

Design for Living

By Michael J. Behe

IN the wake of the recent lawsuits over the teaching of Darwinian evolution, there has been a rush to debate the merits of the rival theory of intelligent design. As one of the scientists who have proposed design as an explanation for biological systems, I have found widespread confusion about what intelligent design is and what it is not.

First, what it isn't: the theory of intelligent design is not a religiously based idea, even though devout people opposed to the teaching of evolution cite it in their arguments. For example, a recent caricatured intelligent design as the belief that if evolution occurred at all it could never be explained by Darwinian natural selection and could only have been directed at every stage by an omniscient creator. That's misleading. Intelligent design proponents do question whether random mutation and natural selection completely explain the deep structure of life. But they do not doubt that evolution occurred. And intelligent design itself says nothing about the religious concept of a creator.

Rather, the contemporary argument for intelligent design is based on physical evidence and a straightforward application of logic. The argument for it consists of four linked claims. The first claim is uncontroversial: we can often recognize the effects of design in nature. For example, unintelligent physical forces like plate tectonics and erosion seem quite sufficient to account for the origin of the Rocky Mountains. Yet they are not enough to explain Mount Rushmore.

Of course, we know who is responsible for Mount Rushmore, but even someone who had never heard of the monument could recognize it as designed. Which leads to the second claim of the intelligent design argument: the physical marks of design are visible in aspects of biology. This is uncontroversial, too. The 18th-century clergyman William Paley likened living things to a watch, arguing that the workings of both point to intelligent design. Modern Darwinists disagree with Paley that the perceived design is real, but they do agree that life overwhelms us with the appearance of design.

For example, Francis Crick co-discovered the structure of DNA, and once wrote that biologists must constantly remind themselves that what they see

was not designed but evolved. (Imagine a scientist repeating through clenched teeth: "It wasn't really designed. Not really.")

The resemblance of parts of life to engineered mechanisms like a watch is enormously stronger than what Reverend Paley imagined. In the past 50 years modern science has shown that the cell, the very foundation of life, is run by machines made of molecules. There are little molecular trucks in the cell to ferry supplies, little outboard motors to push a cell through liquid.

In 1998 an issue of the journal *Cell* was devoted to molecular machines, with articles like "The Cell as a Collection of Protein Machines" and "Mechanical Devices of the Spliceosome: Motors, Clocks, Springs and Things." Referring to his student days in the 1980's, Bruce Alberts, president of the National Academy of Sciences, wrote that "the chemistry that makes life possible is much more elaborate and sophisticated than anything we students had ever considered." In fact,

Dr. Alberts remarked, the entire cell can be viewed as a factory with an elaborate network of interlocking assembly lines, each of which is composed of a set of large protein machines. He emphasized that the term machine was not some fuzzy analogy; it was meant literally.

There's more to life than Darwinism.

The next claim in the argument for design is that we have no good explanation for the foundation of life that doesn't involve intelligence. Here is where thoughtful people part company. Darwinists assert that their theory can explain the appearance of design in life as the result of random muta-

tion and natural selection acting over immense stretches of time. Some scientists, however, think the Darwinists' confidence is unjustified. They note that although natural selection can explain some aspects of biology, there are no research studies indicating that Darwinian processes can make molecular machines of the complexity we find in the cell.

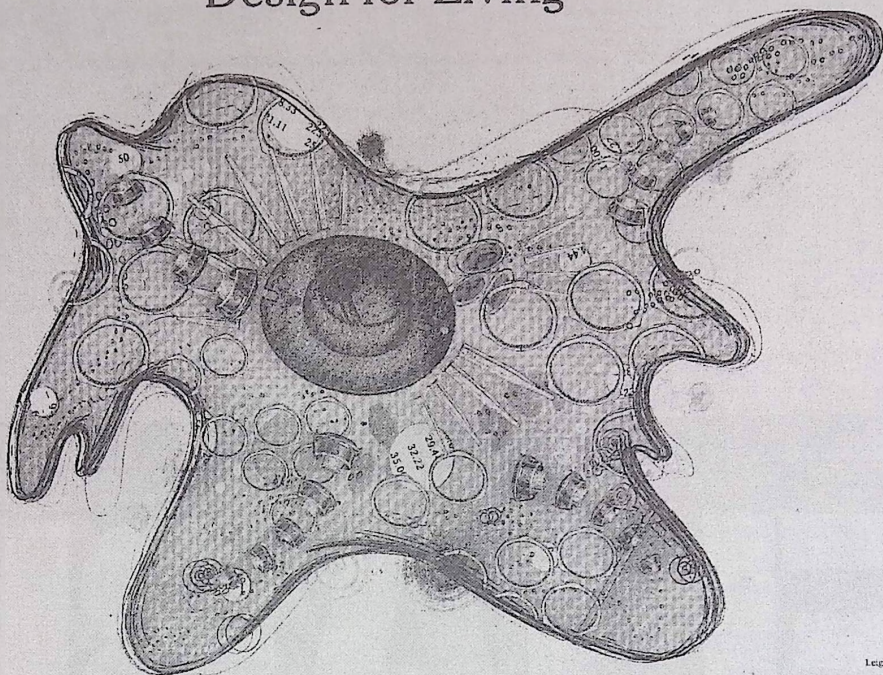
Scientists skeptical of Darwinian claims include many who have no truck with ideas of intelligent design, like those who advocate an idea called complexity theory, which envisions life self-organizing in roughly the same way that a hurricane does, and ones who think organisms in some sense can design themselves.

The fourth claim in the design argument is also controversial: in the absence of any convincing non-design explanation, we are justified in thinking that real intelligent design was involved in life. To evaluate this claim, it's important to keep in mind that it is the profound appearance of design in life that everyone is laboring to ex-

plain, not the appearance of natural selection or the appearance of self organization.

The strong appearance of design allows a disarmingly simple argument. If it looks, walks and quacks like a duck, then, absent compelling evidence to the contrary, we have warrant to conclude it's a duck. Design should not be overlooked simply because it's so obvious.

Still, some critics claim that science by definition can't accept design while others argue that science should keep looking for another explanation in case one is out there. But we can't settle questions about reality with definitions, nor does it seem useful to search relentlessly for a non-design explanation of Mount Rushmore. Besides, whatever special restrictions scientists adopt for themselves don't bind the public, which polls show overwhelmingly, and sensibly, thinks that life was designed. And so do many scientists who see roles for both the messiness of evolution and the elegance of design.



Leigh Stein

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Another Gospel Truth

A scholar sees in a once suppressed book the chance of a different, more diverse Christianity.

BEYOND BELIEF

The Secret Gospel of Thomas.
By Elaine Pagels.
291 pp. New York:
Random House, \$24.95.

By Frank Kermode

ELAIN PAGELS'S "Gnostic Gospels," which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and the National Book Award in 1980, introduced the general public to the discovery in 1945 at Nag Hammadi in Egypt of an extraordinary cache of ancient papyrus books. The peasants who found the jar containing the manuscripts feared that it might house a jinni or spirit, but hoped it contained gold. They broke it open, destroyed some of the disappointing contents and sold the rest.

Written in Coptic, the documents expounded what appeared to be secret and deviant versions of early Christian teaching. Ignorance, commercial greed and academic rivalry ensured that it took a long time for the manuscripts to reach professional scholars. But by the time she wrote her book Pagels had long been involved in fundamental research, and had grown ever more confident of the importance of the find, which some claim rivals that of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The clarity and unobtrusive scholarship of that pioneering account now deserved praise. Now, after more years of research, Pagels offers a kind of supplement, based on her own thinking about the Nag Hammadi evidence and its relevance to modern Christianity. Briefly, she has come to believe that over the centuries the outlawing of texts like "The Gospel of Thomas" has impoverished the Christian church and led to a constructing dependence on St. John's Gospel.

Fifty-two in number, the Nag Hammadi writings are a mixed bag. They include "The Secret Book of James," "The Apocalypse of Peter," "The Gospel of Philip" and other evidently "illegitimate" books, including "The Gospel of Thomas." Although the manuscripts can be dated to the fourth century they are probably translations of Greek originals possibly 300 years older than that — or perhaps even more ancient. Some, it is argued, may be earlier than the four canonical Gospels.

The rejection of these versions of the sayings and acts of Jesus owed much to St. Irenaeus, a second-century bishop of Lyon, remembered as the first great Catholic theologian. He affirmed the authority of four Gospels and sought to purge the church of heretical competitors. These being numerous and diverse, it required the five huge volumes of Irenaeus' "Refutation and Overthrow of Falsely So-Called Knowledge" to deal with them all. He and his successors did

their work so well that until the discoveries at Nag Hammadi this extensive polemic was the chief source of information about these rival testaments. Now it is plain that they represent views markedly different from those of traditional Christianity. So they had to be eliminated. Had those sects survived the condemnation of the orthodox, Pagels says, Christian thought and practice might have developed very differently, and in many diverse directions.

The Gnostics and the Catholics had a fundamental disagreement about the nature of Jesus. In John's view his existence was wholly distinct from that of ordinary humans. John's Gospel differs materially from the other three on some important issues, and this is one of them;

the omnipresent authority of the Bible. Thomas failed, while John prevailed. Committed to the conservation of his tradition, Irenaeus condemned the likes of Thomas as peddling "evil exegesis" and falsifying the one right path to salvation. All who wanted a unified church, so necessary in a hostile world, must stand by John; Irenaeus' reading provided "the basic architecture of what would become orthodox Christianity." In the fourth century the emperor Constantine adopted Christianity, endorsed a creed to which all must subscribe and issued edicts against heretics and schismatics. Now the "Catholic" position had an imperial warrant; there was no salvation outside the church, which alone knew the truth and had the power to purge er-

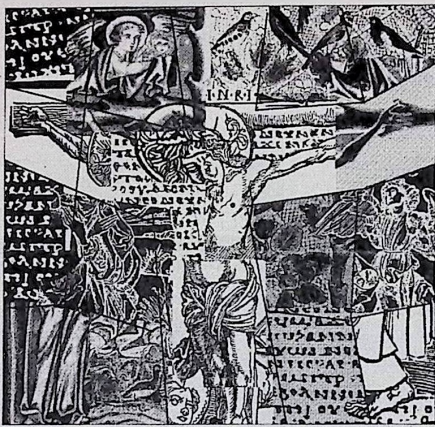
The dissident voices of Nag Hammadi, silent for centuries, uttered much that was understandably thought dangerous. Some denied the physical resurrection; all suggested a Christian way of life foreign to all that has remained familiar. An interesting exercise in "counterfactual" history would be to guess how different the future of Europe might have been if the Gospel that was added to those of Mark, Matthew and Luke had been not John's but Thomas's.

Some of the sayings of Jesus are found in the other Gospels; but his whole manner is more gnomic — in fact Pagels refers to some of the sayings as resembling Zen koans. The emphasis is on secret knowledge, conveyed secretly by Jesus; for example, "If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you." Moreover the interest of narrative, strong in John though not always consistent with the versions in the other three Gospels, is lacking in Thomas, where the interest is in sayings rather than the acts and events commemorated in the conventional Gospels.

Some scholars continue to think Thomas of secondary importance. Pagels, of course, does not. In her gently autobiographical manner she recounts a period of exceptional anxiety and bereavement in her own life, when she found comfort in the Sunday morning community of a Manhattan church. She had long given up the Christianity of John, and as her knowledge of these dissident ancient communities grew she developed a desire for diversity of practice and doctrine and for the undogmatic benefits of religious community. She seems to rejoice that in the earliest years of Christianity there existed these strange, dissident doctrines of illumination. Some worshiped God as both Father and Mother, others went in for sacred dancing, others proposed heterodox interpretations of baptism, and so on.

If one already possessed an incontestable version of the truth, all these deviations could be seen as deplorable — comparable, perhaps, to "wild analysis" in the Freudian tradition. But Pagels looks about the Christian world today and rejoices at the proliferation of the "new forms." Christianity is taking in Africa, North and South America, Korea and China. She cannot be reconciled to churches that claim sole access to the truth of doctrine and discipline. Nag Hammadi seemed to show her that one must shed all such prejudices. The reward, she believes, may be a truer knowledge not only of Christianity, in whatever institutional form, but also of the other great religions.

This packed, lucid little book belongs to the admirable kind of scholarship in which the labor of accumulating Greek and Coptic, Hebrew and Aramaic, the exhausting study of ancient fragments of text against the background of an intimate knowledge of religious history can be represented as a spiritual as well as an intellectual exercise. []



in Mark and his adapters. Matthew and Luke, Jesus was not a god but a messiah ("christos" in Greek) in the Jewish tradition — a human being. John, with his discordant opinion, was added later. Irenaeus said there should be no more, and over time the New Testament canon was closed. But his advocacy ensured that John's would be in all manner of ways the principal Gospel, first in importance though last in order, and a bulwark against the Gnostics. They did not believe in Christ as the divine light sent from heaven, but held that each person should seek the light within, the goal being personal illumination and a kind of twinning with Christ. The tone of their testimony was therefore quite different from John's.

"The Gospel of Thomas" may look exotic to modern readers, who cannot help feeling the strength of tradition and

error. And the truth was largely John's; error belonged to an Egyptian cave.

The novelty of "Beyond Belief" lies, I think, in the polite confrontation Pagels arranges between John and Thomas. She maintains that the fourth Gospel itself plays what might be called (though she does not put it like this) a political game. The disciple Thomas speaks only in John's Gospel, and he is rather coolly presented, said not to have been present with the other disciples when Jesus appeared to them after the Resurrection, and condemned for all time to be the one who doubted. On the other hand we are allowed to assume that John was "the disciple whom Jesus loved" — a privileged and authoritative confidant. (Pagels points out that John puts Peter down in a similar way: the "beloved disciple" beat him in the race to be first to the empty tomb.)

ink Kermode's new book, "Pieces of a Mind," will be published this year.

THE SINS OF THE FATHERS

Reflections on the Death of Christ



Robert Gillooly

The gods visit the sins of the fathers upon the children.

— Euripides (485 – 406 B.C.)

Introduction

It is something of a curiosity, perhaps, that religions have for so long been so taken with the concept of sacrifice. In times past, certainly there was a logic of sorts in offering a gift to those beings who were thought to control the universe as well as one's personal affairs. Still, we may wonder at the logic of a powerful sun-god who yet needs human hearts to fuel his movements, of a benevolent god who calls for the sacrifice of children, or an almighty god who demands atonement from his own creations. However curious the logic, there is no mistaking the debt that Christianity owes to these ancient concepts.

Indeed, the central event of Christianity has become the sacrifice of Christ, and the themes "God gave his only begotten son" and "Christ died for our sins" have become catchwords of the Christian faith, perhaps even topping the celebrated teachings of Christ.

Now, there is a certain beauty in these themes, coming as they do from a gracious God giving his Son, and a generous Son giving his life, for us. But there is also the opposing view that human sacrifice was and is a degenerate act, justified only when seen through the rosy prism of religious myth.

It is this interesting divergence of views that is addressed in the following pages, beginning with . . .

The Nature of Sacrifice

Sacrifice began as a gift to the gods, those improbable beings who once crowded the ancient skies and imposed their wills on a world below. All natural phenomena were thought to be under the control of the gods: A sun-god set the sun on its daily course across the heavens, a wind-god puffed his cheeks and blew mighty gusts across the land, a corn-goddess with yellow hair guaranteed an abundant crop and, on the down side, a volcano-god could cause the very earth to tremble. So early humans had no explanation for the cause of natural events

other than to suppose that invisible beings (gods) had orchestrated the events. No wonder, then, that people sought to honor and appease their gods.

As a way to gain favor with the gods, people turned to prayer, which was essentially entreaty, and to sacrifice, which was an offering of value. Sacrifice served many purposes. It was used to appease the gods, to atone for sins and allay guilt, to secure advantages for one's self or community and even to serve as a ransom paid to the devil — for the ancients were obliged to deal with the evil spirits as well as the benign. Although the nature of the sacrificial offering varied, its value was often related to the importance of the request or occasion. And so it happened that human life was at times placed on the altar, as it were, and even the life of one's child.

Scholars believe that human sacrifice may have begun when early humans saw death all around them, supposed that powerful spirits were calling for these deaths, and decided to satisfy the appetite of the gods with somebody else — a survival strategy. Such is the explanation offered by the noted anthropologist, Westermarck:

“When men offer the lives of their fellowmen in sacrifice to their gods, they do so, as a rule, in the hopes of thereby saving their own.” He describes it as a form of life insurance and not so much an act of wanton cruelty as an absurdity.

The sacrifice of children had an equally unusual beginning. Early tribes believed that the firstfruits of the season belonged to a deity and were therefore his due, or that the god or spirit actually inhabited the firstfruits, which were then partaken of sacramentally and returned to the god. The value placed on the firstfruits of the season was later associated with the firstborn of animals and humans, and the firstborn child was then sacrificed to gain the favor of the god. A number of ancient cultures sacrificed the firstborn, among them the ancient Celts, Russians and Semites.

When the concept of human sacrifice became established in early societies, it was necessarily religious in nature as it involved dealing with a spirit world. But

beyond its religious motives, human sacrifice often seemed to reveal the dark underside of human nature. For example:

- In West Africa, natives asked the king to stop excessive rain by making juju — a sacrifice. A woman was made ready by prayer and a message to the Rain God put in her mouth. She was then clubbed to death and put in a high tree so the rain could see. On the other side, a charm for bringing rain was to lash a young woman to a scaffolding placed high in a tree where she would be devoured by turkey buzzards. Similar rites were available for assuring a good harvest or controlling the sun.
- The ancient Mexicans thought of the sun as a vital life force and named him Ipalmemohuani, or “He by whom all men live.” As the Mexicans believed the sun gave life to the world, they believed he needed to receive life from it. And since the heart was the symbol of human life, the bleeding hearts of men were offered to the sun to give him strength to continue his journey across the sky. Scholars estimate that between 20,000 and 40,000 people a year were sacrificed in Mexico.
- Indian sacrifices to the dreaded goddess, Kali, involved poison, mass immolation and decapitation. In some temples a human victim was sacrificed to Kali every Friday evening. The victim was generally purchased for the purpose, although was sometimes a person found wandering the streets after midnight. At the turn of the 19th century it was believed that human sacrifices were still offered to Kali, on occasion, by almost every district in India.
- Even man-gods were at risk in some early societies. In one such case the king was viewed as a man-god and responsible for the welfare of his people. Therefore, if

the king grew long in the tooth and showed signs of decay, it was a clear threat to the welfare of his people. The answer was to be found in replacing the king with a strong successor and allowing the king's soul to change bodies before it became impaired by the decay. On a timely basis, therefore, the king would be sacrificed for the greater good.

- According to tradition, On, King of Sweden, sacrificed nine of his sons to the god Odin in order that his own life might be spared. Sir James Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* notes that Odin required one son to be sacrificed every nine years in order for the king to preserve his life. The Swedes stopped the monarch just before he dispatched his tenth, and last, son to Odin.

The foregoing examples suggest that the motives for human sacrifice were born of superstition but christened as religious truth. Perhaps of special interest to Christians, who inherited many of the Jewish beliefs, was the ancient custom of Semitic kings to sacrifice their sons for cause. *The Golden Bough* quotes Philo of Byblus, whose work on the Jews says:

“It was an ancient custom in a crisis of great danger that the ruler of a city or nation should give his beloved son to die for the whole people, as a ransom offered to the avenging demons; and the children thus offered were slain with mystic rites. So Cronus, whom the Phoenicians call Israel, being king of the land and having an only-begotten son called Jeoud (for in the Phoenician tongue Jeoud signifies ‘only begotten’), dressed him in royal robes and sacrificed him upon an altar in a time of war, when the country was in great danger from the enemy.”

This ancient custom of Semitic kings is of interest because it bears a resemblance to the death of Christ, also a beloved son who was sacrificed for the whole people — and some thought as a defense against the devil. In fact,

Westermarck noted that the Greek Church and the most important Western Fathers believed that the sacrifice of Christ was a ransom paid to the devil, that his onslaughts against humanity might be eased.

In the end, of course, the Church Fathers chose to regard Christ's death as an atonement for human sin, not as a ransom paid to the devil. But the choice was not an easy one, for it would appear that either (1) God could think of no better remedy for the human condition than the brutish sacrifice of his only Son, or (2) God felt so powerless against the wrath of demons that he offered up his only Son to Satan. Neither option does great kindness to the image of Almighty God, nor to the rationality of the Church Fathers. And both options bear the earmarks of ancient superstition.

From all appearances, then, the concept of sacrifice arose in the earliest of times, when ancient peoples felt obliged to placate their many gods and demons — those invisible spirits that were, after all, only themes of the imagination. The concept of human sacrifice, nevertheless, has seemingly found safe haven in current Christian beliefs. It would not be the only time that superstition has wended its way from primitive beliefs to religious doctrine of great sophistication.

The Transfer of Sin

One of the foundational beliefs in Christianity is that the death of Christ delivered the peoples of the world from sin. It found expression in the Catholic prayer, "Lamb of God, who hath taken away the sins of the world, have mercy on us." However, the presumed ability to transfer sins did not begin with Christianity, and indeed had been in the human hope chest for many centuries before Christ. *The Golden Bough* notes that the transfer of sin to a dying god had become a custom among the ancients, and there seems little doubt that the Church Fathers adopted the ancient belief and associated it with the death of Christ:

"The accumulated misfortunes and sins of the whole people are sometimes laid upon the dying god, who is supposed to bear them away forever, leaving the

people innocent and happy." Such a notion concerning the transference of sin "arises from a very obvious confusion between the physical and the mental, between the material and the immaterial." Early humans evidently believed it possible to shift their sin and suffering to another, just as a load of wood or stone might be shifted to another carrier.

The assumed transfer of sin was not confined to gods, but extended to animals, humans and even to inanimate objects. A tribe in Borneo, for example, annually sent a little boat, a bark, to sea laden with the sins and sorrows of its citizenry, who then retired to their island homes to await another year's accumulation.

Animals were often used as scapegoats. In Arabia a camel was walked through a town struck with pestilence so that it could absorb the disease; the camel was then strangled with the assumption that the pestilence died with the beast. In certain African tribes, monkeys or rats were paraded through the village to attract evil spirits and then crucified to save the entire community from demonic attacks. Jewish high priests laid hands on the head of a goat to transfer the sins of the children of Israel to the goat, which was then banished into the wilderness. And one Pacific tribe used turtles as the object of their absolution.

And on occasion, the animals used as scapegoats were deemed divine. In India, Brahmans transferred the sins of the people into a sacred cow, after which the cow, and therefore the sins, were dispatched to an appointed place. Ancient Egyptians avoided sin and misfortune in a similar fashion, laying such evils on the heads of sacred bulls.

Humans sometimes chose gods as their scapegoats, but the honor was also bestowed on man-gods. Among the many was a man-god the ancient Aztecs believed absolved them of their sins — well before the Spaniards arrived with their own incarnation. And in the Eastern Caucasus, man-gods thought to be possessed of a divine spirit were slain by a sacred spear thrust into their sides, while in the purification ceremony that followed the attendees had their sins taken away.

The suggestion that Christ's sacrifice had taken away the sins of the world, then, was not a novel idea at the time. It seems that humanity has always sought to rid itself of sin, guilt and sorrow, and found the means in the magical transference of evil. Sin has been transferred to goats, men and gods and has been sent to sea in little boats.

And so when early Christians were presented with a dying man-god, they followed an ancient custom and assigned their sins to Christ — and as Christ died so did their sins die with him. Or so they believed.

In a Magic Garden

The premise that Christ died for our sins began with the transgression of Adam, whose sin resulted in the Fall — and from which a hereditary guilt washed over the peoples of the world. And not only did original sin attach itself to the newborn, but human nature was thought to have been weakened, bringing to it ignorance, suffering, a continuing inclination to sin, and death. So Adam's transgression left humanity with a heavy burden to bear.

The theory of primal sin, however, did not begin with Christianity but with the Orphic movement in ancient Greece, near the 5th century B.C. Orpheus was a mythical Greek hero endowed with superhuman musical abilities whose adventures included charming Hades, king of the underworld, and the mythical guardians of the River Styx. He came to an unfortunate end by dismemberment at the urging of rival gods, although "his head, still singing, with his lyre, floated to Lesbos, where an oracle of Orpheus was established." From this beginning and subsequently in the philosophic schools of ancient Greece, there was born a mystic Greek religion, which first offered to purify the soul from innate or inherited evil.

Years later, it was a Jew, Saul of Tarsus, whose Roman name was Paul, that preached the doctrine of original sin. The idea was not explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament and in the New Testament it was Paul who alluded to the

transmission of hereditary guilt from the first man to the entire human race. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes:

While one may gather, here and there in the NT, hints at the universality of sin, it is only St. Paul, in Eph 2.3 ("We were by nature children of wrath even as the rest") and especially in Rom 5. 12-19, who forcefully brings out the doctrine. Through an extended series of contrasts Paul's doctrine gains great power: sin and death have entered into all men (Rom 5. 12); in the transgression of the one, the rest died (5. 15); consequent upon the judgment passed on one man, all men were condemned (5. 18); and through the disobedience of one man the rest were constituted sinner (5. 19).

The concept of primal sin was a serviceable one at the time, as it explained the suffering that blanketed a world supposedly under the protection of a capable and caring God — human suffering then became a deserved punishment for sin, rather than the neglect of an indifferent God. And so it was that early Christians adopted the theory of original sin.

But today we must contend with the awkward but widespread belief that the Magic Garden, and Adam and Eve, were only apocryphal figures. If that is so, there was no Adam, no fall from grace, and no reason for Christ's death to be judged a redemption. So a great deal of Christian doctrine depends on whether the Garden of Eden was mythical or real.

The suggestion that the Christian Fall was mythical first came from scholars who studied the origins of ancient myths. They found stories of a prototypical Fall long before the Old Testament and the biblical account of Adam and Eve. Joseph Campbell (1904 – 1987) in his book *Myths To Live By* finds "the symbolism of the serpent, tree and garden of immortality already in the earliest cuneiform texts, depicted on Old Sumerian cylinder seals and represented even in the arts and rites of primitive village folk throughout the world."

Another indication of the mythical nature of Fall stories may be seen from the description of what life was like before the Fall. Quite marvelously:

- A Christian version of the Fall legend spoke of human beings who were created perfect in every respect — when they first appeared on earth. There was no sin, nor pain, nor disappointment because the Creator had fashioned humans to perfection. There was even “no death,” for humans (and animals) were created to live forever by the grace and power of a supreme being.
- The prophet Zoroaster (6th century B.C.) preached a Fall in the ancient Persian religion, wherein the god Ahura Mazda created a perfect world entirely free of pain and despair, but his perfect creation was then marred by an opposing evil spirit, Angra Minyu, who brought about a Fall and introduced evil and ignorance into the world. Zoroastrianism was still able to offer, like Christianity, hope for a better tomorrow through the intercession of a savior, Saoshyant, who promised the resurrection of the body after death and thereafter a purified soul, both of which would enjoy an eternal life.
- Greek mythology also had its legend of a Fall wherein Hesiod (8th century B.C.) reported a revelation that men in the most ancient times were “a golden race” who lived like gods without cares, labor or illnesses and were surrounded by fruitful fields and flocks; and when they died it was as if they were only overcome by sleep. But then came the well-known Pandora, who opened a vase bidden by divine command to remain closed, and let loose a torrent of troubles, sorrows and disease in the world. The problems in the world, then, have long been associated with a failure not of the gods, but of humans such as Pandora and, of course, Adam.

In the past century, more evidence surfaced to show that the Christian Fall was mythical in nature. Scholars found in the Ninevite records confirmation that the Christian Fall legend was first adopted from more ancient sources by the Jews and by them transmitted to Christianity.

Today, one may marvel that people in all walks of life would believe in a literal garden of Eden, a serpent that could talk, and a fruit with marvelous properties. And for thousands of years. But such is the nature of myths and legends and, as Joseph Campbell says in *Myths To Live By*:

"Today, we know — and know right well — that there was never anything of the kind: no garden of Eden anywhere on this earth, no time when the serpent could talk, no prehistoric "Fall," no exclusion from the garden, no universal flood, no Noah's Ark. The entire history on which our leading occidental religions have been founded is an anthology of fictions. But these are fictions of a type that have had — curiously enough — a universal vogue as the founding legends of other religions, too. Their counterparts have turned up everywhere — and yet, there was never such a garden serpent, tree or deluge."

So it seems clear that the story of Adam and Eve, credited by Christians for almost two thousand years, was dipped from a vast reservoir of religious myth. In our chagrin, we may take comfort in the fact that although Christ died, we are now held blameless for the goings-on in a mythical Magic Garden.

All in all, the beauty of Christ's life lies in his teachings, rather than in the fabled stories of his death: The myth that a Father's sacrifice of his Son could somehow benefit humanity, that personal sin could be transferred to a dying man-god, and that hereditary guilt could be transmitted to the human race from a mythical Adam and Eve. For some, these fanciful creations by the Church Fathers are a shadow on the otherwise luminous life of Christ.

* * *

Theodicy

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.

Theodicy is a branch of theology that studies how the existence of a good or benevolent God is reconciled with the existence of evil. An attempt to reconcile the co-existence of evil and God is sometimes called "a theodicy". See the article on the problem of evil for examples.

Contents

- 1 Origin of the term
- 2 The problem of evil
- 3 The nature of God
- 4 Examples of theodicy
- 5 Analysis of these solutions
 - 5.1 The free will theodicy
 - 5.2 The Calvinistic theodicy
 - 5.3 Relativity of goodness — evil is not absolute
 - 5.4 Human nature
 - 5.5 God is not omnipotent or omniscient
 - 5.6 Contemporary philosophy of religion
 - 5.7 Holocaust theology
 - 5.8 General problems with all theodicies
 - 5.9 Hindu answers to the problem of evil
- 6 Against theodicy
- 7 Evidential arguments from evil
- 8 External links

Origin of the term

The term *theodicy* comes from the Greek *théos* (meaning "god") and *diké* (meaning "right" or "just"), meaning literally "the justice of God". The term was coined in 1710 by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibniz in a work entitled *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal*. The purpose of the essay was to show that the evil in the world does not conflict with the goodness of God, that, indeed, notwithstanding its many evils, the world is the best of all possible worlds (see Panglossianism.)

The problem of evil

The problem of evil has from earliest times engrossed the attention of Western philosophers. In his *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, the well-known skeptic Pierre Bayle denied the goodness and omnipotence of God on account of the sufferings experienced in this earthly life. The *Théodicée* of Leibniz was directed mainly against Bayle. Imitating the example of Leibniz, other philosophers also called their treatises on the problem of evil *theodicies*. In a thorough treatment of the question, the proofs both of the existence and of the attributes of God could not be disregarded, and the knowledge of God was gradually brought within the domain of theodicy, and theodicy came to be synonymous with natural theology (*theologia naturalis*) that is, the department of metaphysics which presents the positive proofs for the existence and attributes of God and solves the opposing difficulties. Theodicy, therefore, may be defined as an attempt to explain the nature of God through the exercise of reason alone. This is in juxtaposition to theology, which attempts to explain the nature of God using supernatural revelation and faith.

Some have argued that the predetermined goal of theodicy (that of justifying the existence of God with the existence of evil) tarnishes any aspirations it might have to be a serious philosophical discipline, because an intellectual pursuit having a predefined goal and preassumed conclusions cannot be deemed in any reasonable way to be methodical, scientific, or rational. Should we respect an inquiry whose goal is not to find out the truth, but to prove *by any means possible* that a particular thing *reasonably doubted* (Bayle and all who follow him) is true? Proceeding from the proposition to be shown to find a proof of that proposition invites confirmation bias on the part of the theorist.

Others argue that theodicy, like all of science and reason, begins with a hypothesis, and then tests the hypothesis to see if the hypothesis can be reconciled with experience and reason. It is common for mathematicians to begin with a proposition that seems to be true (for example Fermat's last theorem) and then work to demonstrate the truth of that proposition through a series of rigorously logical steps. They assert that just as the existence of God may be reasonably doubted, it may also be reasonably believed, because the existence or non-existence of God is, by its very nature, beyond the realm of observable and verifiable phenomena with which science concerns itself. Therefore, since it is reasonable to believe that God may exist, theodicy is a reasonable attempt to reconcile the *hypothesized* existence of God with the perceived existence of evil. While theodicy cannot *prove* the existence of God, it can make belief in God *reasonable*, by showing that the existence of God is not necessarily incompatible with the existence of evil. On the other hand, unlike in mathematics, in a philosophical project like a theodicy it is difficult to say what precisely constitutes a valid logical step, and though one proponent of a theodicy may be convinced of its rigor, another person may find it logically weak or reject some of its assumptions. For this reason, theodicies tend to be controversial, even among theists.

The nature of God

Theodicy investigates the question of to God's nature and attributes.

The latter are in part absolute (*quiescentia*) and in part relative (*operativa*). In the first class belong traits such as infinity, immutability, omnipresence, and eternity; to the second class the knowledge, volition, and action of God. The action of God includes the creation, maintenance, and government of the world, the co-operation of God with the activity of the creature, and the working of miracles. While many grant that all our cognition of God is incomplete, this branch of theodicy attempts to explain those traits of God which we have some understanding of. It includes, for instance, the classical problem of how God can be infinitely good and yet allow evil to occur.

- Calvinism asserts that all events are part of God's plan, and therefore, though they may appear to be evil to us, God intends them for a higher purpose that only he knows, and they are not evil in God's eyes.
- Open Theism asserts that although there is a basis for belief in God, there is no basis for belief in God's omnipotence, omniscience, or benevolence; and that although God is the *most* powerful, *most* loving, and *most* knowing, he is not infinite. Evil therefore exists really, tangibly, and in direct conflict with God's will.
- Malthusism asserts that the "problem of evil" is not a problem at all—the initial question has a simple answer, there is no way that a benevolent omnipotent God would allow evil in the world. Therefore, they reason, God is either not benevolent or not omnipotent.
- "modified Dualism", since the powers of good and evil are unequal, and the evil power is merely tolerated by the good power, who turns all the acts of the evil power into eventual good. Classical Christianity, i.e., from the Apostolic Fathers to Augustine, has been characterized as "modified Dualism". Sts. Augustine and Basil the Great both explicitly mention this idea. St. John of Damascus proposed that God deliberately leaves some events "in our hands". In early modern times (1714) a modified Dualism was advocated by St. John (Maximovitch) of Tobolsk.

Examples of theodicy

Resolutions to the problem of evil generally entail one of the following:

- may
X
 ■ What humans consider evil or suffering is an illusion or unimportant.
 - Events thought to be evil are not really so (such as deaths by natural disaster).
- Free will
X
 ■ A perfect God is not only good but also evil, since perfection implies no lacking, including not lacking that which is evil. A lacking of evil would imply that there is something external to his all-encompassing perfection. This is related to monistic philosophies such as advaita, or pantheism.
- Sin
X
 ■ Evil is the consequence of God permitting humans to have free will, or God may intend evil and suffering as a test for humanity. Without the possibility to choose to do good or evil acts humanity would be nothing but robots.

human cruelty is price of freedom
can't explain natural disasters
- contrast
X
 ■ Evil is the consequence, not cause, of people not observing God's revealed will. Universal reciprocated love would solve most of the problems that lead to the evils discussed here.
- big picture
X
 ■ God's ultimate purpose is to glorify Himself (which, by definition, He alone is infinitely entitled to, without vanity). He allows evil to exist so that we will appreciate goodness all the more, in the same way that the blind man healed by Jesus appreciated his sight more so than those around him who had never experienced blindness.
- X
 ■ God's divine plan is good. What we see as evil is not really evil; rather, it is part of a divine design that is actually good. Our limitations prevent us from seeing the big picture.
- X
 ■ God created perfect angels and perfect humans with a free will. Some of his creations chose independence and lost their perfection: they began to sin, which resulted in evil doing and death. For a while God will allow this to continue, so that it can be proven that his creations can not be happy while independent from God because this was the challenge which caused the rebellion in the first place. In due time God will restore the people who choose to depend on God to perfection and so bring an end to sin and with it an end to evil.
- X
 ■ God is a righteous judge; people get what they deserve. If someone suffers, that is because they committed a sin that merits such suffering. (This is also known as the just world hypothesis).
- test
X
 ■ Suffering is educational. It makes us better people.
- X
 ■ Evil is one way that God tests humanity, to see if we are worthy of His grace.
- X
X
 ■ Evil and pain exist in this world only. This world is only a prelude to the afterlife, where no pain will exist. The scales of justice are balanced in the afterlife.

now + then
- The world is corrupt and of itself shouldn't have been created, but the work of Christ (or some savior figure) redeems the world and thus God's creation of it.
- Absolute evil is not actually real. Rather, it is only a condition of not enough goodness. (See also mention of William Hatcher's explanation.)
 - Evil is relative to good; neither good nor evil could exist without both existing simultaneously.
- Karma: All good is balanced by evil, and it is only when we achieve proper balance that our reincarnation ends. This explains why an infant may be born into misery, due to experiences they will have later in that life, or in previous or later lives.

Absolute evil impossible
not enough goodness

- Mark's position*
- One of the conflicting assumptions is wrong: Drop either the assumption that God is omniscient, or omnipotent, or perfectly good. See the entry on the subject of God and omnipotence for more details on this point.
 - Religions such as Gnosticism and Manichaeism, and even some Christian groups, dispense with the issue by embracing various forms of dualism, in which God is opposed by an evil counterpart, and is therefore not omnipotent.
 - Malthusians go even further than the Gnostics, in a sense, by saying that God simply is evil himself. To them, the problem of evil is not a problem at all, and is neatly resolved by acknowledging that an omnipotent benevolent God would not create a world in which there was evil, concluding that God, assuming he exists, is either not omnipotent, not benevolent, or perhaps both. (They frequently add that if God is not omnipotent but claims that he is, he is thus lying, and consequently is also justifiably deemed evil in nature.)
 - Most atheists believe that statements about God are meaningless. Some atheists believe that the problem of evil can be used to prove that God does not exist by the method of *reductio ad absurdum*. However, as malthusians point out, this method does not prove that God does not exist, but rather that if he does exist he is not omnipotent or benevolent, as he and his followers might claim him to be. The logical error may also fall in other places: for example, that evil does not exist, or that God creating evil does not make God evil.

Analysis of these solutions

The following are detailed analyses of the above stated solutions.

The free will theodicy

Assume that both God and Man possess ultimate free will. This certainly entails the possibility of evil acts, making the free will theodicy plausible *prima facie*.

But must free will *necessarily* lead to evil? How did evil come to be in the first place? One explanation is that humans are corrupt at heart; but that would assume a will that is evil rather than free. Another explanation is that to be free we must act differently than God, and if God is morally perfect, our free actions must then be evil; but this confuses free action itself, with a way that we might recognize free action. A simpler explanation is that it may merely be a contingent fact that humans *happen to* choose evil by their exercise of freedom. And evil, having once arisen even by chance, plausibly led to more evil.

The free will theodicy argues that if God were to 'get involved' and start influencing human actions for the better, then human actions wouldn't be free any longer. Human freedom means that God cannot guarantee human perfection (*see incompatible-properties arguments*).

This requires that free will be a good in itself, greater than the evil it costs to allow such freedom. Why should it be better for God to respect human freedom? What's so great about free will? The response is that free will is what makes us valuable moral agents, and that, if God were to deny us our freedom, human society would be in a deep sense, like an assemblage of robots: not only incapable of evil, but incapable of moral choice in general.... Though value would exist in such a world, the free moral agency possessed by God and actual humans is argued to be far greater. All the cruelty that we humans freely perform is indeed regrettable, but it is the price of freedom. ✓

This argument can only explain evil traceable, however indirectly, free will. It does not explain any catastrophic horror that has nothing to do with human choices, or possibly the choices of other free beings. Think of earthquakes, floods, and disease—so-called 'natural evil' or 'acts of God'. We cannot confront a paralyzed,

demented, and blind Tay-Sachs child and his despondent parents and then chalk up the entire wretched scenario directly to free will. No one chose it. Healing that child wouldn't obviously tread on anyone's freedom. Free will does not seem to account for all the evil we observe, but only certain evil such as that we humans freely create—so-called 'moral evil'.

Some instances of moral evil also themselves involve violations of free will—e.g., rape, and these present a slightly more complex problem. For God to step in and deny the violator his freedom would also be to protect the victim's freedom. In such cases, whose free will is more valuable—which instance of coercion would be worse? It is morally implausible that, given that choice, the best thing to do is to respect a rapist's freedom to rape rather than the victim's freedom not to be raped. So, for moral evil involving coercion—the value of free will may not justify God's inaction. However, all or nearly all evil involves people abridging each other's freedoms. But the problem the theodicy addresses is not whether the rapist abridges another's freedom (they do), but whether God will abridge anyone's freedom. For God to intervene on either side would abridge freedom. God's permitting a rape to occur is logically no different than his permitting any other moral evil to occur, making this criticism of free will theodicy circular.

Others attack this theodicy on other grounds. Some deny the existence of free will altogether, and so have no need for the proposal in the first place. Compatibilists sometimes attack the essential premise that God cannot influence our choices without thereby cancelling our freedom. After all, compatibilists believe that determinism is consistent with human freedom. And if determinism can allow for freedom, perhaps so can appropriate divine meddling with our decisions. Thus the question of exactly how God's intervention would undermine free moral agency is crucial. We need a reason to think that there are at least some, perhaps many, ways that God really couldn't override our choices without cancelling our freedom. The customary appeal is to a strong construal of free will.

Another challenge focuses on different ways to interfere with freedom. One way is to 'jump in' and take control of the agent, dictating its every movement and thought. This is the kind of coercion we envision in mad scientist stories. But it might also be the kind of coercion that motivates our above intuition that if God got involved, we'd all be 'robots'. But there are other, softer kinds of coercion. Look to policemen and jailers. They don't directly take control of an agent's decisions. They just threaten the agent with physical force and restraint, and carry out their threats if necessary. Policemen and jailers restrict our freedom, but not in the same way. If God were to get involved as a Divine Policeman, making threats and enforcing them, then would we be 'robots'? Perhaps not, or at least not in the same way. Instead, we'd be citizens of a divine nation-state, and a very safe and reliable nation-state at that. But then the moral claim that God *should* hold back must be more refined: To just what extent could God (consistently) intervene, without abridging free will?

Other challenges attack the idea that evil-eliminating divine interventions must cancel human freedom. These challenges suggest different ways for God to eliminate evil, all the while leaving our free will untouched—"innocent interventions". One proposal is for God to fortify humans as to render us less vulnerable to the sins of our fellows. We could be bullet-proof, invulnerable to poison, etc. That way, humans would retain the capacity for evil choices and activities; it's just that such evil behavior would be harmless to the 'victims' and futile for the evildoers. On the other hand, it is not obvious that such a system could be constructed. If people cannot do harm, then they are not free moral agents, though they may be free agents in some very restricted sense. Most supporters of a free will theodicy would argue that it is moral free agency, not a vacuous freedom that has no moral consequences, which is essential to making us truly different from automata.

A very similar proposal is that God could allow sinful acts, but stop their evil consequences. So if I fire a rifle at your head, God allows me to make the decision, but then makes the trigger stick, or the rifle misfire, or the bullet pop out of existence. Such interventions would, happily, divorce evil choices from the subsequent suffering. An objection to this solution is that without observing the evil consequences of our actions we would not truly be making moral choices at all. In other words it is not only important for us to have freedom to choose our actions

but also to have freedom with consequences. Presumably, a world where guns only fired when aimed at just targets would not truly present us the option to choose evil since it would be apparent that no harm comes from our actions; and a world where all evil choices were grossly unattractive would likewise not leave us truly free moral agents.

An entirely different approach (not precisely a free will theodicy) is to claim that suffering is merely an appearance, similar to the Buddhist teaching that suffering is illusion (for example, see this summary on BeliefNet (http://www.beliefnet.com/story/80/story_8045_1.html)). Presumably an omnipotent God could isolate each of us in a 'virtual' world where others appear to suffer but in reality are soulless, experience free imitations of life, i.e., each soul could inhabit its own matrix filled entirely with programs imitating human suffering but not actually experiencing it. Admittedly, nothing prevents one from believing this is actually the case and it does appear to solve the dilemma. However, a theology which rests on a huge deception orchestrated by the supreme being (namely, the false appearance that our acts can do evil), is unattractive to those concerned with knowledge of the deity, which requires revelation and the veracity of god.

The Calvinistic theodicy

John Calvin and other Reformed Christians have held to a form of theological determinism and compatibilism, and thus have denied that man possesses free will in the libertarian sense. So for them the problem of evil could not find resolution in appeals to such freedom. For them, the issue had to be resolved within the very nature of the compatibilistic relationship itself.

For God to hold man morally accountable, yet to predestine everything that man thinks or does, something other than the "freedom of contraries" must ground this accountability. Calvinists believe that this something is the capacity of man to choose and act according to his moral state of being, the "freedom of choice". But man's moral state of being is presently subject to sin, and this fact, itself, is part of the problem of evil. So one must inquire as to the cause of man's subjection to sin.

Reformed theology places the cause of this condition in the first man, Adam, whom they believe to be the legal representative of the entire human race. This doctrine, called Federal Headship, is also present in the doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement (and its corollary, Justification by Faith). As a representative of the race, when he sinned against God by eating the forbidden fruit, the entire race fell under the curse of God with him. Various explanations of the exact relationship of Adam to his posterity have been offered, but what concerns us at present is only the doctrine of Adam's legal representation of the race.

Here another question presents itself. How could Adam be held accountable (and with him the entire human race), if he was not free to do other than he did do—if God really intended for him to do exactly as he did? With this question we come to the heart of the Reformed Theodicy. The main points are, firstly, that no one has ever been held accountable for what they *could have* thought or done, only for what they *have* thought or done, and for their purposes in thinking or doing it; and, secondly, that though both Adam and God intended that evil should come about, their purposes were distinct, God's being ultimately good, Adam's being ultimately evil.

The Reformed Theodicy boils down to the distinction of purposes between the primary agent (God) and the secondary agents (humans). While it is true that God intends to bring about evil, God's purpose is not, of itself, evil (cf. Gen. 50:20). This idea can be expressed by analogy:

Picture a man holding down a child while other men stick pieces of metal into the child's eye, all the while the child is screaming in pain, crying out for them to stop. On the surface it seems like a horrible, cruel thing these men are doing to the child. But if we add the information that the child is bleeding to death from the nasal cavity, that there is no time for anesthetic, that the man holding him down is his loving father, and that the men sticking the metal into his eye are doctors trying to save his life, then the problem of evil disappears. The evil doesn't

disappear, it is still there (just ask the child!), but the *problem* of evil is no longer present, because the intention is good.

In other words not all actions which bring about suffering or even evil acts are necessarily evil themselves. There is no problem of evil in the example with the father, and arguably no evil in the sense of moral failing, because his actions serve a greater good. Similarly one can serve a greater good even if you know that your choice will bring about some immoral action. In either case the Calvinist must still claim that God's choice to create a flawed man who would engage in sin or evil does serve a greater good. Thus it seems this position allows us no choice but to accept that some mysterious good is served by having a world filled with imperfect and sometimes evil men as opposed to a world where only those souls who will choose to be good and holy are born.

Opponents of this position have argued that it endorses an "ends justifies the means" system of ethics, but this charge is suspect since Reformed Christians claim that the means, *of themselves*, are truly evil, and therefore subject to punishment, not justified by the ends to which God intends them.

Proponents have argued that the Free Will Theodicy is actually, in principle, no different from the Reformed Theodicy, it simply places the bare possession of libertarian free will as the good that God intended to bring about by the existence of evil, and that the Reformed Theodicy does more justice to the Biblical account of God and man.

Relativity of goodness — evil is not absolute

A less well known approach has been that of the mathematical logician William Hatcher (http://www.onecountry.org/e144/e14416as_Minimalism_Review.htm). He has written about the problem of evil from a relational logic point of view. Hatcher has argued that the problem may be resolved with a minimum of theological assumptions. This is quite appealing because it does not tie the traditional problem to any particular brand of theology. It is part of an approach to traditional philosophical problems that Hatcher calls Minimalism (not to be confused with the use of the same term in art and pop culture).

Briefly, Hatcher uses relational logic to show that very simple models of moral value that include a minimalist concept of "God" cannot be consistent with the premise of evil as an absolute, whereas goodness as an absolute is entirely consistent with the other postulates concerning moral value. In Hatcher's view one can only validly talk about an act A being "less good" than an act B, one cannot logically commit to saying that A is absolutely evil, unless one is prepared to abandon other more reasonable principles.

Human nature

Another, more subtle proposal is for God to alter human nature for the better. Now, talk of improving our nature immediately strikes us as coercive -- surely, it would rob us our freedom as moral beings! But remember that we already have a nature, a bundle of tendencies that influences our choices. Now, the most ardent determinist must grant that human nature alone does not determine our choices. But the most ardent libertarian must in turn grant that our choices are significantly influenced by our natures. It is easier for a sociopath to kill a child than it is for the rest of us. It is easier for us to send money to help our children than to help complete strangers. This is true, even if ultimately we each have final say on our decisions. Now note that this human nature is flawed. We are disposed to be cruel and callous in many ways. The world might be a better place if humans shared a more virtuous and generous nature.

But would it violate our freedom for God to have given us a better nature? Perhaps not. We might choose a kinder nature, if, for example, virtue came in pill form. We might wish it were easier for us to do good. This suggests that an improved nature may be *in accordance* with our free will, and not contrary to it. Moreover, if God exists,

then surely he had a large hand in crafting human nature. As long as he's giving us *some* nature or another, why not shoot for a virtuous nature? If it's wrong to make humans virtuous, then why should it be less wrong to make humans corrupt?

One salient theistic reply is that our corrupt nature is due to the Original Sin of the first human couple. Their free choice changed us for the worse, and for God to change us for the better would be to disrespect their free choice. But this reply raises too many troubling issues of its own. First, the wholesale corruption of mankind was, for Adam and Eve anyway, an unforeseeable consequence of Original Sin; one can no more allege that they truly chose human corruption than that Gavrilo Princip truly chose to plunge Europe into war. Big mistakes don't count as freely chosen outcomes. Second, even if Adam and Eve really did choose human nature for the rest of us, why should their choice count for so much? Don't the rest of us have a say? Invoking Original Sin only makes God look more and more morally confused.

God is not omnipotent or omniscient

The problem of evil only exists when one simultaneously holds that God is omniscient (all knowing), omnipotent (all powerful) and benevolent (all good). The problem of evil does not exist if one gives up any of these three beliefs.

Some schools of the Kabbalah (esoteric Jewish mysticism) argue that the creation of the universe required a self-limitation on the part of God, and that evil is a consequence of God's self-imposed exile from the universe He created. In some readings of this theology, God has deliberately created an imperfect world. The question then arises as to why God would create such a world, and the standard response is to maximize human freedom and free will. Other readings of the same Kabbalistic texts one can hold that this is the best world that God could possibly create, and that God is not omnipotent. Given this reading, the problem of evil does not exist.

In some theistic Unitarian Universalism, in much of Conservative and Reform Judaism, and in some liberal wings of Protestant Christianity, God is said to be capable of acting in the world only through persuasion, and not by coercion. God makes Himself manifest in the world through inspiration and the creation of possibility, and not by miracles or violations of the laws of nature. God relinquishes his omnipotence, in order that humanity might have absolute free will. In this view, the problem of evil does not exist.

In Judaism the most popular works espousing this point are from Rabbi Harold Kushner; many of his works have also become popular with Christians as well.

The idea of a non-omnipotent God was developed by philosophers Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne, in the theological system known as process theology.

In the Evangelical movement of the Protestant churches, Open Theism (also called *Free Will Theism*), similarly asserts that God acts under His own power, but is not omnipotent or omniscient.

Contemporary philosophy of religion

J. L. Mackie, in his now classic article "Evil and Omnipotence", argued that human freedom is consistent with human perfection, and that God should have opted for both. Mackie asserts that human misconduct is a contingent matter—we can choose to do good or evil, with both alternatives being possible. He then asks us to imagine a world in which everyone always chooses good and never chooses evil—a virtuous and sinless world. Finally, he notes that God could have chosen to bring about any possible world, from the one that *is* actual, to a world in which people choose more wickedly, to the good world Mackie just described. So why not go with the good world? The only reply can be that, in choosing to bring about that world, God would thereby deny humans their freedom. But that can't be true. For if it were, then God would have denied us *our* freedom by bringing about the

actual world. Bringing about a world in which people make choices is not freedom-cancelling, and so God should have brought about a world in which people make better choices. This argument is the seed of contemporary discussions of the logical argument from evil, which aims to show that theism and evil are logically incompatible.

Alvin Plantinga, in a response that has also achieved 'classic' status, rebuts Mackie. Plantinga's celebrated "free will defense" argues that evil is consistent with God's existence, because there are some possible worlds that God cannot bring about. This seems curious enough, if we assume that God is omnipotent. Shouldn't he be able to bring about any possible world he wants? But Plantinga reminds us that there are always trivial limits on omnipotence—God can't make $2 + 2 = 5$ or create a married bachelor. Plantinga's work extends these trivial limits to very non-trivial results.

Step one: Plantinga proposes that there are logical truths—so-called "counterfactuals of freedom"—about our free choices in various possible situations, with one choice dictated for every situation. On Plantinga's example, where *S* is a situation in which Curley is free to take or refuse a bribe, it is either true that "If Curley were to be free in *S*, he would take the bribe" or "If Curley were to be free in *S*, he would refuse the bribe" (assume that exactly one can be true). These truths about what we would freely do in possible situations help make us what we are, and are timelessly and necessarily true—and so, crucially, out of God's hands. Consequently, if the first proposition is true (and Curley would take the bribe), then God cannot bring about the possible world in which Curley refuses the bribe. God can only bring about *S* and sadly watch Curley's freely chosen venality manifest itself, as timelessly reported by that unchangeable counterfactual of freedom.

Step two: Plantinga argues for the possibility of a person who will sin at least once, no matter what situation God puts him in. Such a person suffers from so-called "transworld depravity". Though he *can* choose to do good in each situation, though it is *possible* that he does good in each situation, it is nevertheless true that he will choose to sin, a sad fact reported by his counterfactuals of freedom. And God can do nothing to bring about the sinless possible worlds—that's up to the sinner, who will, as a matter of fact, choose otherwise.

We've arrived at the conclusion that perhaps even God cannot bring about Mackie's virtuous and sinless worlds. God may be omnipotent, but he can't change people's free decisions, and he can't change the fact that they will freely choose as they do. And if people will make nasty choices, then those possible worlds in which they choose good are beyond God's reach. Plantinga proposes that perhaps all persons suffer from transworld depravity, that perhaps the actual world, though not the best possible world, is the best one that God could bring about, if he is to respect the free choices of the creatures therein. Natural evil? Perhaps it's also the result of sinful actions—the actions of invisible, powerful moral agents like demons. And this scenario is one in which God's moral perfection is squared with having created a horrid world like our own.

(Here another problem arises, related to God's claim (in many religions) that, after the end of the world, a paradise will be created where evil is defeated. The whole argument that God in his omnipotence could not create the "virtuous sinless world" described above seems to be contradicted by his own claim to plan to do this very thing! Heaven is the promised paradise of infinite bounty that fully matches the criteria of this virtuous sinless world. If such a world is not possible, then God is lying about the promise of Heaven. If such a world *is* possible, and God plans to make one world that way, why wasn't our world also made this way?)

One recent, friendly response to Plantinga is from Daniel Howard-Snyder and John O'Leary-Hawthorne. They claim that, to show the compatibility of theism and evil, Plantinga needs to support the possibility of his sketched scenario—it mustn't be reasonable to doubt its possibility. And they claim that the possibility of all persons being transworld depraved is unsupported. After all, there is another *prima facie* possibility, that all persons are in fact transworld sanctified (and so would do no wrong). Both 'possibilities' seem equally possible, and since they rule each other out, only one of them can be possible. Thus it is reasonable to doubt the possibility of either, and it is reasonable to doubt that Plantinga's scenario is possible; so it is reasonable to doubt that God really is consistent with evil. The two critics take to repairing Plantinga's argument, by replacing the "it is possible that" propositions

with similar "for all we reasonably believe, it is possible that" propositions. The conclusion is then not that theism and evil are compatible, but that, for all we reasonably believe, theism and evil are compatible. The compatibility is not proven, but the incompatibility isn't reasonable, either. Mackie is still rebutted.

Another, stronger challenge comes from Richard Gale. In Plantinga's scenario, God's decisions cause human behavior and the psychological makeup whence that behavior stems; consequently, Gale maintains, human freedom gets cancelled by God's decisions. Ironically, then, Plantinga's "free will defense" story is a story without human freedom. Now, as Gale notes, Plantinga's God can't change peoples' counterfactuals of freedom; the truth of these propositions is up to the relevant people. But, by Plantinga, God *does* decide which possible persons get actualized, knowing full well their counterfactuals of freedom; it's up to God who gets to exist and then do their stuff. Moreover, God crafts his creatures' psychological makeup, which in turn exercises significant influence over their decisions. This is freedom-cancelling, even if our psychology doesn't *determine* our decisions, for it makes God like a mad scientist who implants a test subject with new dispositions and preferences to make her more agreeable. And to decide who gets instantiated is to be a sufficient cause of what decisions get made, even if the persons themselves are sufficient causes in their own right. The result is that Plantinga's God is in charge of too much, robbing humans of their freedom. Or so Gale avers.

In his book *The Problem of Pain* the literary critic and popular theologian C. S. Lewis called pain "God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world".

Yet another intriguing rebuttal holds that there may not be any best possible worlds, i.e., given any possible world there is another possible world which is preferable. If we accept that our world is better than none we can't fault god for failing to create the best possible world, there is no such entity. As an analogy we might consider the following dilemma: A magical genie appears and offers you the chance to improve the world, name any integer and the total world happiness (or whatever it is you think is good) will be increased by that amount. Clearly no matter what number you choose there was a better choice. If you choose to add n units of happiness $n+1$ would have been better. Yet surely you can't be said to be guilty of a moral fault for choosing some number. By analogy how can we say God is not benevolent simply because he chose some world when no matter what choice he made a better one was available.

Holocaust theology

Main article: Holocaust theology

In light of the magnitude of evil seen in the Holocaust, many people have re-examined the classical theological views on God's goodness and actions in the world. How can people still have any faith after the Holocaust? There is a separate entry which discusses the theological responses that people have had in response to the Holocaust.

General problems with all theodicies

All theodicies in general suffer from the flaw of assuming that the God in question is in some way impotent in bringing about a given state of affairs. Any theodicy that the theist brings up implies that there is a limit to God's power (see for example Martin's treatment of the Free Will Theodicy in "Atheism : A Philosophical Justification", where he concludes that "[t]he idea of a God who does not know whether His moral decisions are correct is surely not one most theists hold and may even be incoherent").

Another argument that has been raised against theodicies is that, if a theodicy were true, it would completely nullify morality. If a theodicy were true, then all evil events, including human actions, can be somehow rationalized as permitted or effected by God, and therefore there can no longer be such a thing as "evil" values, even for a murderer (indeed, this is the basis of the moral argument from evil, by Dean Stretton [1]

(http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/dean_stretton/mae.html)).

Hindu answers to the problem of evil

- Hindu philosophers, especially those from the Vedanta school have also attempted to craft solutions to the problem of evil. The whole notions of karma and reincarnation were possible explanations. Shri Madhvacharya, with his beliefs of dualism, has crafted his own solutions to the problem of evil that persists in spite of an all-loving omnipotent supreme Being.

Against theodicy

The late Mennonite theologian, John Howard Yoder, wrote an unfinished essay (<http://www.nd.edu/~theo/jhy/writings/philsystheo/THEODICY.htm>) entitled "Trinity Versus Theodicy: Hebraic Realism And The Temptation To Judge God" (1996). Yoder argues that "if God be God" then theodicy is an oxymoron and idolatry. As is evident from the subtitle, Yoder is not opposed to attempts to reconcile the existence of a God with the existence of evil; rather, he is against a particular approach to the problem. He does not "deny that there are ways in which forms of discourse in the mode of theodicy may have a function, subject to the discipline of a wider setting."

Anyone with even a passing familiarity with Yoder's life and work would realize that he was deeply concerned and engaged with the problem of evil; specifically, the evil of violence and war and how we resist it. Yoder's "case [is] against garden variety 'theodicy' "--in particular, theodicy as a judgment or defense of God.

Yoder asks:

- a) Where do you get the criteria by which you evaluate God? Why are the criteria you use the right ones?
- b) Why [do] you think you are qualified for the business of accrediting Gods?
- c) If you think you are qualified for that business, how does the adjudication proceed? [W]hat are the lexical rules?

Yoder's argument is against theodicy, strictly speaking. This is the narrow sense Zachary Braiterman (<http://www-hl.syr.edu/depts/religion/braiterman.html>) mentions in *(God) After Auschwitz: Tradition and Change in Post-Holocaust Jewish Thought* (<http://pup.princeton.edu/titles/6415.html>) (1998). He writes (<http://pup.princeton.edu/chapters/s6415.html>), "Theodicy is a familiar technical term, coined by the German philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz to mean 'the justification of God.' " In his book, Braiterman coins the term "antitheodicy" meaning "refusing to justify, explain, or accept" the relationship between "God (or some other form of ultimate reality), evil, and suffering."

Braiterman uses the term "in order to account for a particular religious sensibility, based (in part) on fragments selectively culled from classical Jewish texts, that dominates post-Holocaust Jewish thought." Braiterman asserts, "Although it often borders on blasphemy, antitheodicy does not constitute atheism; it might even express stubborn love that human persons have for God. After all, the author of a genuine antitheodic statement must believe that an actual relationship subsists between God and evil in order to reject it; and they must love God in order to be offended by that relationship."

Two of the Jewish post-Shoah thinkers that Braiterman cites as antitheodicists--Emil Fackenheim and Richard Rubinstein--are also cited by Yoder. Yoder describes their approach as "the Jewish complaint against God, dramatically updated (and philosophically unfolded) since Auschwitz ... The faithful under the pogrom proceed with their prayers, after denouncing JHWH/Adonai for what He has let happen." Yoder sees this as a valid form of discourse in the *mode* of theodicy but he claims it is "the opposite of theodicy."

Evidential arguments from evil

Evidential arguments from evil seek to show that the existence of evil provides evidence for God's nonexistence, rather than implying the logical impossibility of God. Philosophers arguing from this point of view are less interested in whether the existence God is logically compatible or incompatible with the existence of evil, often thinking that the arguments about this are inconclusive, with some saying that such "logical arguments" are dead. They focus instead on whether evil provides evidence for or against the existence of God. Their line of argument is: the existence of God may be logically compatible with the existence of evil, but the logical possibility of his existence does not mean that we are justified in believing that He does in fact exist. For such a belief to be justified, evidence is needed, and in the balance of evidence for and against the existence of God, the facts about evil weigh heavily on the negative side of the scales. The classic proponent of this line of argument is William Rowe.

External links

- Stanford Encyclopedia: Problem of Evil (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/evil/>)
- Stanford Encyclopedia: Leibniz on the Problem of Evil (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz-evil/>)

Retrieved from "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodicy>"

Categories: Theology | Philosophy of religion

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May 25, 2005

Dear Norman,

Following up on Gnosticism: I think it might be a good topic for another theological interview. Here's why. Your beliefs, while idiosyncratic, come closer to this religion—if it can be called that—than Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Manicheanism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and so on. Like your belief system, Gnosticism is opposed to what almost all major religions hold in common, namely, that the individual attains salvation by obedience of mind and heart to a supreme power. In these religions, knowledge is always less important than faith and good works as means of salvation. Gnosticism (etymology: *gnosis*=knowledge, *gnostikos*=good at knowing) is ultimately based on the individual's ability to intuitively grasp insights (not certainty) into fundamental questions such as "Who are we? Where have we come from? Who made the world? Where are we going?" It is generally opposed to Revelation via stone tablets, authority figures, sacred books or the utterances of one supreme religious (pontifical) leader. That said, Gnostics do revere various religious writings, including Platonic works, some of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Kabala, Buddhist texts and parts of the New Testament. Gnosticism prefers orphic, mysterious texts to prescriptive do-and-don't texts. It is a very-open-ended, flexible, dare I say, existential religion.

Gnosticism predates all the major religions, save perhaps Judaism, but it never came into complete organizational or doctrinal focus. It is from the East—from India and Babylonia and Persia—and it picked up coloration from the ancient religions of all of these places. Several of its characteristics (properly speaking, it has no formal set of tenets, no 10 commandments or Apostle's creed) were adopted by Christianity, Manicheanism, Zoroastrianism, Islam and Buddhism. Gnosticism was at its height in the second and third centuries, A.D. and has never entirely died out. It is an oppositional religion, always resisting edicts and ukases. It is possible, however, to come up with a synthetic presentation of its cosmology, its view of how things began and might end, which follows.

Emanating from a Supreme God, the One beyond everything, was a lesser divine being, often called Sophia, or wisdom. Sophia emanated (or created) another creature called the Demiurge, out of a desire to know the One beyond everything. This Demiurge thinks it is the God of the Old Testament. The Demiurge has no sense that it is twice removed (at least, some Gnostics see a longer chain—turtles all the way down). It created the material universe, or perhaps only the solar system, including humans, animals and plants. Even though humans are three times removed, they feel a divine spark within and a general feeling of loneliness, incompleteness, and abandonment. The errors of Sophia and the Demiurge are reflected in the constitution of humans, the tension and anxiety that they feel at the core of their human-ness. Throughout human history, the true infinite God emanated messengers to assist mankind on its journey towards ultimate unity, but Sophia and the Demiurge try to undercut the work of these messengers. In some versions, Sophia is what Jews think of as God (Old Testament) and the demiurge is

the Devil. The Manicheans took this opposition and elevated it into an eternal struggle between good and evil, as did the Zoroastrians, who divided all humans into two groups, the people of righteousness and the people of the lie. St. John the Baptist, Jesus, Seth (Adam's third son), Mani and Mohammad have all at various times been seen as messengers from the true infinite God. Reincarnation is accepted by most if not all adherents of Gnosticism, as is the unknowable nature of the infinite God. The trapped spark of divinity, the light within all humans, is also a common element of belief.

In the second century Valentinus and Basilides preached a Gnostic-Manichean version of Christianity and posed a serious challenge to the early Christian Church. St. Augustine was a believer in this "heresy" in his youth. St. Hippolytus, St. Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria fought against Gnosticism, burning its writings and expelling its followers. Much of early Christian doctrine was formulated in opposition to what was perhaps the severest threat to early Christianity.

I can see a lot of consonance between your theological ideas and Gnosticism. Jung, by the way, was pretty much a Gnostic. If you think there is enough here for a conversation, we can have one in early June, if you like.

On another matter: there has been a three-way conversation this week among Horowitz, Lucid and Lennon. I'll spare you the details. Suffice to say that Donna and I will deliver 11 boxes from the Archive in Philly tomorrow and pick up five or six. Bob will have all his copying done by July 15th and everything (save the stuff that you want me to cull out) will be shipped to Texas by then. You will have to decide about Lipton's.

Tom Staley and I have also been in touch and I will go to Texas at least twice over the next nine months for 3-4 week periods. He will pay me \$5,000 for each trip. Thanks for making this happen Norman. I will be able to help them sort out the Archive and also make progress on the letters. I plan to have a proposal in Posternak's hands by end of summer for transmission to Random House.

See you soon, love to Norris.



THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN WORLD RELIGIONS

The problem of evil is a touchstone of any religion. Evil is present everywhere: in our society, in the environment, around us and even inside us. Out of our direct confrontation with evil results suffering, and thus endless questions about the meaning of life. That is why all religions have to give a proper answer regarding the origin, nature and end of evil.

There are three major religious alternatives in explaining evil, stated by the pantheistic, dualistic and monotheistic religions. Pantheistic religions regard evil as ultimately unreal. Human suffering is a product of spiritual ignorance gathered in previous lives and distributed in the present one according to the dictates of karma. In the dualistic religions, good and evil are two eternal and rival principles. Neither has created the other one and each acts according to its own nature. In the monotheistic religions, evil has a personal identity. It is a being that has fallen from an initial good status as a result of misusing his freedom of will. Let us analyze these perspectives and see to what extent they are compatible with one another.

Evil in Eastern religions

Evil in Hinduism

As mentioned in a previous article, Hinduism is a complex mixture of religious trends. Concerning the relation between Ultimate Reality and evil, there are at least three major perspectives, given by:

- 1) the Vedas;

- 2) the Upanishads and the whole corpus of pantheistic writings;
- 3) the Epics and Puranas.

Evil in the Vedas

The oldest Vedic hymns consider Varuna to be the sovereign god. As god of heaven, omnipresent, omniscient and infallible, he has no comparable opponent in the Vedic pantheon. Evil is a matter of not fulfilling his laws by humans or not performing the ritual properly. Very often it has a moral significance, meaning that people are evil-minded or commit adultery (*Rig Veda* 4,5; 10,10). Those who commit evil deeds repent before Varuna (*Rig Veda* 5,85) and try to repair their faults through ritual sacrifices.

The next generation of Vedic gods has Indra as sovereign god. However, he doesn't have the same power over creation as Varuna. He has to fight with the demon Vritra in order to save mankind. In this fight he needs to be strengthened by the sacrifices performed by humans and also needs help from other gods. Starting with the hymns addressed to Indra, the combat against personalized evil becomes a main feature in Hindu mythology, which will develop in the Epics and Puranas.

Evil in the Upanishads

The Upanishads ground a pantheistic perspective on Ultimate Reality and introduce karma as explanation of human suffering. The only true substance of the universe is Brahman, so that evil cannot be real. Ignoring the one and only reality of Brahman launches karma into action and therefore brings suffering to the soul in further lives. Although it is difficult to determine the very beginning of karma's manifestation, a text in *Kausitaki Upanishad* (3,8) indicates that Brahman himself causes the good and evil done by humans, and so he must be the one responsible for the origin of karma:

He (Brahman) causes him whom he wishes to lead up from these worlds to perform good action. This one, indeed, also causes him whom he wishes to lead downward, to perform bad action.

As the manifestations and dissolutions of the world are eternal, so is karma, meaning that suffering is a part of the eternal cosmic cycle. Logically then, the ultimate origin of karma must be in Brahman, because he is the source of any manifestation and the origin of souls. Man cannot be considered guilty for the evil in the world, not even for his own bad deeds, because all of them originated in past lives, of which he cannot be aware. Suffering in the present life is the natural consequence of past lives' ignorance and it has to be endured without questioning. (For more details on karma and reincarnation, the way they act and solve the problem of evil, see our article on [reincarnation](#))

The real problem of man is to get the impersonal self (*atman*) out of the cycle ignorance-karma-reincarnation and find liberation. The belief in the real statute of evil is a major hindrance in attaining liberation, as well as granting value to human personhood. As only a personal witness can experience evil, the solution for escaping it is getting rid of our sense of personhood and withdrawal from this world of illusions, by taking a right view on reality through meditation. (For more information on the nature of Eastern meditation and its trustworthiness as source of knowing truth, [click here](#).)

Evil in Samkhya-Yoga

Although the Samkhya and Yoga *darshanas* are not pantheistic, they follow a close reasoning in defining evil. As philosophies that grant no significance to human personhood, evil is a matter of how much one is caught in the psycho-mental illusions generated by the primordial substance (*prakriti*). It contains the three *gunas*, and two of them (*rajas* and *tamas*) are causing the manifestations of what we call evil in the world, both in the physical aspect and the mental one. Evil is a part of nature and man has to get along with it from one existence to another through his karma. The true problem is finding liberation from the manifestations of *prakriti* through meditation and asceticism, and this means complete cessation of suffering.

Evil in the Epics and Puranas

These writings adopt a middle way in explaining evil, between the dictates of karma and the responsibility of the gods in producing it as sovereign agents in the universe. As these two elements are irreconcilable and mutually exclusive, the solutions to the problem of evil are themselves contradictory. The character of the gods becomes ambiguous in the *Epics* and *Puranas*. They are responsible for producing both good and evil. Here are some examples:

Indra, the ex-hero of the Vedas, commits adultery in the *Skanda Purana* (2,7,23,8-40) and justifies himself by the effect of his past karma. In the *Mahabharata* (12,258,42) he is excused for seducing Gotama's wife by being in a process of working out a result of karma. No wonder that in the *Ramayana* (7,30,20-45) he is accused of having brought adultery into the world by his bad example. In a late Upanishad he even encourages his followers to act immorally: "I killed the three-headed son of Tvashtri and delivered the ascetics to the jackals; I broke a treaty and overcame the demon Prahlada and the descendants of Puloman. Yet not a hair of my head was harmed. So he who understands me is not injured by any deed, not even by stealing, killing an embryo, matricide or parricide. If he has committed any evil, he does not become pale." (*Kausitaki Up.* 3,1)

Although Krishna points to himself as the example for his followers in the

Bhagavad Gita (3,23), when committing adultery in the Puranas he justifies himself in reference to human behavior, saying: "Since even the sages are uncontrolled and act as they please, how could one possibly restrain Vishnu when he becomes voluntary incarnate?" (*Bhagavata Purana* 10,33,35).

Brahma, the creator god, is often accused of being creator of both good and evil. In one situation described in the *Mahabharata*, he grew jealous of people and their heavenly destiny and planned to delude them: "Formerly, all creatures were virtuous, and by themselves they obtained divinity. Therefore the gods became worried, so Brahma created women in order to delude men. Then women, who had been virtuous, became wicked witches, and Brahma filled them with wanton desires, which they in turn inspired in men. He created anger, and henceforth all creatures were born in the power of desire and anger (*Mahabharata* 13,40,5-12). According to the *Vishnu Purana* (1,5,1-18), evil precedes and accompanies Brahma's creation, this being the reason why mankind is evil: "His fourth creation produced creatures in whom darkness and passion predominated, afflicted by misery; these were mankind." In the *Markandeya Purana* (45,40) it is said that he created both "cruel creatures and gentle creatures, dharma and adharma, truth and falsehood".

Not only is evil inevitable in creation, it is said to be a good thing, a necessary dynamic factor in the universe. For instance, in the *Devibhagavata* (4,13), Brihaspati, the guru of the gods says: "All creatures, even gods, are subject to passions. Otherwise the universe, composed as it is of good and evil, could not continue to develop." According to the *Vishnu Purana* (1,5,59-65), the evil in creation is both the will of Brahma the creator and the result of karma's obligation: "Brahma's power is the will to create, and he is impelled by the powers of things to be created." In the same situation is Vishnu (*Linga Purana* 2,6,1-57), who also creates both good and evil, "good people and bad people, those who follow the right path, but also the heretics".

These ambiguous solutions to the problem of evil in Hindu mythology are caused by the fact that the gods cannot be at the same time sovereign, manifestations of an impersonal Ultimate Reality (Brahman) and also in tune with karma. As an effect of the cyclical manifestations of Brahman, good and evil follow one after another during the four ages (*yuga*) of each manifestation, so that nothing in the universe is eternal and nothing dies, neither good nor evil. Man is not responsible for the evil in the world, but only the impersonal karma or the gods of mythology. If the gods are responsible, they either create it willingly (and are evil themselves) because the universe has to contain it, or are forced to create it by the higher law of karma or fate (and then are consequently weak). There is no significant distinction between these two variants. The universe must contain good and evil and so it is created by a certain god.

In conclusion, in Hinduism and the other pantheistic religions in general, there is no central concern to understand and solve the problem of evil. Good and evil are often confused. The attempt to define them is itself a false

problem that gets the treatment false problems deserve. The major concern is spiritual ignorance, in relation to which evil and morality have a secondary importance. Through knowledge, it is said that man reaches above good and evil, attaining an impersonal domain that justifies this attitude.

Evil in Buddhism

Buddhism rejects the authority of the Vedas and the other writings of Hinduism, explaining the nature of evil through the process of constant becoming. Evil is the perpetuation of illusion by the factors that fuel the chain of dependent origination (*paticca-samuppada*). Ignorance in perceiving that the world is impermanent, devoid of a self and in constant becoming leads to suffering. The Buddha proclaimed that in fact the whole of existence is suffering:

The Noble Truth of Suffering (dukkha) is this: Birth is suffering; aging is suffering; sickness is suffering; death is suffering; sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief, and despair are suffering; association with the unpleasant is suffering; dissociation from the pleasant is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering - in brief, the five aggregates of attachment are suffering.

(Samyutta Nikaya 56,11)

There are three fundamental defilements of the mind that combine and interact leading to suffering: greed (*raga*), aversion (*dvesha*) and ignorance (*avidya*). Their origin is desire to experience existence in personal form. As personhood is nothing but an illusory result of the temporary gathering together of five aggregates (the body, feeling, cognition, mental constructions and consciousness), the desire to perpetuate the illusion of personal existence produces suffering, so its extreme solution must be the abolition of personhood. There is no suffering if there is no person left to perceive it.

The paradox of evil and suffering in Eastern religions

The general pattern in Eastern religions is to consider evil illusory, derived from a wrong way of understanding reality. Consequently, suffering emerges from not putting the right view into practice. For this reason, the first noble truth proclaimed by Gotama Buddha states that the only reality of human existence is the all-pervading reality of suffering. This perspective is valid for most of the Eastern religious thinkers that followed the period of the Upanishads. The only possibility to escape suffering is to know the true nature of things, or in other words, the impersonal Ultimate Reality. Proper spiritual knowledge can be attained by the practice of meditation, which requires withdrawing oneself from the world.

On the other hand, considering one's personal suffering to be real leads to bad

attachments (*kleshas*), which are hindrances on the way towards liberation. Therefore we reach a significant inconsistency in understanding the relation between suffering and liberation, as two contradictory principles are stated:

- The all-pervading reality of suffering leads man to seek liberation.
- In order to attain liberation, man has to ignore evil and suffering, which do not belong to the realm of true existence.

In other words, according to most Eastern religions, on the one hand suffering derives from ignoring Ultimate Reality and prompts man to seek it, and on the other hand, the way of knowing Ultimate Reality and escaping suffering demands ignoring suffering.

The question that arises naturally from here is: What has true ontological nature, suffering or the impersonal Ultimate Reality? If suffering is real, man's personal status has to be real too, because suffering can be perceived only at personal level. In this case the impersonal Ultimate Reality has to be questioned. On the other hand, if impersonal Ultimate Reality has true ontological nature, human personhood and suffering are illusory, so that suffering cannot be accepted as the true generator of man's quest for liberation. Paradoxically, spiritual practice demands that suffering should be ignored in order to find the "true reality" towards which it prompts us. Eastern religions promise to help man escape suffering, but while on the way towards liberation they ask us to ignore human suffering. Not only is this contradictory, but such denial of suffering can be accomplished only by denying life itself, a situation that is the ground for the pessimistic view of Eastern religions on human existence. The ultimate cause of this situation is the lack of a personal Creator, directly involved in man's condition by his grace.

Evil in Taoism

As long as any aspect of the world is a manifestation of Tao, corresponding to a different participation of the Yin and Yang principles, nothing can be considered to be truly evil in the world. Even if Yin is considered a negative principle, it never manifests itself alone. In the *Tao-te Ching* it is stated:

*When beauty is abstracted
Then ugliness has been implied;
When good is abstracted
Then evil has been implied.
(Tao-te Ching 2)*

Every positive factor involves its negative or opposing one. What is usually called evil, both the physical and mental aspects, corresponds to a bigger participation of the Yin principle, the result of a lack of balance between the

two opposing principles. Evil belongs to the nature of the world, so man has to subscribe to the universal harmony and respect the equilibrium of the two polarities. Tao is eternal and so are the two principles Yang and Yin, so that good and evil must be eternal, as necessary elements of our world.

Evil in dualistic religions

According to the dualistic religions there are two antagonist and (usually) coeternal deities involved in creation and in governing the destiny of man. **Zoroastrianism** probably stated the first true religious dualism. Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu (or, according to a later tradition, Ohrmazd and Ahriman) are the two coeternal gods responsible for the existence of good and evil in the world. The *Yasna* (30,3) states: "There are two fundamental spirits, twins which are renowned to be in conflict. In thought and in word, in action, they are two: the good and the bad." In the latter tradition of Zurvanism, Ohrmazd and Ahriman are twin brothers, each one creating according to his own nature:

The first of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was Paradise, by the good river Araxes. Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft the serpent in the river and winter, a work of the devils.

The second of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the plains in Samarkand. Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft the fly Skaitiya, which brings death to the cattle.

The third of the good lands and countries which I, Ahura Mazda, created, was the strong, holy Merv. Thereupon came Angra Mainyu, who is all death, and he counter-created by his witchcraft sinful lusts.... (Videvdad 1,3-5).

Man is in the center of this eternal conflict, having the duty to choose always the good and thus help it defeat the evil.

Most dualistic religions that developed after the 1st century AD were influenced by the *Genesis* account of creation but interpret it in a totally different manner. Their position is sharply anti-Judaic and anti-Christian, being aimed at undermining their basic tenets. Marcionism, Gnosticism, Manicheism, Bogomilism and Catharism (as well as other dualistic religions that swept through the medieval world) all acknowledge the God of the Old Testament as creator but deny his goodness, and see the physical world as the product of his ignorance of higher spiritual deities (the Aeons). His creation is therefore hazardous and generates nothing but problems. Contrary to the Bible, man is superior to his creator due to the fact that he was endowed with

a spiritual essence by the Aeons. However, his physical body keeps him bound to a miserable condition, which perpetuates through reincarnation. The only way out of this is the attainment of true knowledge (*gnosis*).

In **Gnosticism** the creator god (*Ialdabaoth*) ignores the higher deities whose descendent he is and creates a world over which he claims to be the only god. However, man is superior to him due to the fact that he received the spirit of life from a higher Aeon (*Sophia*, the mother of *Ialdabaoth*). Satan and Jesus are the enemies of *Ialdabaoth* and teach humans how to attain true knowledge that may save them from ignorance. A detailed study of Gnosticism and its contradictions and incompatibilities with Christianity can be found in Irenaeus' treatise *Against Heresies*.

A similar stand was adopted by **Manicheism**, a new religion that appeared in Persia in the 3rd century AD. Matter and the physical body are considered intrinsically evil as they derive from the bodies of the dead forces of evil (the Archons). As a result of his captivity in the bodily prison, the soul is overwhelmed by ignorance and forgets his true origin. Reincarnation occurs until the soul is released from its earthly sufferings. Manicheism was confronted successfully by Augustine in many of his writings in the 4th century AD. See *On the Morals of the Manichaeans* and *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans*.

In **Catharism** the god of the Old Testament is considered to be the ultimate representative of evil himself. He created the physical bodies of humans and locked angels inside them. According to radical Catharism, human souls are angels who served the good God but were tempted by Satan to experience earthly pleasures and could not resist them. The original bodies and spirits of these angels remained in heaven, but their souls fell into physical bodies. Reincarnation works until one recognizes his heavenly origin and purifies himself in order to be accepted back where he belongs.

In conclusion, according to these dualistic religions, matter in general and the physical body in particular are evil and produce suffering to the captive soul. This reality hinders man from knowing his true spiritual identity, that of a spiritual being fallen or imprisoned in a physical body. Ignoring this reality leads to suffering and reincarnation into various bodies (human or animal) until true knowledge (*gnosis*) is attained.

Evil in Christianity

According to Christianity, God created all things, but this doesn't make Him the creator of evil. The Apostle John states: "God is light; in him there is no darkness at all" (*1 John* 1,5). When God finished His creation, He appreciated that "all that He had made was very good" (*Genesis* 1,31). However, anyone can clearly see that evil exists in our world, in an awful measure. From here arises one of the major accusations brought by the opponents of Christianity:

If God is all-good, He should want to stop evil; if He is omnipotent, He could stop it; but evil exists in the world, so God lacks either all-goodness (if He can stop evil but does not want to) or omnipotence (if He wants to stop evil, but cannot), or both. As God is declared to be all-good (*1 John* 4,8) and all-powerful (*Revelation* 19,6), how could this puzzle be solved?

First we have to define what evil really is, an impersonal substance (as a part or a form of our world), a personal being or a mere illusion. According to Christian theology, only God has in Himself and by Himself Absolute being. Only He exists by Himself, according to the formula "I am who I am" of *Exodus* 3,14. He is the only personal subject that is eternal and immutable (*James* 1,17; *Malachi* 3,6). In other words, the Absolute is the Triune God, not an impersonal substance as in pantheism, and beside Him there is nothing else with the same attributes. This means that evil is neither an inherent quality pertaining to God or to His creation, nor an eternal personal being (as in polytheistic or dualistic religions).

In this case could it be true that evil does not exist, that it is merely an illusion? If we use the terms that characterize only God's existence, yes, it is true that evil cannot exist **by itself**, claiming as God: "I am who I am" (*Exodus* 3,14). This is what the Church Fathers mean in some of their writings by the fact that evil is without substance, reality, being or existence. For instance, in his writing *On the Incarnation of the Word*, Ch. 1, Athanasius says that "God alone exists, evil is non-being". This is not an affirmation of the illusory status of evil, but an ontological perspective on the fallen state of God's creatures that lost communion with God. The context of his words is as following:

For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again. The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone Who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good.

The same meaning is attached to the words of Gregory of Nyssa when mentioning that "there is no evil other than wickedness" in his *Great Catechism*, Ch. 7. The context here is his address to the heretics that claimed that man is the creation of an evil deity (in order to explain the fallen human nature). Gregory of Nyssa states that God is not responsible for man's turning away from Him through sin. This act separates man from His presence and consequently from real existence, as only God is the source for it. Here is Gregory of Nyssa's commentary on the nature of evil:

Since, if their thoughts had taken a loftier view, and, withdrawing their minds from this disposition to regard the

gratifications of the senses, they had looked at the nature of existing things dispassionately, they would have understood that there is no evil other than wickedness. Now all wickedness has its form and character in the deprivation of the good; it exists not by itself, and cannot be contemplated as a subsistence. For no evil of any kind lies outside and independent of the will; but it is the non-existence of the good that is so denominated. Now that which is not has no substantial existence, and the Maker of that which has no substantial existence is not the Maker of things that have substantial existence. Therefore the God of things that are is external to the causation of things that are evil, since He is not the Maker of things that are non-existent. He Who formed the sight did not make blindness.

Although evil has no ontological status with reference to the nature of God, one cannot say evil doesn't exist. Evil existed even before the creation of man. Its origin is to be found in the world of angels. God created them in time immemorial, as personal and immaterial beings endowed with free will, in order to integrate themselves into the divine harmony through obedience and communion. They were created *ex nihilo*, the same way as the material universe, and thus have a nature different from God's. These beings have mind (*Acts* 12,7-10; *1 Peter* 1,12), feelings (*Luke* 15,10), will (*Jude* 6) and are not limited by a physical body. Their number was very large and had a hierarchy among them (*Hebrews* 12,22). Evil appeared in the world of angels when Lucifer, one of God's cherubs, rebelled against this order. In the book of the prophet Ezekiel we can read the following metaphorical description of this incident:

*You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God, and I expelled you, O guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones. Your heart became proud on account of your beauty, and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor. So I threw you to the earth; I made a spectacle of you before kings (*Ezekiel* 28,15-17).*

This angel, who became Satan ("adversary") out of Lucifer ("angel of light"), was expelled from heaven together with all the other angels who joined him in his act of rebellion. The cause of his fall was pride, the desire to be independent from God, to refuse submission and inferiority to Him. Lucifer wanted to be by himself more than his created status could permit him.

Satan's fall couldn't have occurred without a real freedom of choice. He had the ability to choose either to obey God or a selfish way, aimed at considering himself the source of his existence. His choice for the second alternative constitutes the origin of evil in the universe. Evil is not created by God, but is a perversion of His creation, a result of using free will against the very purpose it was created for (against free will obeisance to God in a communion

relation based on love). Evil was not intended by God and is not linked to the essence of God and creation.

Was the creation of beings endowed with free will a mistake of God (as it could be used against its very purpose)? No, because this was the only way possible for Him to have free communion with His creatures, which means a greater good not otherwise attainable. Without free will, angels and mankind would only have been a lifeless world of robots. In order to have perfect communion with the Creator, a created being needs the possibility to choose it freely. This is why God allows to exist starvation, disease, murder, war, etc, in our world. Although such facts constitute reasons for atheism, they represent the cost of preserving our (misused) free will.

As mentioned before, evil is a parasite of good, a diminishing of existence, a loss of what really constitutes the support of existence. That is why Satan and the demons (the fallen angels) do not keep in themselves any remainder of good, nothing from the good categories with which they were created. "Pure" evil became their new nature after the fall. Jesus Christ said to the Pharisees who didn't believe in Him:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8,44).

Having this nature, Satan and the demons do their best to thwart God's plan with mankind, knowing that humans are created to succeed where they (the fallen angels) failed. According to God's justice (and not weakness), they will exist forever, but without the chance to return to the spring of real existence and communion with God. Their eternity is that of spiritual death, of irrevocable departure and closing toward the Source in which they should have found their fulfillment. This is hell, the place where Satan and demons are granted the liberty to eternally renew their wish to exist "by themselves" and express their hate toward God. It is conscious loneliness, because communion is a good thing that cannot exist there. The doctrine of hell, as horrifying as it looks to be, proves that evil has an end, that is has no eternal existence in God's creation.

The Eastern religions have no equivalent for Satan as evil personified. Although in Hinduism exist devilish beings called *asuras*, which can cause problems in people's lives, they are considered to be immature souls caught temporarily in the abyss of deception. They do evolve and are not permanently in this state. The same is the case with the "devil" Mara, who tempted the Buddha while on his way toward *nirvana*. However, the temporary status of evil and hell in Eastern religions is not a result of divine love, but rather a necessity imposed by the cyclic manifestations of Ultimate Reality.

According to Christianity, evil entered our world as a result of Satan's fall, so

it has a personal character. Jesus Christ spoke directly with Satan at the moment of His temptation (*Matthew* 4,1-11; etc.). He cast out demons (*Mark* 1,21-28; etc.), and the apostles did also (*Acts* 5,16; etc.), so they were not addressing illusions. The Apostle Peter warned his fellow Christians that Satan is a real and dangerous presence: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (*1 Peter* 5,8). Likewise, the Apostle Paul emphasizes that "Satan himself is masquerading as an angel of light" in order to deceive humans (*2 Corinthians* 11,14). These passages and many more cannot be ignored in order to suggest an illusory status of evil.

Although Satan is the initiator of evil, it is man that bears the responsibility for spreading it into our world through sin. No matter how bad Satan can be, man cannot be affected by him as long he persists in obedience to God. By submitting himself to Satan's temptation and misusing the freedom of choice granted by the Creator, man became the perpetrator of evil in our world through sin. The Apostle Paul writes: "Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned" (*Romans* 5,12). Sin affected thoroughly our nature, compromised our relation with other people, and also the physical world in which we live. As a result of this situation, but also in order to defend ourselves from the consequences of other people's sin, we need laws and police. This is the way in which we try to limit the effects of sin in our society. However, the basic problem of sin remains unsolved, no matter how much progress could be attained in perfecting the way democracy works. It is not enough to try to limit the effects of sin, but we should address the problem of sin itself.

Satan is not the only one guilty for the evil in our world and we are not just victims lacking any responsibility. God has put a limit to Satan's power against us humans, so that he can never overwhelm us (*1 Corinthians* 10,13). Therefore we have real freedom in refusing evil. Despite the fact that the devil is doing his best to delude man, our free will can resist him; it could resist him in Eden and it can resist him now, with the help of God. As man does not resist evil, he distances himself from God and also closes himself toward his neighbors. Out of the selfish relations he develops in this state, evil expands in our world.

According to Christianity, evil is neither created nor a natural or necessary element. It is a parasite state that perpetuates itself by misusing God's good resources and by following a wrong direction. It is the illness of beings that are no longer in communion with God. But since evil exists, it has to submit to the order over which God is sovereign. God has limited Satan's power and He permits evil to manifest itself only for the benefit of fallen man, in order to awaken him from the spiritual lethargy produced by sin. If man can misuse God's good creation, why wouldn't God be able to use for good those who perform evil? Augustine argued that the providence of God goes so far that even Judas' betrayal, although it is undoubtedly an evil act, can be reversed to produce good: "Satan is evil, Judas is evil; as the doer, so his instrument. But God used both for our sake. Both tried to destroy us, but God used their effort

for our salvation.” (*Sermon CCCI*, ch.4).

Two aspects should be added here in order to understand properly the relation between God and evil. First, since evil is expanding in our world primarily through people, a major reason for not extinguishing all evil in the world in an instant is that such an act would necessarily involve the damnation of all those who perform it. This would cancel any possibility for them to repent and be reconciled with God. As He takes no pleasure “in the death of the wicked”, but rather wants “that they turn from their ways and live” (*Ezekiel* 33,11), a sudden extinction of all evil would contradict His love for mankind. Which one of us would pass the test of God’s holiness after all, if such extinction of all evil would be performed apart from His love?

God’s attitude in tolerating evil in our world was perfectly expressed by Jesus in the Parable of the Weeds (*Matthew* 13,24-43):

The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. The owner's servants came to him and said, "Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?" "An enemy did this," he replied. The servants asked him, "Do you want us to go and pull them up?" "No," he answered, "because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn" (13,24-30).

The explanation to this parable, according to Jesus, is the following:

The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels. As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear (37-43).

God tolerates “weeds” among “wheat”, until a certain moment. His purpose in doing so is that “weeds” could be properly differentiated from “wheat” and pulled up at the right moment. As the parable refers to humans, the people who may be called “weeds” still have the chance of converting and becoming “wheat”. This can happen only as long as they can benefit from God’s grace, that is during their earthly lifetime. It is God’s grace that allows evildoers to live, not his lack of justice or power, in the hope that they may still have the

chance to meet Him, repent and return to a personal relationship with Him. The problem of evil and suffering, often used by the opponents of Christianity to reject God's grace, should rather induce repentance and humble thankfulness for the prolonged chance granted in order to escape the final extinction of all evil at God's final judgment.

Second, God could stop any particular manifestation of evil, but this would annihilate the freedom of personal creatures. The world in which God constantly intervened to stop any manifestation of evil would become a world of robots. Keeping evil under control and using it for our sake serves two purposes: it helps fulfill His plan with mankind (its return to communion with the Creator) and also maintains the creature's freedom. In this context, suffering is a good tool for destroying the self-sufficient illusion of those who think they don't need God and His forgiveness, who consider themselves better and wiser than their neighbor. The Apostle Paul writes to the Christians in Rome: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (*Romans* 8,28). At the same time, God never permits that evil manifests itself overwhelmingly in our lives, as the same author mentions in *1 Corinthians* 10,13:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.

One of the fundamental aspects of suffering in Christian theology is its use as a tool for our salvation, in order to awake those who are departed from God, and also for the sanctification of those who have already restored their relation with God (see for this *1 Peter* 1,6-9; 2,20-21; 3,14; 4,1-2; 4,12-19). However, this does not mean that man can be saved through the endurance of sufferings only. Salvation is granted only by God, through the most supreme expression of suffering that could ever be conceived, which was at the same time its everlasting solution: the vicarious death of Jesus Christ on the cross (see *1 Peter* 2,24).

As a result, man's attitude toward evil should be neither one of resignation, as in the Eastern religions (in order to stop the accumulation of karma), nor of rebellion against God, but one of a conscious and responsible participation in the world. Evil has an end, as well as human suffering. What is requested from us while waiting for it is to fight against evil and suffering, especially against our sinful nature, which perpetuates both our suffering as well as that of our neighbor. As the God of Christianity does not stand impassively toward the fallen man, but meets his needs and has already descended into his problems and misery, He urges action in imitating His compassion in daily living. Although we are not spared from troubles and many times we do not understand their meaning, we should always remember that Jesus promised His help and power in order to conquer them. He said:

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this

world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16,33).

Returning to the questions raised at the beginning of this article, there is no doubt that God is omnipotent and all-good. He did not create evil in the world. Evil is the result of misusing free will by his creatures. Evil is not everlasting. God can stop it, and He will stop it one day forever (*Revelation* 20,10). But until then He allows evil to exist in our world for our benefit, in order to preserve our freedom of will and to use it as an instrument in our salvation. There is no contradiction in God's character; it is only sin that prevents us from understanding what evil really is and from stopping to spread it around us.

Conclusion

Outside the Christian solution to the problem of evil there are possible only pantheistic or dualistic solutions. According to the pantheistic religions, the origin of evil has its root in the manifestation of the impersonal Ultimate Reality, which (at the immanent level of reality) launches karma into action. Considering evil from a transcendental point of view, it is only an illusion that has to be scattered away through the right (pantheist) understanding of reality, acquired through meditation. In the dualistic religions, evil is coeternal with good. The absolute good cannot be an all-good and omnipotent person, because there cannot be two Absolutes. This is the case with Gnosticism, Manicheism and the polytheistic religions (see also the Hindu mythology).

From a Christian point of view, both solutions are not satisfactory in explaining evil, because they lack as fundamental elements the creation *ex nihilo*, the doctrine of the fall, and redemption through God's grace. Without these, evil cannot be understood and defeated.

Next article: [Conclusion](#)

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[Back to Top](#) | [Back to Contents](#) | [E-Mail](#)

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Adult Classes

Books & Essays

Ministries

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THE PROBLEM OF EVIL



By Dennis McCallum

The presence of evil, pain and suffering in our world is the most persistent argument raised against theism. The following are several of the main responses to the presence of evil in the world and its impact on the existence of the God of the Bible.

I. The Problem of evil stated

Traditional Statement —Atheists and others usually state the problem of evil in the form of a dilemma:

1. If God is perfectly loving, He must *wish* to abolish evil
2. If He is all powerful, He must be *able* to abolish evil
3. But evil exists
-- The problem is, if you affirm two of these facts, you cannot affirm the third.
4. Therefore, an all powerful, loving God does not exist.

Second Formulation

1. God is the author of everything.
2. Evil is something.
3. Therefore God is the author of evil.

Third Formulation

1. God made everything perfect.
2. Imperfection cannot come from perfection.
3. Therefore perfectly created beings cannot be the origin of evil.
4. Therefore God must be the origin.

Attack Based on the Persistence of Evil

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1. If God is all good, He would destroy evil.
 2. If God is all-powerful, He could destroy evil.
 3. But evil is not destroyed.
 4. Hence, there is no such God.

II. Christian Responses

Christians should learn to state the free-will defense against the problem of evil quickly and clearly.

Alvin Plantinga's Free Will Defense (Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds- A Study of Rational Justification of Belief in God*. (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967)

1. Free will is of moral value. That is, a world with free will is better than one without it.
2. It is a contradiction to say that God brings it about that humans freely will only the good { vs J.S. Findlay who claims that this is possible }
3. God must bring about the best possible world in his capacity.
4. Therefore, God must create a world with free will. [We believe the word "must" is objectionable here, but the point still stands. Instead read "God is correct to create..."]
5. But then God is not responsible for evil (choices), since it is not in his power to bring it about that men freely choose only the good. [note: this assumes that God cannot, and need not, do the logically contradictory. If logic does not apply to God, then there is nothing wrong with asserting the apparent contradiction that God is good and He permits evil to exist. Where there is no logic, there are not any contradictions . . . and anything could be the case!]

Other Statements of the Biblical Position:

1. God created the *fact* of freedom--man performs the *acts* of freedom.
2. God made evil *possible*; but free will creatures make evil *actual*.
3. The ability to do something does not necessitate doing it. God is able to control everything, yet he allows free will. The Atheistic position reduces to a moral judgment that absence of all evil is more desirable than freedom.

**Note:* Atheistic thinkers are usually contradictory at this point. Secular Humanists prefer freedom in society even if it sometimes results in evil. Most Atheists resist the idea of governmental attempts to eliminate evil by the use of control.

Eschatological Formulation (focuses on how the future, or end state of the world will ultimately be the true standard by which the present will be judged.)

1. If God is all powerful, He can defeat evil
2. If God is all loving and good, He will defeat evil
3. Therefore, evil will be defeated.

**Note:* The question of why God allows the persistence of evil is distinct from the question of why He permitted it in the first place. The biblical answer to the issue of persistence of evil probably has to do with God's strategy for insuring the on-going and safe existence of freedom in the universe.

III. Communication Guidelines

A. In his arguments against God's existence, the atheist presupposes an ultimate standard of justice and good when he refers to evil.

1. Ask, "What basis does the atheist have for saying there is evil in the world?" "Is this not an appeal to his own relative moral feelings and opinions?" "Why should his feelings be authoritative?"
2. Ask, "What's your explanation?" Never accept the burden of being the only one who has to hold to a cohesive and consistent world view.

[Return to the Outlines page](#)

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"Sharing the Open Bible with an Open Heart" - Acts 28:31

If God is good, why is there evil in the world?

This is thought by many to be the most difficult question, both philosophically and emotionally. If you were left to be the architect of this world, would you permit all this misery? This is a question raised by Dostoevski in his work *The Brothers Karamosov*. King David, in the Bible struggled with it. The first word of Jesus from the cross was: *Why?* It is a part of our humanity.

We would all certainly agree that there is evil in this world. We are indignant at the way some people treat others. The abuse of children, rape, murder, tragic accidents are all events that strike at the very fabric of our lives.

The problem seems to be that Christians believe that:

- God is all good
- God is all powerful, and yet
- Evil exists

There seems to be an inconsistency there that goes like this:

- If God is all good, He wouldn't want that evil
- If God was all powerful, He could eliminate that evil
- Therefore, if God exists He is either not all powerful or not all good.

So we need to ask ourselves if that is a good argument. Before we answer that we need to ask ourselves:

For whom is evil logically a problem: the Christian or the non-Christian?

The unbeliever cannot assert this unless he says there is evil. If nothing counts as evil, there is no question. In order to ask the question, he must evaluate something as evil. So what does the unbeliever mean by good and evil? By what standard does he determine that or make that moral judgment?

Good and evil could mean what evokes public approval or disapproval. But if that is true, the following statement would always be senseless: *the vast majority of the community heartily approved of and joined in that evil event*. The majority could never participate in an evil event. But we know that ethics does not reduce to statistics. Most people think of the goodness of something evoking their approval rather than their approval constituting its goodness.

What about evoking the approval of the individual? That is even worse. If good means I approve, then we could never agree with each other in ethical judgments.

Why? Because one is a judgment about me, one about you.

How about instrumental theories of good. Good is defined by consequences brought about - greatest good for greatest number. If this is true, one would have to be able to rate and compare happiness in order to make that judgment. How do you rate and compare the unhappiness of some with the same action provoking happiness in others. Some would interject that good is what produces a particular end. That is true only if the end is good. But that begs the question. Someone might say what is good maximizes the freedom of people. But how do you know the freedom of people is good?

None of these are workable theories for the nature of good and evil. The unbeliever cannot *prove* that what he is talking about is evil.

The point is the Christian can say something is evil because his world view accounts for that judgment, because there is a living Creator who has revealed Himself. Child molestation is evil; but on what basis does the unbeliever call that evil? If you reject God, you are left with: *Everybody can do what is right in their own eyes*. Does the molester then have the right to do what he wants - because it brought him happiness? The problem of evil is not even intelligent unless you begin with a Christian world view.

As an unbeliever you might retort with: *I might not be able to account for evil, but you as a Christian still have a paradox in your way of thinking that needs to be resolved.*

How can we believe as Christians that there is no inconsistency? What are my presuppositions? God reveals himself in the Bible. The Bible teaches that God is all good and all powerful. Now I am going to draw my conclusions in light of that.

From that, I draw the conclusion that there is a *morally sufficient reason* for that evil. That is a logical conclusion. God must have had good reason for what He has done.

As an unbeliever you may want to believe that we have to solve the problem in a *neutral* fashion. But my commitment is to the existence of this God and I can thus draw the logical conclusion that there is a morally sufficient reason for evil.

We have solved the logical problem, but we know that is only a part of the problem. There is the psychological problem as well. We would like to have answers.

We have a problem when the *reason* is not given to *why* bad things happen to us and others. But God rarely provides an explanation for the evil we experience or observe (Deuteronomy 29:29) Even if God told us, we might not understand it and still be baffled (Isaiah 55:8-9)

Even though He does not give us the reasons, they are a part of His plan for history (Romans 8:28)

We are called on by the Bible to trust that God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil in this world. But the Bible does not give us the reason(s), then leave it up to us to finally judge whether God has been good or not.

As an unbeliever you refuse to trust God and will not believe unless you are given the reason why. You will not trust God unless God submits Himself to the moral evaluation of the unbeliever. Let God be on trial and unless God consents to trade places with the unbeliever, the unbeliever won't trust Him. What do you think? Will God enter into that.

Here is the key: *It is a question of ultimate authority in a person's life.*

What if we said: *All right unbelievers. You all now have the right to judge God.* What would happen? Do all unbelievers agree on what is good and evil? No. Once you take it out of the hands of God, you have made it impossible for any moral judgment to be made.

The only logical (and consistent) approach is to say that only God has the right to declare what is good and evil.

The question that Adam and Eve faced in the garden is the exact same question that unbelievers are facing today. Do I have faith in God's Word simply because He says so? Or should we evaluate it based on our own moral authority?

Since Adam and Eve would not presuppose the goodness of God, they have visited upon the human race all the torments we have. When an unbeliever will not accept the goodness of God simply based upon His word, they are simply perpetuating the source of all human woes. Rather than solving the problem of evil, they are adding to it.

[Go to Previous Question](#) | [Return to Skeptic Menu](#) | [Go to Next Question](#)

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The 1994 Lord Acton Essay Competition

The Sword of the State

Tyler Wagenmaker

The constrictive power of government is a power that has little equal. It is a power that is capable of controlling the lives of many, of bending their actions to its will. State power is a two-edged sword, sword that can cut away at the evil in society, yet also cut away at the good. Its accuracy can be dead at times, and if not handled correctly, can tear society asunder. A battle rages over how extensive state power--the sword-- should be. When is government too broad and when does it need to be broadened? When does government begin to stifle or at what point does it begin to nourish? This struggle particularly in a Christian society, pits more government against less government. Who will ultimately take hold of this sword? A possible outcome is this: less government tempered with more religion. Yet the debate over government's role in society continues.

Speaking on human nature has preoccupied many people throughout the ages. From Plato to Augustine to John Calvin to men of the Enlightenment, this question has divided scholars of every age: is mankind inherently evil or inherently good? For lack of space, I will not make an extended argument, but take at face value the words of John Calvin from his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: "Now, all man's faculties are, on account of the depravity of nature, so vitiated and corrupted that in all his actions persistent disorder and intemperance threaten ..." Mankind is naturally evil, unpleasant as that may be. The Bible addresses the issue throughout, with Romans 5:12-21 as one example. As evil creatures, we want to please ourselves and put ourselves first, denying others around us and God above us. This is exhibited time and again throughout human history.

We see this evil in Nero's merciless slaughter of Christians. We see this evil in John Brown's killing of a half dozen Kansas settlers in the 1850s. We see this evil in Joseph Stalin and his Soviet purge of all dissenters. We see this evil in Washington, D.C., where people of all ages are gunned down in the streets. This evil is not only seen in the deaths of others, but in everyday abuses. Drug abuse is rampant in areas throughout the nation and world. Rapes occur regularly. Children are killed every minute from a medical procedure called abortion. There is no need to continue, for all one needs to do is pick up the local newspaper and read these for oneself. What is quickly arrived at is that, yes, people are inclined towards disorder and chaos due to sin. It is an inescapable, stark reality, a reality that must be acknowledged if the role of government is to be brought into proper perspective.

Government can be an agent of change, though the direction of change is debatable. In a democratic society, this debate can freely take place in the political square. What is to be done with this power of government? How is it to be utilized? What should it restrict, cut off, and promote? At first

glance, government is cast daily into both negative and positive images. One day, a scandal will arise, and the public will realize that much has been done in secret to take power away from the people. On another day, government will be seen as a savior, a Mr. Fix-It for the problems that ail us. Are you hungry? Mother government will feed you. Are we overburdened? Mother government will cut her programs. Through all of this debate, however, it must be realized that government does have its place; we cannot get along without it. For, with all of the evil in the world, what is to be done about it?

Government can restrict evil. Through the enforcement of its laws, government can free up society to better itself. Laws are put in place to stop murders, allowing society to better itself. Laws are put in place to outlaw stealing, allowing society to better itself. Individuals are bettered when they are not threatened from these external evils, evils that government has the power to restrict. The power of government, its sword, can cut away at this evil in society, can limit its range and its contact with individuals. Freedom is then realized. The question is then raised on the other side, "But what of the nonviolent crimes, crimes that also restrict the freedom of society? What of those evils?" What is the government's role when it comes to the evils of impoverishment of a neighbor while the man across the street has more money than he knows what to do with and hangs onto it all? What of racial evils, the hate shown on both sides attempting to restrict the other?

Should government, then, be granted great amounts of power in order to combat evils such as this? Or is there a danger in such an action. The question remains, who is to be the one who controls the state? Who shall be its eyes to direct its blade as it slices away the evil? Eyes are needed, the eye of truth. Without truth, the state can haphazardly swipe to and fro, slicing off the evil, true. But in this great act of destruction, the good in society will also suffer, will also be cut. For, the power of the state is a blind power. It can be a power to restrain the wicked, yet also a power to suppress the good. In its aim to eliminate evil, the innocent individual may fall as a casualty. What started out to benefit members of society will end up hurting these very individuals, carrying away what good they contribute. Yet, what alternative is there? What else will restrain and suppress the evils in society? Is there another way, another institution in society that will restrain this evil, so government is not left "holding the bag," of combating evil all alone?

Religion restricts this evil. Sin is a cancer in society, a cancer that is not benign but rather malignant. It is a cancer that wishes to take away the very life of society. This evil, sin, is a rebellion against social order, an order in which God is the summation. This sin, this rebellion against God began with the Fall. But this disorder can be contained and even suppressed. Government is able to retard this cancerous evil. Government, ordained by God, was installed to combat this evil. Yet, from the beginning, God offered another recourse that would drive back sin, drive it back into the fiery gate of Sheol itself. God, early in Genesis, foretold of a coming Messiah who would crush the head of evil. Evil would be dealt the death blow.

So today, we are at a point in time after this victory over evil by Christ Himself. Christianity is the retarder of this evil. This religion will open up the gates of grace upon the world through the light of those who are believers in Christ Jesus. Being a Christian means putting away the old, sinful self and clothing oneself in Christ. Through the working of the Holy Spirit in Christians, society will be

affected. Evil will be restrained, and, if the Church is strong and therefore the Word is spread more and more people will come under the Lordship of Christ as they make Him their Lord. The Church is something not to be dismissed as merely another institution. There is real power in religion, power that has the capability of restraining the evil in the world and furthering the principles of God the principles of love and order.

So, is there a middle road between the two: government or the Church? Can it be worked out where one can take the place of the other? So often in society we see this taking place, in which successes are often limited. The limits occur when government tries to take the place of religion banishing it to the outermost regions of social life. True, government can restrain the evil in the world but only in cooperation with religion. We know only too well what happens when there is only government. Look at the former communist nations, where the power of religion was absent. Government was not merely unable to restrain evil in society, but, in fact, perpetuated it. The power of religion in society cannot be understated. The divine power of religion can hold evil in check.

I believe a balance can be found between the two powers, and that a type of middle road of mutual reliance is possible. This is not a structural reliance as in the days of Charlemagne where church and government were held in the hands of one governing body. Rather, it is a reliance on religious influence in the spheres of government. It is a reliance on the power of religion in society by the government. In this manner, the government will no longer need to keep tight control of the society it governs. Less government will be possible, for the restraining power of religion in society will surpass the restraining power of the state.

It is seen that when religion starts to lose influence and vitality, society as a whole starts to suffer. This is observable today, as William Bennett's "Index of Leading Cultural Indicators" suggests. At the point in time, society becomes alarmed as it sees decay from within. It must then appeal to one of two institutions for relief: the state or the Church. When the state is chosen, it exerts an ever-growing control to restrain the evils of society. In doing so, however, religion is dislodged from its proper place in society. But, the state is not content with this, for it can do more by exerting greater influence over individual lives. So, what the state accomplishes decreases as its influence grows because religion is pushed farther to the margins of society. The only solution to the growing problems ultimately can be found in religion.

This eventually leads back to the overall thrust of the relation between church and state and how individuals fit into the picture. The state's powers must be limited and the influence of religion in society must increase. When this happens, Christians in society will then be allowed to change society around them, for they have been given ample room to move about as the state's powers diminish. A alive and vigorous Christianity will then be able to spread its principles of order and morality in society. In conjunction with, and influenced by, the Church, the state will make laws that are not overbearing and restrictive on society. It will keep order within its proper sphere. Social disorders and not truly evils of order will be dealt with by the Christian Church.

Granted, it would be utopian to believe Christianity could work perfectly and the state operate flawlessly; but if applied, individual freedom will increase while evil in the world will decline. The

state will find its proper place, not above individuals but cooperating with them, allowing them to better society through the influence of religion in their lives.

The contention over the proper role of Church and state continues. In this struggle, it is important to realize the power of religion and how, if allowed to flourish, it would restrain evil in society and bring about true freedom much more effectively than state power. Now, more than ever, society must come to the realization that less government with greater religious influence will bring about the fulfillment of freedom in this nation, freedom from evils and an overbearing state. The sword can slice away at the evil only if its wielder possesses the eyes of God.

Tyler Wagenmaker (honorable mention) currently attends Calvin College in Grand Rapids majoring in history. Included on the Dean's List two years in a row, Mr. Wagenmaker has received several awards for academic excellence including the Faculty Honors Scholarship and Academic Achievement Award.



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as esoteric sect
of Judaism

arose 2nd Century B.C. to
4th Cent A.D. - no climactic
initiation

disdain for authority
& orthodoxy
self-knowledge

Splintered, multiple schools

ascetics
Dualists → spirit vs body
Knowledge-based
anti-femina

Platonic
Zoroastrian
Christian
Jewish
Buddhist

Gnostics

Close to mystical Judaism

Fundamentalists
see it as disreputable

Xian Gnostics piled Christian
beliefs on Greek philosophy

advocated
individualism in
search for enlightenment

early Church divided
between Judaic & Hellenic
a synthesis occurred

- believed in
reincarnation
- diversity of early
Christianity

John opposed to Gnosticism

→ divine spark

1945 Nag Hammadi Egypt
discovery of 12 codices
Dead Sea Scrolls

resurrection, Jews as God
+ original sin added later
(Augustine)

THE WHEEL BROKEN AT THE CISTERN

The Divergence of Orthodox Christianity from Gnosticism.

by Phillip David

Introduction

It's striking that, in this ecumenical age, Christians in the U.S. know so little about Gnosticism. Granted, Gnostics are not a majority of Christians. But it's not as though they don't exist. Certain Gnostic beliefs are embedded in the dogmas of other Christian sects—Mormonism, for example. Gnosticism also shares key characteristics with mystical Judaism, even Buddhism. But try to start a conversation about Gnostic theology in a room full of Christians—even educated ones—and silence is apt to drop like fog on a small backwoods town. Fundamentalist Christians in particular seem to regard it as some sort of disreputable, possibly dangerous or infectious sibling best locked away from polite society.

Gnosticism is hardly unique among ancestors of orthodox Christianity in having been turned out of the family of Christ's "true" followers. And yet, like the orthodoxy that succeeded the first sects and ultimately branched into what we know today as mainstream Christianity, Gnosticism looked to Jesus, Paul, and the Bible as sources of understanding about the nature of man, God, Christ, and salvation. How, then, did orthodoxy come to reject a stream of religious thought that flows from the same well as Catholicism and Protestantism?

Because few nowadays are familiar with even the basic tenets of Gnosticism, misunderstanding attaches freely to the faith. But in the earliest centuries of Christianity it was sectarian animosity rather than ignorance that drove popular misconception, as numerous propagandistic screeds written to discredit the Gnostics and other early Christian groups came to be regarded as truth. Penned by the early Church Fathers—the men who first codified orthodoxy—books like Irenaeus's five-volume *Against Heresies* characterized Gnosticism as the refuge of perverts; of insane, depraved, life-hating freaks who held orgies, practiced promiscuity and homosexuality, aborted and devoured fetuses, and refused to bear children. By discrediting the morals of Gnostics, early theologians convinced their followers that the Gnostics' teachings were absurd and misguided.^[1]

The portrait of Gnostics as dangerous counter-Christians, a portrait painted by power and enshrined as truth, held for sixteen hundred years, until 1945, when an archaeological find known as the Nag Hammadi Library was discovered inside a cave in a mountain in upper Egypt. This remarkable collection of fourth-century Coptic texts, thought to have been copied from material that may date back to as early as the second half of the first century,^[2] cast new light upon long-obscured Christian history: a history that revealed no suggestion that Gnostics hated life or favored any of the repulsive behaviors attributed to them, but rather that they advocated individualism in pursuit of their primary goal, the search for enlightenment. What the Nag Hammadi texts also disclosed is that from the very beginning of Christianity, there existed an alternative theology, a competing—and compelling—interpretation of scripture which, had it not been actively suppressed, might have undermined the entire fabric of the early Church.

Part One: The Emanant Spark

I.

In order to discover why Gnosticism was considered a threat to incipient orthodoxy, it is necessary to understand what the earliest Christians believed. First, a little definition is in order. I use the term *Gnostic* here to denote not only those groups in the second and third century who called themselves Gnostics, but also to include the oldest Christian sects from 30 to 120 C.E., such as the Simonians, Ophites, Naassenes, Cerinthians, and others. These very early Christians shared a rich, diverse set of doctrines that stand in stark opposition to the doctrines we now know as orthodox Christianity. The early sectarians tended to disagree on many things, but they generally did agree on such central matters as the existence of reincarnation and of a class of evil powers called "archons," the meaning of the resurrection, the process of salvation, the doctrine of "emanations," and the nature of humanity.

For years, well-known religious historians like Elaine Pagels and Paul Johnson have written candidly about the diversity of early Christianity. Indeed, study of the earliest Christian sects and communities, of the Nag Hammadi texts, and of records of later, nominally Gnostic groups quickly shatters any myth that there was a single "original" Christianity somewhat in the image of modern fundamentalism, where all held to the four Gospels, the concept of Jesus as God, His death for our sins, the resurrection of the body at the Last Day, and so on. Instead, we see a theology centered around two ideas: that a "divine spark" inheres in humanity, and that the process of salvation represents a universal principle that Jesus demonstrated for humanity so that people could follow his example. We learn that the basic dogmas that most modern orthodox Christians assume were there from the beginning—the resurrection, Jesus as God, original sin—were not always there, and in fact, were constructed by several early Church Fathers long after the death of Jesus.

The notion of original sin, especially, departs from Gnosticism in its assumption that there could be something wrong or ungodly about any kind of knowledge. The Gnostics held just the opposite view. For example, in the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, one of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi and thought to have been written in the second century, the Saviour tells his disciple Thomas, "He who has not known himself has known nothing, but he who has known himself has at the same time already achieved knowledge about the depth of all." In other words, when you become one with ("know") the God within, you will have become one with all that is. The following Gnostic story based on the Gnostic Hymn of the Pearl, also found at Nag Hammadi, expands on this principle and illustrates several other core beliefs:

"Imagine you are a prince. One day your parents, the King and Queen, send you on a mission to Egypt. You must find a pearl guarded by a hungry dragon.

You take off your royal robe and leave the kingdom of your parents.

You journey into Egypt, putting on dirty clothing and disguising yourself as an Egyptian.

Somehow the Egyptians discover that you are a foreigner. They give you food that makes you forget your royal birth and makes you believe that you are one of them. You sink into a deep sleep.

Your parents see your plight and send you a letter that tells you to awaken. It reminds you of your quest to recover the pearl. You remember who you are, a child of kings. You quickly subdue the dragon, recover the pearl and depart, leaving the dirty clothing behind.

When you return to your native land, you see your royal robe, which reminds you of the splendor you lived in before. The garment speaks to you, telling you that it belongs to the one who is stronger than all human beings. You put on your royal robe once more and return to your father's palace."^[3]

The King and Queen symbolize the Creator and a feminine being the Gnostics called the holy mother Sophia (Wisdom). Their kingdom is a realm of light, a place totally outside matter as we know it. It is spoken of as the "pleroma," or "fullness." Your royal robe represents your true Self, your divine image. The dirty clothing represents your earthly body, which you donned when you entered Egypt, the material world.

When you descended into mortality, you left behind your divine image and became an incomplete person. You "fell asleep" when you forgot your true origin. The message sent by your parents represents the Saviour. He will awaken you and remind you what you must do: recover the pearl (the fallen aspects of your soul), find your way back to the realm of light, and clothe yourself once more in your royal robe; in other words, reintegrate with your divine image. By recovering your soul and reintegrating with the divine, you will have achieved *gnosis* (knowledge), which is salvation. For the Gnostics, achieving *gnosis* meant to know oneself *as God*. But "to know" meant not merely to understand one's divine origin, but to achieve the classic goal of the mystic: union with God.

Putting on the royal garment and recovering the pearl were just some of the images Gnostics used to describe achieving *gnosis*. They also believed God to be a transcendent and infinite, perfect, ultimate, unfathomable, invisible Spirit; and that each person is composed of three parts: a seed, or spark, of the Divine; a body; and a soul. The divine spark—the God within—acts something like a pilot light, sustaining the divine potential of the soul and body until the soul is ready to be ignited, or awakened to *gnosis*. The awakened soul pursues union with the God within, and this union is salvation.

II.

The first obvious and profound difference between the ancient Gnostic belief system reflected in the story of the Pearl, and the orthodox beliefs of most other Christians, is the proposition that our souls are of divine origin and existed in a divine state before they "fell" to earth. The idea that our souls are intrinsically divine stands in sharp contrast to orthodox dogmas constructed later, which stressed Jesus's exclusive divinity. As orthodoxy evolved in the first five centuries after Jesus died, St. Augustine's severe, unmerciful doctrine of original sin was adopted by official Christendom. The doctrine of original sin held that, because Adam and Eve partook of forbidden knowledge in the Garden of Eden, we are all intrinsically sinners and therefore cannot look on Jesus simply as an exemplar, as the earliest Christian communities did, but must rely instead on his exclusive divinity—and that of the Church—for our access to salvation. Gradually, the notion of man's original divine origin was all but stamped out, surviving only among a few sects and teachers throughout the succeeding centuries.^[4]

CONTINUED

FOOTNOTES

[1]The chief attacks on the Gnostics were authored by Church Fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Epiphanius. But their work is seriously flawed and must be seen for what it is: religious polemic rather than history. Irenaeus, known as the First Church father, devoted five volumes to a work, *Adversus Haereses*, which purported to expose the Gnostics. Scholars have criticized it for its lack of objectivity and muddled thinking.

Tertullian composed numerous works against the Gnostics. He disliked the Gnostics' philosophical speculations and claimed they were unnecessary. "Since Jesus Christ we have no need of any further investigation," he wrote, "nor of any research since the gospel has already been proclaimed."

The fourth century bishop Epiphanius of Salamis entitled his work *Panarion*, meaning "medicine chest," because it was intended to ward off influences from Gnostic groups. He portrayed all heretics, including Gnostics, as "vain-glorious," "worthless" and "evil-minded." (See Tertullian and Epiphanius, quoted in Randolph's *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987, pp. 15, 19.)

[2] See [Elaine Pagels's comments](#)

Excerpt:

"About the dating of the manuscripts themselves there is little debate. Examination of the datable papyrus used to thicken the leather bindings, and of the Coptic script, place them c. A.D. 350-400. But scholars sharply disagree about the dating of the original texts. Some of them can hardly be later than c. A.D. 120-150, since Irenaeus, the orthodox Bishop of Lyons, writing c. 180, declares that heretics "boast that they possess more gospels than there really are," and complains that in his time such writings already have won wide circulation—from Gaul through Rome, Greece, and Asia Minor."

[3] Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*, pp. 371-375

[4] The Cathars and certain prominent Christian mystics in and outside the Catholic Church preserved some of this aspect of Gnostic teachings. They include St. Francis of Assisi, St. Bonaventure, Meister Eckhart, Jacob Boehme, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Catherine of Genoa, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, and others. All of them taught the intrinsic divinity of man and demonstrated the path to Absolute Oneness with God through initiatic degrees. Some modern Christian denominations have beliefs apparently quite distant from the basic tenets of St. Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin. For example, see #2 in both [the official Church of Latter Day Saints Articles of Faith website](#) and [the official website of the Unity Church](#).



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The Ten Major Principles of the Gnostic Revelation

From Exegesis, by Philip K. Dick

The Gnostic Christians of the second century believed that only a special revelation of knowledge rather than faith could save a person. The contents of this revelation could not be received empirically or derived *a priori*. They considered this special gnosis so valuable that it must be kept secret. Here are the ten major principles of the gnostic revelation:

1. The creator of this world is demented.
2. The world is not as it appears, in order to hide the evil in it, a delusive veil obscuring it and the deranged deity.
3. There is another, better realm of God, and all our efforts are to be directed toward
 - a. returning there
 - b. bringing it here
4. Our actual lives stretch thousands of years back, and we can be made to remember our origin in the stars.
5. Each of us has a divine counterpart unfallen who can reach a hand down to us to awaken us. This other personality is the authentic waking self; the one we have now is asleep and minor. We are in fact asleep, and in the hands of a dangerous magician disguised as a good god, the deranged creator deity. The bleakness, the evil and pain in this world, the fact that it is a deterministic prison controlled by the demented creator causes us willingly to split with the reality principle early in life, and so to speak willingly fall asleep in delusion.
6. You can pass from the delusional prison world into the peaceful kingdom *if* the True Good God places you under His grace and allows you to see reality through His eyes.
7. Christ gave, rather than received, revelation; he taught his followers how to enter the kingdom *while still alive*, where other mystery religions only bring about amnesia: knowledge of it at the "other time" in "the other realm," not here. He causes it to come here, and is the living agency to the Sole Good God (i.e. the Logos).
8. Probably the real, secret Christian church still exists, long underground, with the living Corpus Christi as its head or ruler, the members absorbed into it. Through participation in it they probably have vast, seemingly magical powers.
9. The division into "two times" (good and evil) and "two realms" (good and evil) will abruptly end with victory for the good time here, as the presently invisible kingdom separates and becomes visible. We cannot know the date.
10. During this time period we are on the sifting bridge being judged according to which power we give allegiance to, the deranged creator demiurge of this world or the One Good God and his kingdom, whom we know through Christ.

To know these ten principles of Gnostic Christianity is to court disaster.

(now he tells us?)



Wednesday, May 25, 2005

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Introduction to Gnosticism

Gnosticism is a peculiar religion that has roots older than Christianity. With the arrival of Jesus Christ, Gnosticism developed a strong Christological element, but it is not Christianity by any means. The origins of Gnosticism are difficult to pinpoint, but there are heavy doses of Neoplatonism and Jewish mysticism present, along with touches of Zoroastrianism and Hermeticism. The name itself comes from the greek word *gnosis*, or "knowledge", and it entails esoteric traditions and secret knowledge to assist the journey of the soul to unity with God. It stands distinct from the generic religious movement of *Illuminism*, which simply means to be guided by new, special revelation from God. Gnosticism has a definite set of beliefs, complete with a theology all it's own.

The basic idea of Gnosticism is this: The true infinite God "emanated" some beings from itself. These beings are called Aeons. Depending on the particular flavor of Gnosticism you are talking about, these Aeons have various names. But one, named Sophia (Greek for *wisdom*), emanated another creature called the "DemiUrge". The DemiUrge thinks it is God, and is the God of the Hebrew Old Testament. It doesn't realize it has been emanated from an emanation and is already twice-removed. Thinking itself God, it created material universe as we live in it, and created beings called Archons to rule it. Humans, a result of the material universe created by DemiUrge, are animated by a "spark" of light, which is really just a part of the true, infinite God that began the whole process with its emanations. This spark strives to break free of the imprisonment of material existence, and moves towards unity with the true, infinite God. However, the Archons and DemiUrge fight against this evolutions towards unity. By enlightenment and special knowledge (*gnosis*), humans who have become aware of their true nature can combat the Archons and DemiUrge, sometimes through esoteric ritual. Throughout history, the true infinite God emanated Messengers of the Light to assist mankind in its journey towards unity. These Messengers have included Seth (the third Son of Adam), Jesus, and the Prophet Mani.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy

Gnosticism



Gnosticism (after *gnōsis*, the Greek word for "knowledge" or "insight") is the name given to a loosely organized religious and philosophical movement that flourished in the first and second centuries CE. The exact origin(s) of this school of thought cannot be traced, although it is possible to locate influences or sources as far back as the second and first centuries BCE, such as the early treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the Jewish Apocalyptic writings, and especially Platonic philosophy and the Hebrew Scriptures themselves. In spite of the diverse nature of the various Gnostic sects and teachers, certain fundamental elements serve to bind these groups together under the loose heading of "Gnosticism" or "Gnosis." Chief among these elements is a certain manner of "anti-cosmic world rejection" that has often been mistaken for mere dualism. According to the Gnostics, this world, the material cosmos, is the result of a primordial error on the part of a supra-cosmic, supremely divine being, usually called *Sophia* (Wisdom) or simply the *Logos*. This being is described as the final emanation of a divine hierarchy, called the *Plērōma* or "Fullness," at the head of which resides the supreme God, the One beyond Being. The error of Sophia, which is usually identified as a reckless desire to know the transcendent God, leads to the hypostatization of her desire in the form of a semi-divine and essentially ignorant creature known as the *Demiurge* (Greek: *dēmiourgos*, "craftsman"), or Ialdabaoth, who is responsible for the formation of the material cosmos. This act of craftsmanship is actually an imitation of the realm of the Pleroma, but the Demiurge is ignorant of this, and hubristically declares himself the only existing God. At this point, the Gnostic revisionary critique of the Hebrew Scriptures begins, as well as the general rejection of this world as a product of error and ignorance, and the positing of a higher world, to which the human soul will eventually return. However, when all is said and done, one finds that the error of Sophia and the begetting of the inferior cosmos are occurrences that follow a certain law of necessity, and that the so-called dualism of the divine and the earthly is really a reflection and expression of the defining tension that constitutes the being of humanity -- the human being.

[Table of Contents](#) (Clicking on the links below will take you to that part of this article)

- [The Philosophical Character of Gnosticism](#)
 - [Psychology](#)
 - [Existentialism](#)
 - [Hermeneutics](#)

Definition of Gnosticism

The doctrine of salvation by knowledge. This definition, based on the etymology of the word (*gnosis* "knowledge", *gnostikos*, "good at knowing"), is correct as far as it goes, but it gives only one, though perhaps the predominant, characteristic of Gnostic systems of thought. Whereas Judaism and Christianity, and almost all pagan systems, hold that the soul attains its proper end by obedience of mind and will to the Supreme Power, i.e. by faith and works, it is markedly peculiar to Gnosticism that it places the salvation of the soul merely in the possession of a quasi-intuitive knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of magic formulae indicative of that knowledge. Gnostics were "people who knew", and their knowledge at once constituted them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status was essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, did not know. A more complete and historical definition of Gnosticism would be:

A collective name for a large number of greatly-varying and pantheistic-idealistic sects, which flourished from some time before the Christian Era down to the fifth century, and which, while borrowing the phraseology and some of the tenets of the chief religions of the day, and especially of Christianity, held matter to be a deterioration of spirit, and the whole universe a depravation of the Deity, and taught the ultimate end of all being to be the overcoming of the grossness of matter and the return to the Parent-Spirit, which return they held to be inaugurated and facilitated by the appearance of some God-sent Savior.

However unsatisfactory this definition may be, the obscurity, multiplicity, and wild confusion of Gnostic systems will hardly allow of wild confusion of Gnostic systems will hardly allow of another. Many scholars, moreover, would hold that every attempt to give a generic description of Gnostic sects is labor lost.

ORIGIN

The beginnings of Gnosticism have long been a matter of controversy and are still largely a subject of research. The more these origins are studied, the farther they seem to recede in the past. Whereas formerly Gnosticism was considered mostly a corruption of Christianity, it now seems clear that the first traces of Gnostic systems can be discerned some centuries before the Christian Era. Its Eastern origin was already maintained by Gieseler and Neander; F. Ch. Bauer (1831) and Lassen (1858) sought to prove its relation to the religions of India; Lipsius (1860) pointed to Syria and Phoenicia as its home, and Hilgenfeld (1884) thought it was connected with later Mazdeism. Joel (1880), Weingarten (1881), Koffmane (1881), Anrich (1894), and Wobbermin (1896) sought to account for the rise of Gnosticism by the influence of Greek Platonic philosophy and the Greek mysteries, while Harnack described it as "acute Hellenization of Christianity". For the past twenty-five years, however, the trend of scholarship has steadily moved towards proving the pre-Christian Oriental origins of Gnosticism. At the Fifth Congress of Orientalists (Berlin, 1882) Kessler brought out the connection between Gnosis and the Babylonian religion. By this latter name, however, he meant not the original religion of Babylonia, but the syncretistic religion which arose after the conquest of Cyrus. The same idea is brought out in his "Mani" seven years later. In the same year F. W. Brandt published his "Mandiäische Religion". This Mandaean religion is so unmistakably a form of Gnosticism that it seems beyond doubt that Gnosticism existed independent of, and anterior to, Christianity. In more recent years (1897) Wilhelm Anz pointed out the close similarity between Babylonian astrology and the Gnostic theories of the Hebdomad and Ogdoad. Though in many instances speculations on the Babylonian *Astrallehre* have gone beyond all sober scholarship, yet in this particular instance the inferences made by Anz seem sound and reliable. Researches in the same direction were continued and instituted on a wider scale by W. Bousset, in 1907,

- [Reception and Revelation](#)
- [The Gnostic Mytho-Logos](#)
 - [The Myth of Sophia](#)
 - [Christian Gnosticism](#)
 - [Basilides](#)
 - [Marcion](#)
 - [Valentinus and the Valentinian School](#)
 - [The System of Ptolemy](#)
 - [Mani and Manichaeism](#)
- [Platonism and Gnosticism](#)
 - [Numenius of Apamea and Neo-Platonism](#)
- [Concluding Summary](#)
- [Sources](#)

The Philosophical Character of Gnosticism

Gnosticism, as an intellectual product, is grounded firmly in the general human act of reflecting upon existence. The Gnostics were concerned with the basic questions of existence or "being-in-the-world" (*Dasein*) -- that is: *who we are* (as human beings), *where we have come from*, and *where we are heading*, historically and spiritually (cf. Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* 1958, p. 334). These questions lie at the very root of philosophical thinking; but the answers provided by the Gnostics go beyond philosophical speculation toward the realm of religious doctrine and mysticism. However, it is impossible to understand fully the meaning of Gnosticism without beginning at the philosophical level, and orienting oneself accordingly. Since any orientation toward an ancient phenomenon must always proceed by way of contemporary ideas and habits of mind, an interpretative discussion of Gnostic thinking as it applies to Psychology, Existentialism, and Hermeneutics, is not amiss here. Once we have understood, to the extent of our ability, the philosophical import of Gnostic ideas, and how they relate to contemporary philosophical issues, then we may enter into the historical *milieu* of the Gnostics with some degree of confidence -- a confidence devoid, to the extent that this is possible, of tainting exegetical presuppositions.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Psychology

Who are we? The answer to this question involves an account (*logos*) of the nature of the soul (*psukhê* or psyche); and the attempt to provide an answer has accordingly been dubbed the science or practice of "psychology" -- an account of the soul or mind (*psukhê*, in ancient Greek, denoted both soul, as the principle of life, and mind, as the principle of intellect). Carl Jung, drawing upon Gnostic mythical schemas, identified the objectively oriented consciousness with the material or 'fleshly' part of humankind -- that is, with the part of the human being that is, according to the Gnostics, bound up in the cosmic cycle of generation and decay, and subject to the bonds of fate and time (cf. *Apocryphon of John* [Codex II] 28:30). The human being who identifies him/herself with the objectively existing world comes to construct a personality, a sense of self, that is, at base, fully dependent upon the ever-changing structures of temporal existence. The resulting lack of any sense of permanence, of autonomy, leads such an individual to experience anxieties of all kinds, and eventually to shun the mysterious and collectively meaningful patterns of human existence in favor of a private and stifling subjective context, in the confines of which life plays itself out in the absence of any reference to a greater plan or scheme. Hopelessness, atheism, despair, are the results

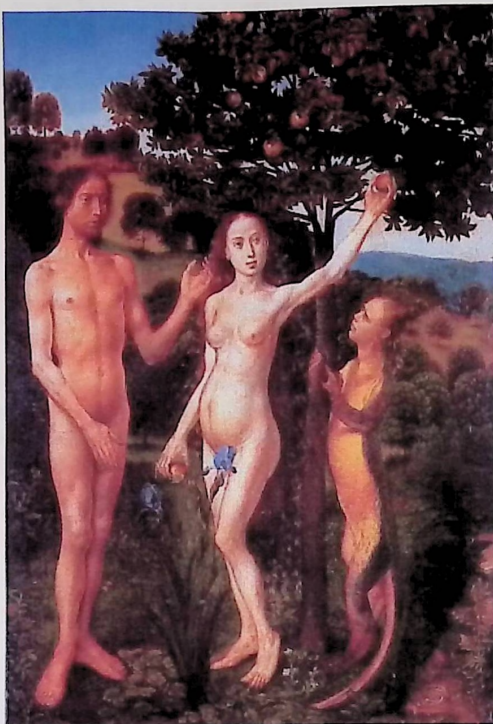
of such an existence. This is not the natural end of the human being, though; for, according to Jung (and the Gnostics) the temporally constructed self is not the true self. The true self is the supreme consciousness existing and persisting beyond all space and time. Jung calls this the *pure consciousness* or Self, in contradistinction to the "ego consciousness" which is the temporally constructed and maintained *form* of a discrete existent (cf. C.G. Jung, "Gnostic Symbols of the Self," in *The Gnostic Jung* 1992, pp. 55-92). This latter form of 'worldly' consciousness the Gnostics identified with soul (*psukhē*), while the pure or true Self they identified with spirit (*pneuma*) -- that is, mind relieved of its temporal contacts and context. This distinction had an important career in Gnostic thought, and was adopted by St. Paul, most notably in his doctrine of the spiritual resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:44). The psychological or empirical basis of this view, which soon turns into a metaphysical or onto-theological attitude, is the recognized inability of the human mind to achieve its grandest designs while remaining subject to the rigid law and order of a disinterested and aloof cosmos. The spirit-soul distinction (which of course translates into, or perhaps presupposes, the more fundamental mind-body distinction) marks the beginning of a transcendentalist and soteriological attitude toward the cosmos and temporal existence in general.

[Back to Table of Contents](#)

Existentialism

The basic experience of existence, described by the philosophy that has become known as 'Existentialism,' involves a general feeling of loneliness or abandonment (*Geworfenheit*, "having been thrown") in/to a world that is not amenable to the primordial desires of the human being (cf. Jonas, p. 336). The recognition that the first or primal desire of the human being is for the actualization or positing of a concrete self or 'I' (an autonomous and discrete individual existing and persisting amidst the flux and flow of temporal and external 'reality') leads to the disturbing realization that this world is not akin to the human being; for this world (so it seems) follows its own course, a course already mapped out and set in motion long before the advent of human consciousness. Furthermore, that the essential activity of the human being -- i.e., to actualize an autonomous self within the world -- is carried out in opposition to a power or 'will' (the force of nature) that always seems to thwart or subvert this supremely human endeavor, leads to the acknowledgment of an anti-human and therefore anti-intellectual power; and this power, since it seems to act, must also exist. However, the fact that its act does not manifest itself as a communication between humanity and *nature* (or pure objectivity), but rather as a mechanical process of blind necessity occurring apart from the human endeavor, places the human being in a superior position. For even though the force of nature may arbitrarily wipe out an individual human existent, just as easily as it brings one into existence, this natural force is not conscious of its activity. The human mind, on the other hand, *is*. And so a gap or fissure -- a product of reflection -- is set up, by which the human being may come to orient him/herself with and toward the world in which s/he exists and persists, for a brief moment. Martin Heidegger has described this brief moment of orientation with/in (toward) the world as "care" (*Sorge*), which is always a care or concern for the "moment" (*Augenblick*) within which all existence occurs; this "care" is understood as the product of humankind's recognition of their unavoidable *being-toward-death*. But this orientation is never completed, since the human soul finds that it cannot achieve its purpose or complete actualization within the confines set by nature. While the thwarting necessity of nature is, for the Existentialist, a simple, unquestioned fact; for the Gnostics it is the result of the malignant designs of an inferior god, the Demiurge, carried out through and by this ignorant deity's own law. In other words, nature is, for modern Existentialism, merely indifferent, while for the Gnostics it was actively hostile toward the human endeavor. "[C]osmic law, once worshipped as the expression of a reason with which man's reason can communicate in the act of cognition, is now seen only in its aspect of compulsion which thwarts man's freedom" (Jonas, p. 328). Time and history come to be understood as the provenance

G N O S T I C I S M



Empire's conquest of Jerusalem around 60 B.C., which sent many Jews into paroxysms of [apocalism](#). Many were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the messiah, who was most often imagined as a general or king who would liberate the Holy City (again).

The Gnostics began as a very esoteric sects of Judaism, but quickly assimilated Christian beliefs with such enthusiasm that the two became largely indistinguishable. The core set of beliefs held by the Gnostics included one or more of the following tenets (mixing and matching from the list was encouraged):

- The world was created by an Evil God (usually identified as the Old Testament God) who was acting without proper authorization from the Good God, who was the secret and true God.
- The material world, for either the reason above or some other reason, is therefore inherently evil and corrupt.
- Adam and Eve were thrown out of the Garden of Eden by the Evil God for the "sin" of seeking knowledge (gnosis, get it?), thereby rendering the serpent into a heroic figure.
- The Evil God is a male figure, sometimes referred to as Samael, which



There's a popular misconception that early Christianity was a unified group under the Church of Rome's banner of Peter as "Pope Peter I". How do such misconceptions arise?

We can never know for sure, but we'll just have to accept the Church of Rome's centuries of persecution and extermination of heretics, massive and efficient burning campaigns and an active attempt to rewrite history.

In reality, there was a different version of Christianity available on every street corner through the first centuries after the death of [Jesus Christ](#). Among Gnostics were in many ways the most radical and influential.

Unlike its Roman competitor, Gnosticism was not a means a monolithic and inviolable set of beliefs. The word "gnostic" is the Greek term "gnosis" means "knowledge." The Gnostics believed they were the owners of secret information about how things worked. The actual content of that information dramatically differed based on who you asked.

The Gnostic tradition actually predates Christianity at least a century. During the period just before the birth of Christ, Judaism had become severely fractured and various sects competed for popular and theological support. Much of this activity was driven by the

means "blind God," or Yaldabaoth, which means "born of chaos" or some such thing. The Good God often depicted as a mother goddess named Sophia, which means "wisdom."

- Jesus was an emissary of the Good God (or Goddess), who was sent to Earth to impart secret knowledge to the chosen few.
- All that stuff in the New Testament is just the mass market version of what Christianity was supposed to be while the Gnostics possessed the special edition DVD of Christianity with lots of bonus features, i.e. secret teachings which were denied to the unworthy.
- Jesus didn't die on the cross, but rather only created the illusion he was being crucified. Some Gnostic versions of the Passion story have Jesus magically switching places with Simon of Cyrene (who in the New Testament mercifully carries the cross a few blocks to give Jesus a break). Jesus then stands off to the side laughing his ass off while Simon is crucified in his place. (And remember, this is the emissary of the Good God.)
- The Gnostics had widely divergent views on sex. Most Gnostics believed the body was made from matter and thus utterly unimportant in the scheme of things. This naturally leads to one of two extreme viewpoints. 1) It's best to entirely eschew all pleasures of the sinful flesh, so one must never have sex, or 2) Since the flesh is completely worthless, it's completely irrelevant what you do with it, so do whatever you like. As the Shakers would later discover, the first approach has the unfortunate effect of causing religion to pretty much die out in the first generation, which is why you tend to hear more about the Shakers than the Gnostics.

The Gnostics didn't believe in the whole "apostolic succession" concept that led to the creation of the papacy, which made them prime targets for the burgeoning Roman Catholic church. The Roman church denounced Gnosticism as heresy on the premise that it denied the reality of the [Crucifixion](#), but really they were more pissed about the fact that Gnostics opposed any sort of central authority and believed that revelation came only from God.



Naturally, the Roman church decided the best way to resolve these differences was to kill all the Gnostics and burn all their books. This took a while, but they did a really thorough job. With the extermination of the [Cathars](#) and the [Knights Templar](#) by the [Inquisition](#) in the 13th century, the last vestiges of Gnosticism were eradicated... or so it seemed.

There were traces of gnosticism scattered throughout the Christian bible (specifically the Gospel and letters attributed to the apostle John, as well as the [Book of Revelation](#)). But the real survivals of the religion were in three distinct branches.

The weirdest, but least influential, surviving branch was the [Mandaeans](#), a ascetic sect of between 10,000 and 60,000, located along the border between [Iran](#) and [Iraq](#). The Mandaeans believe there is a world of light and North and darkness to the South, and the two are engaged in war. Other than that, they seem to follow general Gnostic lines, although they hold some secrets to themselves.

The second survival of Gnosticism came through secret societies, which purport to carry on Gnostic traditions through various means. [Freemasonry](#) is thought to be influenced by the Gnostics, as were the [Knights Templar](#), who were based in the same French territory where the Cathars lived. Various groups claim the [Knights Templar](#) as part of their lineage, including the



Illuminati and the Ordo Templi Orientis. The latter organization overtly identifies itself with Gnosticism of its major rituals is the Gnostic Mass, written by Aleister Crowley.

The third survival of Gnosticism is a weird historical oddity. In 1945, a collection of ancient texts were found at the site of Nag Hammadi, Egypt. They had been sealed in jars and buried by a small sect which had abandoned the site, then forgotten. Because they had been so thoroughly concealed, they escaped the vast book-burn campaign of the early Catholic church. The discovery of the texts provided the first legitimate record of Gnostics; previously most historical information about Gnosticism was extracted from published church attacks attacking their beliefs.

The Gnostic scriptures provided a lot of insight into the development of early Christianity, as well as provided textual clues to the origins of the New Testament gospels, which may have been plagiarized in part from the originals.

Gnosticism has become somewhat *en vogue* in recent years. The underlying theme of the "world as illusion" has provided fodder for many modern auteurs, including notably sci-fi giant Philip K Dick, Grant Morris of The Invisibles, and the Wachowski Brothers, creators of The Matrix.

So when the next Inquisition comes, rest assured that Keanu Reeves will be the first one up against the wall.

[Pornopolis](#) | [Rotten](#) | [Faces of Death](#) | [Famous Nudes](#)

Mailer Takes on God, or Mailer's Takes on God

Let me begin with a quotation from a now famous 1958 interview, titled in *Advertisements for Myself* as "Hip, Hell, and the Navigator, one of a series of addenda to *The White Negro* that took the meaning of that essay into realms only intimated in the original. In answer to a question about the relationship of anarchic experience to expression—can the Hipster by very definition write a novel? Can such experience without form be corralled into the form of a literary text—questions safe to ask of an artist, Mailer responds:

"I think it can; and not only that, but I think Hip is particularly illuminated by one notion so central and so shattering that its religious resonances and reverberations are going to dominate this coming century. And I think there is one single burning pinpoint of the vision in Hip: it's that God is in danger of dying....I believe Hip conceives of Man's fate being tied up with God's fate. God is no longer all-powerful. [here a phrase was lost to static in the tape]. The moral consequences of this are not only staggering, but they're thrilling; because moral experience is intensified rather than diminished."

Richard Stern, not quite expecting this turn, can only state: **Now that's a fantastic assertion. That really makes me sit up.**

In thinking about all the ways we have talked about the significance of Norman Mailer's work at this wonderful symposium, it struck me that this is one we have neglected: Norman Mailer Wrestles with God, though it runs, certainly from *The White Negro* onward, as perhaps the source of his most distinctive and unsettling energy in his work. In fact, if one begins a search for meditations on religion as I did late last night and

early this morning—the suffocating effects of organized religion, the mission to save a dying God as expressed in the reassertion of the sensual, and myriad other weavings of the eternal into otherwise mundane issues of politics, personal relations, and the like, and the attention paid by at least a few scholars to its importance, notably Mike Lennon, one finds a vast cosmology—ever changing but ever focused on the theme of preserving a sense of divine aliveness to good and evil in ourselves and others, in the fleshy, sensual, transcendent stakes of life in all its dimensions—against technology, ideology, and the deadening fear of totalitarian politics on all sides.

If I were to characterize Mailer's person and persona, borrowing from Robert Lucid's talk, I would call him a Holy Outlaw, and if I were to use a word to describe psychic field of his endeavors, borrowing from Sam Tanenhaus, I would say it would be the field of the Daemonic. And, I would add, a Jew. A Jewish Holy Outlaw in the Fields of the Daemonic. I say a Jewish Holy Outlaw as opposed, say, to the Brothers Berrigan, peculiarly Holy Catholic Outlaws. Or, in this same era, the peculiarly polite Protestant, even Episcopal Holy Outlaw, Bishop Pike. For Mailer's God was the God of the Old Testament—playing, punishing, wagering, creating, always creating, and imbuing his creations with fullest capacities for courage, deceit, sexuality, and love. And I would throw in, at certain moments, the Kabbalist, whose sense of the indirect secretions of God illuminating human consciousness had its version in Mailer's work. In speaking of the hipster's use of drugs (in that same interview), its nature and ambiguity, he says: **"In Hip, which has after all to a certain extent come out of drug-taking...the attitude would be more that if taking drugs gives one extraordinary sensations, then the drug-taker is probably receiving something from God. Love perhaps. And perhaps he is. Let's**

just entertain the notion as a rational hypothesis which may or may not be true and let's see how far we go with it. If the hipster is receiving love from God he may well be draining some of the substance of God by calling upon this love, you see, which drug releases. And in draining the substance of God he's exhausting Him, so that the drug-taker may be indulging an extraordinarily evil act at the instant he is filled with the feeling that he is full of God and good and a beautiful mystic. This involves new moral complexities...

Which brings me to Existentialism and the Daemonic. Mailer and others protested against the vogue of Sartre and Heidegger in that each in his own way took God out of the equation, totalitarianized experience by insisting on its totally human origins. In this sense, though it perhaps hardly seemed that way at the moment, he was the outlaw in league with the Protestant theologian Paul Tillich and the Catholics Jacques Maritain and Gabriel Marcel, and with such psychologists Wilhelm Reich and Rollo May who like Mailer saw the brilliant questions that Freud asked of the unconscious had been domesticated to near death by the Freudians. And I wish Mailer had known Rollo May, whose idea of the daemonic, a kind of cosmologized Freudian It or *Id*, the burning dynamo of both creativity and evil, sometimes at the same time, bore some resemblance to Mailer's own constantly evolving sense of holy libido.

Two more points. Mailer's ever-evolving holy outlaw as person and third-person persona, as a number of panelists have pointed out, ^{JEEKS}sought to penetrate the souls of others, explicate them, make them human and therefore divine. He ^{STANDS}understood that technology and totalitarianism ^{HAVE}made it easy to dehumanize, and to rationalize and soften the edges even on the most heinous acts. ^{MAILER TRIES TO}He sought to revivify all human actors,

not to relativize their sins, not even to make the worst bigots and killers blameless victims, but to reinstate a fullness of vision and feeling to those old words, Good and Evil. In gaining our full humanity in every dimension, we might better recognize who are true enemies were.

In closing, ^{a last} ~~one more~~ point. It is fascinating to me that while most intellectuals and artists since the late 1950s have slowly but surely collapsed religion and organized religion into the single term and remained wary of it, and the weak tea of "spiritual but not religious" has come more recently to be seen as an alternative, something Mailer predicted in the 1950s as he critiqued the beatnik love affair with Zen, he is one of the few writers to remain a true Heretic, so engaged with God that has refused not to talk about him in his own inimitable and Prophetic way.