7 : The problem of evil

First we should note that "the problem of evil" is rather poorly named. It ought to be called "the problem of the existence of evil" or better "the problem, for monotheists, of the existence of evil," since unlike the "problem of duckweed" or the "problem of government corruption," solving the problem of evil would not eliminate evil—at least not directly. It would just explain why there is evil at all in a universe completely governed by an all-knowing and entirely good God.

If there were more than one God, then, of course, the problem of evil would not arise. For we could say that some gods bear ill-will toward humans or that there are conflicts among the gods that spill over into human affairs. When no *one* god must account for everything, the existence of evil needs no more explanation than any conflict we see between different essential natures, as between, say, a dog's and a cat's.

If there is *one* God and Creator of the universe, however, one God who is infinitely powerful, all-knowing, completely good, and self-consistent, then we have a *logical* problem with the existence of evil. For if God's control is total, if God's wisdom is complete, and God's goodness is constant and unassailable, then why would—or rather, how *could*—God cause (or allow) children to be raped, airplanes of vacationers to explode in mid-air, volcanoes to smother cities, terrorists to believe they will go to heaven, executives to run off with pension funds, etc., etc., not to mention innumerable famines and genocides?

This is "the problem of evil."

Among traditional (mono)theists, several explanations—several "solutions"—to the problem of evil have been offered. These solutions can be summarized and grouped into three types. Each attempts to preserve God's absolute creatorship, goodness, power, knowledge, and wisdom. Why? Because explanations that do *not* keep all of God's traditional attributes intact are not considered explanations of—are not considered "solutions to"—the problem of evil at all. Here are the three:[28]

1 **Totality Explanations.** We (humans) cannot and will not ever understand God's plan or methods. Thus, what may *seem* to us like evil really

28 *This tripartite division is certainly not the only way to parse the problem of evil. For a detailed overview of recent thinking about the problem of evil by logicians and philosophers, see Michael Tooley (2004). What follows is a far rougher treatment.*

is not, in the larger picture. Perhaps God is saving us from worse evil yet. Perhaps he is teaching us a lesson we need to learn. Or maybe God is testing our faith (to see whom he will reward). In all these cases it is *human* understanding of love, justice, and goodness that falls short. Ditto our understanding of the nature of God and our interpretation of events. Blind to the Big Picture, ignorant of God's plans and methods, we cannot judge. The world he made is good. Indeed, it is the best it can be and still be a world governed by laws.[29] God's ways are surpassingly wise because he is good and considers *all* eventualities.

2 **Freedom Explanations.** God, who has absolute freedom, created human beings in his image, which is to say, as having freedom also. This freedom includes the freedom to do harm unintentionally or intentionally, which is to say, innocently or culpably. (Some argue only the latter is evil.) Either way, say Freedom Explanations, because God is wholly good and humans might or might not be, the fact that evil exists proves that God values our freedom more than any of his other gifts to humanity—in fact, more than he values our goodness. God prefers us to *choose* to do good rather than do good (or do anything) automatically, robotically, unable to conceive of doing anything else. So evil is simply a nasty side-effect of freedom, which we would be wrong to give up on that account.

3 **Finite Knowledge Explanations.** These solutions to the problem of evil combine elements of the first two. But they focus on another limitation that humans have and God does not have, namely, limitations in ordinary, factual, this-worldly knowledge. Thus: whereas God has complete knowledge of (not to mention power over) the world in every detail, we do not. The future remains opaque to us, as does history in detail, and as do the myriad facts about the world that surrounds us now. Under these circumstances, the best we can do with the best of intentions is not likely to be good enough to ensure that the right things happen. There will be mistakes. There will be unforeseen outcomes, accidents, coincidences, and so forth. Nor can we control the consequences of decisions we have already made, forcing unfolding events toward the good we wanted to see and had aimed for. To be good, and always and only good, *requires* perfect knowledge of con-

29 *If the world were not "governed by law," it would be without regularity or system, and neither we nor any animal could learn about or adapt to it. In essence, this is the answer to Job given by God.*

ditions initially and/or perfect control over events thereafter, as well as perfect education as to the nature of the good. Since God did not endow us with any of this knowledge (this he kept to himself), nor, apparently, with the ability to acquire it all, the whole panoply of harms and evils caused by ignorance, error, or stupidity remains possible, even likely.[30]

The above three paragraphs represent a *very* brief treatment of how mainstream theologians in the Judeo-Christian tradition have tried to explain the existence of evil without taking anything away from (their picture of) God.[31] The question is: do any of these explanations succeed? The answer, I think, is no. Because although each type of explanation offers some comfort, each takes something away from God as traditional believers suppose God to be.

For example, Totality Explanations (which say we cannot know God's plans or ways) diminish the "omni" component of God's supposed omnibenevolence. For they admit that God, albeit for the best of reasons, does not have good-will toward *all* people and *all* creatures *all* the time. He has ill-will toward sinners, for example, at least for a while, until they

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30 *To go on with this third answer: our freedom can be seen not as a gift that God gave us out of the goodness of "his" heart, but a gift God* had *to give us as a consequence of the limitations God also imposed on our knowledge and power. The reason we have the freedom to choose is because the* process *of imagining options, choosing among them, acting upon our choice, and assessing the outcomes—in short, the* process *of guessing, choosing, and learning from experience—is the* only *way to go forward rationally when knowledge and/or power are limited. A creature that knew everything from the start and/or that was able to control everything to suit its desire would have to* decide *nothing except what to desire in the first place. Once it had decided to want the good (and it would know infallibly what good* was*), no further choices would have to be made, and no further freedom would be needed. It follows that God, as traditionally conceived, does not* have *to be free. Only we do. For an expansion of this argument, see T. J. Mawson (2005, pp. 55–69) and a riposte from Wes Morriston (2005).*

31 *I omit Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and other mystical traditions that posit the existence of a "dark force" or evil god equal in power to Yahweh. My remarks assume genuine* mono*theism. For a more extensive treatment of (the problem of) the problem of evil, see J. L. Mackie, (1990) and Susan Neiman (2002).*

32 *It doesn't help to argue that God has good will toward those whom he punishes, like the "tough love" strict fathers rain down upon wayward children. For one, no father would* kill *his child, which God (as traditionally conceived) does or allows with regularity. For another, no punished child can be blamed for imagining his or her father genuinely angry, and genuinely if temporarily* wishing harm *upon them, which belief is probably better for the mental health of the child than the alternative. Consider: is pain caused by someone* ›

repent and/or repair what they have done.[32] Nor does God seem to mind the slaughter of millions of animals every day so that we can have lunch. God's being "all good, all the time," we realize, actually only guarantees that God is interested in some *greater* good, one we can't necessarily see, and for which some people and creatures just have to suffer.[33]

Totality Explanations also undermine rational faith in God's omnipotence, for they say that God is incapable of so arranging laws and/or events that no one has to suffer for the sake of the long term or for the sake of others. It says that even God cannot make an omelet without breaking some eggs (to borrow Lenin's phrase). God becomes the Supreme Utilitarian, arranging the most good for the most people that he can, i.e., according to his plan and within the laws that he Himself cannot or will not change (or reveal to us).[34]

Totality Explanations have one more undesirable result for theists. To admit that our comprehension of God is limited in a permanent way, indeed in principle, is to admit that we might not know much about God at all. This in turn opens the possibility that God might not be wholly good. Perhaps God *likes* a little sin, discord, and mayhem to "spice up his life"... in which case we have to wonder: just how much is "a little" to

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< *who hates you (hopefully temporarily) not preferable to pain caused by someone who, as they punish you, assures you they love you without cease, that they're "doing it for your sake"? You might reply "Well, no. My* dentist *causes me pain and loves me (in a way)." But unlike a good dentist, God of the Bible rarely explains himself to sufferers; and, as though to add insult to injury, He has a way of rewarding (or allowing reward to accrue to) people who are clearly sinners. Traditional believers find they must take refuge in what they would dearly like to explicate, which is God's inexplicability. No wonder the doctrine of heaven and hell—compensatory reward and punishment* after death*—puts itself forward.*

33 "Have *to suffer," of course, implies an unwillingness to suffer, which raises the possibility that if one is always* willing *to suffer—so great and so constant is one's faith in the wisdom of God's plan—then one's suffering,* now voluntary, *transforms itself into profoundly meaningful self-sacrifice. Alas, even if one found this response healthy and life-affirming (which I personally do not), it does not cover the bulk of suffering in this world, which is the suffering of innocents who are* not *so devout (not to mention the suffering of billions of animals who, after leading miserable lives, daily become our food, who did not volunteer to do so, and who are incapable, anyway, of the requisite faith). Or shall we say that not believing in God's Plan and sacrificing oneself to it unquestioningly is crime enough to be the legitimate target of God's punishment? There are many religious fundamentalists who would say "Yes, this is so. If you suffer, if you die, it is God's (good) idea that you do." Atheists are quick to point out the fatalism and circularity of the whole argument.*

34 *Of course, if God* cannot *change the law then God is once again not omnipotent, and if God* will *not, in the cause of alleviating suffering, God is not omni-benevolent.*

God? To us it often seems like a lot. The point is that incomprehension of God, once accepted as inevitable, opens the door to the acceptance of everything that happens—from genocides to children dying of cancer to your beloved dog being run over—as part of God's plan, as well as acceptance of the possibility that God might endorse evil.[35] Indeed, God might have attributes of which theologians have yet to dream.

Freedom Explanations raise different sorts of problems.

Let us agree from the outset: freedom is wonderful, even essential to human life. Let us also agree that we cannot be *totally* free, free to walk though walls for example, to change the past, or to converse with the dead. But it does not follow from this that being free—even being *very* free—requires us to be free to do serious wrong or harm.

What do I mean? Freedom entails the ability to make choices. A traditional believer can imagine that God sets those choices before us and hopes that we will choose well. Now think of a banquet buffet, with, say, fifty dishes to choose from. Is it necessary that some dishes—say four of them—be poisonous? Surely not. Let us take the four poisonous ones off the table. All forty-six of the remaining dishes could be good, all could

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35 *There is a tradition, rooted in Judaism, of understanding God and humankind to be in partnership, working together—not alone—to repair or perfect the world* (tikkun olam). *In this tradition, God needs us as much as we need him. This is why God enters into covenants—contracts—with people at all. We are not God's slaves or puppets. The implied limitation of God's power in this scheme cannot be overlooked, however, which is why the "partnership hypothesis," though admirably pragmatic, cannot be thought to solve the problem of evil for Judaism or for theism generally. Saying that God in his infinite wisdom* chose *to work this way (i.e., to limit his power) amounts to a dodge, not a doctrine. (Can God take full power back at any time? If so, then God never gave up his power.) And it does not undo this concession: if God needs us to do his work—indeed if God* needs *anything—then God is neither omnipotent nor perfect in himself.*

Besides, let us look at the partnership from a purely human point of view. Would you voluntarily enter into a partnership with a person whose modus operandi *included unilaterally killing off members of your family and other innocents in order to get his way, and then saying (if he bothers to say anything at all) "trust me"? This would be a partnership with the Godfather, not God the Father, and certainly not God the Holy Spirit. Says our theology: if God is good, only and entirely, and doing good is up to us, only and entirely, it follows that God's very existence is up to us.*

36 *Leibniz famously solved this particular problem in theodicy by having God* in*capable of doing anything* logically *impossible, like make something at the same time be wholly black* and *wholly white or having 1 plus 1 be equal to 3. The laws of logic are in a sense above God, conditioning of Him. It is simply not possible to have a world without conflict, to have races without winners and losers. It follows that the world we live in is the best logically possible one.*

be healthy, tasty, good-looking, and so still allow a great deal of room for choice and preference on the part of the guests. If God had arranged the world so that all available options were pretty-good actions, would we not have been free enough?

The point is, if he could not so arrange the world, then he is not omnipotent.[36] And if he has not and will not, then he is not omni-benevolent.

Then too, if we are free to choose evil, then surely so is God (on the traditional view of God). If God cannot choose evil—what with being all-good—is "he" less free than we are?[37] It would seem so, on purely logical grounds. It would seem that in order to make sense of God's total goodness, freedom ought to be available fully only among good alternatives, for God as well as for us.[38]

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37 *Jean Paul Sartre said that either God (as traditionally conceived) is free,* or *we are. Some have argued that God's "inability" to do evil may indicate nothing more than his utterly consistent choosing not to. Yet others propose that God may have deliberately limited his powers for our sake. In Christianity, the doctrine of* kenosis *describes God as having reduced himself to living in the world as Jesus out of compassion for humanity. In medieval Judaism one has the Kabbalistic doctrine of* tzimtzum *(see* REFLECTIONS *18): God is imagined to have withdrawn himself from Creation, to have limited his powers soon after the first moment so as to leave room for human actions, for chance, and for material reality itself...this out of the desire to have something other than himself to love. Had God not done so, the universe to this day would be nothing but pure light—God's holy light, filling everything, immaterial, without real extension or duration—and neither sun nor moon nor any living creature would exist.*

Some might see the similarity between this doctrine and the cosmogonist Alan Guth's hypothesis of cosmic inflation. Here, however, we could entertain ourselves by speculating whether God as described by the Kabbalah might not also have voluntarily reduced himself to being the God proposed by the theology of theopraxy, i.e., simply the good we do. Has "he" not the power to do so?

38 *There is one more objection to traditional theodicy, credited to John Hick. Why did God choose* freedom *to be the supreme value for humans? Did God* have *to? If so, then God is not free, and this non-freedom has nothing to do with logical possibility, as Leibniz argues (cf. note 36). Surely God could have chosen* any *feature of life, any virtue, to be the most valuable one—language, dexterity, happiness, strength, fructitude—one that would not logically entail evil and might well require giving up quite a lot of freedom...and we would have agreed, indeed "concluded" with all sorts of emotion, that* this *was God's supreme gift to humanity.*

39 *There is a minority opinion among liberal theologians that God does not know the future. Possibilities exist for God as well as for us. God takes risks. God does not know what we are going to do; God does not know what "he" is going to do either, because it depends how things develop and, at least a bit, on our cooperation. These concessions go a long way toward neutralizing the problem of evil, of course, but they do not* solve *the problem of* ›

Finite Knowledge Explanations also fall short of defending traditional monotheism.

For one, they do not make evil a necessary feature of the world, just a probable one. Sooner or later, they say, human stupidity if nothing else will cause something bad to happen. Very well. But if we are unable to do the good reliably because of our perceptual-cognitive limitations, and if God wanted it that way, the question arises: Why doesn't God step in to save us from ourselves and from natural disasters?

Here's an analogy. Believing in the benefits of freedom, imagine that you want to offer your two-year-old nephew, soon to visit, maximum run of your house. You would probably remove all protruding sharp objects, fragile valuables, and poisons. You could not and would not remove all possible dangers. He could still fall down the stairs, run out into the street, or drown in the pond. Because such dangers are not eliminable, then, you would stay in attendance, hovering close enough by to swoop in and prevent calamity. On the Finite Knowledge view, God does not seem to want to offer us the same protection. He lets us hurt ourselves in the most irreversible ways. As fathers go, he seems about as caring of his brood as a fish.[39]

The problem of evil has been a significant intellectual challenge for theists for more than three thousand years, and only slightly less a problem for deists, who must agree that the world is the way it is by divine design. It puts into words the average believer's nagging doubts; it represents the skeptic's best shot in his or her argument against faith in a Biblical God. Philosopher Susan Neiman (2002) argues that solving the problem of evil has been the consistent if unstated theme of *secular* moral philosophy since the seventeenth century, and she is probably right.

From strongly traditional believers, however, the response has been different: not rationality or argument, but comfort taken in one, two, or all three of the above explanations, together with renewed faith in God—faith beyond the sort that says "ignorance is our lot, so *trust,*" which one might call rational faith, to faith that says "believe in God against all contrary evidence, logic, and argument," which can only be called irrational or blind faith.

< *evil because no* solution *would compromise any of the classical attributes of God, which "the open view of God" does, to wit "his" omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, or omnibenevolence; as well as, possibly, "his" eternity or creatorship. See Clark Pinnock (1994), John Sanders (1998), or Gregory Boyd (2000) and a critical reaction to the idea in Bruce Ware (2001). In Judaism, the idea that God genuinely needs humankind to fulfill his purposes is not that unusual or heretical. See for example Abraham Joshua Heschel (1997).*

The theology of theopraxy cannot solve the problem of evil in the terms set up by theism. No rational philosophy or religion can. Something about what most people mean by "God" has to give.

8 : The problem of good

Unlike other forms of theism, the theology of theopraxy proffers that God has only one of the attributes traditionally ascribed to God, namely, perfect goodness. In the theology of theopraxy, what is *not-good* is simply *not God*, no matter how entertaining or useful or real it might be. Crimes and cruelties, therefore, are never justified by the larger achievements in which they might eventuate, much less the esthetic qualities they might exhibit.[40]

The existence of evil is not a problem that the theology of theopraxy *has* to explain because it does not posit a God who knows all or who can do all in the first place. God, it argues, cannot break the laws of nature in order to divert certain trains of events from causing harm. Nor did God design or create the world as we find it, which is a world where rigidity, chaos, indifference, misinformation, mediocrity, and selfishness are common. In a world like ours, the miracle (if one wants miracles) *is that there is good at all.* Put another way: *God* is the miracle.

The problem for atheists, it follows, is not the problem of evil, which provides ready ammunition for an attack on traditional theism. The problem for atheists, rather, is *"the problem of good."* For if there is no God in any sense, including the theology of theopraxy's, then whose image or what thought-patterns inspired Moses, Solomon, Isaiah, Jesus, Francis of Assisi, Ghandi, Schweitzer, Wallenberg, and Mother Theresa,

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40 *Crimes and cruelties are by definition impositions on unwilling others, and so cannot be justified. Pain and suffering, however, can sometimes be justified. Two examples: when lesser pain* must *be endured in order to prevent greater pain (think of dragging a child to the dentist), and when those who will feel the pain agree voluntarily, beforehand, to risk pain or to sacrifice themselves for the sake of the larger good envisaged, a good that they also voluntarily agree* is *larger, and good enough. Put another way: the end never justifies the means unless those to be used as a means agree that the end is worthwhile, and also to being a means for achieving it.*

Are these exceptions exploitable? Alas, yes. With regard to the first, one can falsely attest that a worse pain is inevitable unless the subject undergoes the presently proposed one. Religious fundamentalists turn the second to their advantage by advocating that everyone volunteer for everything *that might happen to them, on the grounds that, since* whatever *happens to them is the will of God (and thus for the best), one should "beat God to it" as it were, and* will *whatever appears inevitable. Of course, this makes a mockery of God's gifts to us of* intellect*, which would include the right to question seeming inevitability, and of* freedom*, which would include the right to refuse, without penalty, to volunteer for suffering.*

to name a famous few, to do what they did? Set these heroes aside: how does everyday kindness, decency, and honesty arise? Whence supererogatory—"above-and-beyond-the-call"—acts of philanthropy, altruism, and love? Whence honor in business and even war? These are not minor achievements, and situation-by-situation, calculated-from-scratch self-interest does not explain them completely. The question is: how could a world without God—i.e., without (according to the theology of theopraxy) goodness exemplified and embodied all around in small and large ways—bring about any of these things? This is "the problem of good."[41]

While it might or might not be a problem for atheists (we will look at their reply in a moment), the existence of goodness in a bad or indifferent world is not a problem for our theology. Or rather, it poses none of the *logical* dilemmas that the problem of evil does for theism. This is because the theology of theopraxy does not posit a single locus of dominion over all good or evil: God is present where good is being done and absent where good is not being done: God is good-being-done. Some long-lasting *idea* of God might be what carries some of us from one good deed to another, but only *in* the deed and *as* the deed does God literally come to life. God's job, as it were, is to redeem the world through us, and ours to redeem the world through "him," properly conceived.

If, then, there is no logical problem for us in the fact that there is goodness in the world, a mystery remains nonetheless. When God's power is our power and "his" wisdom is our wisdom, when God "sees with our eyes and hears with our ears" as Confucianism too pictures it (cf. DECLARATIONS 9), then the problem of good is better called the mystery or wonder of good. For truly, the radiance of the slightest genuine kindness is equal to the light of the stars. And it is harder to explain.

"STOP, STOP," cries the atheist. "Why do you speak of 'wonder' and 'mystery'? There is no *wonder* in the existence of good; nor is there anything remotely divine or mysterious in any part of the process. 'Good' is merely what we call those behaviors, rules, and tools that have proven beneficial to the ongoing life of human beings, starting with ourselves and *our* people, but becoming more inclusive as we do better in our own, longer-term, best interests."

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41 *John Horgan (2002) poses the problem of good nicely: "This is by far the greatest gift that mystical experiences can bestow on us: to see—really* see*—all that is right with the world. Just as believers in a beneficent deity should be haunted by the problem of natural evil, so gnostics, atheists, pessimists, and nihilists should be haunted by the problem of friendship, love, beauty, truth, humor, compassion, fun. Never forget the problem of fun."*

And the atheist might go on: "Your theology should be content with *natural* explanations for morality, along the lines offered by sociobiology and evolutionary psychology.[42] To wit: goodness, morality, ethics, law, religion itself...are instantiated in behaviors that are useful for the proliferation of the human species, that survive the selection process, that increase progeny who will repeat these useful—i.e., 'good'—behaviors.[43] There's no wonder or mystery here. Does the theology of theopraxy itself not say God evolves?"

These are strong challenges. Here is our reply.

Our atheist is not wrong, just one-eyed. One can explain a thunderstorm in Texas as what happens when warm humid air from the Gulf of Mexico flows over a body of dry cold air coming from the north and condensed water droplets by the trillion fall to earth. There's nothing wrong with this description, ethically or scientifically. But it does not explain or begin to describe the experience of running through a summer storm with thunder all around and water seeping into your socks with every splashy step. Likewise, understanding the chemical composition of foodstuffs and their transformation by heat can help us be better cooks, as would knowing the history of world cuisines. But those same facts have another face when they become the taste of a sauce taken off a hot spoon. And it is actually this "face"—the experience—that is the culmination of the art of cooking.

Similarly, we can accept that our moral intuitions emerged from biological evolution and from tens if not hundreds of millennia of living together as human beings. Understanding the process will be rewarding. But evolutionary explanations of goodness yield facts that have the same two-sided character as the facts that describe weather and cooking: one side that is all "fitness indicators," "genetic predispositions," "kin selection," "social utility," and so forth, and another side which is how goodness *actually feels to someone who is doing it or witnessing it*. One gets this side from good novels and movies, and one gets it from living life oneself.

Such dual explanations are not the same as duelling explanations. Dual explanations support each other. Duelling ones do not. Evolutionary explanations of the roots of ethical behavior might well, if they are good in the scientific sense, help us do good in the moral sense.[44] But when

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42 *For overviews, see Robert Wright (1995), Matt Ridley (1998), or Frans de Waal (1996).*

43 *See David Sloan Wilson (2002), Pascal Boyer (2002), and Loyal D. Rue (2005).*

44 *Steven Pinker (2002) makes this point, as do all who argue that finding evolutionary logical reasons for contemporary practices does not* ipso facto *condone them. In fact, by and large, they do the opposite. Going* counter *to our natural impulses is most often the moral* >

naturalistic explanations come around to illuminate and enhance the experience of seeing, deciding, and enacting what is good, they have a much better chance. The experiential side of the coin is the side that counts as much; it's the side that people recognize and the one that educates.[45]

One has to realize, in sum, that *evolution-in-process* feels like *life as lived.* One has to realize that when the phone rings we are all suddenly existentialists, cast into a world we didn't make and as spontaneous as cats.

Evolutionary, biological, and even humanistic explanations of "where morality comes from" challenge traditional belief in God. But they support the theology of theopraxy's entirely. When God is a production of human experience as real as color, music, or democracy and "closer than the vein in your neck,"[46] God's mystery and wonder do not depend on revelation in the Biblical sense: no voices from thin air, no angelic light, no ladders into the clouds are required. It is simply the wonder of being touched by ethical action firsthand, up close. Here is a child offering her blood for transfusion into her sick brother; here is a man risking his life to lead a dog off a busy road; there is a woman anonymously channelling her wealth to charity; there is a man steadily forbearing insults to himself and offering goodwill in return. On such occasions a familiar amalgam of emotions is elicited: awe, gratitude, joy, hope, pride in being

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< *direction. There are, after all, evolutionarily "good" reasons why women have inferior social status to men (I shall not go into them here), just as there are evolutionarily "good" reasons why stepfathers are more likely to harm their stepchildren than fathers are their own children. There are reasons to take revenge that make perfect sociobiological sense. Etc. Being civilized, however, means* not *perpetuating these behaviors. Understanding the evolutionary origins and uses of these behaviors helps in not perpetuating them because it helps us devise practices and laws that avoid the circumstances that trigger them and/or that offer more tempting and less harmful alternatives: soccer, not war.*

45 *A great deal of science goes the other way, of course: starting in phenomenology—which means starting with extreme sensitivity to the structure, texture, and content of actual experience, probably one's own—and only then moving to generalizations and quantifications. It takes a phenomenologist* extraordinaire *to compare, in all seriousness, the experience of a person in an closed, upward-accelerating elevator to the experience of a person in a gravitational field, as Einstein did for his Theory of General Relativity (calling it the Principle of Equivalence). The physics laboratory is a virtual haven for phenomenologists. Would that there were an equivalent for moralists.*

46 *The phrase is Qur'anic (Sura 50:16). If traditional, Bible-based theism would let go of its objective, prior, 'out there' existence-claims on behalf of God in favor of phenomenological, existential, produced-*by*-life claims for the existence of God, it too would be unfazed by evolutionary and humanistic explanations.*

human. Just as the experience of being scalded is not nullified by knowing that it is "just" billions of fast-moving water molecules battering the nerve endings under our skin, so the wonder of goodness is not at all undone, and is perhaps intensified, by the knowledge that it emerged from billions of years of selfish, witless, life on earth becoming conscious—the light of stars becoming light of another sort. Think this, and the mystery and wonder of God can come from something as simple as the pleasure of realizing that one is alive, free, without pain, and at the same time of benefit to others who deserve the same experience.

And who deserves that experience? Every baby born.

The truth is that some measure of goodness is all around. Every iota of tact, every laugh among friends, every moment of patience and offering of help, is an instance of God. Every obedience to law, every washing of hands, feeding a pet, or letting someone sleep is God at work. This is what it means to know that God is immanent *and* in our hands. That we can walk peacably and work respectfully among other people, that we tolerate their foibles and can expect the same from them, are miracles that do not appear miraculous because they are "normal." And they are normal because they are built upon millennia of learning and transmission of the Word of God (or Way of Heaven), which itself evolves over time. We need only contemplate with the existentialists our ever-present freedom to do almost *anything*—including lie, murder, steal, dishonor, and abandon—to see that good-doing is always up to us, that it is always a choice, and a choice of which we can later be proud even if we were not fully aware at the time that we were choosing.

Recall the hells-on-earth that dot human history. Bring to mind the ones that exist right now somewhere on the planet. Now look out of your window. Every bird not shot, every walker not carrying a gun, every car waiting patiently for a traffic light to change, every repairman writing up a job fairly, every person dying in a fresh hospital bed rather than on a battlefield or in a gutter, every street that is swept, every bush that is trimmed, every toddler studying a worm... is God evidenced and instanced.

Look upon these things and be glad. Rejoice at peace and decency. See that for the most part your "cup runneth over," and more: that by your actions *you* are one reason for that cup "running over" for others. Call it the wonder of doing. "The wonder of doing," Abraham Joshua Heschel thought, "is no less amazing than the marvel of being....and (it) may prompt us to discover 'the divinity of deeds.' (I)n doing sacred deeds we may begin to realize that there is more in our doing than ourselves, that in

our doing there is something—nay, someone—divine. (It is) 'through the ecstasy of deeds' that we learn 'to be certain of the hereness of God.'"[47]

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47 *Maurice Friedman (1987, p. 265, 266.).*