take a look inside a Children's Hospital and see all the little bald-headed children — children who have leukemia or other kinds of cancer. In this World, death is not optional, and it often comes much sooner than we want it to. Besides, look at wars, assassinations, the Holocaust, disease, etc.

Evil exists; therefore, what kind of a Deity made the World? Hume suggests that the World may have been made by an infant Deity or by a senile Deity. The other Deities may look at the World created by our Deity and shake their heads sadly.

According to Hume, all arguments for Deity are wrecked by the Dilemma of Evil, which goes back to the time of the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus. This is the Dilemma of Evil:

P1: There is evil in the world.

P2: Either God cannot or God will not abolish evil.

P3: If God cannot abolish evil, then God is not omnipotent.

P4: If God will not abolish evil, then God is not omnibenevolent.

C: Therefore, either God is not omnipotent or God is not omnibenevolent.

Or:

P1: If God is omnipotent (all-powerful), then He could prevent evil.

P2: If God is omnibenevolent (all-good), then He would prevent evil.

P3: Evil exists.

C: Therefore, either God is not omnipotent, or God is not omnibenevolent.

III. The Argument From First Cause

As usual, Hume starts by saying that the argument is weak. As you will recall, the Argument From First Cause argues that there must be a First Cause that is the explanation of causation in the world. An alternative explanation for causation was an infinite regress of causes. One thing causes another, which causes another, which causes another, and so on. Saint Thomas Aquinas rejected this because it always leaves us with cause, which is what we are trying to explain.

However, Hume asks: What is wrong with an infinite regress of causes? This is something that Hume has no difficulty believing in.

Second, Hume argues that the argument does not prove what it is supposed to prove. Suppose that there is a First Cause. Hume asks, Why can't we ask for a cause of the First Cause? and Why can't we ask for a material cause of the material universe?

Hume's Conclusion

Hume’s conclusion is short and sweet: “All religious systems are subject to insuperable difficulties. Each disputant triumphs in his turn, exposing the absurdities, barbarities, and pernicious tenets of his antagonist. But all of them prepare a complete triumph for the skeptic who tells them that no system ought ever to be embraced with regard to such questions. A total suspense of judgment is here our only reasonable recourse.”

Chapter 17: Richard Taylor (1919-2003): The Argument from Contingency

Captain Jean-Luc Picard of *Star Trek: The Next Generation* can state that religion is a superstition of the past, but philosophers today are still taking the question of the existence of God seriously. One contemporary philosopher who believes he has a good argument for the existence of God is Richard Taylor.

Taylor starts with a plausible principle: The Principle of Sufficient Reason. According to the Principle of Sufficient Reason, there is an explanation or cause for everything. To illustrate the principle, he asks us to imagine that we are walking in the woods and we come across a translucent ball. (*Translucent* means "transmitting light but causing sufficient diffusion to eliminate perception of distinct images" — *The American Heritage Dictionary*.) Of course, we would ask, "Why is that translucent ball here?" In doing this, we are asking for a reason sufficient to explain the translucent ball's existence.

Taylor explains the Principle of Sufficient Reason in this way: "in the case of any positive truth, there is some sufficient reason for it, something which, in this sense, makes it true — in short, that there is some sort of explanation, known or unknown, for everything."

Of course, the translucent ball is unusual and so we do not expect to see it in a woodsy setting, and so we ask where it came from. But if we were unfamiliar with rocks in a woodsy setting, and had come across a rock instead of the translucent ball, we would be asking why the rock was there. Taylor makes this point to show that even though we ask for reasons for the existence of unusual things, we could also ask for reasons for the existence of things we are used to.

One thing that we are used to is the existence of the world. (Taylor defines the world as everything that exists, except for God, if God should exist.) Everything in the world is contingent; that is, its existence is dependent on something other than itself. For example, I am contingent. I exist because my parents brought me into being. Of course, my parents are also contingent; they exist because *their* parents brought them into being.

Some questions we should ask are these: Why does anything exist? Why should there be a world at all? We can certainly imagine the world not existing. As you can see, Taylor is using the Principle of Sufficient Reason on a grand scale: What is a reason sufficient for explaining the existence of the world?

Please note that the complexity of the universe is not a sufficient reason for its existence. Suppose the universe consisted entirely of a translucent ball. We would still want to know the reason for its existence. The same thing applies to our world of many and complex objects, including billions and billions of stars, as astronomer Carl Sagan might say.

Please note also that even if the world is old, that still is not a sufficient reason for its existence. We would still want to know why there is a world. Just to say that something is very old does not explain why it exists.

Please note further that even if the world does not have a beginning, that still is not a sufficient reason for its existence. We would still want to know why there is a world. Just to say that

something has always existed does not explain why it exists.

Our world could have always existed (as in the Steady State theory), or it could have had a beginning (as in the Big Bang theory). Either way, it is proper to speak of the world as being created. Taylor points out that people have been confused by the word "creation," incorrectly assuming that "creation" implies a beginning in time. Taylor writes, "Now if the world is the creation of God, its relationship to God should be thought of in this fashion; namely, that the world depends for its existence upon God, and could not exist independently of God." It is possible that both God and the world are eternal, but that the world is contingent upon God. (Or, alternatively, it is also possible that God is eternal, the world had a beginning in time, and the world is contingent upon God.)

So, what is the reason sufficient for explaining the existence of the world? Two answers suggest themselves. One is that the world is responsible for its own existence; that is, that it has aseity (necessary existence). Taylor finds this implausible because everything in the world appears to be contingent.

Taylor writes, "It would be a self-contradiction to say of anything that it exists by its own nature, or is a necessarily existing thing, and at the same time to say that it comes into being or passes away, or that it ever could come into being or pass away. Nothing about the world seems at all like this, for concerning anything in the world, we can perfectly easily think of it as being annihilated, or as never having existed in the first place, without there being the slightest hint of any absurdity in such a supposition."

The second possibility, and the only one that remains, is that a self-caused, necessary being is responsible for the existence of the world. This being, of course, is God. Taylor attempts to clear up some confusion over the terms we apply to God. For example, to say that a self-caused being brings itself into being is absurd. Taylor writes, "To say that something is self-caused (*causa sui*) means only that it exists, not contingently or in dependence upon something else, but by its own nature, which is only to say that it is a being which is such that it can neither come into being nor perish."

Is the idea of a self-caused, necessary being absurd? Taylor writes, apparently not. If we can think of objects whose existence is impossible, such as a square circle or a formless body, why not of a being whose existence is necessary?

Taylor also attempts to make clear the notion of a first cause. He points out that "first" does not mean "first in time." Rather, he writes, "To describe God as a first cause is only to say that he is literally a *primary* rather than a secondary cause, an *ultimate* rather than a derived cause, or a being upon which all other things, heaven and earth, ultimately depend for their existence."

One important point to note is that though Taylor has argued that God exists, his argument does not establish that God has all the attributes that the Judeo-Christian religion says God has. Taylor has argued that God is the Creator of the world and that God has aseity (necessary being). However, his argument does not show that God is benevolent. Still, Taylor shows that modern philosophers do not simply assume that God does not exist; indeed, many modern philosophers believe that there are good arguments for the existence of God.

Captain Picard talks about philosophy; however, he seems to assume that God does not exist (without presenting any arguments to show that this is actually the case). That is not philosophical.

Note: The quotations by Richard Taylor that appear in this essay are from his *Metaphysics* (2nd edition; copyright 1974).

Chapter 18: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963): The Argument From Morality

C.S. Lewis wrote about the Moral Argument in his book *Mere Christianity* (1952). Of course, Lewis is famous for many things, not just for being a defender of the faith in many of his books. For example, he wrote the wonderful children's series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, which I have read several times. In addition, *Shadowlands* is a nonfiction movie about Lewis' marriage to the American poet Joy Davidman.

The Moral Argument argues that God is the best explanation for Humankind's experience of a Moral Law within themselves. As such, it uses the Principle of Sufficient Reason. We find an objective moral law within ourselves; what is a reason sufficient to explain the existence of this moral law?

It is an important presupposition of the Moral Argument that the Moral Law is objective and not subjective. If the Moral Law is subjective, then ethics is a matter of opinion. What I believe is right, is right for me, and what you believe is right, is right for you. The same applies to what each of us believes to be wrong.

One consequence of subjectivism is that the same thing can be both right and wrong at the same time. Thus, I may think that rape is morally right and you may think that rape is morally wrong, and if subjectivism is the correct ethical theory, then both of us are correct in what we believe. Thus, rape is morally right for me but morally wrong for you.

Objectivism, however, denies this. According to objectivism, moral rules exist that apply to everyone, no matter what we may believe about them. Thus, according to objectivism, the truth of the statement "Rape is wrong" is not a matter of opinion. The statement is either true or false. If the statement is true, then this moral rule applies to everyone, at every time, in every place, no matter what they may believe about the statement.

Note that although objectivism requires that ethical statements (e.g. "Rape is wrong" and "Murder is wrong") be either true or false — they are not a matter of opinion — objectivism does not require the belief that every human being have an innate moral sense that tells them what to do. (We may have to be educated about what is morally right and what is morally wrong; after all, we have to be taught calculus, which is definitely objective.) In addition, objectivism does not require that all persons naturally and easily know what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Objectivism merely requires that ethical statements be true or false. We may not know whether a certain ethical statement is true or false — objectivism merely requires that it be true or false.

As you know, Lewis will argue that God is the best explanation of the Moral Law. However, many people would like to argue that human beings are the source of the Moral Law. Of course, if this were true, then the Moral Law would be subjective and not objective. An argument for human beings as the source of the Moral Law could state that certain moral laws came into effect because they were useful in helping communities to exist. However, a subjectivist who argues this could not argue that it is objectively better for communities to exist than not to exist. Lewis believes in an objective moral law that he calls the Law of [Human] Nature or the Law of Decent Behavior.

Lewis starts his argument from human experience: There are two odd things we notice about members of the human species:

> 1) They have an idea about the kind of behavior they ought to practice.
>
> 2) They do not, in fact, always practice this kind of behavior.

Because of these two things, the human species is much different from a stone or a tree. After all, a stone or a tree does not think about what it ought to do; in addition, a stone or a tree always does what it is supposed to do. If you drop a stone, the stone does not suddenly take thought and remember that now it is supposed to fall to the ground. Instead, it is a nonthinking thing and obeys unquestioningly the law of gravity.

We know that there is a Moral Law that human beings are aware of, but which stones and trees are not aware of. The next question is, What is a reason sufficient to explain the existence of the Moral Law?

Lewis writes that there are two main views of the existence of the universe:

> 1) The Materialist view: According to this view, the universe just happened to exist.
>
> 2) The Religious view: According to this view, "what is behind the universe is more like a mind than it is like anything else we know. That is, it is conscious, and has purposes, and prefers one thing to another. And on this view it made the universe, partly for purposes we do not know, but partly, at any rate, in order to produce creatures like itself — I mean, like itself to the extent of having minds."

In trying to decide which view is correct, we cannot have recourse to science, because science cannot answer such questions as these: Why is there a universe? and Why does it go on as it does? and Has it any meaning?

The only way that we can answer this question is from our observation of ourselves. Within ourselves, we find a Moral Law — a Moral Law that the physical universe is unable to account for. The best explanation of the Moral Law is that a mind is behind the universe, making the universe what it is.

The Materialist view of the universe cannot explain the existence of the Moral Law because, as Lewis states, you can hardly imagine a bit of matter telling you what is right and what is wrong. (According to Materialism, all reality consists of matter and the manifestations of matter. Materialism has no room for a nonmaterial mind or spirit.)

The only other view of the universe is the Religious view, which states that there is a Mind behind the universe Who directs the universe. Lewis writes, "The only way in which we could expect [the Mind] to show itself would be inside ourselves as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way." Of course, this is an exact description of the Moral Law we find within ourselves. Lewis' conclusion at this point is this:

> I am not yet within a hundred miles of the God of Christian theology. All I have got at this point is a Something which is directing the universe, and which appears in me as a law urging me to do right and making me feel responsible and uncomfortable when I do wrong. I think we have to assume it is more like a mind than it is like anything else we

> know — because after all the only other thing we know is matter and you can hardly imagine a bit of matter giving instructions.

Lewis uses logical reasoning in his essay. He writes that there are two candidates for explaining the existence of the Moral Law: the Materialist view and the Religious view. Since Materialism cannot explain why the Moral Law exists, then the religious answer must be the correct one.

In a short note, Lewis mentions an alternative to the Materialist view and the Religious view: the Life-Force Philosophy (aka Creative Evolution and Emergent Evolution). According to this view, “the small variations by which life on this planet ‘evolved’ from the lowest forms to Man were not due to chance but to the ‘striving’ or ‘purposiveness’ of a Life-Force.” Lewis asks people who hold this view “whether by Life-Force they mean something with a mind or not.” If they do, then they really hold the Religious view. If they don’t, then they are talking nonsense, for what sense does it make to say that “something without a mind ‘strives’ or has ‘purposes’?”

Lewis completely rejects the Life-Force Philosophy. He writes, “The Life-Force is a sort of tame God. You can switch it on when you want, but it will not bother you. All the thrills of religion and none of the cost. Is the Life-Force the greatest achievement of wishful thinking the world has yet seen?”

Note: The quotations by C.S. Lewis that appear in this essay are from his *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952).

Chapter 19: Peter Berger (1929-2017): A Rumor of Angels

Peter Berger was a modern sociologist, yet his writings show an excellent understanding of philosophy and philosophical reasoning. In his book *A Rumor of Angels* Berger argues that many aspects of Humankind's (that is, our) experience point to a reality that transcends the reality in which Naturalists believe. (According to philosopher David Stewart, "Naturalism can be generally defined as the philosophical view that nature, or physical reality, can be explained on its own terms, without recourse to any transcendent or 'supernatural' reality.") Berger, of course, argues against Naturalism on the basis of human experience.

The argument from ordering

In his chapter titled "Theological Possibilities: Starting With Man," Berger begins with what he calls the "argument from ordering." One aspect of Humankind's experience is that "reality is 'in order,' 'all right,' 'as it should be.'" Child psychologists have even stated that faith in the order of the universe is necessary for the maturation of the individual. As Berger points out, "every ordering gesture is a signal of transcendence."

To illustrate this point, Berger uses a vivid example. A child wakes up in the middle of the night, afraid and crying. Any good mother hearing her child cry will go to it and comfort it, saying the equivalent of "Don't be afraid — everything is in order, everything is all right." And, the mother hopes, the child will be reassured by its mother and fall asleep again.

Berger asks, Did the mother lie to her child? If the Naturalists are correct, we will die eventually and there will be no afterlife. If that is correct, then the mother did lie to her child. In Berger's vivid words, "If there is no other world, then the ultimate truth about this one is that eventually it will kill the child as it will kill his mother." After all, death in this world is not optional.

Berger's argument from ordering consists of a series of arguments that go like this:

First, Berger gives a brief outline of the argument he wishes to make:

> In the observable human propensity to order reality there is an intrinsic impulse to give cosmic scope to this order, an impulse that implies not only that human order in some way corresponds to an order that transcends it, but that this transcendent order is of such a character that man can trust himself and his destiny to it.

The series of arguments Berger uses to reach his conclusion are these:

> P1: "There is a variety of human roles that represent this conception of order [described in the passage quoted above], but the most fundamental is the parental role. Every parent (or, at any rate, every parent who loves his child) takes upon himself the representation of a universe that is ultimately in order and ultimately trustworthy."
>
> P2: "This representation can be justified only within a religious (strictly speaking a supernatural) frame of reference. In this frame of reference the natural world within which we are born, love, and die is not the only world, but only the foreground of another world in which love is not annihilated in death and in which, therefore, the trust in the power of love to banish chaos is justified."

C: “Thus man’s ordering propensity implies a transcendent order, and each ordering gesture is a signal of this transcendence.”

Having drawn this important conclusion, Berger continues with his series of arguments. Note that since he has argued for the conclusion immediately above, the second premises of the following two arguments are not so implausible as they would seem if he had not argued for that conclusion.

P1: “Man’s ordering propensity implies a transcendent order, and each ordering gesture is a signal of this transcendence.”

P2: “The parental role is not based on a loving lie. On the contrary, it is a witness to the ultimate truth of man’s situation in reality.”

C: “In that case, it is perfectly possible … to analyze religion as a cosmic projection of the child’s experience of the protective order of parental love.”

The series of arguments continue:

P1: “It is perfectly possible … to analyze religion as a cosmic projection of the child’s experience of the protective order of parental love.”

P2: “What is projected is, however, itself a reflection, an imitation, of ultimate reality.”

C: “Religion, then, is not only … a projection of human order, but … the ultimately true vindication of human order.”

One word about these arguments. Berger would agree that the conclusions he reaches cannot be empirically proven; however, he does believe that in some aspects of Humankind’s everyday, non-mystical experience we have implications of a transcendent reality.

Berger believes that the ordering impulse of Humankind (and other impulses to be described soon) provide a starting point for a religion based on “inductive faith,” which he defines as “a religious process of thought that begins with facts of human experience.” Four other arguments provide starting points for inductive faith:

The argument from play,

The argument from hope,

The argument from damnation, and

The argument from humor.

The argument from play

Play is a “basic experience of man” and is found in cultures throughout the world. Using the research of Johan Huizinga, author of *Homo Ludens — A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Berger points out that in play we suspend some of the assumptions of the “serious world.” For example, the time in a game is different from the time of the real world (it takes much longer than 60 minutes to play a basketball game of four quarters of 15 minutes each). Also, in play, we find elements of joy and deathlessness.

Berger writes, “All men have experienced the deathlessness of childhood and we may assume that, even if only once or twice, all men have experienced transcendent joy in adulthood. Under the aspect of inductive faith, religion is the final vindication of childhood and of joy, and of all gestures that replicate these.”

The argument from hope

In describing this signal of transcendence, Berger points out that Humankind is “always oriented toward the future.” We have projects we wish to accomplish, and an “essential element of this ‘futurity’ of man is hope.” Empirically, we know of some men who risk death or say ‘no’ to death in order to accomplish their projects; as an example, Berger mentions “the artist who, against all odds and even in failing health, strives to finish his creative act” and “the man who risks his life to defend or save innocent victims of oppression.” Inductive faith finds in hope a signal of transcendence.

Berger writes, “Inductive faith acknowledges the omnipresence of death (and thus of the futility of hope) in ‘nature,’ but it also takes into account the intentions within our ‘natural’ experience of hope that point toward a ‘supernatural’ fulfillment.”

The argument from damnation

Some offenses cry out to heaven because they are so evil; in such cases, damnation is the only suitable punishment. As an example, Berger mentions the crimes of Adolf Eichmann, the subject of Hannah Arendt’s book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. According to *The Concise Columbia Encyclopedia*, “As head of the Gestapo’s Jewish section, he oversaw the maltreatment, deportation to concentration camps, and murder (especially by the use of gas chambers) of millions of Jews.” For such a person, even death after a long period of torture is not sufficient punishment for his crimes.

Berger writes that when dealing with the murderer of a child, the

> transcendent element manifests itself in two steps. First, our condemnation is absolute and certain. It does not permit modification or doubt … . In other words, we give the condemnation the status of a necessary and universal truth. … Second, the condemnation does not seem to exhaust its intrinsic intention in terms of this world alone. Deeds that cry out to heaven also cry out for hell. … No human punishment is ‘enough’ in the case of deeds as monstrous as these. These are deeds that demand not only condemnation, but *damnation* in the full religious meaning of the word — that is, the doer not only puts himself outside the community of men; he also separates himself in a final way from a moral order that transcends the human community, and thus invokes a retribution that is more than human.

The argument from humor

According to Berger, “*The comic reflects the imprisonment of the human spirit in the world.* This is why, as has been pointed out over and over since classical antiquity, comedy and tragedy are at root closely related.” However, although the human spirit is imprisoned in the world, comedy laughs at this imprisonment, thus implying that “this imprisonment is not final but will be overcome, and by this implication provides yet another signal of transcendence — in this instance in the form of an intimation of redemption. I would thus argue that humor, like childhood and play, can be seen as an ultimately religious vindication of joy.”

And so these are the signals of transcendence that Peter Berger has chosen to write about. Taken together, they point toward a transcendent reality; however, taken together, they are not a proof (at least in an empirical sense) of a transcendent reality.

Note: The quotations by Peter Berger that appear in this essay are from *A Rumor of Angels: Modern Society and the Rediscovery of the Supernatural*, by Peter Berger (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company Inc., 1969).

Chapter 20: William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879) and T.H. Huxley (1825-1895): Agnosticism — The Only Legitimate Response

Two people who believed that it is both illogical and immoral to believe in God are William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879) and Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), both of whom were agnostics and advocated suspending belief in God because the evidence is not sufficient either to prove or disprove the existence of God.

Clifford came up with a vivid parable to illustrate his point:

> A shipowner was about to send to sea an emigrant ship. He knew that she was old, not overwell built, and often had needed repairs. It had been suggested to him that possibly she was not seaworthy. He thought that perhaps he ought to have her overhauled and refitted, even though this should put him to great expense.
>
> Before the ship sailed, however, he said to himself that she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms, that it was idle to suppose that she would not come safely home from this trip also. He would put his trust in Providence, which could hardly fail to protect all these unhappy families that were leaving their fatherland to seek for better times elsewhere. He would dismiss ungenerous suspicions about the honesty of builders and contractors. In such ways he acquired a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was safe and seaworthy: he watched her departure with a light heart, and benevolent wishes for the success of the exiles in their new home; and he got his insurance money when she went down in mid-ocean and told no tales.

According to Clifford, the person who believes in God is like the shipowner. The evidence — according to Clifford — is not sufficient to justify belief in God; therefore, the only logical and moral thing to do is suspend belief in God. If you choose to believe without sufficient evidence, then you are like the shipowner who sent all those emigrant families to a watery grave and then collected the insurance.

Clifford was a very logical person — he was a mathematician as well as a philosopher — who believed that "it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, or to nourish belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation." And according to Clifford, everyone has the duty to be rational in his or her beliefs: "It is not only the leader of men, statesman, philosopher, or poet, that has this duty to mankind. Every rustic who delivers in the village alehouse his slow infrequent sentences, may help to kill or keep alive the fatal superstitions which clog his race. No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal *duty* of questioning all that we believe."

In many instances, I agree with Clifford. Before believing that crystals have the power to keep razor blades sharp, one ought to put the belief to the test — perhaps by performing an experiment in which one razor blade is housed in a crystal and another is not, and then seeing which blade — if any — stays sharp longer.

Huxley was also an agnostic; in fact, he invented the terms "agnostic" and "agnosticism," as he tells us in these paragraphs:

> When I reached intellectual maturity and began to ask myself whether I was an atheist, a theist, or a pantheist; a materialist or an idealist; a Christian or a freethinker; I found that the more I learned and reflected, the less ready was the answer; until, at last, I came to the conclusion that I had neither art nor part with any of these demonstrations, except the last. The one thing in which most of these good people were agreed was the one thing in which I differed from them. They were quite certain that they had attained a certain 'gnosis', — had, more or less successfully, solved the problem of existence; while I was quite sure I had not, and had a pretty strong conviction that the problem was insoluble. And, with Kant and Hume on my side, I could not think myself presumptuous in holding fast by that opinion. …
>
> So I took thought, and invented what I conceived to be the appropriate title of 'agnostic'. It came into my head as suggestively antithetic to the 'gnostic' of Church history, who professed to know so much about the very things of which I was ignorant; and I took the earliest opportunity of parading it at [the Metaphysical Society], to show that I, too, had a tail, like the other foxes.

Huxley agreed with Clifford that it is immoral to believe something without having adequate evidence to justify that belief. In fact, believing that holding an unjustified belief is immoral as well as illogical is what distinguishes agnosticism from skepticism.

Huxley tells us what he means by agnosticism:

> Agnosticism is properly described as a creed in so far as it expresses absolute faith in the validity of a principle which is as much ethical as intellectual. This principle may be stated in various ways, but they all amount to this: that it is wrong for a man to say that he is certain of the objective truth of any proposition unless he can produce evidence which logically justifies that certainty. This is what agnosticism asserts; and, in my opinion, it is all that is essential to agnosticism.

Fortunately, William James provides an adequate response to the beliefs of Clifford and Huxley, as you will discover when you read James' essay "The Will to Believe." The essay about James follows the next essay, which is about psychics.

Sources: The quotations come from two essays: Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief" and Huxley's "Agnosticism."

Chapter 21: David Bruce (Born 1954): In the Year 2525, All Heads will be Triangular

In the previous essay, I wrote this:

> William Kingdon Clifford was a very logical person — he was a mathematician as well as a philosopher — who believed that "it is wrong to believe on insufficient evidence, or to nourish belief by suppressing doubts and avoiding investigation." And according to Clifford, everyone has the duty to be rational in his or her beliefs: "It is not only the leader of men, statesman, philosopher, or poet, that has this duty to mankind. Every rustic who delivers in the village alehouse his slow infrequent sentences, may help to kill or keep alive the fatal superstitions which clog his race. No simplicity of mind, no obscurity of station, can escape the universal *duty* of questioning all that we believe."
>
> In many instances, I agree with Clifford. Before believing that crystals have the power to keep razor blades sharp, one ought to put the belief to the test — perhaps by performing an experiment in which one razor blade is housed in a crystal and another is not, and then seeing which blade — if any — stays sharp longer.

In this essay, I present some evidence that psychics are incorrect when they make predictions. I have always thought that looking at predictions by psychics is stupid because they have one important disadvantage: They are quickly forgotten, and so who knows whether they become true? Well, that's no longer a problem for me.

You see, I buy lots and lots of used books, and I purchased a 1975 edition of *The People's Almanac* by David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace. A compendium of the unusual, *The People's Almanac* devotes much space to psychics, including their predictions.

Let's see what the psychics predicted in 1975 about the then-future.

Predictions That Were Supposed to Become True in 1975-1980:

• New York will be uninhabitable. The water level will rise and eventually flood the city out of existence. (Predicted by Malcolm Bessent)

• From 1979 to 1982, the U.S. Government will control the mental activities of Americans through a "mind-shaping" program. All people who do not follow the line of thinking advocated by the Government will be brought before "Thought Courts" and be subject to "modified thought," or brainwashing. … Individual thought impressions will be filed like fingerprints with the Government. (Predicted by David Bubar)

• From 1975 to 1985, the devil will rule the Earth. (Predicted by Criswell)

• In 1978, Lake Michigan will be drained for land use. (Predicted by Criswell)

• By 1980, the internal combustion engine will be outlawed in all major American cities. (Predicted by Olof Jonsson)

• In the 1970s or early 1980s, the Red Chinese will use atomic bombs on the U.S. The bombs will do damage, but major cities will be protected by sophisticated detection. (Predicted by Ethel Johnson Meyers)

• Senator Edward Kennedy will be elected president of the United States in 1976. (Predicted by Alan Vaughan)

• There will be no presidential election in 1980 because a constitutional amendment will change the presidential 4-year-term to a single term of 5 or 6 years. (Predicted by Alan Vaughan)

Predictions That Were Supposed to Become True in 1981-1990:

• From May 11, 1988 to March 30, 1990, the Aphrodisiacal Era will flourish. Clouds of aphro-fragrance will float over the U.S. An aphrodisiac will also be put in water and heating systems. Sexual craziness will overcome the populace. Sex will be performed in the streets of Hollywood, and Florida will become a huge nudist camp. The Secretary of State will be caught in acts of perversion. The invention of an antidote will end the era. (Predicted by Criswell)

• In 1982, a dying planet named Bullanon will come so close to earth that it will affect earth's gravity, affecting the poles. It will also cause a 40-day snowstorm with ice, resulting in "white death." (Predicted by Criswell)

• In 1985, a Caucasian woman, called the Lady of Light, will become leader, 1st of the Orient, then of the world. Under her leadership, men will become slaves and women will hold the power. War will end; the world will become a near-paradise. (Predicted by Criswell)

• The U.S. will have its 1st woman President. (Predicted by Jeane Dixon)

• A comet will collide with the earth, causing huge tidal waves and mighty earthquakes. (Predicted by Jeane Dixon)

• A neo-Nazi group with some Hitlerian ideas will take over Germany, both East and West. This group will fight a war that will extend from Europe to the U.S. (Predicted by Irene Hughes)

• All major cities will ban private cars. Only medical and law enforcement personnel will be allowed to use cars, and those will be compact and electrically powered. (Predicted by Olof Jonsson)

• By 1986, one of every 3 children will be deformed in some way by radiation. (Predicted by Dr. N)

• In 1981, the U.S. will go to war with China. (Predicted by Alan Vaughan)

Were No Predictions Correct?

Several psychics predicted that people would become more concerned about the environment. Lest we be too impressed by this, let's remember that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, people were very concerned about the environment. After all, the first Earth Day was held in 1970, fully five years before *The People's Almanac* was printed.

My Prediction for Next Year

Next year, Americans will realize that psychics are full of digested food. Unfortunately, I think that my prediction has as much chance of becoming true as did the predictions listed above.

Chapter 22: William James (1842-1910): The Will to Believe

One subject of interest to philosophers is the relationship between faith and reason. Is it reasonable and justifiable to believe in God? Some people such as William Kingdon Clifford (1845-1879) and T.H. Huxley (1825-1895) argue that it is immoral to believe something without sufficient evidence. These people tend to regard statements such as “God exists” and “God is good” as scientific hypotheses. One should examine the evidence, then on the basis of the evidence decide whether the hypotheses are true or false.

A philosopher who believes that we can have legitimate belief in God despite agnosticism is the American psychologist and philosopher William James. In his essay “The Will to Believe,” James provides a response to the agnosticism of Clifford and Huxley.

Definitions

As many good philosophers do, James begins his argument by defining terms important to his argument:

1. A hypothesis: This is any thesis proposed for us to believe in. For example, God exists.

2. A live vs. a dead hypothesis: A live hypothesis is a thesis that you have a chance of believing. For example, there is life on other planets. A dead hypothesis is one which you have no chance of believing. For example, your teacher can turn invisible and fly.

3. An option: An option is a choice between hypotheses. For example, either God exists or God does not exist.

4. A living vs. a dead option: A living option is one in which both hypotheses are live (possible for you to believe). For example, this Saturday evening you will either study or see a movie. A dead option is one in which one or both hypotheses are dead (not possible for you to believe). For example, this Saturday you will either study or fly to the moon.

5. A forced vs. an avoidable option: A forced option is one in which you are forced to choose between the two hypotheses. For example, this Saturday evening you will either study or not study. An avoidable option is one in which you can choose a third alternative. For example, this Saturday you will either study or see a movie. You have a third alternative: You could go to a theatrical production.

6. A momentous vs. a trivial option: A momentous option has three characteristics: The opportunity is unique, the stake is significant, and the decision is irreversible if it later prove unwise. For example, suppose an explorer asks you to ask to climb Mount Everest with her this summer — all expenses paid. Would you go?

In contrast, a trivial option is one in which the opportunity is not unique, the stake is insignificant, or the decision is reversible if it later prove unwise. For example, you are watching TV and a commercial comes on imploring you to buy a salad shooter.

7. A genuine option: A genuine option is live, forced, and momentous.

Investigation of Options

Now we will investigate some options to find out what kind they are:

1. To go to Antarctica or Moscow over spring break: This is a dead option for most USAmerican students. Chances are, few USAmerican students have a chance to go to either Antarctica or Moscow over spring break.

2. To go to Florida or California over spring break: This is a live option for many USAmerican students. Many USAmerican students could go to either place over spring break. However, this is an avoidable option. A student could choose to go to New York instead.

3. To buy this pair of pants or not: This is a live option for most of you. If you see a nice pair of pants in a department store window, you could buy the pants or not. In addition, this is a forced option. Either you buy the pants or you don't. However, this is a trivial option. The opportunity is not unique: You can buy pants anytime. The stakes are not significant: Who cares a lot about a pair of pants? Also, if your decision later prove unwise, you can reverse it. If you buy the pants and they don't fit, you can bring them back to the store. Or, if you decided not to buy the pants, later you can come back to the store and buy them.

4. To operate on skin cancer or not: Now things are getting interesting. Suppose your physician tells you have a choice: either get the operation, or die of skin cancer. You get a second opinion, and the second opinion is the same as the first: either get the operation, or die of skin cancer. This option is live, it is forced, and it is momentous. However, in this case, we can examine the evidence, and the evidence very clearly tells us what we ought to do: Have the operation. Remember what Viktor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, said: If unnecessary suffering is avoidable, avoid it. Don't die of skin cancer if you don't have to.

James' Thesis

However, not every genuine option is one where the evidence about what we ought to believe or do is as clearcut as in the option about being operated on for skin cancer. For those cases where the evidence is ambiguous, James defends a certain thesis:

> The thesis I defend is, briefly stated, this: *Our passional [emotional] nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, "Do not decide, but leave the question open," is itself a passional decision, — just like deciding yes or no, — and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth.*

In other words, if the evidence is there, believe it. However, if the evidence does not clearly support one hypothesis over the other hypothesis, then we must have recourse to our emotional nature.

Other Genuine Options

This is a genuine option:

To be benevolent or not to be benevolent: This is a genuine option. It is living, forced, and momentous. It is momentous because the opportunity is unique (the opportunity for a particular good deed may not come again), the stakes are significant (whether or not you will feel guilt later in life), and the decision is not reversible if it later prove unwise (I wish I could go back in time and erase some of the bad deeds I have done).

The Religious Option

The religious option — to believe or not to believe in God — is also a genuine option. It is living, forced, and momentous. It is momentous because the opportunity is unique (we have only one life in which to choose), the stakes are significant (the kind of life you will lead in the next life, should an afterlife exist), and the decision is not reversible if it later prove unwise (after you die, it's too late to change your mind).

According to James, since the evidence on the question of the existence of God is ambiguous and inconclusive, we can have recourse to our emotional nature when deciding which hypothesis to believe. James decides to believe in God because he is unwilling to lose out on the benefit of believing in God, should God exist. Therefore, James rejects the rule that we ought not to believe something without sufficient evidence. As James puts it, "… *a rule of thinking which would absolutely prevent me from acknowledging certain kinds of truth if those kinds of truth were really there would be an irrational rule.*"

The agnostic, as represented by Clifford and Huxley, would say about the religious option that we ought not to believe in God, that the evidence is insufficient to show that God exists, and that therefore it is immoral to believe in God.

However, James states that both Clifford and Huxley fall back on their passional (or emotional) natures when they suspend judgment. After all, the evidence is insufficient to show that God does not exist. Therefore, Clifford and Huxley are also acting immorally when they choose not to believe in God.

Note: The quotations by William James that appear in this essay are from his "The Will to Believe," in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910).

Chapter 23: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963): On Obstinacy in Belief

In his essay “On Obstinacy in Belief,” C.S. Lewis argues that religious beliefs are not like scientific hypotheses. In particular, he is concerned with the nature of belief in God after that belief has been established and the believer is involved in a personal relationship with God. Lewis believes that the initial decision to believe in God is based on evidence, including the evidence of history, religious experience, and authority. He also believes that one may continue to believe in the goodness of God despite such negative evidence as the existence of evil.

Of course, Lewis believes that the balance of positive and negative evidence supports belief in God. In his essay, he mentions and argues against a number of arguments against belief in God, and then he states, “I will never believe that an error [the ‘error’ of believing in God] against which so many and various defensive weapons have been necessary was, from the outset, wholly lacking in plausibility. All this ‘post haste and rummage in the land’ obviously implies a respectable enemy.”

Lewis begins his paper by talking about two kinds of belief other people have written about:

> 1) The scientific attitude toward belief, in which the scientist carefully considers the evidence before him, and
>
> 2) The Christian attitude toward belief, in which it is praiseworthy to believe even in the face of negative evidence.

In his essay, Lewis will show that the scientist and the Christian are much closer in their attitudes toward belief than they might at first suppose. Before doing this, though, Lewis attempts to clear up some misunderstandings about belief. He writes, “Scientists are mainly concerned not with believing things but with finding things out. And no one, to the best of my knowledge, uses the word ‘believe’ about things they have found out.” According to Lewis, a scientific hypothesis is not a belief. To find out how a scientist really regards belief, we can’t look at the scientist in his laboratory; instead, Lewis writes, we must look at the scientist during his leisure hours.

In analyzing the verb “believe,” Lewis writes that it expresses two degrees of opinion. Often, it expresses a weak degree of opinion, as in talking about the weather: “I believe it will rain today.” If it doesn’t rain today, I doubt if the person will be much upset (unless the person is a farmer suffering from a drought).

There are two cases in which the degree of opinion of “believe” is strong. One is belief in a person. Someone may tell you that your best friend has just robbed a liquor store. You, based on your opinion of your friend’s character, exclaim, “I don’t believe it!” The other case in which the degree of opinion of “believe” is strong is when a Christian says, “I believe God exists” and “I believe God is good.”

In these two cases, Lewis says, “We are speaking of belief and disbelief in the strongest degree but not of knowledge. Belief, in this sense, seems to me to be assent to a proposition which we think so overwhelmingly probable that there is a psychological exclusion of doubt, though not a logical exclusion of doubt.”

Other beliefs besides religious beliefs are this strong. Beliefs about our friends and family are often like this. Consider this case supposed by Lewis: To go back to the scientist, if someone were to suggest that the scientist's wife were unfaithful, we would consider him a good man if he resisted the suggestion. If, instead, he were to set a series of traps by which to discover whether his wife was faithful or unfaithful, we would consider him blameworthy: He ought to have had more faith in his wife. (This is not to say that all wives — or husbands — are faithful; at some point an accumulation of negative evidence could make it ridiculous to believe in a wife's — or a husband's — fidelity.)

Religious beliefs are even stronger than the faith that men ought to have in their wives. As Lewis writes, "I am far from suggesting that the case I have supposed is exactly parallel to the Christian obstinacy. … the Christians seem to praise an adherence to the original belief which holds out against any evidence whatever. I must now try to show why such praise is in fact a logical conclusion from the original belief itself."

To do so, Lewis writes about a number of situations in which someone is asked to have faith in us; these situations are analogous to the situation of the human being who is asked to believe in God. As Lewis writes, "There are times when we can do all that a fellow creature needs if only he will trust us." For example:

- To get a dog's paw out of a trap, we may have to push the paw further into the trap.
- To extract a thorn from a child's finger, we may have to hurt the finger in order to get the finger to stop hurting.
- To teach a boy to swim or to rescue someone who can't swim, we have to get them to believe that the water can support the human body.
- To get a beginning mountain climber safely over a nasty spot, we may have to ask him to climb higher so that we can get him down.

In order for these things to be done, the other person must have faith in us. Such faith may be based only on the way we look or the sound of our voice, but Lewis points out, "No one blames us for demanding such faith. No one blames them for giving it."

In these analogies, God is like the person helping the dog, child, swimmer, and mountain climber. As Lewis writes, "From this it is a strictly logical conclusion that the behaviour which was appropriate to them will be appropriate to us, only much more so" in the case of believing in God.

Of course, there is some evidence against the propositions "God exists" and "God is good." The Christian is asked to keep believing despite this evidence. But Lewis writes that two facts make this tolerable:

1) Along with the negative evidence, there is positive evidence.

2) "We think we can see already why, if our original belief is true, such trust beyond the evidence, against much apparent evidence, has to be demanded of us. … We believe that His intention is to create a certain personal relation between Himself and us, a relation that is really *sui generis* [of its own kind] but analogically describable in terms of filial or erotic love."

In conclusion, Lewis believes that Christian belief is justifiable. Christian belief uses the "logic of personal relations," since the Christian has a personal relationship with God. Christian belief does not use "the logic of speculative thought" in which a person tests hypotheses to see if they are true and to arrive finally at knowledge.

Note: The quotations by C.S. Lewis that appear in this essay are from his "On Obstinacy in Belief," in *They Asked for a Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, Ltd., 1962).

Chapter 24: Blaise Pascal (1623-1662): Belief Without Proofs

Blaise Pascal was a Frenchman who lived from 1623-1662. As a fifteen-year-old, he published monographs on conic sections. According to the *Concise Columbia Encyclopedia*, Pascal also "founded the modern theory of probability, discovered the properties of the cycloid, and contributed to the advance of differential calculus." After having a mystical experience on November 23, 1654, he began collecting notes for a book in which he would attempt to convince non-believers to believe in God. He died before his book was completed; however, his notes were published under the title of *Pensées* (*Thoughts*) in 1670. This essay is based on some of Pascal's notes.

To begin, Pascal divided men into three groups: "There are but three classes of persons: those who have found God and serve Him; those who have not found God but do diligently seek Him; and those who have not found God, and live without seeking Him. The first are happy and wise. The second are unhappy, but wise. The third are unhappy and fools."

For Pascal, only the believers are happy; everyone else is unhappy. Of the three groups, Pascal had respect for those who are searching for God; however, he had no respect for those who have not found God and are not searching for God.

Indeed, Pascal makes fun of those who say they have searched for God but have not found him. He says that these people spend a few hours reading Scripture and ask a few questions of an ecclesiastic, then they boast that they "in vain consulted books and men."

According to Pascal, "It is a sorry evil to be in doubt. It is an indispensable duty to seek when we are in doubt. Therefore he who doubts and neglects to seek to dispel these doubts, is at once in a sorry plight and guilty of great perversity. If he is calm and contented in his doubt, if he frankly avows it, if he boasts of it, if he makes it the subject of vanity and delight, I can find no terms with which to describe him."

In attempting to move people from the third group (unhappy and fools) to the second (unhappy, but wise because they are seeking God), Pascal first admits that arguments based on natural theology will not be convincing to these groups. After one has found God, then one will find proof of God's existence in everything that exists; unfortunately, if one has not yet found God, one will find that evidence inconclusive.

Pascal places Man in perspective: Man is in between the infinitely large and the infinitely small. Compared to an atom, Man is very large; compared to the universe, Man is very small. Yet there is something special about Man, for he has intelligence. In a famous passage, Pascal writes:

> Man is but a reed, weakest in nature, but a reed which thinks. A thinking reed. It needs not that the whole universe should arm to crush him. A vapor, a drop of water is enough to kill him. But were the universe to kill him, man would still be more noble than that which has slain him, because he knows that he dies, and that the universe has the better of him. The universe knows nothing of this.

Pascal states that all men desire happiness. In this, he is in agreement with Aristotle. But whereas Aristotle believed that a man could become happy by fulfilling his potential, Pascal believes that men find happiness only in God.

Now that he has set the scene, Pascal is ready to make his famous wager, in which he proposes to move people from group three to group two. He asks the unbeliever to consider the stakes of believing in God versus not believing in God. If one believes in God and God exists, then one wins eternal happiness; if one believes in God and God does not exist, then one loses a finite amount of time — time spent searching for God. On the other hand, if one does not believe in God and God does exist, then one loses infinite happiness; if one does not believe in God and God does not exist, then one wins only a finite amount of time.

To put this wager in perspective, imagine that someone offers to make a wager with you. You will bet on the flip of a coin — if you win, you will win a million dollars, and if you lose, you will lose only a dollar. Who would not make this wager?

Of course, this wager seems crudely materialistic, based as it is on what you will win or lose. However, remember that Pascal directs this wager to the third group: the unhappy fools. Pascal feels certain that if he can move these people into the second group, he can then help them move into the first group of the happy wise who have found God and are presumably interested in more than they can win by finding God.

How does Pascal propose to move people in the second group into the first group? Here his advice appears to me sound. You will find faith by imitating those who already have faith in God. (Here again we see the influence of Aristotle, who says that one can acquire moral virtue by imitating those who already have moral virtue.)

Pascal writes,

> Now what will happen to you if you take this side in the religious wager? You will be trustworthy, honorable, humble, grateful, generous, friendly, sincere, and true. You will no longer have those poisoned pleasures, glory and luxury; but you will have other pleasures. I tell you that you will gain this life; at each step you will see so much certainty of gain, so much nothingness in what you stake, that you will know at last you have wagered on a certainty, an infinity, for which you have risked nothing.

This is sound advice. If you want to be a certain kind of person, act as if you are already that kind of person. If you want to be courageous, act as if you are already courageous, and eventually you will become courageous. If you want to be a certain weight, act as if you are already that weight; for example, if you want to lose weight, act the way a slim person acts — don't overeat, and do exercise. Eventually, you will achieve your desired weight.

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis briefly tells a story about a person who had to wear a mask that made him look much nicer than he really was. When he finally took the mask off, he discovered that his face had grown to fit the mask, and so he really had become nice-looking.

Note: The material this essay is based on comes from *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*, by Alburey Castell, Donald Borchert, and Arthur Zucker. Their material came from Pascal's *Thoughts*, but the selection of thoughts and the order in which they are discussed involves interpretation by Castell, Borchert, and Zucker.

Chapter 25: Paul Tillich (1886-1965): Faith as Ultimate Concern

Paul Tillich's concept of faith as ultimate concern is fascinating. According to Tillich, "Faith is the state of being ultimately concerned: the dynamics of faith are the dynamics of man's ultimate concern."

All of us have many concerns. Certainly we are concerned with such things as acquiring food, shelter, and clothing. However, we have a concern that is more important to us than any of the other concerns. An ultimate concern demands complete surrender and promises complete fulfillment.

An ultimate concern can have either true or false ultimacy. If our ultimate concern is not worthy of being our ultimate concern, if it is not genuinely ultimate, then it has false ultimacy and it is idolatrous, according to Tillich. There are many examples of idolatrous ultimate concerns in the world.

An example of a person whose ultimate concern was idolatrous can be found in baseball great Ty Cobb, who was the first player to be voted into baseball's Hall of Fame. Cobb was a racist who, according to a review by Allen Barra in *Newsday* of Al Stump's book *Cobb: A Biography*, "once beat a black groundskeeper because the man tried to shake his hand." Cobb died rich, but alone.

According to Barra, "At [Cobb's] funeral, none of his three children, two ex-wives or hundreds of former teammates showed up.

"*Cobb* is a monument to a man who achieved unqualified success in the furious and unrelenting pursuit of goals that proved, finally, to be utterly trivial."

Other idolatrous ultimate concerns include a total commitment to nationalism. When Nazi Germany was defeated, propaganda minister Paul Joseph Goebbels killed himself — and his children. Killing himself may be understandable, since Goebbels would certainly have been found guilty of war crimes and almost certainly would have been condemned to death. However, Goebbels and his wife did not need to kill their children. They apparently killed their children because they did not want them raised in a country that was not Nazi Germany.

It is possible to change one's ultimate concern. Ebenezer Scrooge is the main protagonist of Charles Dickens' short novel *A Christmas Carol*. Early in the short novel, Scrooge's ultimate concern is money. A miser, Scrooge likes money for its own sake, not for anything money can buy. Scrooge does not even use his money to make his life comfortable. He prefers to bask in the warmth of his bank book rather than in the warmth of a roaring fire. (Scrooge's fires are small, as fuel costs money.)

However, in *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge changes his ultimate concern to one that is truly ultimate. He learns to use his money to relieve human suffering — something much more worthy than simply hanging on to one's money for the sake of having money.

It is possible to find people in real life with ultimate concerns that are truly ultimate. Lives that are devoted to God can show this through a devotion to service and to inquiry.

A life of service is devoted to helping other people. An example of a person devoting himself to a life of service is D. Cordell Brown, a Protestant minister who has cerebral palsy. After becoming a minister, he began to look for a way to serve other people, and he decided that services for adults with handicaps were much needed. Therefore, he took his farm in Warsaw, Ohio, and turned it into Camp Echoing Hills, a camp for people with handicaps. Next, he started an adult residence for adults with handicaps at Echoing Hills, and since then has started many other handicapped adult residences in Ohio, including Echoing Meadows in Athens, Ohio (home of Ohio University). Brown has helped and is helping many thousands of adults and children in wheelchairs during his lifetime.

A life of inquiry is devoted to the acquisition of knowledge. In Athens, Ohio, there are numerous examples of lives of inquiry; all you have to do is to look at the professors (and many of the students). One example is Dr. Donald Borchert, retired chair of the Ohio University Philosophy Department. He has several degrees, and he has written several books. Dr. Borchert specializes in Ethics and Philosophy of Religion. In addition to devoting his life to inquiry, Dr. Borchert has devoted his life to service, as is shown by the philosophy courses he taught.

According to Tillich, “Faith as ultimate concern is an act of the total personality. It happens in the center of the personal life and includes all its elements. Faith is the most centered act of the human mind.” In addition, he writes, “Faith is a total and centered act of the personal self, the act of unconditional, infinite and ultimate concern.”

Tillich also believes that your ultimate concern provides a core of meaning — a unity and focus — to your personality. Without an ultimate concern, you would drift aimlessly through life. Lives with an ultimate concern that has true ultimacy have a resonance that is lacking in other lives.

Your ultimate concern gives meaning to your life and takes all of your effort. When you have an ultimate concern, you have a reason to get up in the morning. People who are devoting their lives to service and to inquiry always have something to do. There are always people who need help and always more books to read.

If you should not have an ultimate concern, your life would have no core of meaning. For an example of someone without an ultimate concern, we can look at the fictional character Mersault in the beginning of Albert Camus’ novel *The Stranger*. Mersault lives for the moment only and doesn’t care strongly about anything; he wanders aimlessly through life without thinking much about anything.

We should be aware that a person may pay lip service to one ultimate concern, but in reality have another ultimate concern. Thus, someone may say that serving God is their ultimate concern, but an objective observer looking at this person’s life may say that money is actually this person’s ultimate concern. (Comedian Bill Hicks and his friends used to watch a televangelist and bet on how quickly the televangelist would stop talking about God and start talking about dollars.)

Here is a question for you to think about: What is *your* ultimate concern?

Note: The quotations by Paul Tillich that appear in this essay are from his *Dynamics of Faith* (Volume 10 of the World Perspective Series, edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen. Copyright 1957 by Paul Tillich).

RELIGIOUS LANGUAGE

Chapter 26: A.J. Ayer (1910-1989) and Frederick Copleston (1907-1994): A Discussion on Religious Language

We will now address a difficult topic about language. Assuming that there is a God, we wish to talk about that God. The Judeo-Christian conception of God is that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent. In addition, God created the spatio-temporal universe and is therefore outside space and time. (This sentence illustrates the difficulty of speaking about God: Already I have used a spatial term — "outside" cannot be applied to God if indeed God is not a part of the spatio-temporal universe.) In fact, Christian author C.S. Lewis suggests that God does not perceive time as we do. God sees time as a whole: past, present, and future. We finite humans, however, are "stuck in time" (to use Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.'s phrase), and so we can see only the present.

Because of the differences between us finite humans and the infinite God, two questions arise:

1) Does language function differently when we talk about God?

2) How are we to distinguish true statements about God from false statements about God?

Two philosophers engaged in a meaningful discussion about religious language in a 1949 broadcast on the BBC. The philosophers were A.J. Ayer, an atheist, and Frederick Copleston, a Jesuit priest. Ayer argued that religious language is not meaningful because it cannot be verified. Copleston, however, argued that religious language is meaningful although it is not literal.

A.J. Ayer and the Analysis of Sentences

A.J. Ayer was much influenced by the logical positivists, who analyzed sentences to determine what logical type they belonged to. We will analyze these sentences:

1. The person reading this page is six feet tall.

This sentence is meaningful. It is a cognitive sentence, which means it bears information. In addition, it is the kind of cognitive sentence that is known as synthetic, which means that it can be verified through the use of our senses. To verify the sentence, you would measure yourself and see if in fact you are six feet tall. If you are six feet tall, you have verified the sentence. If you are not six feet tall, you have falsified the sentence; that is, you have shown that the sentence is false.

2. Life forms exist on planets circling Alpha Centauri.

This sentence is also meaningful. It is also cognitive and synthetic. One thing to notice about this sentence, however, is that it is verifiable only in principle. (We can't verify the sentence right now.) If we go to Alpha Centauri and search for life on its planets, we will be able to verify the sentence if it is true and falsify it if it is false. Ayer regards sentences that are check-up-able (that means, able to be checked up on to see whether they are true or false) as meaningful.

3. All squares have four sides.

This is another meaningful sentence. It is cognitive because it bears information. However, it is not synthetic because we have to verify it by means other than the use of our senses. (Geometric shapes such as squares do not appear in the empirical world. A square you draw will not have perfectly straight lines and will not have perfect 90-degree angles.) In this case, we verify the sentence through an analysis of the terms used in the sentence. Sentences of this type are called analytic sentences. Another example of an analytic sentence is "All bachelors are unmarried males."

4. Oh, it's wonderful to be in love!

5. Don't slam the door!

6. What time is it?

None of the above sentences is cognitive because none of them bears information; nonetheless, all of them are very useful in real life. The first sentence is exclamatory (it makes an exclamation), the second is imperative (it gives an order), and the third is interrogative (it asks a question).

7. I have as a friend a shy little elf that disappears whenever anyone tries to check up on him.

Now we come to a very interesting sentence. Suppose I make the claim that I have as a friend a shy little elf that disappears whenever anyone tries to check up on him. If you try to see him, my shy little elf disappears. (As everyone knows, shy little elves have magical powers. After all, have you ever seen a shy little elf that didn't have magical powers?) If you try to touch him, he moves out of your way. If you try to smell him, he quietly sprays the room with air freshener.

How many of you believe that I really have as a friend a shy little elf? Of course, none of you (except possibly a few people with bumper stickers that say, I brake for Hobbits). The reason you don't believe the claim in this sentence is because the claim is un-check-up-able: There is no way to verify the claim if it is true, or to falsify it if it is false.

This, of course, leads to Ayer's main point about the importance of the principle of verification, which he states in a loose form in this way: "… namely that to be significant a statement must be either on the one hand a formal statement — one that I should call analytic — or on the other hand empirically testable."

8. The Prime Minister of England is good.

Here we have another interesting sentence. This sentence certainly appears to be meaningful; however, verification of this sentence can be difficult because people's opinions of the goodness of the Prime Minister vary enormously. (Of course, liberals and conservatives will have vastly different opinions about the current Prime Minister.) In Ayer's opinion, this statement merely expresses approval of the Prime Minister of England. (Interested students can study Ayer's ethical theory known as Emotivism.)

9. God exists.

10. God loves us.

Here we have two more interesting sentences. Once again, it is difficult to see how these sentences can be verified. Philosophers — and other people — disagree about whether these sentences are true or false. (Some philosophers — but not Ayer — argue that these sentences are analytic.) Ayer believed that these sentences are not empirically verifiable and so they are not synthetic. Since in Ayer's opinion these sentences are neither analytic nor synthetic, he believed that they are not cognitive and therefore these sentences are as much nonsense as the sentence "I have as a friend a shy little elf that disappears whenever anyone tries to check up on him." According to Ayer, the statements "God exists" and "God loves us" are not meaningful.

Copleston's Criticisms of the Principle of Verification

However, Copleston made several objections against Ayer's principle of verification:

1) Copleston pointed out that the principle of verification seems to have been specifically formulated in order to rule out the possibility of such a metaphysical entity as God. However, this means that the logical positivists who influenced Ayer made an assumption about reality when they formulated the principle of verification. In Copleston's words:

> If you say that any factual statement, in order to be meaningful, must be verifiable, and if you mean, by verifiable, verifiable by sense experience, then surely you are presupposing that all reality is given in sense experience.

2) Copleston also pointed out that some statements seem to be meaningful even though they are not in principle verifiable. For example, isn't the following statement meaningful even though it is not in principle verifiable?

> Atomic warfare will take place, and it will blot out the entire human race.

This statement can never be verified if it is true because no human being will be alive to verify it.

3) Can the principle of verification itself be verified? Copleston said: No, it can't. In Copleston's words, the principle of verification

> must be, I should have thought, either a proposition or not a proposition. If it is a proposition it must be, on your premises, either a tautology [this is what a true analytic sentence is] or an empirical hypothesis. If it's a tautology, then no conclusion follows as to metaphysics; if it's an empirical hypothesis, then the principle itself would require verification. But the principle of verification cannot itself be verified. If, however, the principle is not a proposition, it should be, on your premises, meaningless.

Note: The quotations by A.J. Ayer and Frederick Copleston in this essay are from a transcription of a 1949 broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation.

Chapter 27: Antony Flew (1923-2010), R.M. Hare (1919-2002), and Basil Mitchell (1917-2011): The Falsification Debate

Philosophers take language seriously because it is so useful in thinking. Accordingly, philosophers have studied the nature of religious language to find out whether it is meaningful, and if it is meaningful, in what way. After all, although we may talk about the intelligence of God, we know that the word "intelligent," as applied to God, is different from the same word applied to human beings because God's intelligence — if He exists — is so much greater than the intelligence that human beings have.

Antony Flew

One philosopher who has concluded that statements such as "God exists" and "God is good" are meaningless is the British philosopher Antony Flew. In concluding this, Flew makes use of the concepts of verification and falsification.

Statements can be of two kinds: logical or empirical. Examples of logical statements include "All bachelors are male" and "All squares have five corners." The first logical statement is true, of course, because by definition all bachelors are male. The second logical statement is false, of course, because by definition all squares have four corners, not five. We were able to check up on these statements to find out whether they are true or false; therefore, they are meaningful.

The second kind of statement is empirical; for example, "Grass is green," or "It is raining outside." We can check up on the truth of these statements simply by looking at grass or looking outside to see if it is raining. If in fact it is raining outside, the statement about rain has been verified; if in fact it is not raining outside, the statement about rain has been falsified. To be meaningful, an empirical statement has to be check-up-able in principle. For example, someday we will be able to check to see whether the statement "Subterranean life forms exist on Mars" is true or false.

Many philosophers have believed that unless a statement can be falsified, it is meaningless. For example, let's suppose that I tell you that I have a very special lectern. Under it lives a shy elf that disappears whenever somebody tries to check up on him. No matter what you do to try to check up on the existence of the elf — for example, try to take the elf's photograph — the elf disappears and so you have no proof of the elf's existence. You can't see the elf because he's shy and disappears whenever someone tries to look at him. You can't hear him because he's a quiet elf. You can't smell him because he's a clean elf who takes a bath twice a day. You can't taste or touch him because if you stick your tongue or hand out at him he disappears.

Surely, you would say that there is no shy elf living under my lectern because there is no way to falsify the elf's existence. You would believe there is no shy elf because no matter how hard you try to prove the elf does not exist (that is, falsify its existence), I would continue to affirm that the elf disappeared because he is shy and does not want to be checked up on.

Antony Flew believes that statements such as "God exists" and "God is good" are similar to my statement about the shy elf. To illustrate his belief about the first statement, he tells a parable that was developed by the philosopher John Wisdom (1904-1993).

> Once upon a time two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, “Some gardener must tend this plot”. The other disagrees, “There is no gardener”. So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. “But perhaps he is an invisible gardener”. So they set up a barbed-wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells’ *The Invisible Man* could be both smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire ever betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. Yet still the Believer is not convinced. “But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves”. At last the Skeptic despairs, “But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener or even from no gardener at all?”

Flew points out that when we say that “God exists,” we seem to be making a statement; however, he believes that we are not really stating anything. At one time, the sentence “God exists” may have been stating something, but when we qualify God’s existence (by saying He is invisible, etc.) so much that we cannot falsify His existence, the sentence dies “the death of a thousand qualifications.”

Flew also points out that the statement “God loves us” appears to be unfalsifiable. After all, in the 20st century occurred the Holocaust, two world wars, the firebombing of Dresden, the dropping of two atomic bombs, several political assassinations, an enormous number of rapes and murders, many deaths of very young children from cancer, etc., yet people continue to believe that God loves us.

According to Flew’s logic, if the statements “God exists” and “God loves us” are unfalsifiable, then they are just as much nonsense as the unfalsifiable sentence “I have a shy elf that disappears whenever someone tries to check up on him.”

Therefore, Flew asks: “Just what would have to happen not merely (morally and wrongly) to tempt but also (logically and rightly) to entitle us to say ‘God does not love us’ or even ‘God does not exist’? I therefore put … the simple central questions, ‘What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God?’”

R.M. Hare

R.M. Hare’s response to Antony Flew is to relate a parable of his own: A parable in which he points out that we interpret the world in which we live through using a set of unverifiable, unfalsifiable assumptions which Hare calls *bliks*. Hare’s parable is this:

> A certain lunatic is convinced that all dons [English university professors] want to murder him. His friends introduce him to all the mildest and most respectable dons that they can find, and after each of them has retired, they say, ‘You see, he doesn’t really want to murder you; he spoke to you in a most cordial manner; surely you are convinced now?’ But the lunatic replies ‘Yes, but that was only his diabolical cunning; he’s really plotting against me the whole time, like the rest of them; I know it I tell you.’ However many kindly dons are produced, the reaction is the same.

Of course, this person is a lunatic; however, Hare says, all of us have *bliks*. Hare's example of a *blik* that many of us have is, "The car we are driving is safe." Hare — and I — don't know much about the steering mechanisms of cars. We simply assume that the car is going to steer properly when we drive it. (Of course, we do take the car to the garage for checkups occasionally.)

Another example of a *blik* that many people have concerns flying. Many people are afraid of flying, no matter how many statistics you cite showing the safety of flight.

Now we need to ask this: Is belief in the existence of a loving God a *blik*? If so, then no amount of evidence either for the existence of God or against the existence of God will sway believers or unbelievers. (If belief in the existence of a loving God is a *blik*, then belief in the nonexistence of a loving God is also a *blik*.) The question is not scientific, and so the scientific concepts of verifiability and falsifiability do not apply to it.

Basil Mitchell

Basil Mitchell contributes to the debate by relating yet another parable. This is the Parable of the Stranger:

> In time of war in an occupied country, a member of the resistance meets one night a stranger who deeply impresses him. They spend that night together in conversation. The Stranger tells the partisan that he himself is on the side of the resistance — indeed that he is in command of it, and urges the partisan to have faith in him no matter what happens. The partisan is utterly convinced at this meeting of the Stranger's sincerity and constancy and undertakes to trust him.
>
> They never meet in conditions of intimacy again. But sometimes the Stranger is seen helping members of the resistance, and the partisan is grateful and says to his friends, "He is on our side."
>
> Sometimes he is seen in the uniform of the police handing over patriots to the occupying power. On these occasions his friends murmur against him: but the partisan still says, "He is on our side." He still believes that, in spite of appearances, the Stranger did not deceive him. Sometimes he asks the Stranger for help and receives it. He is then thankful. Sometimes he asks and does not receive it. Then he says, "The Stranger knows best." Sometimes his friends, in exasperation, say "Well, what *would* he have to do for you to admit that you were wrong and that he is not on our side?" But the partisan refuses to answer. He will not consent to put the Stranger to the test. And sometimes his friends complain, "Well, if *that's* what you mean by his being on our side, the sooner he goes over to the other side the better."

In this parable, of course, the Stranger is analogous to God. Mitchell's parable reminds me very much of C.S. Lewis' "logic of personal relations." The partisan achieves a personal relationship with the Stranger, and because of that personal relationship, believes in the Stranger even when appearances are against him. In the same way, if you have a friend who is accused of a crime, you may continue to believe in your friend even though appearances are against him.

Mitchell points out that we can treat statements such as "God loves us" in

three different ways: (1) As provisional hypotheses to be discarded if experience tells against them; (2) As significant articles of faith; (3) As vacuous formulae (expressing, perhaps, a desire for reassurance) to which experience makes no difference and which make no difference to life.

The Christian, once he has committed himself, is precluded by his faith from taking up the first attitude: “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” He is in constant danger, as Flew has observed, of slipping into the third. But he need not; and, if he does, it is a failure in faith as well as in logic.

Notes:

• The quotations by Antony Flew, R.M. Hare, and Basil Mitchell that appear in this essay are from “Theology and Falsification,” in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955).

• By the way, Antony Flew later became a believer in God on the basis that the evidence available to us supported the existence of God.

Chapter 28: John Hick (1922-2012): Verification and Falsification

The philosopher John Hick also has a reply to Antony Flew. Hick believes that in some cases a statement or proposition can eventually be verified although it can never be falsified. He gives an example from mathematics:

> Consider, for example, the proposition that "there are three successive sevens in the decimal determination of [pi]". So far as the value of [pi] has been worked out, it does not contain a series of three sevens, but it will always be true that such a series may occur at a point not yet reached in anyone's calculations. Accordingly, the proposition may one day be verified, if it is true, but can never be falsified, if it is false.

According to Hick, there will someday be eschatological (refers to the doctrine of the "last days") verification of the statements "God exists" and "God is good." Thus, although we cannot falsify these statements now (or ever — because they are true statements, according to Hick), in the afterlife we will be able to verify them. To make his point, Hick tells a vivid parable of his own:

> Two men are traveling together along a road. One of them believes that it leads to a Celestial City, the other that it leads nowhere; but since this is the only road there is, both must travel it. Neither has been this way before, and therefore neither is able to say what they will find around each corner. During their journey they meet both with moments of refreshments and delight, and with moments of hardship and danger. All the time one of them thinks of his journey as a pilgrimage to the Celestial City and interprets the pleasant parts as encouragements and the obstacles as trials of his purpose and lessons in endurance, prepared by the king of that city and designed to make of him a worthy citizen of the place when at last he arrives there. The other, however, believes none of this and sees their journey as an unavoidable and aimless ramble. Since he has no choice in the matter, he enjoys the good and endures the bad. But for him there is no Celestial City to be reached, no all-encompassing purpose ordaining their journey; only the road itself and the luck of the road in good weather and in bad.

The point here, of course, is that in this life we cannot falsify the existence of God; however, in the afterlife we will be able to verify both God's existence and God's goodness.

Source: John Hick's comments come from his article "Theology and Verification," printed in *Theology Today* (1960).

Chapter 29: Paul Tillich (1886-1965): Religious Symbols

Paul Tillich is an important theologian who argued that if we are to talk about God, our language must be symbolic. He argues that symbols open up new levels of reality and of meaning.

Tillich argues that symbols are an indispensable part of our language. Also according to Tillich, "… there are levels of reality of great difference, and … these different levels demand different approaches and different languages."

In his essay, he divides his discussion of symbols into five parts.

I. Distinction Between Signs and Symbols

Signs and symbols have similarities and differences. A similarity is that both signs and symbols point beyond themselves to something else. A difference is that only symbols participate in that which they symbolize.

Examples of signs include a red light on a traffic sign — the red light means "stop." Most words (e.g., "desk") are also signs. The word "desk," of course, signifies the physical object we call a desk.

Examples of symbols include the flag. The American flag is more than pieces of colored cloth sewn together; the flag participates in that which it symbolizes (it symbolizes a country and the ideas that the country believes to be important) — otherwise, people would not get upset when someone burns the flag as a protest. In addition, a wedding ring is a symbol. It is a symbol of a special kind of relationship between two people.

However, you should be aware that mathematical "symbols" are not genuine symbols (in Tillich's meaning); they are merely signs that point to mathematical functions.

II. The Functions of Symbols

The first function of symbols is the representative function — to represent something. However, according to Tillich, "… perhaps the main function of the symbol [is] the opening up of levels of reality which otherwise are hidden and cannot be grasped in any other way."

All symbols, including artistic and religious symbols, open up new levels of meaning — "internal reality" or levels of self-understanding that correspond to new levels of external reality. Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" can lead you to an awareness of the choices — sometimes small choices — in your life that end up making a huge difference in your life. For example, perhaps you were about equally divided in deciding which of two different universities you should attend. But if you meet your future mate at the school you attend, the decision of which school to attend will have an enormous impact on your life.

Another difference between signs and symbols is that signs can be easily replaced; they are "consciously invented and removed." For example, if we wanted to, we could change a red traffic light to a blue traffic light with little problem; all it would take would be a change in traffic laws. In addition, corporations sometimes change their corporate logos.

On the other hand, symbols cannot be easily replaced; however, they are born and they can die. An example that Tillich gives is the Virgin Mary, which is a symbol that has died for Protestants. Catholics sometimes pray to the Virgin Mary to intercede with Jesus Christ for them. Protestants, however, believe that every person is his or her own priest. Therefore, there is no need for an intermediary between the sinner and Jesus — the sinner can pray directly to Jesus.

One more point: According to Tillich, symbols arise out of the "group unconscious" or "collective unconscious." That is why symbols cannot be easily changed.

III. The Nature of Religious Symbols

Like all symbols, religious symbols open up new levels of reality. In Tillich's words, "Religious symbols do exactly the same thing as all symbols do — namely, they open up a level of reality, which otherwise is not opened at all, which is hidden."

In the case of religious symbols, the reality that is opened up is ultimate reality (i.e., God). One point that Tillich makes is that many, many symbols have been used to attempt to explain the nature of God; some are more appropriate to one society than to another.

As an illustration, here are some symbols for God in the Old Testament:

king

father

mother

shepherd

farmer

dairymaid

fuller (laundress)

builder

potter

fisherman

tradesman

physician

teacher and scribe

nurse

metal-worker

warrior

judge

This multiplicity of symbols seems chaotic; can all these symbols possibly be meaningful? Tillich's answer is this:

> … in order to open up the seemingly closed door to this chaos of religious symbols, one simply has to ask, "What is the relationship to the ultimate which is symbolized in these symbols?" And then they cease to be meaningless; and they become, on the contrary, the most revealing creations of the human mind, the most genuine ones, the most powerful ones, those who control the human consciousness, and perhaps even more the unconsciousness, and have therefore this tremendous tenacity which is characteristic of all religious symbols in the history of religion.

Symbols are not identical with that which they symbolize; if they are so regarded, then they are idolatrous. As an example, Tillich points out that "holy persons can become a god."

IV. The Levels of Religious Symbols

Symbolic language attempts to speak of two levels of God's reality:

1) The *transcendent level* (the ultimate reality that transcends space and time). According to Tillich, the transcendent level is "the level which *goes beyond* the empirical reality we encounter."

On the transcendent level, we find:

> First, the personhood of God. According to Tillich, we encounter God as a person. After all, we cannot encounter God as "ultimate being."
>
> Second, the qualities or attributes of God — that God is love, God is mercy, God is power, God is omniscient, God is omnipresent, God is almighty. According to Tillich, when we say these things about God, we are not speaking literally.
>
> Third, the acts of God, including His sending His son to Earth to die for our sins and His creating the World. Once again, when we say these things about God, we are speaking symbolically.

2) The *immanent level* (the continued presence of God in the world). According to Tillich, the immanent level is "the level which we find *within* the encounter with reality."

On the immanent level, we find these things:

> First, "the incarnations of the divine." Christians believe that God became Man in the person of Jesus Christ. Other religions have also believed in the divine becoming incarnate.
>
> Second, "the sacramental" — that is, the Christian sacraments (e.g., the Lord's Supper, baptism). According to Tillich, "The sacramental is nothing more than some reality becoming the bearer of the Holy in a special way and under special circumstances."

V. The Truth of Symbols

Tillich also points out that symbols are immune to empirical criticism. Examples include the Virgin Mary and the immaculate conception of Jesus. The Virgin Mary could very well become a part of divinity in Catholic theology, according to Tillich. (This in fact did not happen, but Tillich regarded this as a possibility at the time he was writing.) Why? Because of

her powerful symbolism. Jesus' virginal birth is legendary and not historical fact, yet because of the symbolism involved people continue to believe in the virginal birth of Jesus.

So how should we evaluate the truth of religious symbols? Perhaps the words that we should use to evaluate symbols are "adequate" and "inadequate," rather than "true" and "false."

Note: The quotations by Paul Tillich that appear in this essay are from his "The Nature of Religious Language" in *The Christian Scholar*, XXXVIII, 3 September 1955.

Chapter 30: H.P. Owen (1926-1996): The Doctrine of Analogy

Can what we say about God be literally true in the same sense as when applied to finite human experience?

H.P. Owen gives an answer to this question in his *The Christian Knowledge of God* (copyright 1969). Owen argues in favor of using analogy to speak about God.

As Owen writes, “The problem that faces the theist is this. God is infinite and incorporeal; but we, and all created things within this spatio-temporal universe, are finite and corporeal. How, then, can the concepts and images which we draw from our experience be applicable to God?”

We have two major ways of speaking about God. The first way is negative (the *via negative*): This means that we talk about what God is not. (It doesn’t mean that we say bad things about God!)

In addition, there is a positive way of speaking about God. In this way, we make definite assertions about God. As Owen points out, there are three modes of positive predication:

1) The univocal,

2) The equivocal, and

3) The analogical.

The *Via Negativa*

In the *via negativa*, we say what God is not: We avoid making definite assertions about God. Owen writes, “According to this way, when we say that God is personal we are entitled to assert only that he is not impersonal.” Examples of the *via negativa* include these sentences:

• God is *not* finite.

• God is *not* evil.

• God is *not* material.

According to Brian Davies, author of *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (1993), “The appeal to negation is best thought of as an attempt to prevent people from misrepresenting God. Those who make it emphasize the unknowability of God and argue that, though one can talk significantly about God, one can only do so by saying what he is not.”

The main problem with the *via negativa* is this: We want to talk positively about God. However, Owen identifies four problems with the *via negativa*:

1) We want to say that God is good, not that God is not evil. The *via negativa* does not allow us to speak positively about God. In fact, Owen writes, the *via negativa* “is not a reformulation, but an outright denial, of theism. The statement ‘God is not evil’ is not equivalent to the statement ‘God is good.’” Surely Owen is correct here; a person can be not evil, yet not be good.

2) “The *via negativa*, if taken as a self-sufficient interpretation of theistic language, produces nonsense.” For example, if a proponent of the *via negativa* were to say that Susan (to use

philosopher David Stewart's example) never lies, and we were to ask, "Do you mean that Susan is always truthful?" then the proponent of the *via negativa* is forced to say, "No, I didn't say that." The connotations of the sentences "Susan never lies" and "Susan always tells the truth" are different.

3) "In fact every theist (however subtle he may be) is sooner or later bound to forsake the *via negativa*." Owen's example is this: If a person is "asked whether God transcends the world, could he seriously answer, 'I don't know, but I'm sure he is not identical with it.'"

4) The *via negativa* is incompatible with the language of the Bible. For example, Jesus spoke of God as a father, and Jesus did not use the *via negativa* in doing so.

The Univocal and Equivocal Uses of Language

Here are two positive ways of speaking. In the univocal use of language, a word has more or less the same meaning when applied to different things. For example, when we use the word "beautiful" in speaking of a beautiful woman, a beautiful painting, and a beautiful sunset, the word has more or less the same meaning when applied to the woman, the painting, and the sunset.

In the equivocal use of language, a word has a major shift in meaning when applied to different things. For example, I can call my pet Rover a dog (he is one), but I can also call a certain brand of computer a "dog." However, when I call a computer a dog, the word has a very different meaning from what it had when I called my pet a dog.

In logic, one should avoid the fallacy of equivocation: drawing an illogical conclusion because of a shift in meaning in a word used in the argument. For example:

> P1: A dog has four legs and barks.
>
> P2: My computer is a dog.
>
> C: My computer has four legs and barks.

The main problem with both the univocal and the equivocal uses of language is this: They do not allow us to talk positively of God. After all, when I say, "God is intelligent," I do not mean to say that he is intelligent in the sense that I am intelligent. Therefore, I don't want to use the word "intelligent" univocally. However, I don't want the word "intelligent" in the sentence "God is intelligent" to mean something completely different from what I mean when I say, "I am intelligent." Therefore, I don't want to use the word "intelligent" equivocally.

We need a third way of speaking positively about God. That way is discovered with the analogical use of language.

Analogy

An analogy is a comparison of two or more things in terms of their likeness, in a way that also recognizes their differences. We can speak of downward analogies and upward analogies. An example of a downward analogy is the sentence "My dog is intelligent." In this case, the comparison is between my dog and me. Yes, my dog and I are of course different; however, there is also a similarity between us: Both of us are intelligent. However, this sentence is a downward analogy because we go from "intelligent" as applied to me to "intelligent" as

applied to my dog; that is, we go from “intelligent” in a fuller sense to “intelligent” in a less full sense.

An example of an upward analogy is the sentence “God is intelligent.” In this case, the comparison is between God and me. Once again, God and I are of course different; however, there is also a similarity between us: Both of us are intelligent. However, this sentence is an upward analogy because we go from “intelligent” as applied to me to “intelligent” as applied to God; that is, we go from “intelligent” in a less full sense to “intelligent” in a completely full sense. After all, God is omniscient, while my intelligence is alas all too limited. (I wish I had an IQ of 50,000.)

Two Types of Analogy

There are two types of analogy, only one of which is useful in speaking about God. The Analogy of Attribution (aka the Analogy of Proportion) is not useful in speaking about God; in the Analogy of Attribution two things are being compared, but the quality being attributed to both things properly belongs to only one thing. As an example, Aristotle used the statement that a certain climate is healthy. Of course, a climate cannot be healthy in the sense that a person is healthy. However, we can meaningfully say that a climate is healthy in the sense that it contributes to (helps cause) health in human beings.

The Analogy of Attribution is not useful in speaking about God because God caused everything that exists. God caused the material universe to exist, yet we would not want to say that God is material.

Fortunately, the Analogy of Proportionality is useful in speaking about God. In the Analogy of Proportionality, the quality applied to two things is said to belong to both things, but in different ways. We use the Analogy of Proportionality in the sentences “My dog is intelligent” and “God is intelligent.”

Four Objections to the Use of the Analogy of Proportionality in Theology

Owen responds to four objections against the use of analogy in theology. The first two were made by the husband-and-wife team of Peter Geach and G.E.M. Anscombe.

1) Analogy is based on a mathematical model in which three of four terms are known (e.g., 3 is to 6 as 4 is to x); however, in analogy as used in theology, only two terms (the terms referring to humans) are known, and therefore we cannot use analogy to speak about God.

Owen’s response: Owen points out that a theological analogy is different from a mathematical analogy. Also, we do know something about God before assigning qualities to Him: God is a “self-existent being.” In addition, we can affirm qualities of God. We can know *that* God is good, even though we cannot say we know *how* God is good.

2) “… since God’s wisdom is supposedly identical with God, but not man’s wisdom with man, the metaphor breaks down at once; for we cannot have in mathematics that x is to a as b is to c, and x = a, but not b = c.”

Owen’s response: Once again, Owen says that a theological analogy is different from a mathematical analogy. When we say that God is good, we are saying more than when we say that a human being is good. God is always good, whereas a human being is only sometimes

good. However, in a theological analogy we don't need to have the exactness of a mathematical analogy. Analogical language recognizes both similarities *and* differences.

3) "… the doctrine of analogy has been found objectionable on the ground that, in order to avoid equivocality, it asserts an identity between God and man, but that 'the supposition that any identity of characteristic can hold between God and man is incompatible with the fundamental assumption that God is infinite.'"

Owen's response: Once again, Owen points out that analogical language recognizes both similarities *and* differences. The identity that exists between God and humanity is not a pure identity, but only an "identity in difference."

4) "… we cannot meaningfully predicate an X of God when X is unknowable."

Owen's response: We can give a meaning to X in terms of finite objects. For example, when say that "God is wise," we have an understanding of wisdom as it is found in finite objects such as human beings.

God as Father

Jesus speaks of God as Father; in doing so, Jesus is speaking analogically. In addition, Jesus does not qualify the analogical language by using the *via negativa*. But how can this unqualified analogy be true? According to Owen, "… positive images [such as calling God "Father"] refer to God *indirectly*."

Note: The quotations by H.P. Owen that appear in this essay are from his book *The Christian Knowledge of God* (London: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1969).

The quotations above are from *Exploring the Philosophy of Religion*, by David Stewart, 2nd edition, 1988.

Chapter 31: Ian Ramsey (1915-1972): Talking of God: Models, Ancient and Modern

Ian Ramsey: Use Models to Talk About God

Ian Ramsey gives us yet another way of speaking about God. We can talk about God in terms of models. A model is a way of speaking about God that allows us to speak positively about Him. For example, if I call God "Father," I am using "Father" as a model. I am saying that in some sense God is like a male parent. The use of "Father" as a model gives me a way of speaking and thinking about God.

Three Types of Models Used to Describe God

In all of the three types of models below, theological language is directly related "to the world of experience," in the words of Eric Heaton.

I. Family Models (Associated with Home and Friends)

The first type of model is related to the family; for example, God is described in terms of these models:

Father

Mother

Husband

Friend

Why use family models? Why use these models that are associated with home and friends? As an example, let us take the model of Father. What can we learn from the description of God as our Father? When you have a loving Father (and God is described as loving us), you have a Father who takes pains over you. Often this means that your father gives you rules to follow and punishes you if you don't obey the rules. Chances are, everyone reading this has been grounded at one time or another. Similarly, God — Our Father Which Art in Heaven — has given us rules to follow. (Of course, when God grounds you because you broke His rules, it's for eternity!) When things are going well for us, as they often do, it's as if we had a loving Father watching out for us.

As another example, let's take a true friend. (God, of course, is true.) Characteristics of a true friend include reliability and trustworthiness. In some aspects, the universe is like that. For example, take seed-time and harvest. One thing that we can always be sure of in Athens, Ohio, is that Winter will be succeeded by Spring. Winter may seem as if it will never end, but eventually it does end and is succeeded by Spring.

In these models of home and friends, Ramsey writes that "the human case acts as a catalyst for the cosmic case, to generate a cosmic disclosure." The term "cosmic disclosure" is important in Ramsey's thought. We can look around us, and often we can learn something about the transcendent reality that lies behind the physical reality that we experience with our senses.

II. Work and Crafts, and Profession Models

The second type of model is related to work and crafts, and professions; for example, God is described in terms of these models:

Shepherd

Farmer

Dairymaid

Fuller (Laundress)

Builder

Potter

Fisherman

Tradesman

Physician

Teacher and Scribe

Nurse

Metal Worker

Why use models that arise from Humankind's work and crafts and professions? Once again, there is a correspondence of patterns. A well-developed model in the Bible is that of shepherd. ("The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not want.") In what way are the ancient Israelites and we like sheep?

The ancient Israelites were frequently at war, as are the modern Israelites. It's no wonder that they felt in need of a protector. C.S. Lewis referred to the material universe as being under enemy occupation. Although God is the Creator of the Universe, evil is present in the universe, and evil spirits are about, trying to tempt us. We need a protector — a shepherd — even today.

III. National Models

The third type of model is related to the Nation; for example, God is described in terms of these models:

King

Warrior

Judge

Why use models that arise from the context of national or international politics? The model of Judge is well developed. At the end of time, there will be a Day of Judgment, and there it will be decided whether we loved truth and justice or merely said we did. At the Day of Judgment God will decide whether we will be close to Him or banished to Outer Darkness.

The other two models are also well developed in the Bible. About the model of Warrior: C.S. Lewis believes that the forces of God will eventually triumph over the forces of Evil. Since God is omnipotent, there is no doubt that He will eventually triumph. Things may seem

ambiguous right now, but that is partly so we can make our choice (either for God or against God) in an ambiguous situation.

Some Models are More Fertile than Others

Some models speak to us more than other models. The models of God as Father and as Judge are very fertile. Other models are not so fertile. For example, God as fuller (laundress) seems to have little to say to us today. However, Ramsey writes, "Every model is sooner or later inadequate." The model of King may someday lose its adequacy.

Two Cautions

Ramsey does write that we must be careful to observe two cautions:

1) "… we shall not remain content with any one model. … [Therefore,] use as many models as possible, and from them develop the most consistent discourse possible."

We need to use a multimodel discourse, because no one model can capture the characteristics of God.

2) "If we are to talk reliably about God we must be alert to the need to fit our discourse at all points to patterns of events in the world around us."

Models need to be both meaningful and relevant. They therefore need to fit the events of this day and age.

Five Reflections

Ramsey next draws five reflections based on the material he has presented so far:

1) "Theological language, and talk about God in particular, often passes men by because it brings with it no cosmic disclosures."

Suppose we call God a King. Today this may remind a student of the King and Duke in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Or perhaps it may remind the student of the many wives of King Henry VIII. Calling God a King may be meaningless to many modern people.

So can we use new models to speak about God? Can we use the models of a sleek new sports car or personnel manager? (God is my personnel manager. I shall not want.) Perhaps not. Perhaps we can find no "cosmic disclosures" in such models.

But what about the model of Air Traffic Controller? These people have the job of bringing in planes safely to the airport runway. Can this be a meaningful and relevant model for today?

2) "Whether our models are old or new they must be developed with circumspection."

"Circumspection" means "prudence." We must choose our models carefully. Is "rugby player" a good model for God?

3) "Further, all models in theology must be accompanied by *qualifiers*, those words in theological language which preserve the mystery and transcendence of God, for example, 'perfect,' 'infinite,' 'all,' 'only,' and so forth."

According to Ramsey, we must use the word "infinite" as a qualifier. We should not say, "God is infinite," because it is incomplete (though relevant). Instead, we should say, "God is

infinitely loving" or "God is infinitely powerful."

4) "… none of us must ever despise the models whence our theological discourse is hewn, for without these we have no way to the cosmic disclosure and no way back to relevance."

Unless we use models, Ramsey writes, theology can become "no more than word-spinning."

5) "Presented with some theological phrase, then, of whose meaning (if meaning it has) we are doubtful or even inclined to deny, my recipe for understanding it is:

"a) Do not be content to take the phrase in isolation, but search for its appropriate context, verbal and nonverbal.

"b) At this point try to pick out the model(s) from which the context is derived; these should help us to discover that 'basis in fact' for the theological assertion — its bearing on the world around us.

"c) […] See […] how any particular model has been qualified to generate that cosmic disclosure in which I am bound to think that the ultimate ground of all theological assertions will be found."

A Final Comment

Ramsey writes that theology must always have "some fit with the world around us." Therefore, according to Ramsey, "[…] the believer is committed to an endless exploration of countless models, in this way constantly improving his understanding of the one God who confronts him in any and every cosmic disclosure."

Note: The quotations by Ian Ramsey that appear in this essay are from his *Christian Empiricism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdsman Publishing Company, 1974).

Chapter 32: Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005): The Metaphorical Process

Paul Ricoeur is an important philosopher of language who investigated the use of metaphor in religious and poetic language.

Definitions of Metaphor

Before seeing what Ricoeur has to say about metaphor, let's make sure we understand what a metaphor is. We can do that by looking at what a few reference books say about metaphor.

A) According to *A Handbook of Literary Terms* (H. L. Yelland, S. C. Jones, and K. S. W. Easton), a metaphor is a "figure of speech in which a comparison is made between two objects by identifying one with the other." There are two ways in which this can be done:

> 1) The metaphor can be made as a "definite statement"; for example, "The moon was a ghostly galleon, tossed upon cloudy seas" (Alfred Noyes), and
>
> 2) The metaphor can be inferred; for example, "Tiger, Tiger, burning bright / In the forests of the night" (William Blake). The implied metaphor here is the comparison between the tiger and a fire.

Obviously, the two things being compared are "not really alike."

A Handbook of Literary Terms also identifies many everyday metaphors, such as:

> 1) a cutting remark,
>
> 2) to shadow somebody,
>
> 3) the heart of the matter, and
>
> 4) a hard-boiled person.

B) *A Handbook to Literature* (C. Hugh Holman) defines "metaphor" as "an implied analogy which imaginatively identifies one object with another and ascribes to the first object one or more of the qualities of the second or invests the first with emotional or imaginative qualities associated with the second."

A Handbook to Literature gives as an example of a dead metaphor "transgression." Formerly, the word meant "to cross a line," but the metaphorical meaning has been lost.

In addition, *A Handbook to Literature* points out that metaphor is one of the tropes. It defines "trope" as "a figure of speech involving a 'turn' or change of sense — the use of a word in a sense other than its proper or literal one; in this sense figures of comparison (… metaphor, simile) as well as ironical expressions are tropes or figures of speech."

C) W. L. Reese's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Religion* states that in a metaphor "we are presented with an unusual identification." For example:

> 1) "The man is a rock."
>
> 2) "The skies are angry."

In addition to what we have learned from looking at the above reference books, it may be useful to list a few metaphors used in religious language:

1) “A mighty fortress is our God.”

2) “The Lord is my shepherd.”

3) “Our Father Which art in Heaven.”

Paul Ricoeur: The Metaphorical Use of Language

Previously, we looked at two contrasting views of language:

1) For A.J. Ayer, the literal meaning of words is of primary importance. Ayer was very scientific in outlook and felt that philosophy should serve as a tool for science.

In contrast to Ayer, Frederick Copleston believed that statements about God can be meaningful, even if they are nonliteral. Copleston, like other people who defend religious language, believes that we must use nonliteral language to express meanings that cannot be expressed with literal language.

2) For Paul Tillich, the symbolic function of words is also important. Symbols serve as a way of talking about important things that cannot be expressed otherwise.

We will now look at yet another view of language. Paul Ricoeur wrote the article “Biblical Hermeneutics.” In it, he argues that metaphor creates new levels of meaning. The word “hermeneutics” refers to principles that we can use to interpret a written text.

The Semantics of Metaphor

Ricoeur wrote about “The Semantics of Metaphor,” so immediately we must ask what “semantics” means. The word “semantics” means the investigation of language, especially how its meaning and form develops and changes.

Previously, rhetoricians had believed that metaphor is not innovative, gives no information about reality, and is only an ornament to language; however, Ricoeur argues vigorously against these beliefs.

Ricoeur’s Main Ideas

1) “*Metaphor proceeds from the tension between all the terms in a metaphorical statement.*”

According to Ricoeur, a metaphor includes tension. For example, “A mighty fortress is our God.” Here the term “mighty fortress” is in tension with the word “God.” The person who first hears or reads this sentence may wonder how these terms can be related.

2) “… metaphor does not exist in itself, but in an interpretation. Metaphorical interpretation presupposes a literal interpretation which is destroyed.”

Literally, the sentence “A mighty fortress is our God” doesn’t make sense. Imagine taking the sentence literally. We would end up worshipping a castle — a bunch of stones on a hill — if we took the sentence literally. Nevertheless, the sentence has meaning, but the meaning is discovered in an interpretation that is not literal.

3) Metaphor "is a calculated error. It consists in assimilating things which do not go together. But precisely by means of this calculated error, metaphor discloses a relationship of meaning hitherto unnoticed between terms which were prevented from communicating by former classifications."

The sentence "A mighty fortress is our God" is a calculated error. The writer of the sentence knows that the sentence is not true literally. But the error is calculated. The sentence does have content; it does make sense.

4) Ricoeur's Theory of Tension: "True metaphors are *metaphors of invention* in which a new extension of the meanings of the words answers a novel discordance in the sentence."

Ricoeur makes a distinction between live metaphors and dead metaphors. Dead metaphors have lost their metaphorical meaning. We now speak of the foot of a chair and the leg of a table without knowing that we are using metaphors. Live metaphors, however, open up new levels of meaning for us.

Ricoeur's fifth and sixth points are the two conclusions that follow from the above points:

5) "… *true metaphors are untranslatable*. … Tension metaphors are untranslatable because they create meaning."

To see if this is true, take a poem that uses metaphors and try to translate it into a passage that does not use metaphors. Has some of the meaning of the poem been lost? True, we can paraphrase the poem, but we lose some of the meaning of the poem.

If you are looking for a poem to paraphrase, try "The Lord is my shepherd" (Psalm 23). You can paraphrase it as "God will take care of me," but the poem is saying much more than that.

6) "… metaphor is not an ornament of discourse. Metaphor has more than an emotional value. It includes *new information*. … In short, metaphor says something new about reality."

The literal use of language is not enough. It can't capture everything that we wish to express in language.

With a true metaphor, we are not just substituting words for other words; for example, when we say "A mighty fortress is our God," we are not just substituting the phrase "mighty fortress" for "God." Instead, we are expressing a meaning that cannot be expressed literally.

Metaphor and Reality

Ricoeur makes a distinction between sense and reference. In Ricoeur's words, "Meaning [that is, sense] is *what* a statement says, reference is *that about which* it says it."

So, we can ask, What is the *reference* of metaphorical language? What exactly is it that a metaphor is referring to?

Here Ricoeur makes a hypothesis that is at odds with the hypotheses of the rhetoricians. The rhetoricians felt that metaphor is merely ornamental; however, for Ricoeur, "… the suspension of the referential function of ordinary language does not mean the abolition of all reference, but, on the contrary, that this suspension is the negative condition for the liberation of another referential dimension of language and another dimension of reality itself." Here Ricoeur is

speaking specifically about poetic language, but his insight holds true for other metaphorical language as well.

In other words, in ordinary language when I refer to a chair, I am referring to a physical object I can point to. However, a true metaphor does not have that kind of reference. If I say “The Lord is my shepherd,” I should not go outside and roam the hills and pastures looking for a shepherd.

Ricoeur also makes two suggestions (here he speaks about poetic language, but what he suggests can be applied also to religious language):

1) “The general idea is that metaphor is to poetic language as model is to scientific language. In scientific language a model is essentially a heuristic device which serves to break up an inadequate interpretation and to blaze a trail toward a new, more adequate interpretation.”

We can think of two models of the solar system. One model is that of Ptolemy, in which the Earth is at the center of the universe. The other model is that of Copernicus, in which the Sun is at the center of the solar system. The newer model replaces the older model and is a better interpretation of the physical universe.

Other models include Isaac Newton’s theory of gravity, which was followed by Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, which was followed by quantum physics.

(By the way, the word “heuristics” refers to something that will stimulate interest in the further investigation of a topic.)

2) “a *language of the arts* exists and does not differ fundamentally from the general language.” According to the philosopher Nelson Goodman, “a painting represents reality no less than a discourse on reality does.”

So what can we conclude from all this? Ricoeur writes, “Poetic language also speaks of reality, but it does so at another level than does scientific language. … poetry imitates reality only by recreating it at a mythical level of discourse.”

What reality? The life world — the world of persons, beauty, love, feelings, and values. Most of us consider such things as the emotions and love to be real. Scientific language can’t describe them — the only way to describe them is through poetic language.

To conclude, Ricoeur writes, “Poetic language does not say literally what things are, but what they are like. It is in this oblique fashion that it says what they are.”

Note: The quotations by Paul Ricoeur that appear in this essay are from his “Biblical Hermeneutics,” in *Semeia* 4, edited by John Dominic Crossan (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

Chapter 33: David Bruce (born 1954): The Problem of Evil

Let's say you are walking along the sidewalk and suddenly you hear a scream for help from the other side of the street. You look and you see a gang of men has started raping a woman. What do you do?

You have several options:

1) You could run over and try to stop the rape.

2) You could stay on your side of the sidewalk but start yelling for help, hoping that the men will stop raping the woman.

3) If the situation seems sufficiently dangerous, you could pretend you don't see anything, keep walking past the scene of the crime, then call the police.

4) Or you could pretend you don't see anything, keep walking past the scene of the crime, then keep walking and not call the police.

5) Finally, and some people have probably done this, you could walk across the street and join in the rape.

Of these options, I hope that I would *at least* call the police. (In the infamous case of the rape and murder of Kitty Genovese in New York City in 1964, lots of eyewitnesses did not bother to call the police, although these eyewitnesses were safe at home in their apartments.)

But now let's ask what God does in a situation such as this. God is omniscient (all-knowing), so presumably He knows that the rape is occurring. God is omnibenevolent (all-good), so presumably He wants to help the woman and stop the rape. And God is omnipotent (all-powerful), so presumably He can help the woman and stop the rape.

But what does God actually do in a situation such as this? Rapes occur every day, and based on our experience, I think we can say that God acts most like the person who keeps walking past the rape and doesn't even bother to call the police.

Something definitely seems wrong here.

For many people, the main reason they don't believe in God is that evil exists. The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus put the problem of evil in a dilemma:

P1: If God is omnipotent (all-powerful), then he could prevent evil.

P2: If God is omnibenevolent (all-good), then he would prevent evil.

P3: Evil exists.

C: Either God is not omnipotent, or God is not omnibenevolent.

If this dilemma cannot be refuted, then it seems the omnipotent, omnibenevolent God of the Judeo-Christian religions has to go. After all, I personally cannot doubt the existence of evil after reading books concerning the Holocaust and slavery. Certainly, one visit to a Children's Hospital should convince anyone that evil exists. The sight of bald-headed children dying of incurable cancer is definitely convincing to me. And we all know that rapes occur every day.

Of course, some philosophers mention free will when speaking about the problem of evil. God does not commit rape; human beings do. And human beings can choose not to rape, or they can choose to prevent rape. For example, when Ohio University student Haley Butler visited London, she saw and enjoyed the musical *Wicked*, although she attended the musical alone despite having promised her parents that she would not go out alone at night. On her way back to her hotel, she noticed that a strange man was following her. She tried to get away from him, but he kept on following her. In the subway, she needed to take an elevator to get to ground level, but she thought, “There is no way in hell I’m getting in the elevator with that man. He’s going to rape me. He’s going to rape me, and then he’s going to kill me.” She was making a major effort not to cry when the elevator door opened, and a man in the elevator looked at her, saw how frightened she was, and even though he had never seen her before, said, “Oh my gosh! How are you? I can’t believe I ran into you!” Haley knew that she had never seen this new man before, but she replied, “I’m great! It’s so good to see you!” The strange man who had been following Haley left, and Haley said, “You saved me. That guy was following me, and I didn’t know what to do!” The new man responded, “I know. I could tell by the look on your face! You seemed so frightened.” The new man even walked her to her hotel just to ensure that she would be safe.

(Some men can be very helpful in situations like this. Comedian Jay Leno once noticed a woman being harassed by a man, so he went over and pretended to be the woman’s boyfriend and chased the harasser away.)

Chapter 34: Deuteronomic Theology of History: Suffering Viewed as Merited Punishment

God and the Bible

The Bible is a collection of more than 60 literary works; many authors wrote it over a period of more than 10 centuries. Despite this, there is a unifying theme to the Bible:

> A personal God exists. This God has a purpose. This God acts to accomplish that purpose. This God wants human beings to unite with Him to accomplish that purpose.

The purpose of this God of divine action seems to be the creation of a "people of God." This involves the establishment of a human community that is holy, just, and righteous, a community that eventually would bring spiritual enlightenment to Humankind.

A Little History

Abraham first settled in Canaan, the land of milk and honey. However, many years later, a famine forced the Israelites to go to Egypt, where they were enslaved. The great Jewish leader Moses masterminded the Israelites' Exodus out of Egypt. Joshua was the leader who finished the Exodus.

Claim

Faithfulness and loyalty to God and His purposes lead to peace and prosperity, while rejection of God and His plans leads to strife and adversity. This is the Deuteronomic Theology of History.

Apparently, the author(s) of Deuteronomy believed that a people who worshipped the one true God would prosper, while a people who didn't would not prosper.

We can ask: Should the righteous be happy and the unrighteous be miserable? Accordingly, adversity and suffering in the life of a nation or individual would be interpreted as evidence that the will of God was being violated.

The Deuteronomic Moral Law of Cause and Effect is "As you sow, so shall you reap." For a long time, this moral law seemed to explain quite well the adversities that befell people and offered the Israelites a cosmic story whose power to interpret events endured for centuries.

More History

However, after being enslaved in Egypt, when the Israelites were back in Canaan, the Israelites — in times of prosperity — worshipped Baal, the god of the Canaanites. Still, during hard times, they returned to the worship of the one true God.

Because the Israelites were worshipping Baal after returning from Egypt, the prophets warned of a coming doom because of the Israelites' neglect of righteousness and disregard for social justice. Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, destroyed Jerusalem. The leading Israelites were carried off into exile in Babylon.

Fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the exiled Israelites to return to Palestine to rebuild their nation. To many of the

exiles, the Deuteronomic Moral Law was being vindicated:

> Israel had paid for her sins, but her renewed commitment to God was now being rewarded.

Therefore, the re-patriots attempted to establish a holy community in Palestine that would remain faithful to God. According to Deuteronomic theory, this building of a holy community should have produced peace and prosperity, but it did not. Strife and adversity plagued the Israelites in their rebuilding. Because of this, the Deuteronomic cosmic story was seriously challenged.

And so we — and the ancient Israelites — can ask this question: Why do bad things happen to good people?

The Book of Job: A Case Against Deuteronomy

Background

Job was an upright, honest, and moral man from East Palestine. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, etc. Every so often, Job sent for his sons and daughters in order to offer a Holocaust (sacrifice to God). Job was a decent God-fearing man who loved his children and took care of all who needed it.

According to the Deuteronomic Moral Law, Job should have had a good life because good things would happen to good people.

Job's Case Against the Deuteronomic Moral Law

Bad things happened to Job:

1. Raiders took all of Job's flocks.

2. During a feast, a strong wind blew down the house of Job's eldest son and killed all of his children.

3. A disease struck Job and covered him with boils from head to toe.

Job's three friends insist that the Deuteronomic Moral Law holds strong and that Job should repent his sins. Job replies that God "destroys blameless and wicked alike." Job refuses to repent because he has done nothing wrong and wants to challenge God personally.

In the ancient biblical system of law, "if a man is accused of wrongdoing without proof, he may take an oath, swearing to his innocence. At that point, the accuser must either come up with evidence against him or drop the charges" (Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*). Job swears that he is innocent, and God appears to Job and answers him out of a whirlwind, saying:

> Where were you when I planned the earth?
>
> Tell me, if you are wise.
>
> Do you know who took its dimensions,
>
> Measuring its length with a cord? …

Were you there when I stopped the sea …

And set its boundaries, saying, “Here you may come,

But no further”?

Have you seen where the snow is stored,

Or visited the storehouse of the hail? …

Do you tell the antelope when to calve?

Do you give the horse his strength?

Do you show the hawk how to fly?

Have you an arm like God?

Can you thunder with a voice like His?

You tread down the wicked where they stand,

Bury them in the dust altogether …

Then will I acknowledge that your own right hand

Can give you victory.

God answers Job, not by justifying Himself in front of Humankind, but by referring to His own omniscience and omnipotence. Job recovers his faith in God even stronger than before because of this experience. However, the question “Why do bad things happen to good people?” remains unanswered. Apparently, the Deuteronomic Moral Order has not been validated, so why do bad things happen to good people?

We have the Dilemma of Evil:

P1: There is evil in the world.

P2: Either God cannot or God will not abolish evil.

P3: If God cannot abolish evil, then God is not omnipotent.

P4: If God will not abolish evil, then God is not omnibenevolent.

C: Therefore, either God is not omnipotent or God is not omnibenevolent.

Some Attempts to Answer Job’s Question

1) There is no omnibenevolent God.

Perhaps God does not exist. Or perhaps God is evil.

2) Suffering is a Test by God.

This is what the Prologue and Epilogue of Job say. God is engaged in a battle with Satan, and God tests us to see if we are faithful to Him. However, should we accept this answer? Shouldn’t we humans have faith in those we love? If so, then shouldn’t God have faith in us?

3) A Finite God.

John Stuart Mill believed this. According to Mill,

1) Deity is a being of "great but limited power,"

2) Deity is of "great but perhaps unlimited knowledge,"

3) Benevolence but not justice is one of Deity's attributes.

However, according to Mill, a theology centering in this conception has several things to recommend it over the more traditional view of God. For example, a finite God needs our help. There is a battle going on between good and evil, and to win, God needs us to be on His side.

Another person who believes in a finite God is Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. His son died very young of a disease that aged him prematurely. Kushner decided because of that experience that God wants to help, but cannot. Therefore, God is not all-powerful. Kushner interprets the Voice from the Whirlwind as saying, "You think it's easy to be God? You try it! You try to 'tread down the wicked where they stand,' then come back to Me and complain!"

4) Response to John Stuart Mill

F.H. Bradley asks, Is a finite God beneficial to the believer? After all, if God is finite, then we may be following Him to an overwhelming defeat. Bradley also says that we ought not to expect ultimate theoretical consistency in religion; after all, religion consists of a relationship between two wills: the infinite will of God and the finite will of Humankind. Bradley also suggests that perhaps religion functions to enrich human life.

5) The Unknown Mystery

We can regard evil as a mystery that human beings are not able to explain. Perhaps we should expect mysteries in religion. Perhaps suffering transcends human intelligence. Also, if we are immortal, then it is possible that unmerited suffering would receive compensation in the next life. This is not satisfactory to me. Why shouldn't we be able to explain evil? The Principle of Sufficient Reason says that there is an explanation or cause, known or unknown, for everything.

6) Other Theodicies

John Hick: We are in transition between *bios* (biological life) and *zoe* (eternal life). We are in a vale of soul-making to prepare ourselves to be citizens of Heaven; suffering is one way to prepare us for Heaven.

C.S. Lewis: God is omnipotent, but that does not mean that God can do anything — such as create a square circle. Lewis explains moral evil (evil that people do) by saying that it is intrinsically impossible to create a world in which human beings have free will and there is no evil. Lewis explains natural evil (evil caused by tornados, hurricanes, many birth defects) by saying that human beings must have stable environments in which to exist, and this means that physical, natural laws will exist that affect good and bad people equally.

Complete Disclosure: These notes, which were typed (and partly written) by David Bruce, are based on a handout received in the course "Stories and the Pursuit of Meaning," taught at Ohio

University by Philosophy professor Donald Borchert. Much of this essay follows the handout (and Borchert's textbook, *An Introduction to Modern Philosophy*), very closely.

Chapter 35: Rabbi Harold S. Kushner (1935-2023): When Bad Things Happen to Good People

When Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Harold S. Kushner. New York: Avon Books, 1981.

When Bad Things Happen to Good People is a book of theology and philosophy that became a best seller. At Ohio University, philosophy professor Donald Borchert used it in a course titled "Stories and the Pursuit of Meaning." One story that people use to bring meaning into their lives is a religious story. Often, people believe in an omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), omnibenevolent (all-good) God, but this seems inconsistent with the presence of evil and suffering in this world.

The book's author, Rabbi Harold Kushner, has experienced evil and suffering. Aaron, his son, was diagnosed with progeria (rapid aging) at the age of the three and died an early death — he died two days after his fourteenth birthday. Because of that experience, Kushner decided to write this book.

Kushner expresses much dissatisfaction with the traditional answers that people give to those who suffer. One common assumption is that people who suffer must have done something awful to deserve their suffering. This assumes that God punishes evil-doers by inflicting them with suffering. But certainly a three-year-old child would not be capable of doing much sin in his short lifetime. (And a three-year-old has not reached the age of responsibility.) And it seems that a rabbi — a man of God — would not deserve such evil and such suffering — and even if he deserved to suffer, why should such a disease be inflicted on an innocent child? Kushner completely rejects the assumption that people who suffer must have done something awful to deserve their suffering.

Instead, Kushner turns to the Book of Job in the Bible and looks for an answer to his question. Job is a good man, but he suffers. After being prosperous for a long time, suddenly many evils happen to him. He loses his wealth, his children die, and boils cover his skin and torment him. And Job becomes angry at God.

Kushner writes that in the ancient biblical system of law "if a man is accused of wrongdoing without proof, he may take an oath, swearing his innocence. At that point, the accuser must either come up with evidence against him, or drop the charges." Job swears that he is innocent, and God appears to him out of a whirlwind, saying,

> Where were you when I planned the earth?
>
> Tell me, if you are wise.
>
> Do you know who took its dimensions,
>
> Measuring its length with a cord? …
>
> Were you there when I stopped the sea …
>
> And set its boundaries, saying, "Here you may come,
>
> But no further"?

> Have you seen where the snow is stored,
>
> Or visited the storehouse of the hail? …
>
> Do you tell the antelope when to calve?
>
> Do you give the horse its strength?
>
> Do you show the hawk how to fly?"

Kushner's interpretation of the Book of Job revolves around three statements, which many people would like to believe:

> A. God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens in the world. Nothing happens without His willing it.
>
> B. God is just and fair, and stands for people getting what they deserve, so that the good prosper and the wicked are punished.
>
> C. Job is a good person.

Of these statements, we can affirm any two, but we can affirm only two. Statement C we can accept. Job is truly a good person. Therefore, Kushner writes, we must give up one of two affirmations of God. Either God is not all-powerful or God is not all-good. Kushner quotes these lines from the Book of Job:

> Have you an arm like God?
>
> Can you thunder with a voice like His?
>
> *You* tread down the wicked where they stand,
>
> Bury them in the dust altogether …
>
> Then will I acknowledge that your own right hand
>
> Can you give you victory.

Kushner interprets this passage as God's "saying 'if you think it is so easy to keep the world straight and true, to keep unfair things from happening to people, *you* try it.' God wants the righteous to live peaceful, happy lives, but sometimes even He can't bring that about. It is too difficult even for God to keep cruelty and chaos from claiming their innocent victims. But could man, without God, do it better?"

So Kushner denies that God is responsible for everything that happens in the world. Some things happen for no reason at all, including things, such as diseases, that cause suffering. There is some similarity in the views of Kushner and the Christian C.S. Lewis here. Both believe that natural evil such as deaths due to tornados and earthquakes occurs because there are uniform laws of nature that make no exceptions for good people. However, uniform laws of nature are necessary if we are to have science. In addition, moral evil such as murders occurs because God has endowed people with free will, which includes the freedom to choose to do evil.

However, there is a difference between the views of Kushner and of Lewis. Lewis believes that we can affirm that God is all-powerful; however, this does not mean affirming that God can do

things that are intrinsically impossible. For example, God can't create a square circle. In addition, if God wants people to develop souls, then He can't create a world in which there is no evil — such a thing would be intrinsically impossible. Instead, God must create a world with uniform laws of nature that don't make exceptions for good people (a good person who steps off a cliff will fall to the ground just as fast as a bad person), and He must create a world in which people have free will, including the freedom to choose to do evil (as, for example, Hitler did). Nevertheless — and Kushner agrees with this — God is on the side of good people.

So why do we need God if God is finite? According to Kushner, God helps us by giving us strength and courage. Therefore, all of us need God. Kushner regards as a proof of God's existence the many people he has seen who, having drained all their strength, suddenly find new strength to draw upon.

Chapter 36: John Hick (1922-2012): Evil and the God of Love

A theodicy is an attempt to justify the goodness of God despite the presence of evil in the world. John Hick is an important philosopher/theologian who has developed what we can call the "Vale of Soul-Making" theodicy. In it, Hick suggests that the purpose of the universe is not to be a hedonistic paradise (although Heaven may very well be that), but is instead to help us develop souls so that one day we may become worthy of being citizens of Heaven.

Hick begins by contrasting two different views of Humankind, beginning with the view of Saint Augustine (354-430 C.E.), which is called by Hick "the majority report," meaning that very many people believe it. According to Saint Augustine, human free will accounts for much of the evil that we find in the world. This is something that Hick agrees with; however, he does not agree with Saint Augustine's second assertion, which is that at one time Humankind was in a state of perfection, from which it fell. In other words, Saint Augustine believes that God created Humankind perfect, but that through the use of free will, Humankind sinned and stopped being perfect.

This, of course, is one way to interpret the myth of the Garden of Eden. (By the way, a myth can be true, even if it is not literally true.) Adam and Eve were perfect, but they were tempted to sin, gave in to this temptation and did sin, and so became not perfect. However, we can interpret this myth in other ways. My own interpretation is that at one time Humankind (or its ancestors) did not sin — when our ancestors had not acquired the knowledge of good and evil and so were incapable of sinning. However, eventually Humankind achieved sufficient intelligence to know the difference between right and wrong and so became able to sin. (I don't think that a dog sins because a dog is not capable of knowing the difference between right and wrong.)

Instead of accepting this opinion of Saint Augustine's, Hick much prefers what he calls the "minority report" of St. Irenaeus (born in Anatolia, circa 140-160 C.E.; died circa 200 C.E.), a second-century Christian writer. As Hick writes, "Instead of regarding man as having been created by God in a finished state, as a finitely perfect being fulfilling the divine intention for our human level of existence, and then falling disastrously away from this, the minority report sees man as still in process of creation."

An important part of Hick's theodicy is that he recognizes two levels of existence: *Bios* and *Zoe*. *Bios* is mere biological life, whereas *Zoe* is eternal or spiritual life. St. Irenaeus believes that we were created with biological life, and that we are in the process of acquiring eternal or spiritual life.

This view can be supported with passages from the Bible. We are supposed to become "children of God" (Hebrews ii. 10) and "fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans viii. 17). In addition, this view is compatible with evolution. Life apparently originated as one-celled creatures in the ocean; therefore, Humankind was not created perfect and whole. Instead, life has evolved to the point where Humankind has achieved enough intelligence to tell right from wrong and has achieved the free will to choose to join the race of decent men or the race of indecent men (using Viktor Frankl's terminology in *Man's Search for Meaning*).

Hick does make a value judgment in his theodicy. He writes, "The value-judgment that is implicitly being invoked here is that one who has attained to goodness by meeting and

eventually mastering temptations, and thus by rightly making responsible choices in concrete situations, is good in a richer and more valuable sense than would be one created *ab initio* in a state of either innocence or virtue."

God could have created us morally perfect, if He had wished. However, He would have had to create us without free will — we would be like robots who are programmed always to do good and never to do evil. It is much more morally valuable to have a human being who freely chooses to do the right thing than to have a robot that is forced always to do the right thing.

Hick also points out, "Man is in process of becoming the perfected being whom God is seeking to create. However, this is not taking place — it is important to add — by a natural and inevitable evolution, but through a hazardous adventure in individual freedom."

Many people might think that the world ought to be becoming better and better as Humankind becomes more and more perfect. However, that is not the case. The move toward becoming a child of God is happening in individuals, not in Humankind as a whole.

In fact, Hick specifically states, "Because this is a pilgrimage within the life of each individual, rather than a racial evolution, the progressive fulfilment of God's purpose does not entail any corresponding progressive improvement in the moral state of the world."

In addition, Hick points out a common mistake (made by David Hume, among others): "They think of God's relation to the earth on the model of a human being building a cage for a pet animal to dwell in." When these critics of theism look at the world, they note its imperfections and criticize it because of them. They believe that if God really were omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then He would have made the Earth a hedonistic paradise.

Hick writes, "Men are not to be thought of on the analogy of animal pets, whose life is to be made as agreeable as possible, but rather on the analogy of human children, who are to grow to adulthood in an environment whose primary and overriding purpose is not immediate pleasure but the realizing of the most valuable potentialities of human personality."

As you can see, Hick believes that the world was made not to be a source of endless delights for Humankind, but was made in order for us to develop souls. What kind of world is necessary in order to make souls? Suppose I were to ask you: What is more important?

> Pleasure, or Moral Integrity?
>
> Pleasure, or Unselfishness?
>
> Pleasure, or Compassion?
>
> Pleasure, or Courage?
>
> Pleasure, or Humor?
>
> Pleasure, or Reverence for the Truth?
>
> Pleasure, or the Capacity to Love?

I would hope that you would agree that pleasure is less important than the other qualities listed above. To help us develop those better qualities, God has not created a hedonistic paradise on this Earth, but instead He has created a world in which there is evil, yes, but a world in which we can — if we choose — develop the better qualities listed above.

Hick's theodicy includes these themes: free will, and harmony. We see the harmony in a World (Heaven) to come in which Humankind (who have become citizens of Heaven) has achieved the better qualities listed above. According to Hick, "The good that outshines all ill is not a paradise long since lost but a kingdom which is yet to come in its full glory and permanence."

By the way, the phrase "the vale of Soul-making" comes from a letter written by English poet John Keats to his siblings in April 1819.

Note: The quotations by John Hick that appear in this essay are from his *Evil and the God of Love*, revised edition by John Hick (copyright 1966 and 1978).

Chapter 37: Edward H. Madden (born 1925) and Peter Hare (born 1935-2008): Rejection of Hick's Theodicy

Previously, we examined John Hick's theodicy, in which he argued that a combination of free will and harmony (eventually, those who become children of God will reach Heaven) will serve to justify the goodness of God despite the presence of evil in the world. Now, however, we will look at the views of Edward H. Madden and Peter Hare, who reject Hick's "Vale of Soul-Making" theodicy in their book *Evil and the Concept of God*.

Madden and Hare first quote Hick making an important point that

> man, created as a personal being in the image of God, is only the raw material for a further and more difficult stage of God's creative work. This is the leading of men as relatively free and autonomous persons through their own dealings with life in the world in which he has placed them, towards that quality of personal existence that is the finite likeness of God.

Madden and Hare then mention Hick's criticism of many writers who use the fact of evil against God. According to Hick, such writers "assume that the purpose of a loving God must be to create a hedonistic paradise." Hick, as well as Madden and Hare, will reject the idea of a hedonistic paradise, but nonetheless Madden and Hare will argue that the amount of evil that is in the universe is sufficient to reject belief in God.

Madden and Hare accuse Hick of three informal fallacies in his theodicy. The three informal fallacies are 1) all or nothing, 2) it could be worse, and 3) slippery slope.

I. A Fallacy: All or Nothing

According to Madden and Hare, the all-or-nothing fallacy "is the claim that something is desirable because its complete absence would be far worse than the evil its presence now commands." They believe that the fallacy lies in reasoning that there are only two alternatives: all of something, or none of something. However, Madden and Hare say that there is a third alternative: less of something.

Madden and Hare believe that Hick is guilty of the all or nothing fallacy on two occasions. The first occurs when he uses the free-will defense. Yes, there is moral evil in the world, but Hick says that the moral evil in the world is necessary to create souls. If God were to create us in such a way that we always choose to do the right thing, then we would be robots without free will and without the chance to develop into the finite likeness of God.

However, according to Madden and Hare, there is a third alternative: We could have free will, but our freedom to do evil and our moral inclinations to do evil could be much less than they are now. This would allow us to still develop souls, while doing less evil than we do now.

Madden and Hare use an analogy here. They say that God is like the headmaster of a very permissive school. The headmaster does not make the school's students read books because he doesn't want to do anything that would restrict their freedom by forcing them to learn — he wants them to choose to learn for the sake of learning, not because they are forced to learn.

According to Madden and Hare, there is a better way to run the school — one that will still give the students some freedom. As they point out, “There are, after all, many different ways for a parent to guide his child’s moral growth while respecting his freedom.”

The second way in which Madden and Hare believe that Hick is guilty of the all-or-nothing fallacy is in Hick’s explanation of epistemic distance. We do not have knowledge of the existence of God. Why? According to Hick, it is because God wants us to develop faith. If we knew that God existed, it would not be possible for us to have faith.

Once again, Madden and Hare use the analogy of the headmaster. The headmaster appears before the students only once a year to give an address. But Madden and Hare say that their analogy is too generous — God hardly ever appears before his people. Jesus walked the Earth 2,000 years ago, and has not returned since.

II. A Fallacy: It Could Be Worse

According to Madden and Hare, the it-could-be-worse fallacy “is the claim that something is not really bad because it will be followed by all manner of desirable things.” However, Madden and Hare say that this does not justify the bad thing. We can think of another alternative to something bad that is followed by something better. That alternative is this: something good that is followed by something better.

Hick writes, “Christian theodicy must point forward to that final blessedness, and claim that this infinite future good will render worth while all the pain and travail and wickedness that has occurred on the way to it.” By this, Hick means that eventually the faithful will earn their way into Heaven. (This is a variant of the Harmony type of theodicy.) Hick also suggests that it is possible that we will not remember the bad things that occurred to us on Earth.

Madden and Hare reject this. If we are being tortured now, how can this torture be justified even if someday we will be in Heaven? In a vivid analogy and counterargument, Madden and Hare ask us to imagine a man torturing his wife. Suppose that once the torture is over, the man gave his wife a drug that caused her to forget the torture. This is better than remembering the torture, but it does not explain why the torture was necessary in the first place.

III. A Fallacy: Slippery Slope

According to Madden and Hare, the slippery-slope fallacy “is the claim that if God once started eliminating evils of this world he would have no place to stop short of a ‘perfect’ world in which only robots and not men were possible.” However, Madden and Hare say that God would know where to stop to reduce the amount of evil that is in the world yet still have enough evil to serve the purpose of building souls.

One problem that Hick must face is that of excessive suffering — dysteleological suffering. Some suffering is necessary. If you are out of shape and wish to get in shape, you have to force yourself to exercise even though you would rather not exercise. (Eventually, when you get in shape, you will enjoy exercising.)

However, some of the suffering in the world does not have a good result. Although some people are ennobled by suffering, other people are made bitter by suffering. The people who are ennobled by suffering have what we can call teleological suffering. They are building their souls. The people who are embittered by suffering have what we can call dysteleological suffering. Their suffering serves no good purpose.

Let no one doubt that pain hurts. Let no one doubt that suffering can harden a person and make that person bitter. How can Hick justify this kind of suffering? Why wouldn't God get rid of at least the dysteleological suffering in the world?

Is the slippery-slope fallacy that Hick is supposed by Madden and Hare to have committed really a good criticism? Is it true that God could eliminate some of the evil that is in the world without logically having to eliminate all of the evil that is in the world?

Possibly not. Take the world of the 20th century. The worst evil in it is probably Adolf Hitler. According to Madden and Hare, God could eliminate some of the evil in the world and still have enough evil to suffice for the purpose of building souls. Therefore, God could eliminate the evil of Adolf Hitler.

But notice what happens next. The second-worst evil has now moved up to the place of the first-worst evil. Perhaps the second-worst evil is Benito Mussolini. The logic of Madden and Hare's argument requires that God eliminate the evil of Benito Mussolini.

But notice what happens next. What was once the third-worst evil has now moved up to the place of the first-worst evil. The logic of Madden and Hare's argument requires that God eliminate this evil as well.

Etc.

In Hick's words:

> Unless God eliminated all evils whatsoever there would always be relatively outstanding ones of which it would be said that He should have secretly prevented them. If, for example, divine providence had eliminated Hitler in his infancy, we might now point instead to Mussolini. … There would be nowhere to stop, short of divinely arranged paradise in which human freedom would be narrowly circumscribed.

According to Hick, once God began to remove evils, He would have to continue removing evils until no evils were left at all.

Hick does not appear to be guilty of the fallacy of slippery slope. The logic of Madden and Hare's argument seems to require that God continue to eliminate evils until no evil is left in the world.

However, as we have seen, Madden and Hare reject Hick's thesis. According to Madden and Hare, God would know when to stop eliminating evils. There would still be evil in the world, but much less evil in the world than we have at present. But that amount of evil would still be sufficient for soul-building.

We should point out that since human beings have free will, the amount of evil we cause can vary. If most people use their free will to do evil, much evil will be in the world. During such times, the amount of evil in the world can greatly exceed what is needed for soul-building. Also, of course, if most people use their free will to do good, much good will be in the world.

IV. Mystery

Hick eventually resorts to mystery. He writes, "I do not now have an alternative theory to offer that would explain in any rational or ethical way why men suffer as they do. The only appeal left is to mystery."

The kind of mystery that Hick appeals to is that there is no answer to the problem of evil. Not only do we not have an answer to the problem of evil now, but there will be no answer forthcoming in the future (at least, in this world).

However, Hick suggests that mystery can aid us in the process of soul-making. He asks us to imagine a world in which there was no unjust suffering — all suffering would be punishment for something that the person had done wrong, or the suffering would be "a part of moral training." Such a world would seem to inhibit the development of compassion.

Madden and Hare make three objections to this idea:

1) We can feel compassion even when the suffering is teleological. As an example, Madden and Hare point out that a husband can feel compassion for his wife's labor pains even though the labor pains will result in the birth of a child. Also, we can feel compassion for the pain suffered by a criminal even though we think the suffering is deserved.

2) Suppose that some undeserved and unnecessary suffering is needed in the world. According to Madden and Hare, the amount of needed undeserved and unnecessary suffering is much less than the world currently has.

3) "… while unjust suffering may increase compassion, it also creates massive resentment." Once again, we must remember that suffering crushes some people.

V. One Last Justification for Unjust Suffering

Hick offers one last justification for unjust suffering. Suppose that there was no unjust suffering in the world. In that kind of world, you would be rewarded for good deeds and punished for bad deeds. However, in that kind of world, you would quickly figure out what you would have to do to get ahead, and therefore you would do good deeds not because they are the right thing to do, but because you want to get ahead. In other words, you would do good deeds because you were selfish, not because you cared about the people you were helping. This is the opposite of developing a good will — doing good deeds because they are the right thing to do, not because you hope for a reward.

Madden and Hare make three objections to this idea:

1) If God were to administer rewards and punishments for our actions, he would certainly take into account a person's *motive* for doing something. If someone does a good deed merely for a reward, God would know enough not to give a reward to that person.

2) If God administers rewards and punishments on the basis of motive, this will have a good effect on human morality.

3) Suppose that always rewarding a person for having a good will is bad. That does not mean that God couldn't get rid of an enormous amount of the unjust suffering that we see in the world today without getting rid of the possibility of acting with a good will.

Note: The quotations by Edward H. Madden and Peter Hare that appear in this essay are from their *Evil and the Concept of God* (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, 1968).

Chapter 38: John Stuart Mill (1806-1873): The Divine Attributes

John Stuart Mill was an original thinker. In fact, his father brought him up to be an original thinker, teaching him Latin and Greek at a very early age. By the time he became a teenager, Mill had learned both languages and much else besides. As a thinker, Mill contributed in many different areas of intellectual endeavor.

Among the things Mill believed was that human beings need to be as free as possible (without infringing on the freedom of other human beings) in order to pursue happiness and to increase the amount of knowledge in the world. This is what he argued in his influential essay *On Liberty*.

On the question of the existence of God, Mill argued that we ought not merely to accept the traditions handed down by our religions, but that instead we ought to investigate the evidence and see what it tells us.

To investigate God, Mill used natural theology — that is, he looked at nature and used his human reason to see what nature can tell us about God. As a result of his investigation, he concluded that the traditional description of God as omnipotent (all-powerful), omniscient (all-knowing), and omnibenevolent (all-good) is incorrect. Instead, God is limited in at least two of these areas. According to Mill,

> These, then, are the net results of Natural Theology on the question of the divine attributes. A Being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture; of great and perhaps unlimited intelligence, but perhaps, also, more narrowly limited than his power: who desires, and pays some regard to, the happiness of his creatures, but who seems to have other motives of action which he cares more for, and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose only. Such is the Deity whom Natural Religion points to.

Let's see how Mill arrived at these conclusions. First, let's take omnipotence. Mill argued that God cannot be omnipotent because of the traces of design in the world. Readers will remember that one argument for the existence of God is the design argument; because the world is orderly, there must be a God to order the world. For example, both William Paley (1743-1805) and Mill used the example of an eye to argue that God must exist.

An eye is a very complex organ. It consists of a lens, a retina, rods, and many other parts, all of which when put together allow a living being to see. A creator must have made this ingenious organ because of its complexity, according to the design argument, and that creator is God.

Mill agreed with this argument; however, Mill says that the argument shows that God is not omnipotent. After all, if God were omnipotent, He could merely will that a creature be able to see, and that creature would be able to see — even without eyes! That God had to have recourse to the creation of an eye for His creatures to see shows that God's power is limited, Mill believes. Any resort to a contrivance such as the eye disproves God's omnipotence, according to Mill. In Mill's words,

> It is not too much to say that every indication of Design in the Kosmos is so much evidence against the Omnipotence of the Designer. For what is meant by Design?

> Contrivance, the adaptation of means to an end. But the necessity for contrivance — the need of employing means — is a consequence of the limitation of power.

For example, let's say that you need to lift a weight of 4000 pounds. No human being is powerful enough to simply pick up the weight using his or her body only; instead, we must have recourse to a contrivance such as an arrangement of pulleys. By means of an arrangement of pulleys, we can lift the weight.

Mill further believes that God's power is limited because He did not create matter and energy. Instead, according to Mill, these things existed, and God used them in His work. This also poses a limitation on God — God is limited by the materials He had to work with.

Still, Mill believes that God is very intelligent. The design of the eye is evidence of God's intelligence, just as the design of a pulley is evidence of Humankind's intelligence. Still, according to Mill, there is nothing to show that God is omniscient, although there is much evidence to show that God is very intelligent. In Mill's words,

> The fundamental principles of natural religion as deduced from the facts of the universe, negate his omnipotence. They do not, in the same manner, exclude omniscience: if we suppose limitation of power, there is nothing to contradict the supposition of perfect knowledge and perfect wisdom. But neither is there anything to prove it. The knowledge of the powers and properties of things necessary for planning and executing the arrangements of the Kosmos, is no doubt as much in excess of human knowledge as the power implied in creation is in excess of human power. And the skill, the subtlety of contrivance, the ingenuity as it would be called in the case of a human work, is often marvellous. But nothing obliges us to suppose that either the knowledge or the skill is infinite.

Moving on to God's purported characteristic of omnibenevolence, Mill stated that if you look at how God designed His creatures, you will discover that He designed them to stay in existence for a short time. An individual human being can last for just over a hundred years at most; it's difficult to tell just how long the human species will last, but we know that many species have become extinct.

In addition, if you look at God's creatures, you will discover that God has paid some attention to our happiness. After all, we are capable of feeling many pleasures, although we can also feel many pains. In general, the pleasures help us to stay in existence (we get pleasure from eating and drinking and from having sex), and the pains also help us to stay in existence (if you touch a hot stove with your fingers, you will quickly move your fingers from the stove because of the pain of the burn you feel; if you could not feel the pain of the burn, you would keep touching the stove and could receive a very severe burn). However, this does not show that God is omnibenevolent, according to Mill:

> If the motive of the Deity for creating sentient beings was the happiness of the beings he created, his purpose, in our corner of the universe at least, must be pronounced, taking past ages and all countries and races into account, to have been thus far an ignominious failure; and if God had no purpose but our happiness and that of other living creatures it is incredible that he would have called them into existence with the prospect of being so completely baffled.

So what about justice? According to Mill, the only justice that we can find in nature is that which Humankind has brought into existence. (To me, one of Humankind's greatest inventions has been the legislated life.) In Mill's words,

> Such are the indications of Natural Religion in respect to the divine benevolence. If we look for any other of the moral attributes which a certain class of philosophers are accustomed to distinguish from benevolence, as for example Justice, we draw a total blank. There is no evidence whatever in Nature of divine justice, whatever standard of justice our ethical opinions may lead us to recognize. There is no shadow of justice in the general arrangements of Nature; and what imperfect realization it obtains in any human society (a most imperfect realization as yet) is the work of man himself, struggling upwards against immense natural difficulties, into civilization, and making to himself a second nature, far better and more unselfish than he was created with.

One can interpret Mill's essay as showing the limitations of natural theology. After all, a *real* revelation could tell us much more about God's characteristics.

Note: The quotations by John Stuart Mill that appear in this essay are from his *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1875).

Chapter 39: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963): Divine Omnipotence

One person who has addressed the problem of evil in a way convincing to me is C.S. Lewis, author of the popular *Narnia* children's books. One of the things he did was to analyze the concepts "omnipotent" and "impossible." In ordinary, unreflective usage, people think of an omnipotent Being as being able to do anything, such as create a stone so heavy He cannot lift it. But no less a philosopher than St. Thomas Aquinas says, "Nothing which implies contradiction falls under the omnipotence of God."

In looking at the concept "impossible," Lewis distinguished between two kinds of impossibilities: conditional and intrinsic. Something is conditionally impossible if there are conditions that make it impossible. For example, we could say, "It is impossible for you to learn Latin unless you study." In other words, "If you don't study, it is impossible for you to learn Latin." The phrase following "if" gives the condition under which learning Latin is impossible.

On the other hand, some things are intrinsically (or absolutely) impossible. For example, a four-sided triangle is intrinsically impossible because triangles are defined as three-sided figures. Another impossible thing is a square circle. Actually, Lewis would object to my use of the word "things" here. According to Lewis, "It remains true that all *things* are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities."

This analysis clears up the confusion about whether God can create a stone that is so heavy that He cannot lift it. This statement leads to a logical paradox and so is nonsense. According to Lewis, God's "[o]mnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense."

One of the things that is intrinsically impossible to do is to create a being that has free will and at the same time does not have free will. Since this is a logical contradiction, it is intrinsically impossible. Thus, if God gave Humankind free will (and the traditional Judeo-Christian religions say that God did so), then God must leave us free to choose to do either good or evil. Not to do so would be to take away our free will.

What kind of a world would God create if He wished it to be lived in by creatures having free will? Lewis identifies three characteristics that such a world must have:

> 1) If Humankind has free will, then the world must be one in which Humankind has the "freedom to choose: and choice implies the existence of things to choose between." Therefore, we need an environment in which to make choices.
>
> 2) To exercise our freedom of choice in an environment, the environment must be stable.
>
> 3) To have a human society, once again the environment must be stable.

What does it mean to have a stable environment? It means that nature must follow fixed laws. This allows both for free choice and for the existence of evil. For example, imagine an environment in which someone decided to hurt a person badly, so he picked up a baseball bat and swung it at the person's head as hard as he could. In a world with fixed natural laws, of course the baseball bat would bust the other person's head open. If God were to fix the world

so that no one could ever hurt another person (and thus take away Humankind's free will), then the baseball bat might turn to Jello before hitting the other person.

A stable environment is also important for other reasons. For one thing, unless nature follows fixed laws, it would be impossible for science to develop. For another, we communicate with other human beings and become aware of their existence through our use of a common, neutral environment.

What Lewis has shown us are these two things:

1) God cannot do what is intrinsically impossible, such as create a being that has free will and at the same time does not have free will.

2) God, to provide a suitable environment for His free creatures, must create an environment that is stable and follows fixed laws.

Because of these two things, both moral evil (which man is responsible for through using his free will to choose to do evil) and natural evil (which comes about from nature following natural laws, resulting in tornados, earthquakes, volcanoes, etc.) become possible.

Note: The quotations by C.S. Lewis that appear in this essay are from his *The Problem of Pain* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940).

Chapter 40: C.S. Lewis (1898-1963): Human Pain

Many people don't believe in God because evil exists. The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-280 B.C.E.) put the problem of evil in a dilemma:

> P1: If God is omnipotent (all-powerful), then he could prevent evil.
>
> P2: If God is omnibenevolent (all-good), then he would prevent evil.
>
> P3: Evil exists.
>
> C: Therefore, either God is not omnipotent, or God is not omnibenevolent.

If this dilemma cannot be refuted, then it seems the omnipotent, omnibenevolent God of the Judeo-Christian religions has to go. After all, I personally cannot doubt the existence of evil after reading books concerning the Holocaust and slavery. Certainly, one visit to a Children's Hospital should convince anyone that evil exists. The sight of bald-headed children dying of incurable cancer is definitely convincing to me. And we all know that rapes occur every day.

One person who has addressed this dilemma is C.S. Lewis (1898-1963), author of the popular *Chronicles of Narnia* children's books. In his book *The Problem of Pain*, Lewis wrote a theodicy — theodicies attempt to justify the goodness of God although evil is present in the world.

Lewis points out that there is a "good element in the idea of retribution" by God. When things go well for an evil person, the evil person is enclosed in "illusion" — the illusion that God is not necessary in his or her life. But when evil in the form of pain becomes "unmistakably present" in the evil person's life, then the evil person is roused and will do one of two things:

> 1) The evil person can rebel and curse the universe and/or God. This may lead to a deeper repentance later.
>
> Or:
>
> 2) The evil person can "make some attempt at an adjustment, which, if pursued, will lead him [or her] to religion."

Either way, something good can come out of pain. (Note: Pain is bad. I am not denying that. Something can be bad, yet something good can come out of it. A woman may be raped and then decide to become a counselor for other raped women. Becoming a rape counselor is good, but the rape itself is bad.)

Of course, Lewis also recognizes that bad things can come out of pain. The person who rebels may never repent. People can be so crushed by grief that they spend the rest of their lives being cynical and bitter.

The Three Operations of Pain

According to Lewis, pain has three operations. The first operation "shatters the illusion that all is well." Things may seem to be going very well for us, but then pain intrudes itself into our life.

The second operation “shatters the illusion that what we have, whether good or bad in itself, is our own and enough for us.” This operation demonstrates to us that we need God. Whatever else we have — money, fame, success, power, children — is not enough.

This operation can also force us to turn to God. As Lewis writes, “Everyone has noticed how hard it is to turn our thoughts to God when everything is going well with us.” When we are faced with disaster, on the other hand, our thoughts turn naturally to God.

The third operation of pain is more difficult to understand than the first two operations. We are supposed to choose God for Himself only and not for any other reason, yet “to choose involves knowing that you choose.”

When we do things, we may be doing them for God’s sake only, or we may be doing them for another reason entirely. Sometimes we may do something that God wants us to do, yet we are doing it for another reason entirely — it is only a “happy coincidence” that what we are doing is what God wants us to do. For example, I may donate money to charity because I want to deduct that money from my taxes. God wants us to donate money to charity, and I am doing that, but not for the reason God wants me to do it.

According to Lewis, “We cannot … know that we are acting at all, or primarily, for God’s sake, unless the material of the action is contrary to our inclinations, or (in other words) painful, and what we cannot know that we are choosing, we cannot choose. The full acting out of the self’s surrender to God therefore demands pain: this action, to be perfect, must be done from the pure will to obey, in the absence, or in the teeth, of inclination.”

This brings up a problem. Can’t we do God’s will because we enjoy doing God’s will? Immanuel Kant felt that a moral action, to have moral value, had to be done solely out of a sense of duty. If we do a good thing because we enjoy doing it, then, according to Kant, our act does not have moral value. Aristotle opposes Kant in this. Aristotle believed that as a person becomes more virtuous, that person will enjoy more and more doing virtuous things.

Lewis’ Christian solution to this problem is this: “We agree … with Aristotle that what is intrinsically right may well be agreeable, and that the better a man is the more he will like it; but we agree with Kant so far as to say that there is one right act — that of self surrender — which cannot be willed to the height by fallen creatures unless it is unpleasant.”

Self-surrender, however, is a good thing. According to the Christians, “he that loses his soul shall find it.” In other words, by surrendering one’s will to God, one becomes more free.

As Lewis writes, “If pain sometimes shatters the creature’s false self-sufficiency, yet in supreme ‘Trial’ or ‘Sacrifice’ it teaches him the self-sufficiency which really ought to be his — the ‘strength, which, if Heaven gave it, may be called his own’: for then, in the absence of all merely natural motives and supports, he acts in that strength, and that alone, which God confers upon him through his subjected will.”

Christianity emphasizes self surrender — this is what martyrs do, and this is what Jesus did on Calvary. In addition, this is what Christianity says we are to do today.

In saying all of this, Lewis is not denying the reality of pain: “I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

Two Principles

In estimating the credibility of the old Christian doctrine of being made "perfect through suffering," Lewis says that two principles ought to be observed: "In the first place we must remember that the actual moment of present pain is only the centre of what may be called the whole tribulational system which extends itself by fear and pity."

Both fear and pity can lead to good things. Pity can help us to love the unlovely. We become more willing to help the homeless or the handicapped if we pity them. Fear, on the other hand, can lead us to God. This can be one of the effects of fighting in the trenches during wartime.

The second principle is "when we are considering pain itself — the centre of the whole tribulational system — we must be careful to attend to what we know and not to what we imagine." Novelists often make out pain to be wholly bad, and life to be entirely meaningless because of pain. But is this your experience?

Lewis writes, "I did not find the front-line trenches or the C.C.S. more full than any other place of hatred, selfishness, rebellion, and dishonesty. I have seen great beauty of spirit in some who were great sufferers. I have seen men, for the most part, grow better not worse with advancing years, and I have seen the last illness produce treasures of fortitude and meekness from most unpromising subjects."

One way to look at the world is as a "vale of soul making." We are here on this world to learn to become citizens of Heaven, and suffering can help to make us worthy of that honor.

Lewis concludes, "If the world is indeed a 'vale of soul making' it seems on the whole to be doing its work."

Note: The quotations by Lewis that appear in this essay are from his *The Problem of Pain* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1940).

MORTALITY VERSUS IMMORTALITY

Chapter 41: Bertrand Russell (1872-1970): Do We Survive Death? No

Bertrand Russell has a simple answer to the question "Do we survive death?" His answer is, "No." According to Russell, "When I die, I shall rot, and nothing of my ego will survive." Despite the flat denial, Russell is a philosopher, and as a philosopher, he provides reasons for his answer in his essay "Do We Survive Death?"

Russell begins his essay by discussing "the sense in which a man is the same person as he was yesterday." According to Russell, "The continuity of a human body is a matter of appearance and behavior, not of substance."

By this, Russell means that our body is constantly changing. Each day some of our cells die and are replaced by new cells. Indeed, Russell writes, the atom that exists now cannot be said to be the same atom that existed a few moments ago, according to modern physics. In any case, the matter that makes up your body is completely replaced every seven years or so.

So what does it mean to say that we are the same person that we were yesterday? Russell's answer is that we are the same person because of our memories and our habits. These are the things that make us the persons we are. That is why Russell writes, "If … we are to believe that a person survives death, we must believe that the memories and habits which constitute the person will continue to be exhibited in a new set of occurrences."

What does this have to do with whether we survive death? Russell believes that our memories and our habits are dependent on our bodies and especially our brains. Without bodies and brains, we will not have memories or habits, and so we will no longer exist as persons. Once we die and our body and brains decay, we will no longer exist.

(To this, someone such as St. Paul would respond that, through the power of God, our bodies will be resurrected. Once our bodies are resurrected, then we will exist as persons again.)

According to Russell, "It is not rational arguments but emotions that cause belief in a future life." Rational arguments, Russell believes, support belief in the finality of death. It is emotions such as the fear of death that make us believe or hope that we shall survive death.

However, in contrast to many people, Russell believes that it would be a bad thing if people wholeheartedly believed in a future life and so ceased to fear death. If that were to happen, people would be even more likely than they are now to give up their lives in wars. On the other hand, if people knew that death is final, Russell believes that the effects would be very good. For example, people would be much less likely to fight in wars.

A book titled *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor During the Holocaust* by Steve Lipman tells a story that supports this. The Nazis were against much religion; however, one German general disliked this — but not because he was religious. According to Lipman, the general said, "I look at it from the technical point of view, and I know that no army which goes into battle without some hope of an afterlife will fight well. Hitler and his Nazis are ruining our raw material."

I am not so sure as Russell is that it is good to believe that death is final. I think that if people believed this, many of them would become selfish. If all we have is one go at life, we may want to grab all the gusto we can, and if our actions hurt other people, too bad for them. Today, some people devote themselves to doing good, hoping for a reward in an afterlife. Russell, on

the other hand, thinks that if people believed that death is final, then they would want everyone to have an equal chance at a good life and so would work for social justice.

Russell next considers the argument for immortality that stems from “admiration of the excellence of man.” Certainly Humankind has done many excellent things. After all, Humankind is capable of much good — just think of Mother Teresa!

Russell gives two main responses to this:

1) “In the first place, it has been found, in the scientific investigation of nature, that the intrusion of moral or aesthetic values has always been an obstacle to discovery.” Russell gives much evidence for this. For example, people once believed that the orbits of planets must be circles “because the circle is the most perfect curve.” (Scientists have discovered that orbits are elliptical.)

To this, I reply that science must make assumptions that are different from the assumptions that philosophy or religion makes. When investigating nature, one ought not to be concerned with whatever lies outside of nature — for example, God. (To say “a miracle occurred” is to make a poor explanation of an experiment.)

2) Although one of the good things about Humankind is their discovery of good and evil, Russell criticizes this by pointing out that it is difficult to tell who is correct about what is right and wrong. After all, many theories have been proposed about this subject. (In his own life, Russell seems to have been able to distinguish right from wrong, as he was a prominent advocate for world peace and a prominent opponent of nuclear weapons.)

Russell also asks whether we should have “such a high opinion of man.” Yes, Mother Teresa existed, but so did Adolf Hitler. Yes, Humankind is capable of much good, but Humankind is also capable of much evil — murder, rape, slavery, the Holocaust, etc. I suppose that one reply to this is that not everyone will deserve eternal life.

Russell’s conclusion seems pessimistic to me: “The world in which we live can be understood as a result of muddle and accident; but if it is the outcome of deliberate purpose, the purpose must have been that of a fiend. For my part, I find accident a less painful and more plausible hypothesis.”

Russell’s story of Humankind is much different from the story of many religious people. To Russell, the universe and Humankind are both accidents. To many religious people, the universe was created by God, who placed in it people with free will so that they could develop souls and earn a place in Heaven.

Note: The quotations by Bertrand Russell that appear in this essay are from his essay “Do We Survive Death?” in *Why I Am Not a Christian* (London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd., 1957).

Chapter 42: Corliss Lamont (1902-1995): I Am Mortal

The question of whether we are mortal or immortal is important because the answer can affect the way we live our life. After all, if we are afraid of death, we may be afraid to live. Also, a person who believes we have only one life — with no possibility of resurrection — may choose to live his or her life selfishly.

Corliss Lamont (1902-1995) is the author of *The Illusion of Immortality* (1965, revised edition). In this book, Lamont argues that we are mortal. He is a clear and interesting writer, and he makes some important points to support his belief that we are mortal.

First, Lamont does what many good philosophers do: He defines an important term. By the word "immortality," Lamont writes that he means personal immortality — the survival for an indeterminate time after death of the person. This means that what survives after death — if anything does survive — would have the memories of the person who has died, and would have an awareness of self-identity.

There are other concepts of immortality, but Lamont — although he mentions them — is not writing about them in his argument that we are mortal. Other concepts of immortality include these:

a) **ideal or Platonic**: Attaining a certain eternal quality in life or thought.

b) **impersonal psychic entity**: The survival of an entity which is absorbed into some kind of All or Absolute or God.

c) **material or chemical**: The elements of our body will remain after we die; they will become a part of the Earth.

d) **historical**: We have lived, and nothing can ever alter that fact.

e) **biologic or plasmic**: We achieve a kind of immortality through our children and descendants.

f) **social or influential**: If our lives achieve greatness, we will influence future generations. Socrates and Martin Luther King, Jr., have achieved this kind of immortality.

h) **eternal reoccurrence**: This interesting theory says that everything that has ever happened will happen over and over again in precise detail. This theory was spoken of by the Stoics, and in the 19th century was taken up again by Friedrich Nietzsche. (So make sure you have some fun in your life.)

However, the fundamental issue for the kind of immortality — personal immortality — that Lamont is considering in his book is the relationship between body and personality. Synonyms for personality include mind, soul, and spirit. If the relationship between body and personality is so strong that the personality cannot survive the death of the body, then we are mortal, according to Lamont. After all, we know what happens to our body after we die.

Lamont will in fact argue that the personality cannot survive the death of the body. As you can tell, Lamont is not a Cartesian dualist. According to Cartesian dualism, human beings have

both immaterial minds and material bodies. This means that it is possible for our immaterial mind to survive the death of our material body.

However, Lamont believes in what he calls psychological monism. According to this theory, human beings are composed of only one thing. This means that when the body dies, the human being — including its personality — dies.

The First Strategy

Lamont has two strategies for convincing his readers that we are mortal. In his first strategy, he tries to show that thinking and emoting and other activities — in other words, personality — that we associate with the mind or soul or spirit are so intimately connected with the body, that they cannot survive the death of the body. He makes four major points in using his first strategy:

1: As the body develops, so the personality develops.

Lamont points out that we begin life with the union of two reproductive cells: the egg of our mother, and the sperm cell of our father. No personality is present at that time. However, as our body grows and develops, so does our personality grow and develop. The personality of an infant is different from the personality of a toddler, which is different from the personality of a five-year-old child, etc. This shows that personality is dependent upon the development of the body, according to Lamont.

2: Genetic material determines both physical and mental characteristics.

When the reproductive cells of our parents unite, we are created. Of course, our heredity helps determine how tall we will be, what our sex is, and what color eyes we have, but the reproductive cells of our parents also help determine how intelligent we will be. After all, it is genetic material that determines whether we shall be born with mental retardation or be born a genius. Also, the sex we are helps determine some of our personality traits.

3: Disorders of the brain result in disorders of the mind.

For example, some people's bodies don't produce enough lithium. Because of this, they can acquire a bi-polar personality: One day they are ecstatic, the next day they are suicidal. Also, all of us have seen sitcoms (like those on Nick on Nite) in which a character is hit on the head and forgets who he or she is (amnesia). In addition, some operations on the brain can cure some personality disorders (a bit of bone may be pressing on a person's brain, causing problems; remove the bit of bone and you remove the personality problems).

4: "Men are born with brains, *they acquire minds*."

Here Lamont has a very vivid example: He writes about the wolf-children of India. In 1920, two girls were found in India who had apparently been raised by wolves. Kamala was about eight years old, and Amala was around one year and a half old. The two girls had survived by adopting the habits of wolves. Kamala ran faster on four limbs than on two, howled at night, and insisted on going naked. Lamont finds it significant that Kamala did not even learn to walk upright while living with the wolves.

According to Lamont, these two wolf-girls show that brains come first, then personality develops. This helps show, according to Lamont, that personality is dependent upon the body

— the environment of the body affects the personality that we develop.

The Second Strategy

Lamont's second strategy is to make use of the law of parsimony. According to the law of parsimony, we ought to be stingy with our assumptions (economy of hypothesis). If we can explain something by making only one assumption, that is better than explaining the same thing with two assumptions.

For example, a number of theories can explain the movement of the planets in the solar system. The Ptolemaic theory used 79 assumptions, while the heliocentric theory of Copernicus used 34. Later came Newton, who explained the movement of the planets with only one assumption: the Law of Gravity.

Lamont's point is that we can explain human beings by using psychological monism. Because of this, there is no need to assume the existence of both a material body and an immaterial mind. Why assume that two things exist when the assumption of the existence of only one thing will explain the facts of human personality?

Lamont's Conclusion

Lamont's conclusion is very simple: We are mortal.

Lamont believes that the mind is dependent on the body. When the body dies, the mind dies, and we die. We call this the Argument from Dependence. According to this argument, consciousness depends upon the brain and the central nervous system. Unless there is a brain and a central nervous system, there can be no consciousness.

Note: The quotations by Corliss Lamont that appear in this essay are from his book *The Illusion of Immortality* (New York: F. Ungar Pub., 1965, revised edition).

Chapter 43: Curt John Ducasse (1881-1969): The Question “Are We Immortal?” is Still Open

Curt John Ducasse (1881-1969) is a philosopher who believed that it is possible that we are immortal. In his essay “Is Life After Death Possible?”, published in the *Forester Lecture Series, Vol. 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948), he doesn’t attempt to prove that we are immortal; instead, he merely tries to show that the question of “Are we immortal?” is still open.

First, Ducasse answers the question, “Why do people want to be immortal?” Of course, people want personal immortality for various reasons. Some people want to be reunited with their dear ones who have died previously. Others — who have led unhappy lives — want to have a second chance at gaining happiness. Still others want to continue learning, and yet others want to continue counting in the affairs of Humankind. And, of course, others see an afterlife as a chance to redress injustices that went unpunished in this life.

Ducasse describes two arguments commonly advanced against immortality. First is the Argument from Dependence, which Corliss Lamont made much use of. According to this argument, consciousness depends upon the brain and the central nervous system. Unless there is a brain and a central nervous system, there can be no consciousness. Advocates of this argument point out that consciousness is always associated with a living body, and that drugs (alcohol, LSD) that affect the central nervous system also affect consciousness.

The second common argument used to deny immortality is the Identity Theory. According to this theory, consciousness is identical with minute events in the brain. Advocates of this theory ask, “How can a non-material idea affect a material brain?”

In addition, people who argue against personal immortality ask, “Shouldn’t the survival of a human personality require a human body?” After all, if a human personality were placed in the body of a shark, the human personality perhaps would be unlikely to survive very long.

However, Ducasse believes that these two arguments do not prove their point. About the Identity Theory, Ducasse points out that saying love equals these minute events in the brain is like saying that “wood” is another name for “glass.” This, of course, is a re-definition of the word. It seems unlikely that we can ever say that love is the equivalent of breathing fast, having a racing pulse, and having certain neutrons in the brain doing something or other.

About the Argument from Dependence, Ducasse admits that head injuries do extinguish consciousness. When these happen, the person suffering the head injury has no memory of what happened for a time after the head injury. However, Ducasse suggests, perhaps the consciousness still exists but is dissociated from the body. (This would mean that the consciousness is in another realm.) After all, lack of memory does not mean lack of consciousness. We can remember very few days of our life specifically; however, we can be pretty sure that we were conscious most of the days of our life.

Ducasse also considers some possible empirical evidence for postdeath survival. This may sound eerie, but Ducasse is interested in ghosts, as are many other philosophers. Why? Because if ghosts really exist, then we have empirical evidence that human consciousness can survive for at least some time after death.

In writing about ghosts, Ducasse tells some interesting stories. For example, the ghost of a dead girl appeared before her brother. The brother noticed a scratch on her cheek. After telling their mother about the ghost, the brother discovered that the mother had accidentally made the scratch while preparing her daughter's body for burial. However, the mother had immediately covered the scratch with powder and had told no one about the scratch. In another case, the ghost of a child appeared before several people in a room. A dog noticed the ghost first, barked at it, and then seven people saw it.

Another type of possible empirical evidence for postdeath survival may be found in experiences with mediums who claim to be able to contact the dead. Ducasse admits there are a lot of fakes in this field; however, he believes that some mediums are genuine — these mediums have been investigated by the Society for Psychical Research in London, which has pronounced them to be genuine.

Still, Ducasse admits, there are two explanations for the phenomena of mediums. One explanation is that the phenomena are real, that the mediums really are able to contact the dead. If this is so, then there really is empirical evidence for postdeath survival.

However, a second explanation is that the mediums have telepathic powers. Thus, when a medium reveals something that only a dead person and one living person could have known, the medium may have been reading the living person's thoughts. In this case, there is no empirical evidence for postdeath survival.

In the next part of his essay, Ducasse exposes the assumption that makes many people regard the arguments against immortality as being much stronger than they really are. Ducasse states that such people are making a metaphysical assumption: "To be real is to be material." In other words, reality consists of matter in motion — planets moving in space, human beings moving on the surface of the Earth, etc.

Ducasse writes,

> Now the assumption that to be real is to be material is a useful and appropriate one for the purpose of investigating the material world and operating upon it; and this purpose is a legitimate and frequent one. But those persons, and most of us, do not realize that the validity of that assumption is strictly relative to that specific purpose. Hence they, and most of us, continue making the assumption, and it continues to rule judgment, even when, as now, the purpose in view is a different one, for which the assumption is no longer useful or even congruous.

In other words, the metaphysical assumption "To be real is to be material" is great for scientists, who investigate the physical universe. However, it is not an appropriate assumption when one is investigating things that exist, but that do not exist as material (physical) things.

What kind of things are these that exist but are not material? They include (or may include) these things:

- Metaphysical entities such as minds or souls.
- God.
- The ideas we have in our mind.

- Emotions such as love.

- Fictional characters such as Huck Finn. We can talk meaningfully about Huck Finn, so in some sense he exists, but Huck Finn is not a physical human being.

- Geometrical objects such as squares, triangles and circles. These *never* appear in the material universe.

- Numbers. No one has ever seen a “one” before, although many people have seen one apple, or one this, or one that.

Ducasse points out that most of what we perceive consists of vivid color images. We assume that these vivid color images are associated with material objects, but we are not sure of that. Most people we see in the world we never hear or smell or taste or touch — they are just vivid color images.

Of course, Ducasse has not proven that we are immortal. All he has done is to say that people such as Corliss Lamont have not proven their case and so the case against immortality is much weaker than many people probably think. As Ducasse would say, The question of “Are we immortal?” is still open.

Note: The quotations by Ducasse that appear in this essay are from his essay “Is Life After Death Possible?”, published in the *Forester Lecture Series, Vol. 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1948).

Chapter 44: Robert F. Almeder (born 1938): Death is Not the End

Robert F. Almeder is a philosopher who believes that we do in fact survive death. In his book *Death and Personal Survival: The Evidence for Life Against Death* (1992), he investigates the evidence for life after death — including such things as ghosts. In fact, a good title for this essay would be "Ghost Stories 101."

I. Evidence for Life After Death

1. People Remembering Earlier Lives as Different People

Almeder investigates people who remember earlier lives as different people — in other words, reincarnation — something Almeder strongly believes is true. A vivid example concerns Dr. Arthur Guirdham's investigation of Mrs. Smith.

Mrs. Smith went to British psychiatrist Dr. Guirdham in 1961 complaining of waking up from sleep screaming. The doctor examined her for neuroses but found none. Little by little, Mrs. Smith revealed that when she was a young girl she had written down strange things that came to her as recollections. Dr. Guirdham examined these writings and discovered that they were written in medieval French and in a language called *langue d'oc* ("the language spoken in southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries"). He sent the writings to a specialist who stated that they revealed knowledge of the Cathars (Christian dissidents who were strongly dualist). In the doctor's own investigation, he discovered that four of the songs Mrs. Smith had written could be found in old manuscripts of the 13th century.

The writing apparently revealed things that Mrs. Smith could not have known. These things were not verified at the time that Mrs. Smith wrote them — they were verified later. For example, she wrote that Cathar priests sometimes wore dark blue. Textbooks of the time stated that the priests always wore black, but later it was verified that they sometimes wore dark blue or dark green. Also, names and family relationships that she had written could be found in the dog Latin records of the Inquisition. Furthermore, she had stated that Cathars had been kept as prisoners in a certain church crypt. At first, no one believed that prisoners had been kept there, but later it was discovered that so many prisoners had been rounded up that prisoners in fact had been kept in that crypt.

The doctor's investigation convinced him that reincarnation is true — a conclusion that Almeder agrees with.

2. Apparitions of the Death

Almeder also writes about apparitions of the dead — ghosts. One vivid example concerns the Rev. Abraham Cummings, who wrote an account about the late Mrs. Butler in 1826. The ghost of Mrs. Butler allegedly appeared in a village in Maine several times before many people during a period of several months. During her visits, she spoke with people and accurately foretold births and deaths. For example, she predicted that the new Mrs. Butler would give birth to one child and then shortly thereafter die. In addition, on one occasion her husband tried to put his hand on her body and it passed through. Several eyewitnesses swore that they had seen this.

Another vivid example concerns the ghosts of Flight 401. On Dec. 28, 1972, an Eastern Airlines plane (Flight 401) crashed, killing 101 people. Shortly thereafter, the ghosts of the pilot, Robert Loft, and the second officer, Don Repo, began appearing on airplanes that had been made with parts recycled from the crashed airplane.

Often, a dazed captain would appear on a plane. The stewardess would be worried about him, but when she tried to comfort him, he would disappear. On one occasion, the stewardess called back the pilot, who stared at the dazed captain and said, “My God, it’s Bob Loft.” The ghost of Don Repo also appeared frequently, sometimes warning the crew of potential mechanical problems. Once he said, “Watch out for fire on this plane.” Later, on takeoff the plane’s third engine burst into flames and the plane had to land.

If ghosts such as those described here truly exist, then we have empirical evidence for postdeath survival. Almeder believes that ghosts exist.

3. Possession

In addition to ghosts, Almeder recounts some vivid examples of possession, in which the spirit of a dead person inhabits the body of a living person. One vivid example is that of the “Watseka Wonder.” This case of possession allegedly took place in Watseka, Illinois, in the late 1870s. Mary Roff was 18 years old when she died in 1865. A year later, Lurancy Vennum was born. In 1877, at age 13, Lurancy began to have fits, during which her body was allegedly possessed by several spirits — most notably by the spirit of Mary Roff.

When Lurancy’s body was possessed by Mary Roff, she had no memory of being Lurancy. In fact, she went to live with the Roff family for a while, during which time she recognized many of Mary’s friends and relatives and recounted many events from Mary’s childhood. Later, Lurancy’s personality returned and she remembered nothing about Mary Roff. Almeder explains this by saying that Mary Roff’s disembodied personality had possessed the body of Lurancy Vennum.

Another vivid example concerns Shiva and Sumitra Singh. This occurred in India and is discussed in a 1989 article in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. On July 9, 1985, Sumitra Singh appeared to die; however, she revived in a confused state and stated that she was Shiva and that she had been murdered by her in-laws. As Shiva, Sumitra acted differently, for Shiva was of a higher caste than hers. Shiva had been well educated, while Sumitra had not. In addition, as Shiva, Sumitra was able to recognize many of Shiva’s friends and relatives. Once again, Almeder accepts this as a case of genuine possession.

4. Out-of-Body Experiences

Almeder also writes about out-of-body experiences, which have been investigated by Dr. Raymond Moody, who is famous for his research into near-death experiences. (The out-of-body experience is a part of near-death experiences.)

Once again, we have a number of vivid examples. One patient had clinically died, but the doctor was able to resuscitate him. The doctor was surprised by the patient’s description of what had happened in the hospital room during the resuscitation attempt and by the description of the equipment that had been used. However, what most surprised the doctor was the patient’s description of the nurse who had helped resuscitate him. In fact, the patient even knew her name. The patient explained that after he had left his body he had walked down the

hall to see his wife and had noticed the nurse rushing in to help him. (He had noticed her name written on her nametag.)

In another vivid example, a woman who had been blind for over 50 years was able to describe the equipment that had been used to resuscitate her — equipment that had been invented after she had gone blind — and she was able to tell the doctor that he was wearing dark blue during the resuscitation attempt.

In yet another story, a doctor had rear-ended a car on his way to the hospital and he was worried about it. This time the patient told him not to worry about the accident — apparently being able to read his mind during the out-of-body experience.

The final example concerns a man who had clinically died in a hospital where his sister was lying in a diabetic coma. While having his out-of-body experience, he began talking to his sister, who then began to go away from him. He tried to follow, but she told him, "You can't go with me because it's not your time." After being resuscitated, the man told the doctor that his (the man's) sister had died, but the doctor denied it. However, after checking, the doctor discovered that the man's sister had died.

5. Communications with the Dead Through Mediums

Finally, we have examples of communications with the dead through a medium. The first vivid example concerns Laura Edmonds, whose father was Judge John Worth Edmonds of New York. This example of a medium at work was reported in 1905 in the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*. A Greek man attended a séance at which Ms. Edmonds was the medium. A dead Greek man allegedly controlled her body and told the living Greek man that his son had recently died in Greece. This was later confirmed.

The Main Point

The main point of all these examples of ghosts, mediums, etc. is that if these experiences are genuine, they provide support for postdeath survival and for dualism. Of course, Almeder believes that they are genuine.

II. Objections to Life After Death, and Responses

Almeder responds to three objections to life after death, and then he states his conclusion

1. It is impossible to imagine what a disembodied spirit would be like; in fact, the very idea of a disembodied spirit is conceptually incoherent.

Almeder's response is that even if we cannot imagine what a disembodied spirit would be like, this is no reason to suppose that a disembodied spirit cannot exist. After all, Almeder points out, we cannot fully imagine an infinite set of numbers, yet we know that such series exist.

In addition, Almeder writes, those people who say that the notion of a disembodied spirit is conceptually incoherent are engaging in a dogmatic answer — they are simply refusing to consider the possibility of a disembodied spirit.

2. We don't have any experimental evidence of postdeath survival.

Almeder's response here is that we don't need experimental evidence. Experimental evidence is good for answering certain kinds of questions, such as those about causal connections.

However, experimental evidence is not good for answering questions about what happened in the past. For example, we know that dinosaurs have existed in the past, but we can hardly reproduce their existence in a laboratory (except in *Jurassic Park*).

3. There is so much fraud associated with ghosts and mediums that we need experimental evidence to establish that postdeath survival is possible.

Almeder's response is that we don't need that kind of evidence — only the kinds of evidence that we already have: Many and widespread apparently true examples of such things as reincarnation, ghosts, and communications with the dead through mediums.

III. Almeder's Conclusion

Almeder's conclusion is that a very strong case has been made for reincarnation and that postdeath survival is a fact.

Chapter 45: Antony Flew (1923-2010): Death is the End

Antony Flew argued against immortality in his book *The Presumption of Atheism* (1976). As you may suspect, Flew was at the time an atheist. (He later became a believer in the existence of God.) In this book, he examines three possible ways in which one could have personal survival, and he rejects each way. According to Flew, the best theory for immortality is that of the astral body; however, he does not believe that the evidence supports the existence of an astral body.

I. The Enormous Initial Obstacle

Flew writes about the "enormous initial obstacle" to belief in personal immortality. According to Flew, the "huge obstacle lying across the path of any doctrine of personal survival or personal immortality is the familiar fact that — with the possible exceptions of the prophet Elijah and Mary the mother of Jesus bar Joseph — all men die and are in more or less short order buried, cremated, or otherwise disposed of."

II. Survival and Immortality

Flew identifies the kind of survival that he is considering in his book. As always, a good philosopher is careful to define his or her terms. What Flew is considering is personal survival after death. He is aware that there are many differing kinds of immortality — for example, biologic immortality in your children or social immortality in the influence that your fame and/or works have on succeeding generations — however, here he is considering the survival of the person after death.

III. Three Ways for Survival

According to Flew, there are three different ways in which one could achieve personal survival. Before criticizing these three ways, he first identifies them.

1. The Platonic or Platonic-Cartesian Theory

This theory is one that is familiar to many Jews and Christians, among other people. According to the Platonic-Cartesian theory,

a. A person is composed of two things: body and soul. Of course, this is familiar to many people from Sunday school.

b. The soul is the real, essential person. The body is the least important part of what we are, according to the Platonic-Cartesian theory. Instead, what is really important is your soul, since this is the part of you that is eternal and immortal. Socrates, of course, among many other philosophers, believed that we ought to take care of our soul and not be so concerned about our body.

2. The Astral Body Theory

This theory finds its home in psychical research. According to the Astral Body theory,

a. Shadowing a person is the person's astral body. According to the Platonic-Cartesian theory, the soul is immaterial. However, according to the Astral Body theory, the astral body is

material. Flew writes that according to the Astral Body theory, "… inside, and so to speak, shadowing what is ordinarily thought of as the person is another being of the same form."

b. The astral body is the real, essential person. Once again, one's ordinary, corporeal body is not the real, essential person; instead, one's astral body is. Hollywood movies such as *Topper* and *Blithe Spirit* and *Ghost Dad* show astral bodies.

3. The Reconstitutionist Theory

Religious people often believe in this theory; for example, Peter Geach believes that one day we will be resurrected. Our corporeal body will be reconstituted and we will again exist with our own body.

IV. The Reconstitutionist Theory Criticized

Flew criticizes each of these theories, maintaining that none of them is acceptable. Against the Reconstitutionist theory, he makes what he calls the Replica Objection. According to this objection, God will make a replica of me; however, this replica is not me. Flew writes,

> For thus to produce even the most indistinguishably similar object after the first one has been totally destroyed and disappeared is to produce not the same object again, but a replica. To punish or to reward a replica, reconstituted on Judgment Day, for the sins or virtues of the old Antony Flew dead and cremated in 1984 is as inept and as unfair as it would be to reward or to punish one identical twin for what was in fact done by the other.

However, I do not accept this objection. Such an objection could be made against a physical object without a mind; however, if in my resurrected body I still have the same memories and sense of personal identity that I had while alive, I would consider myself to be the same person I was while alive and not a replica.

V. The Platonic or Platonic-Cartesian Theory Criticized

As you will recall, these are the assumptions of the Platonic-Cartesian Way:

1. A person is a combination of a corporeal, perishable substance (that is, a body) and an incorporeal, perhaps imperishable substance (that is, a mind or soul).

2. The incorporeal mind is the real, essential person.

Flew spends several pages criticizing the Platonic-Cartesian Theory. First, in order to show how easy it is to make these two assumptions, he discusses Curt John Ducasse and what Ducasse wrote about paranormal occurrences such as telepathy. According to Flew, Ducasse made the two assumptions of the Platonic-Cartesian theory in that discussion. These two assumptions, of course, are dualist in nature.

However, according to Flew, Ducasse and other dualists like him fail to do two important things:

1. They have not shown conclusively that such paranormal experiences are not explainable in terms of the ordinary and natural; that is, Flew believes that ESP [extrasensory perception] can be best described as communication between people rather than as communication between minds or souls.

2. They have not shown that the concept of an incorporeal personal being — that is, a disembodied mind or soul — is intelligible and coherent.

Flew criticizes the Platonic-Cartesian assumption that a person is a combination of a material body and an immaterial soul. He does this by pointing out how closely related are a person's personality and a person's body. For example, if you were to teach a young child about persons, you would do so by pointing to bodies. For example, you would point to a person's body and say that this is a person. In addition, much of what we say about persons — that they laugh, cry, eat, etc. — can only be said about corporeal entities.

Flew writes that "personality is essentially some sort of function of persons; and persons are — surely equally essentially — corporeal."

Flew also tries to show that even if we grant that ESP exists, it can be explained in terms of communication between people rather than in terms of communication between minds or souls. One point that Flew makes is that it is very hard to determine when ESP occurs. For example, someone may be subjectively quite certain that ESP has occurred in his or her experience; however, subjective certainty is very often a poor criterion of determining what is the truth. Frequently, we are mistaken in what we believe.

According to Flew, "The upshot appears to be that the concepts of ESP are essentially parasitical upon everyday and this-worldly notions; that where there could not be the normal, there could not be ESP as the exception to that rule." He adds that "the truth appears to be that the very concepts of ESP are just as much involved with the human body as are those of other human capacities."

Flew's next point is that the concept of an incorporeal personal being — that is, a disembodied mind or soul — is not intelligible and coherent. Of course, unless this concept is intelligible and coherent, it makes little sense to say that the incorporeal mind is the real, essential person.

One point that Flew makes is that Plato believed in the concept of a disembodied soul, yet even Plato — in his Myth of Er in his *Republic* — was unable to describe the experience of such a disembodied soul except in terms of a physical body.

In addition, suppose there were such a disembodied soul. What would its experiences consist of? Basically, they would be a string of memories; however, if we are to make sense of this string of memories and to have the concept of a self, we must be a substance, defined by Flew as "that which can significantly be said to exist separately and in its own right, so to speak."

VI. The Astral Body Criticized

Flew's objection to the astral body is that it is difficult to "find some sort of positive characterization for an astral body: such that an astral body really would be a sort of body in a way in which an imaginary body, or a non existent body, or an incorporeal body are not sorts of body; and at the same time such that the hypothesis that we have, or are, astral bodies is not shown false by any presently available facts."

This kind of positive characterization is unlikely to be found. One may try to stipulate that the astral body is undetectable by present-day scientific instruments, but that in the future it will be detectable by the more refined instruments, but that seems to be fakery, according to Flew.

VII. Conclusion

Flew writes, “My conclusion is, therefore, that if there is to be a case for individual and personal survival, what survives must be some sort of astral body; but that, in the present state of the evidence, we have no need of that hypothesis.”

Note:

The quotations by Flew that appear in this essay are from his book *The Presumption of Atheism* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976).

Chapter 46: Konstantin Kolenda (1923-1991): Reality and God

Christians and Jews believe in a personal God; however, some religions and some people do not believe in a personal God. (A personal God is a God we can communicate with — a God who is aware of what we do and is concerned about what we do.) Buddhism and Confucianism are two religions that do not believe in a personal God.

In addition, Konstantin Kolenda is a philosopher who argues against belief in a personal God. He does believe in a humanistic religion; however, he redefines words such as "God" and "religiousness."

(This brings up an objection we can make against Kolenda: Words such as "God" and "religiousness" already have a widely accepted meaning, so why should we redefine them and give them an entirely different meaning? Of course, Kolenda would argue in return that he is giving these words their true meaning.)

Kolenda believes that the religious impulse arises out of an awareness of death. Death is not optional, and human beings know this. Therefore, they develop a sense of religion. In addition, they try to achieve compensation for their approaching death. (The word "compensation" means to strive to accomplish significant in this life, to try to achieve a kind of perfection.)

In Kolenda's words: "… I may compensate in thought, in imagination, for what I find myself to be. I may complete the actual with the ideal. I can try to fill out my destiny by eliminating from it — in thought and desire — all imperfections, whether they are imperfections in knowledge or in moral status or in aesthetic vision."

We are definitely mortal, but that may not be a bad thing. Because we know that we have been given approximately three score and ten years (70 years) on average in which to live, we can decide to use that time wisely — to live life to its fullest, to accomplish something significant, perhaps to help other people. Being aware of the shortness of life may make us aware of how valuable life is, and so we may decide to use it wisely.

In a metaphor, Kolenda refers to the compensation a blind person can receive: better sense of hearing, better sense of touch, better sense of smell, better sense of taste. The loss of the sense of sight leads to the better use of the other senses. In the same way, being aware of our mortality can make us resolve to make better use of the years of life we do have.

(This doesn't always work: In an episode of *The Simpsons*, Homer thought he was going to die and made good use of 24 hours. After discovering that he would live, he resolved to live life to its fullest, but then he went back to munching on pork rinds and watching *Bowling for Dollars* on TV.)

Previously, I mentioned that Kolenda redefines words such as God. The traditional definition is that God is an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent Being. As defined by Kolenda, however, "The idea of God is man's recognition of his own longing to take his higher ideals seriously."

In addition, Kolenda redefines religiousness. According to Kolenda,

> A religious feeling may occur in a moment of participation, when we are struck or astonished by the beauty of nature or by the spectacular achievements of other persons. It also may well up from the inner resources in our own attentive and creative moments. In either case, we find ourselves in a heightened state of awareness and appreciation, and we declare the world — and our destiny in it — good.

Because Kolenda is a Humanist, he believes that Humankind is important. He also believes that Humankind can be creative and show great intelligence. In fact, part of the purpose of education is to help us understand and appreciate the great achievements of Humankind. This is what religiousness should be all about.

However, according to Kolenda, the natural religiousness of man is open to these two dangers:

1) Inflating the "object of religious attitude" into a "mysterious, supernatural, otherworldly, transcendent realm." Of course, this is what much organized religion does. Kolenda warns against priests, religious orders, and church power.

2) Reducing the "object of religious attitude" to "a modest effort of a lonely individual to embellish his life by pursuing moral or aesthetic ideals, by lending his energies to the task of improving mankind, or by discerning in nature some beauty and design." In my opinion, Kolenda's brand of religion may be open to this objection. However, according to Kolenda, religiousness is much more than this.

Kolenda also makes a distinction between two different kinds of questions about religion. Secondary questions about religion include these questions:

- "Is the believer right?"
- "Does [the believer] have evidence for what he [or she] claims?"

Of course, these are philosophical questions. On the other hand, primary questions about religion include these questions:

- "Can we understand the believer?"
- "Can we see that the way of life [the believer] embraces as a result of his [or her] response to the religious message makes his life richer, more integral, more rewarding in terms of his [or her] ability to reach higher levels of sympathy, participation, and creative effort?"

These are moral questions. Indeed, Kolenda describes the test of the religious impulse as being moral: Does religion make the life of the believer better?

In appreciating the things around us, radiance — a concept from Saint Thomas Aquinas — is important. According to Kolenda, "Radiance is the capacity of something — object, event, act, or process — to attract attention to itself. Radiance accompanies participation."

Examples of radiance include being moved by these things:

- music.
- a spoken word.
- a display of intellectual power.

- an admirable deed.
- a skillful performance.
- an ingenious invention.
- a winning smile.
- a generous impulse.

These are things that any well-rounded person ought to be able to appreciate. They are also the things that education is intended to help us appreciate.

Finally, here are two quotations from Kolenda that illustrate the importance he places on living a good life:

1) “A rich, well-rounded life is still our ideal, and a life wasted on trivialities fills us with regret.”

In other words, is it really necessary to watch that much television?

2) “I rob myself when I fail to respond to the beauty around me, whether it is in nature or in the man-made world. I rob others when I fail to use talents that could provide satisfying experiences for them. In either way, my destiny is impoverished — and so is the universe. A religious attitude will not be indifferent to this loss.”

In other words, you should appreciate the beauty of the world — and you should contribute to it.

Note: The quotations by Konstantin Kolenda that appear in this essay are from his *Religion Without God* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1976).

Chapter 47: Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) and Albert Camus (1913-1960): The Meaning of Life Without God

Can life without God be meaningful?

There are two answers to this question: yes and no. The ‘no’ answer seems to become apparent in Bertrand Russell’s description of the universe as presented to us by modern science. In his essay “A Free Man’s Worship (Mysticism and Logic),” Russell first quotes a passage stating that the universe was created by a heartless being, and then he continues,

> Such, in outline, but even more purposeless, more void of meaning, is the world which Science presents for our belief. Amid such a world, if anywhere, our ideals henceforward must find a home. That man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspirations, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man’s achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul’s habitation henceforth be safely built.

Given this kind of universe, many people will say that life has no meaning and seek to find refuge in God — a Being that Russell believes does not exist. However, Russell continues and finds some meaning in life without a God:

> Brief and powerless is Man’s life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned to-day to lose his dearest, to-morrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day; disdaining the coward terrors of the slave of Fate, to worship at the shrine that his own hands have built; undismayed by the empire of chance, to preserve a mind free from the wanton tyranny that rules his outward life; proudly defiant of the irresistible forces that tolerate, for a moment, his knowledge and his condemnation, to sustain alone, a weary but unyielding Atlas, the world that his own ideals have fashioned despite the trampling march of unconscious power.

Russell has certainly painted an unromantic picture of the universe; however, we know that he found meaning in his existence on earth despite his lack of belief in God and in an afterlife. Russell found his meaning first in mathematics and philosophy, and later in his opposition to the atomic bomb. For much of his life he was in opposition to war. Certainly in this world there are evils to be fought and new knowledge to be discovered.

I believe that Norse mythology also presents a picture of a universe that will ultimately end in chaos, but is yet a universe in which there are gods who find meaning in their lives by struggling mightily and heroically to stave off the final destruction of the universe.

In Norse mythology, Ragnarok is the name given to the twilight of the gods and the destruction of the universe. Ragnarok will be preceded by the coming of three straight winters with no intervening summers. These will be followed by three more winters, during which wars will be fought on earth. Three great monsters that the Norse gods had previously bound will break free and will attack the gods, riding over the rainbow bridge Bifrost into the domain of the gods. The wolf Fenris will kill the chief god Odin, but will in turn be killed by Odin's son Vidar. Another son of Odin, Thor, will kill the Midgard serpent, which is so big it encircles the earth, but Thor will die from the serpent's venom. The watchman of the gods, Heimdall, will fight the evil Loki until both are killed. The god Freyr, who cares for the fruits of the earth, will be killed by Surtur, who will then burn up the universe.

So, the Norse gods *know* that the universe will end in destruction, but rather than despairing, they devote their efforts to postponing the day of destruction. Odin is the chief god responsible for this. He values wisdom. In one story, he went to the Well of Wisdom and begged its guardian, Mimir the Wise, for a drink from it. In payment, Mimir, who was blind, asked Odin for one of his eyes. Odin paid this price in order to gain wisdom. Perching on Odin's shoulders are two ravens, Thought (Hugin) and Memory (Munin), who fly over the world and bring Odin the information they discover.

Odin was always a benefactor to Humankind. He won the knowledge of the Runes by suffering for it in a kind of crucifixion, and he gave this knowledge to Humankind. In addition, he took from the Giants the skaldic mead, which made a poet of anyone who drank from it. Odin also gave this mead to Humankind.

Despite the view that the universe ultimately cares nothing for human endeavors and that the universe will eventually destroy Humankind, both Bertrand Russell and the Norse gods found meaning in their lives. That meaning lay in acquiring knowledge, serving Humankind while Humankind exists, and staving off the final day of destruction as long as possible.

Of course, we cannot stave off the destruction of the universe; however, like Bertrand Russell, we can try to stave off the destruction of the human species — or, at least, try to reduce human suffering.

Albert Camus is a 20th-century author who was an atheist, but who believed that we can give meaning to our life through trying to reduce human suffering. In *The Plague*, Camus gives a portrait of a city that is infected with an epidemic of plague, and a portrait of how different people respond to the plague.

Dr. Donald Borchert, a philosopher at Ohio University, describes the plot of *The Plague* in this way:

> In the French town of Oran on the Algerian coast, life had revolved around making money and other financial interests. Things were business as usual until suddenly all the rats in the town begin to die. Thousands of them emerge from their hidden dwellings and die in the open streets and hallways. As the city takes care of the rats, the townspeople are ignorant of the source of the epidemic until the citizens themselves fall victim to a strange and deadly epidemic. Dr. Rieux identifies the sickness as the plague. Oran is eventually quarantined: its gates are closed and its citizens are isolated from the outside world, behind impenetrable walls. For the next few months, the death toll continues to rise at an alarming rate while the morale and hope of the citizens steadily

fall until a plateau of numb apathy is reached. As the plague rages on, the characters in the story are faced with death and inevitably have to evaluate their lives and the meaning that life and their situations hold. After the initial psychological shocks of the epidemic pass, the able-bodied persons of the town (realizing that they are all in the same situation) unite in an effort to fight the plague. Eventually the plague begins to subside and families and friends are reunited as the city is reopened. But the plague surrenders with a vengeance: Tarrou (Rieux's close friend) is its final victim. Added to that loss is the death of Rieux's wife who was in a sanatorium in another town. The story closes with an eerie and ominous lingering of the now-dormant plague.

One thing we can ask about the novel is why Camus chose to write about a walled city. My answer is that the walled city represents life on Earth. We are born, and the only way to escape from life is to die. It is as if we are surrounded by walls we cannot cross. We are imprisoned in a life that is fraught with suffering. After all, everyone suffers.

As an atheist, Camus does not believe that life has a given meaning. After all, there is no God to give a meaning to life. Therefore, Camus would say that when we ask the question, "What is the meaning of life?" that we are asking an incorrect question. Instead, we should be asking the questions "What gives my life meaning?" and "How shall I make my life meaningful?" It is up to each of us to choose how to give our life meaning; it is up to us how we choose to deal with life.

Camus' spokesperson in *The Plague* appears to be Dr. Rieux, the doctor who fights the plague. Camus' spokesperson is not the Christian Paneloux, who at first believes that the plague was sent to Oran as a punishment. However, after witnessing the great suffering and death of a young child infected with the plague, Paneloux comes to believe that the plague is a part of God's ultimately good plan for Humankind.

But according to Dr. Rieux, "… every country priest who visits his parishioners and has heard a man gasping for breath on his deathbed thinks as I do. He'd try to relieve human suffering before trying to point out its excellence."

Still, Dr. Rieux knows that he will eventually lose his fight. In this life, at least, death is not optional. The plague, to Dr. Rieux, represents a "never-ending defeat." Eventually, everyone will die — if not of the plague, of something else. Dr. Rieux may win a battle here and there, but eventually the enemy will win the war.

There are three ways to face life, and it is up to us which one we choose:

1) The Atheist (Nonreligious) Way: In this, Camus' way, we act as if the war can be won, although we know that it cannot.

2) The Religious Way: We act as if the war can be won, and we believe that the war will be won.

3) The Way of Uncertainty: We act as if the outcome of the war is uncertain. Some theists, such as John Stuart Mill, who believes in a finite or limited God, believe this. So do agnostics.

Notes:

• The quotations by Bertrand Russell are from his essay "A Free Man's Worship (Mysticism and Logic)."

• Albert Camus' *The Plague* is widely available and has been translated by many people.

Chapter 48: Maurice Lamm (1930-2016): The World Beyond the Grave

What will life after death — assuming there will be an afterlife — be like? Historically, the concept of life after death has evolved. Very early in human history, people apparently had some sort of belief in life after death. Often, early human beings would place tools in the graves of their dead, apparently reflecting a belief that the tools would be useful to the dead person in the next life. In addition, Egyptian pharaohs were buried with many precious items and food; indeed, they were buried with every item that would supposedly be needed in an afterlife.

Traditional ancient Greek beliefs about death were bleak. The ancient Greeks believed there was a world — Hades — where the dead went to live, but it was a gloomy world. In *The Odyssey*, the Greek hero Odysseus went to Hades and found it a shadowy world where the dead disliked their existence. In Hades, Odysseus met Achilles, who told him that he would rather be the live slave of a poor farmer than a dead king in Hades.

However, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato (circa 429-347 B.C.E.) had a different conception of the afterlife. According to Plato, the soul is by nature immortal and so it will survive the death of our body. Plato seems to have believed in Eastern ideas; for example, he seems to have believed that the souls of most people would be reincarnated and only the soul of a philosopher would escape being imprisoned again in a body. Those who escape rebirth will live a happy existence in the next life.

In Judaism, the emphasis was on the living — as it is now — and only in the later books of the Bible do we see anything resembling a happy afterlife. Many early Jews did not believe in immortality, although some Jews believed in a gloomy afterlife in Sheol, which is similar to the ancient Greek Hades. However, in the Book of Daniel, we do see a hope of immortality: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2).

With Plato and the Jews, we see two different ways of looking at human beings:

1) Plato: Humans are incarnated souls.

2) Judaism: Humans are animated bodies.

Because of Judaism’s emphasis on the body, which the Jews regard as a gift of God, St. Paul (died C.E. 64? or 67?) believed that our hope for immortality lies in God’s power to resurrect our body. Indeed, according to St. Paul in I Corinthians 15, the belief in immortality is central to the Christian faith: “… if Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe.”

According to St. Paul, Jesus was resurrected, and we will be resurrected. St. Paul does not engage in philosophical arguments that we will be immortal, but he does point out that evidence exists for Jesus’ resurrection: hundreds of eyewitnesses, including St. Paul himself.

When we are resurrected, we will have a body, but it will be a spiritual body, according to St. Paul: “It is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:44).

Maurice Lamm

Maurice Lamm, a rabbi, gives a contemporary account of Jewish beliefs regarding life after death in his book *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (1969).

The Concept of Immortality

Lamm tells his readers, “The conception of an after-life is fundamental to the Jewish religion; it is an article of faith in the Jews’ creed.” However, as shown above, this seems to have not always been the case. Early in the Jewish Bible are few references to immortality. Only in the later books of the Old Testament, such as Daniel, do we have clear references to an afterlife.

Nevertheless, the great medieval Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) believed in the resurrection of the dead. Other medieval Jews, including Hesdai Crescas, Ben Zamah Duran, and Joseph Albo, also held that resurrection was a belief central to Judaism.

However, although there is a belief in resurrection — apparently the resurrection of a spiritual body that for good people will be close to God — there is little knowledge about what heaven may be like. The Jews are very much concerned with life and are not preoccupied with death. According to Maimonides, it is impossible for Humankind to have a clear knowledge of what life after death will be like.

According to Judaism, we are immortal, but in this Earthly life the precise details of immortality are not worked out. We will learn about immortality when we are immortal.

Resurrection: A Symbolic Idea

In analyzing the concept of resurrection, Lamm writes, “Some contemporary thinkers have noted that the physical revival of the dead is symbolic of a cluster of Jewish ideas.” Lamm writes in particular about three of these ideas:

1) “First, man does not achieve the ultimate redemption by virtue of his own inherent nature.”

Plato (circa 429-347 B.C.E.) saw human beings as dualistic in nature: Humans have both a mortal body and an immortal soul. Nothing can destroy the soul, and so we are immortal because of the nature of the soul.

Judaism sees things differently. If we are immortal, it is because of the grace and the mercy of God. We are *not* immortal by nature; if not for God, our dead body would rot, and that would be the end of us. Instead, God’s omnipotence and goodness result in our being able to live again after death.

2) “Second, resurrection is not only a private matter, a bonus for the righteous individual. It is a corporate reward.”

We will not be resurrected on a desert island. Humankind is a social animal and lives in a community. All the righteous of all the ages will live together in a community after death.

3) “Third, physical resurrection affirms unequivocally that man’s soul *and* his body are the creations of a holy God.”

According to Judaism, each person has a soul or mind (which is not immortal by nature) and a body. Also according to Judaism, both the soul and the body are valuable. Neither ought to be scorned. No one should deprecate the body in an attempt to glorify the soul. After all, according to Judaism, both the soul and the body are gifts of God.

According to Lamm, “Resurrection affirms that the body is of value because it came from God, and it will be resurrected by God. Resurrection affirms that man’s empirical existence is valuable in God’s eyes.” After all, Humankind strives to do things on Earth, and worthy strivings are valuable. All worthy strivings will “be brought to fulfillment at the end of days.”

The Meaning of Death

Lamm addresses the question, “What does it mean to die?” According to Lamm, the meaning of death is very closely related to the meaning of life. What life means to you will determine what death means to you. Lamm examines five different ways of looking at life:

1) Suppose that life is an “inconsequential drama, a purposeless amusement.” We live, then we die, and that’s it. Being born is the first act, and dying is the last act. In that case, death is merely the end of existence, and as Lamm writes, “Death has no significance, because life itself had no lasting meaning.”

2) Suppose that life is “only the arithmetic of coincidence” and Humankind exists only because of the haphazard workings of the forces of Nature. Suppose life began as one-celled creatures in the ocean simply because the physical elements for life were present, and through a series of accidents evolved into Humankind. In that case, as Lamm writes, “death is meaningless, and the deceased need merely be disposed of unceremoniously, and as efficiently as possible.”

3) Suppose that life is “a great battlefield,” in which beast battles beast in a struggle for survival. Suppose that the view of Nature “red in tooth and claw” (Hobbes) is correct, and that only the fittest survive. In that case, death is “the end of a cruel match that pits man against beast and man against man.”

4) Suppose that death is “absurd, with man bound and chained by impersonal fate or ironbound circumstances.” If so, then Humankind has no freedom, but is completely determined. If that is true, then “death is the welcome release from the chains of despair.”

5) Finally, we have the religious view of life: Suppose that “life is the creation of a benevolent God, the infusion of the Divine breath.” Suppose further that Humankind is capable of a personal relationship with God. In that case, “death is a return to the Creator at the time of death set by the Creator, and life-after-death the only way of a just and merciful and ethical God.”

Because God is “just and merciful and ethical,” Lamm states, we will be immortal. Our soul will be with God, and in addition, our body will be replaced. If a person is truly religious, then both life and death are truly meaningful.

In conclusion, Lamm writes, “Death has meaning if life had meaning. If one is not able to live, will he be able to die?”

Note: The quotations by Maurice Lamm that appear in this essay are from his *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning* (New York: Jonathan David Publishers, 1969).

Chapter 49: John Hick (1922-2012): Immortality and Resurrection

John Hick is an important theologian who wrote about immortality and resurrection, as well as many other religious topics.

I. The Immortality of the Soul

Plato (circa 429-347 B.C.E.) was an ancient Greek philosopher who believed that the soul is immortal. He had two main arguments for immortality:

1) The soul belongs to the part of reality that is unchanging and eternal. Plato believed that the sensible world — the world that we perceive with our five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste) is not the real world. Instead, there is another, higher level of reality — one that we perceive with our mind. Plato believed that our soul is immortal by its own nature and belongs to this unchanging, eternal reality. In fact, Plato believed in reincarnation and thought that when we learn something we are in fact only recollecting something that we had learned in our other lives.

2) The soul is not composed of parts, so therefore it can't disintegrate. Our physical body is composed of many different parts — we use the atoms of the food we eat to nourish our bodies and to build bones, teeth, skin and muscle. When our physical body dies, it decomposes and its components break up and return back to the clay from which we came. But since our soul is not composed of parts, according to Plato, it does not decompose.

However, although Plato was a giant of philosophy and some people think that philosophy consists of a series of footnotes to Plato, another giant of philosophy — Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) — disagrees with him. Kant's reply to Plato's theory is that even though the soul, if it is a simple part, cannot disintegrate, nevertheless consciousness may cease because its intensity diminishes to zero.

In addition, the type of dualism (the view that Humankind is composed of two things: mind and body) espoused by Plato and by René Descartes (1596-1650) has come under attack by such philosophers as Gilbert Ryle (1900-1976), author of *The Concept of Mind* (1949), who believes that the soul in the human body is like a "ghost in the machine." Ryle deliberately mocks the concept of a human soul.

Because of this, more philosophers are paying attention to St. Paul's (died C.E. 64? or 67?) idea of resurrection as a re-creation of the psychophysical person.

II. The Re-Creation of the Psychophysical Person

In a re-creation of the psychophysical person, God recreates the human being (the psychophysical person) who existed previously. This human being will be a *soma pneumatikon*, which Hick defines as "a 'spiritual body,' inhabiting a spiritual world as the physical body inhabits our physical world."

However, will the re-created psychophysical person still be myself? This brings up the problem of personal identity. If I am re-created in a spiritual body, can I still be the person who was associated with a physical body on the Earth? As Hick writes, "A major problem

confronting any such doctrine is that of providing criteria of personal identity to link the earthly life and the resurrection life."

To help answer this problem, Hick performs three thought experiments:

1) Suppose that John Smith disappears in the U.S. and reappears in India; he has the same memories and habits as the John Smith who disappeared. Would we consider the present John Smith the same person as the John Smith who disappeared in the U.S.? Hick believes that yes, we would. Personal identity — as Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) suggested — largely consists of memories and habits.

2) John Smith dies in the U.S. and reappears in India; he has the same memories and habits as the John Smith who died. Once again, Hick says that we would have to consider the new John Smith the same person as the John Smith who died — even though we see John Smith's corpse. Once again, memories and habits are very important in establishing personal identity.

3) John Smith dies in the U.S. and reappears in a whole new world; he has the same memories and habits as the John Smith who died. Once again, Hick says that we would have to consider the new John Smith the same person as the John Smith who died. Once again, memories and habits are very important in establishing personal identity. Of course, this thought experiment is analogous to a person dying, then waking up in the Kingdom of God: Heaven.

The point of these thought experiments is to show that resurrection would be of the same person whom we are now; even though there may be some differences (for example, having a spiritual body rather than a physical body), these differences would not be enough to make us into a completely different person. Even in Heaven, we will have a sense of personal identity and be able to remember some of the things we did on this Earth. And apparently, we will have some of the same habits we have now (so let's be sure to make them good habits!). Hick even says that possibly our spiritual body may bear a distinct resemblance to our physical body.

III. Does Parapsychology Help?

Does the Spiritualist Movement provide any evidence for immortality? Certainly the Spiritualist Movement claims to have some people — called mediums — who can speak with the dead. However, even if these experiences are genuine, they would not prove endless survival — which is what Christians mean by immortality — but only that the personality survives for some time after death.

Many philosophers, however, have been interested in parapsychology, simply because they want to know if there is any empirical evidence for survival after death — even survival for only a short time. However, parapsychology investigates two different kinds of phenomena:

1) Phenomena that involve no reference to a life after death; for example, ESP and telepathy. Hick defines telepathy in this way: "Telepathy is a name for the mysterious fact that sometimes a thought in the mind of one person apparently causes a similar thought to occur to someone else when there are no normal means of communication between them, and under circumstances such that mere circumstance seems to be excluded."

2) Phenomena that involve reference to life after death; for example, mediums contacting the dead, and ghosts. Still, in the case of mediums apparently contacting the dead, we have two explanations of these phenomena.

First, the medium really could be in contact with the dead. However, this does not seem to be the case. Hick gives two examples of mediums contacting the "dead," only the mediums were not contacting the dead at all. In the first case, two women filled their heads with information regarding a fictional character from an unpublished novel one of the women had written, then they went to see a medium. The medium "proceeded to describe accurately their imaginary friend as a visitant from beyond the grave and to deliver appropriate messages from him."

In the second example, a medium was in contact with the "spirit" of a Gordon Davis. The medium spoke in Davis' voice, showed quite a lot of knowledge about him, and even remembered Davis' death. However, Davis — a real estate agent — was still alive at the time, and was showing a house nearby!

Because of this, Hick gives a second explanation of what the mediums are doing when they produce a spirit. Instead of contacting the dead, they may instead be telepathically reading the minds of living people. In Hick's words: "Such cases suggest that genuine mediums are simply persons of exceptional telepathic sensitiveness who unconsciously derive the 'spirits' from their clients' minds."

So what about ghosts? Once again, ghosts do not provide good evidence for survival after death. Think of this example: A woman sees a man throwing himself into the lake by which she is sitting. A few days later, a man does throw himself into the lake. Once again, telepathy may be involved. The woman may have read the thoughts and emotions of the man. In this case, there is a "phantom of the living" which is "created by previously experienced thoughts and emotions of the person whom they represent." Similarly, Hick writes, it is possible that "phantoms of the dead are caused by thoughts and emotions experienced by the person represented when he was alive."

Hick concludes that perhaps parapsychology will not answer our questions about immortality. However, it is still early and we should not entirely rule out the possibility that parapsychology will "open a window onto another world."

Note: The quotations by John Hick that appear in this essay are from his *Philosophy of Religion* (2nd edition, copyright 1973).

Chapter 50: Raymond A. Moody, Jr. (born 1944): Life After Life?

Is there life after death?

Philosophers have long been interested in such questions as whether psychic phenomena exist, for if they do, they may help answer such questions as whether the mind is a substance that can exist independently of the body and whether Humankind survives death.

Although I am a skeptic when it comes to psychics such as Jeane Dixon foretelling the future, I was much interested when I ran across the book *Life After Life* by Raymond A. Moody, Jr. Dr. Moody has a Ph.D. in Philosophy and is now a medical doctor. In addition, he is now also a psychiatrist. At the time he wrote this book he had a Ph.D. in Philosophy but was still working on his medical degree, which he earned soon after this book was published.

In *Life After Life*, Dr. Moody investigates near-death phenomena. These are the experiences of people who have come very close to dying; indeed, very many of the people who relate their experiences to Dr. Moody were actually pronounced clinically dead before being resuscitated. One interesting fact about these experiences is that they have many elements in common.

Early in his book, Dr. Moody constructs a composite experience using several points of similarity among near-death experiences:

> A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.
>
> After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a "body," but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before — a being of light — appears before him. This being asks him a question, nonverbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.
>
> Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.

Dr. Moody is careful to point out that no two accounts are exactly alike and that no single account has all of the elements that have been reported in near-death experiences. He is also careful to say that he has not proved that there is life after death, although he says these experiences are interesting and ought to be studied more. In addition, as Dr. Moody admits, his is not a scientific study. For example, he does not identify the people who have had these experiences, since they requested anonymity.

However, these experiences are very interesting, and so let's look at what people who have experienced them say they have learned from them.

First, they say that they are no longer afraid of death. Note that they aren't actively seeking death after having these experiences, although they believe that the after-life is very pleasant. None of these people wants to commit suicide. Indeed, in an afterword to his book, Dr. Moody points out that people who have attempted suicide and have had near-death experiences report that the next life was not very pleasant for them. One man, who shot himself after his wife died, reported, "I didn't go where [my wife] was. I went to an awful place. … I immediately saw what a mistake I had made. … I thought, 'I wish I hadn't done it.'"

A person who didn't attempt suicide reported, "[While I was over there] I got the feeling that two things it was completely forbidden for me to do would be to kill myself or to kill another person. … If I were to commit suicide, I would be throwing God's gift back in his face. … Killing somebody else would be interfering with God's purpose for that individual."

Second, Dr. Moody himself summarizes the lessons learned during near-death experiences in this way:

> There is a remarkable agreement in the "lessons," as it were, which have been brought back from these close encounters with death. Almost everyone has stressed the importance in this life of trying to cultivate love for others, a love of a unique and profound kind. One man who met the being of light felt totally loved and accepted, even while his whole life was displayed in a panorama for the being to see. He felt that the "question" that the being was asking him was whether he was able to love others in the same way. He now feels that it is his commission while on earth to try to be able to do so.
>
> In addition, many others have emphasized the importance of seeking knowledge. During their experiences, it was intimated to them that the acquisition of knowledge continues even in the after-life. … [A] man offers the advice, "No matter how old you are, don't stop learning. For this is a process, I gather, that goes on for eternity."

Finally, none of the people who have had these experiences have made reports of being judged or of heaven or hell. Instead, the being of light, who sees the bad things we have done, responds "not with anger and rage, but rather only with understanding, and even with humor." According to one woman, "His attitude when we came to these scenes [of when she was selfish and failed to show love] was just that I had been learning even then." Of course, none of these people may have been really evil.

Dr. Moody writes, "According to these new views, development of the soul, especially in the spiritual faculties of love and knowledge, does not stop upon death. Rather, it continues on the other side, perhaps eternally, but certainly for a period of time and to a depth which can only be glimpsed, while we are still in physical bodies, 'through a glass, darkly.'"

Note: The quotations by Raymond A. Moody, Jr., that appear in this essay are from his *Life After Life* (Atlanta, GA: Mockingbird Birds, 1975).

Chapter 51: Peter Geach (1916-2013): Dualism Rejected But Survival Affirmed

Peter Geach is a philosopher who believes that we can survive death. However, in his book *God and the Soul* (1969), he takes a different approach from that taken by Curt John Ducasse and Robert Almeder. Geach rejects the type of evidence allegedly presented by reincarnated spirits, ghosts, and mediums, and instead presents a theory that is compatible with Jewish and Christian belief.

I. An Important Distinction

First, however, Geach makes an important distinction between mere Postdeath Survival and the Endless Survival that we associate with Immortality. Some philosophers that we have looked at have considered Postdeath Survival — the survival of the personality for a period of time after death. However, when most people think of Immortality, they think of Endless Survival.

Now even if the evidence of reincarnated spirits, ghosts, and mediums turns out to be true, it establishes only that the personality survives death for a short time — not for forever. After all, the supposed ghosts of the pilot and the second officer of Flight 401 were around for only a couple of years after death. Did their personalities then vanish forever?

II. Geach's Rejection of Three Viewpoints About How People Survive Death

No. 1: The Astral Body

Before Geach presents his own theory about immortality, first he examines and rejects three other theories. The first theory that he examines and rejects is the theory that an astral body (or subtle body) survives the death of the material body.

Geach's objection to the astral body is that if it is in fact a sort of body, it would then produce physical effects. Of course, if astral bodies produce physical effects, then the very sensitive instruments of physicists could measure these effects. However, no physicists have ever found such effects.

Some people have suggested that Geach ought to examine the evidence for himself instead of waiting for physicists to do it. However, Geach points out that this is not the way that real science works. When scientists discovered X-rays and electrons, they did not invite laymen to examine the evidence. Instead, they appealed to other scientists to examine the evidence. So, if physicists refuse to take astral bodies seriously, Geach says it is pointless for him to take astral bodies seriously.

No. 2: Platonic Dualism

Plato believed in a form of dualism that Geach rejects. In this kind of dualism, a human being is composed of both a material body and an immaterial mind. (Descartes believed this, too.) When the material body dies, the immaterial mind (or soul, or spirit) is able to continue in existence.

Geach's first objection to Platonic dualism is that it doesn't make sense to say that an immaterial mind is able to sense things. The five senses of seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, and

smelling are so connected to the body that we ought not to say that an immaterial mind that is not connected with a material body does them. Therefore, Geach says, we ought not to say that a disembodied mind is capable of feeling such sensations.

Geach's second objection to Platonic dualism is that a disembodied mind of the sort that Platonic dualism supposes would not in fact be Peter Geach if it were incapable of feeling the sensations that Peter Geach feels in life. In other words, Geach believes that he is not his soul. Instead, a very important part of Peter Geach is his body.

No. 3: Reincarnation

Robert Almeder believes in Reincarnation. However, Geach rejects Reincarnation. Suppose that someone claims to be a Reincarnation of someone else. Geach asks, How would we confirm that in fact such a Reincarnation had taken place? One answer would be: By similarities of character and by memories. Geach rejects this answer.

Similarities of character are not enough to establish the identity of an alleged reincarnated person. Memories are also not sufficient, in Geach's opinion. Even if someone were to have memories that "only" the dead person could have had, Geach believes that this is not sufficient to establish the identity of the alleged reincarnated person. In such extraordinary circumstances, it is best to give up our "ordinary assumptions about what can be known."

In addition, mediums do not provide evidence for postdeath survival. Geach points out several odd things that mediums have done: They have communicated with Martians, and with Red Indians (Native Americans) who could not speak any Indian language, and with people who were alive and well at the time the medium was communicating with them.

III. Geach's Alternative: Bodily Resurrection

Now Geach is ready to give his answer to the question of immortality: Bodily resurrection. First, though, he examines the criteria of personal identity. For Geach, material continuity is an important criterion of personal identity. A baby grows up to be an old man. During that time, every atom of the infant's body will be replaced, yet we still believe that the old man is the same person as the baby (but grown older, of course). So material continuity does not mean material identity.

In addition, mental continuity is important. However, Geach believes that mental continuity is not enough to establish personal identity. Suppose a person claims to be another person — someone who is from Australia. This person seems to have the same memories as the person from Australia, yet further suppose that we find the dead body of the person from Australia — the body has all the relevant scars, body characteristics, etc. Many of us would not believe that the new living person is the dead person from Australia.

However, let me point out here that many of us have intuitions that are different from Geach's. If we were to suddenly wake up and discover that we had a new body (if you were white, you became black overnight; or if you were a girl, you became a boy, etc.), most of us would still suppose that we were essentially the same person, only with a different body. Several Hollywood movies show that people's intuitions support this: *Watermelon Man*, *Big*, *Freaky Friday*, etc.

Now Geach brings up his theory of bodily resurrection. According to Geach, we can claim personal immortality only if we undergo bodily resurrection. As Geach points out, this is

compatible with Christian and with Jewish doctrine.

The Christians take much of their belief about immortality from St. Paul's *I Corinthians 15*. There St. Paul points out that Christ was raised from the dead, and that hundreds of eyewitnesses, including St. Paul himself, saw Him. The Christian belief in immortality rests on the claim that Jesus Himself was dead for three days, then conquered death and lived again.

Without bodily resurrection, there is no hope of immortality, according to Geach. As Judas Maccabeus said, "If there is no resurrection, it is superfluous and vain for me to pray for the dead." However, I should make the point that St. Paul seems to be speaking of the resurrection of a spiritual body, whereas Geach seems to have in mind the resurrection of a material body.

A final question: Does Geach's bodily resurrection provide an answer to Corliss Lamont and his Argument from Dependence? According to this argument, consciousness depends upon the brain and the central nervous system. Unless there is a brain and a central nervous system, there can be no consciousness.

Note: The quotations by Peter Geach that appear in this essay are from his book *God and the Soul* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969).

Chapter 52: St. Paul (circa 5 BCE-circa 67 CE): The Resurrection of the Body

Bertrand Russell and other philosophers, including Corliss Lamont, mounted a formidable attack against immortality by using what we can call the Argument from Dependency. Basically, Russell argued that our personality (including habits and memories) is so dependent upon our brain that when our brain (and body) dies, our personality must also die.

St. Paul has a response to Russell. According to St. Paul, Russell is in part right — we do need to have a body in order to have a personality. However, St. Paul believes that we will have a body in the afterlife — the power of God will resurrect our body and we will live again.

The evidence for this is very Christian — St. Paul cites the resurrection of Jesus Christ as evidence that death will be conquered and we will live again. In *I Corinthians* 15, St. Paul mentions the numerous eyewitnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus. There were over 500 eyewitnesses — most of whom St. Paul says were still alive as he was writing. One of these eyewitnesses was St. Paul himself:

> I passed on to you […] that Christ died for our sins, as written in the Scriptures; that he was buried and that he was raised to life three days later, as written in the Scriptures; that he appeared to Peter and then to all twelve apostles. Then he appeared to more than five hundred of his followers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have died. Then he appeared to James, and afterward to all the apostles.
>
> Last of all he appeared also to me.
>
> (1 Corinthians 15: 1-8; Good News Translation)

Please note that St. Paul does not use philosophical arguments to prove that we are immortal — his evidence is empirical: eyewitnesses. Another thing to note is that many people distrust eyewitnesses; most of us have read detective novels in which an eyewitness made a mistaken identification. Still, there were a vast number of eyewitnesses in this case, including St. Paul himself.

Also note that the resurrection is central to Christianity: The resurrection of Jesus is the most important thing in Christianity, and Easter is — or should be — more important than Christmas. According to St. Paul, "[…] if Christ has not been raised from death, then we have nothing to preach and you have nothing to believe" (1 Corinthians 15: 14; Good News Translation).

Yet another point to make is that the resurrected body will be different from our Earthly body. Here on Earth, we have a physical body; in the afterlife, we will have a spiritual body. According to St. Paul,

> […] When the body is buried, it is mortal; when raised, it will be immortal. When buried, it is ugly and weak; when raised, it will be beautiful and strong. When buried, it is a physical body; when raised, it will be a spiritual body. […]
>
> (1 Corinthians 15: 42-43; Good News Translation)

> “What I mean, friends, is that what is made of flesh and blood cannot share in God’s kingdom, and what is mortal cannot possess immortality.”
>
> (1 Corinthians 15: 50; Good News Translation)

Immortality has been controversial in the history of Humankind. Even in the early books of the Bible, immortality is not something assumed. In *Job* this question is asked:

> If a man dies, shall he live again?
>
> (*Job* 14:14; English Standard Version)

However, in *Daniel* (a late book in the Old Testament), we read:

> And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.
>
> (*Daniel* 12:2; English Standard Version)

Even in the New Testament, immortality is regarded as controversial. The Pharisees believed in resurrection, but the Sadducees did not.

It’s interesting to note that in some early religions even when there was a belief in a life after death, this life after death was not regarded as desirable. The Homeric hero Achilles said in *The Odyssey* that it is better to be the living slave of a poor farmer than it is to be a dead king in the Underworld .

Fortunately, Christian immortality is regarded as being much better than this.

One other believer in immortality must be mentioned, if only as a contrast to St. Paul. The ancient Greek philosopher Plato believed that each human being is an immortal soul trapped in a mortal body. To Plato, death represented the release of our immortal soul. When Plato’s teacher, Socrates, died, he told his friend Crito, “Crito, we ought to offer a cock to Asclepius. See to it, and don’t forget.” Asclepius was the god of healing, and a cock was offered to him when someone was healed of a disease. In other words, Socrates was now healed of life, and so he offered a cock to Asclepius. This is reminiscent of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s epitaph: “Free at last. Free at last. Thank God Almighty, I am free at last.” However, as a Christian, Dr. King believed in Paradise.

Chapter 53: John Baillie (1886-1960): I am Immortal

One philosopher who argues from a Judeo-Christian standpoint that we are immortal is John Baillie, who was born in Scotland in 1886 and who died in 1960 after a long career in philosophy and theology. During his long career, he was even appointed Chaplain to the Queen of Scotland. In his 1934 book *And the Life Everlasting*, he argues that we are immortal. His writing is very clear.

Baillie's argument for immortality is given in what he calls a "syllogism of hope." A syllogism is an argument that consists of two premises and a conclusion. That he uses this form is an advantage to the reader because it clearly identifies his premises and his conclusion; thus, the reader is aided in determining whether the premises are true and whether they provide adequate support for the conclusion.

The first premise of the syllogism of hope is "God is Omnipotent Love." Baillie starts with belief in God; he assumes the existence of God — an omnipotent, omnibenevolent Being Who is the object of worship in Judeo-Christian religions. For Baillie, two characteristics of God are that He is all-powerful and all-loving.

One must ask whether this premise is true. When Baillie evaluates the truth of this premise, he writes,

> The question I find myself asking is not whether God is omnipotent, but whether Omnipotence is God; not whether the Eternal Lover of our souls is truly in control of the universe, but whether that which is in control of the universe is truly such as to be a Lover of our souls. My own temptation, accordingly, has never been to doubt the power of a God unmistakably revealed as love, but rather to doubt the love of a God unmistakably revealed as power. The almightiness of reality is only too plain; it is the love that so often seems hidden.

However, Baillie believes that the first premise is true.

The second premise of the syllogism of hope is this: "Therefore, God will preserve the persons He loves and values." One thing that has been suggested as human beings' intrinsic value is that through using their free will they are able to choose to bring good into the universe. (Of course, through their free will they are also able to choose to bring evil into the universe.)

One thing that Baillie believes is "The Omnipotence behind the universe is our Father and our Friend." Therefore, he asks, if these two premises should be allowed, would not this conclusion follow: "Therefore, God will preserve the persons He loves and values." Indeed, Baillie asks, "Is it possible to believe that the Eternal Father, if He veritably is, should consent to the annihilation of the souls He loves?"

Here is the completed syllogism of hope:

> P1: God is Omnipotent Love.
>
> P2: Something of intrinsic value resides in human individuality.
>
> C: Therefore, God will preserve the persons He loves and values.

Baillie finds the syllogism of hope convincing; he adds that if we do not, we ought to ask ourselves which of the two premises we doubt. (Baillie believes that the two premises provide adequate support for the conclusion; therefore, if the premises are true, then the conclusion is also true.)

According to Baillie,

> If the truth […] of [the syllogism of] hope's [premises] be granted, then its conclusion cannot possibly be resisted. Hence it is of the utmost importance that those who doubt or deny this conclusion should make it clear to others *which of the two premises they are doubting*. It seems to me that there is no small degree of equivocation in contemporary literature on this vital point. Every one who denies the doctrine of personal immortality is denying *either* the ultimate conservation by the universe of the values that emerge during its process *or* the intrinsic nature of the value that resides in personality. *Either* he is doubting the reality of God the Father Almighty *or* he is holding possible that God should will the annihilation of the souls He loves — or at the very least the dissipation of their individualities […].

In conclusion, Baillie offers a way for people to become more assured of their immortality. It is a very simple way, based on Scripture:

> The way to attain to a surer hope is thus not so much to attend to the sharpening of our wits, though that too may have its measure of importance, as to deepen our human experience of fellowship with God and, as a fruit, increase our sense of the preciousness of human souls. Here as everywhere the two great commandments are to love God with all of our heart and our neighbors as ourselves.

Note: The quotations by John Baillie that appear in this essay are from his book *And the Life Everlasting* (C. Scribner's, 1934).

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: ZEN STORIES (RETOLD)

• When Zen master Hakuin was a young Zen student, he learned that hidden virtue is rewarded. He was traveling with two older monks; all three travelers were carrying baggage. While he walked, Hakuin meditated. One of the older Zen monks pleaded that he was ill and asked Hakuin to carry his baggage for him. Hakuin agreed. The other monk then decided to take advantage of Hakuin by claiming that he also was ill and asking Hakuin to carry his baggage, too. Heavily loaded, Hakuin meditated while carrying all the baggage until the three monks reached the boat on which they would travel. Exhausted, Hakuin slept for a long time. When he awoke, he was surprised that the boat had traveled through a storm. While the other monks had been terrified by the storm, become seasick, and vomited, Hakuin had slept peacefully. (Source: Thomas Cleary, translator, *Zen Antics*, pp. 21-22.)

• Two monks were out walking, and they came to a river that they needed to cross. On the bank of the river was a woman who also needed to cross the river, so one of the monks offered to carry her, an act of kindness to which she agreed. The monks and the woman crossed the river,

then the woman went in one direction and the monks in another. Long afterward, one of the monks told the monk who had carried the woman, “We have taken a vow to stay away from women. Why did you carry the woman across the river?” The other monk replied, “I set the woman down a long time ago. Why are you still carrying her?” (Source: Chih Chung Tsai, *Zen Speaks*, p. 26.)

• The Zen master Mokusen Hiki visited a rich man, who was very miserly. Mokusen Hiki held out a closed hand to the miser, and he asked, “If my hand were always like this, what would you call it?” The miser answered, “Deformed.” Mokusen Hiki then held out a hand that was opened wide and asked, “If my hand were always like this, what would you call it?” The miser again answered, “Deformed.” Mokusen Hiki then said to the rich man, “If you understand this, you are a happy rich man.” The miser thought for a long time, and then he changed his ways. When there was a reason to be thrifty, he was thrifty and kept closed the hand that held his money. When there was a reason to be generous, he was generous and opened the hand that held his money. (Source: Chih Chung Tsai, *Zen Speaks*, p. 37.)

• A thief went to Zen master Shichiri to rob him. Shichiri told the robber where his money was located, then as the robber was leaving, he told the robber, “It’s polite to say ‘Thank you.’” The robber was so startled that in fact he said, “Thank you.” A few days later, the robber was caught and taken to Shichiri, and the police asked Shichiri, “Did this man rob you?” Shichiri answered, “No. I gave him the money — he even thanked me for it.” The robber did serve a prison term — for his other crimes — but after getting out of prison, he became Shichiri’s disciple. (Source: Chih Chung Tsai, *Zen Speaks*, p. 37.)

• Zen master Rinzai once told an assembly of monks, “I spent 20 years with Obaku. When three times I asked him about the cardinal principle of Buddhism, he gave me three blows with his stick. It was like being patted with a branch of mugwort. I’d love another taste of that stick now. Who can give it to me?” A monk said, “I can.” Rinzai then held out his stick toward the monk, but when the monk tried to take it from him, Rinzai used the stick to hit him. (Source: Perle Besserman and Manfred Steger, *Crazy Clouds*, p. 39.)

• In 1693, Zen Master Bankei knew that he was dying. When one of his disciples asked him to compose a traditional death poem, he replied, “I’ve lived for 72 years. I’ve been teaching people for 45. What I’ve been telling you and others every day during that time is my death verse. I’m not going to make another one now, before I die, just because everyone else does it.” (Source: Sushila Blackman, compiler and editor, *Graceful Exits*, p. 82.)

• Dasui Fazhen, a 10th-century Zen master, was once asked, “How are you at the time when life-death arrives?” He answered, “When served tea, I take tea; when served a meal, I take a meal.” (Source: Sushila Blackman, compiler and editor, *Graceful Exits*, p. 73.)

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APPENDIX C: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

It was a dark and stormy night. Suddenly a cry rang out, and on a hot summer night in 1954, Josephine, wife of Carl Bruce, gave birth to a boy — me. Unfortunately, this young married couple allowed Reuben Saturday, Josephine's brother, to name their first-born. Reuben, aka "The Joker," decided that Bruce was a nice name, so he decided to name me Bruce Bruce. I have gone by my middle name — David — ever since.

Being named Bruce David Bruce hasn't been all bad. Bank tellers remember me very quickly, so I don't often have to show an ID. It can be fun in charades, also. When I was a counselor as a teenager at Camp Echoing Hills in Warsaw, Ohio, a fellow counselor gave the signs for "sounds like" and "two words," then she pointed to a bruise on her leg twice. Bruise Bruise? Oh yeah, Bruce Bruce is the answer!

Uncle Reuben, by the way, gave me a haircut when I was in kindergarten. He cut my hair short and shaved a small bald spot on the back of my head. My mother wouldn't let me go to school until the bald spot grew out again.

Of all my brothers and sisters (six in all), I am the only transplant to Athens, Ohio. I was born in Newark, Ohio, and have lived all around Southeastern Ohio. However, I moved to Athens to go to Ohio University and have never left.

At Ohio U, I never could make up my mind whether to major in English or Philosophy, so I got a bachelor's degree with a double major in both areas, then I added a master's degree in English and a master's degree in Philosophy. Currently, and for a long time to come, I publish a weekly humorous column titled "Wise Up!" for *The Athens News* and I am a retired English instructor at Ohio U.

If all goes well, I will publish one or two books a year for the rest of my life. (On the other hand, a good way to make God laugh is to tell Her your plans.)

By the way, my sister Brenda Kennedy writes romances such as *A New Beginning* and *Shattered Dreams*.

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Ben Jonson's The Case is Altered: *A Retelling*

Ben Jonson's Catiline's Conspiracy: *A Retelling*

Ben Jonson's The Devil is an Ass: *A Retelling*

Ben Jonson's Epicene: *A Retelling*

Ben Jonson's Every Man in His Humor: *A Retelling*

Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humor: *A Retelling*

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Ben Jonson's The Magnetic Lady, or Humors Reconciled: *A Retelling*

Ben Jonson's The New Inn, or The Light Heart: *A Retelling*

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