THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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This paper considers briefly the approach to the problem of evil by Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and John Hick and argues that none of these approaches is entirely satisfactory. The paper then develops a different strategy for dealing with the problem of evil by expounding and taking seriously three Christian claims relevant to the problem: Adam fell; natural evil entered the world as a result of Adam's fall; and after death human beings go either to heaven or hell. Properly interpreted, these claims form the basis for a consistent and coherent Christian solution to the problem of evil.

Introduction

The problem of evil traditionally has been understood as an apparent inconsistency in theistic beliefs.[1] Orthodox believers of all three major monotheisms, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, are committed to the truth of the following claims about God:

(1) God is omnipotent;
(2) God is omniscient;
(3) God is perfectly good.

Reasonable people of all persuasions are also committed to this claim:

(4) There is evil in the world;

and many theists in particular are bound to maintain the truth of (4) in virtue of their various doctrines of the afterlife or the injunctions of their religion against evil. The view that (1)-(4) are logically incompatible has become associated with Hume in virtue of Philo's position in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, though many other philosophers have maintained it[2], including in recent years J.L. Mackie[3] and H.J. McCloskey.[4] As other philosophers have pointed out, however, Philo's view that there is a logical inconsistency in (1)-(4) alone is mistaken.[5] To show such an inconsistency, one would need at least to demonstrate that this claim must be true:

(5) There is no morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of evil.

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Since Hume, there have been attempts to solve the problem of evil by attacking or reinterpreting one of the first four assumptions. Mill, for example, suggested a radical weakening of (1) and (2);[6] and according to Mill, Mansel reinterpreted (3) in such a way as almost to make (4) follow from it, by in effect claiming that God's goodness might include attributes which we consider evil by human standards.[7] But for reasons which I think are obvious, theists have generally been unwilling to avail themselves of such solutions; and most attempts at solving the problem, especially recently, have concentrated on strategies for rejecting (5). Some of these attempted rejections of (5) make significant contributions to our understanding of the problem, but none of them, I think, ultimately constitutes a successful solution of the problem. In this paper, I will briefly review what seem to me three of the most promising discussions of the problem of evil and then develop in detail a different solution of my own by presenting and defending a morally sufficient reason for God to allow instances of evil.

I

Plantinga's presentation of the free will defense is a landmark in contemporary discussions of the problem of evil. As Plantinga expounds it,[8] the free will defense rests on these two philosophical claims, which it adds to the theological assumptions (1)-(3):

(6) Human beings have free will;

and

(7) Possession of free will and use of it to do more good than evil is a good of such value that it outweighs all the evil in the world.

Plantinga uses these assumptions to argue that a morally sufficient reason for God to permit evil is possible: the value of man's possession and use of free will is a possible reason for God's permitting moral evil, which is evil caused by man. The value of the fallen angel's possession of free will is a possible reason for God's permitting natural evil, evil which is not caused by human free choice but which (Plantinga suggests) could be attributed to the freely chosen actions of fallen angels. As long as it is possible that there be a morally sufficient reason for God to allow evil, regardless of whether or not that possibility is actualized, the existence of evil is not logically incompatible with the existence of a good God.

Plantinga's work has generated considerable discussion, which cannot be effectively summarized here.[9] But for my purposes perhaps the most interesting criticism is the objection that even if we grant Plantinga's free will defense everything it wants and needs, what results does not seem to be even a candidate for a

morally sufficient reason justifying God's permitting instances of evil. In "The Irrelevance of the Free Will Defense",[10] Steven Boer has argued that nothing in the grant of free will to creatures entails that creatures always be able successfully to inflict the harm which they have willed. It is possible that God allow his creatures to be free with respect to their willing and yet prevent by natural or supernatural means the suffering which their evil will and actions aim at. Thus, for example, God could allow Smith to will to murder Jones and to act on that will by hiring killers to shoot Jones, and at the same time God could warn Jones of Smith's intentions in time for Jones to run away and hide until Smith's wrath had subsided. By warning Jones God would prevent the evil of Jones' murder without interfering with Smith's exercise of free will. Many critics of Plantinga's position are bothered by the fact that they cannot seriously entertain the notion that Plantinga's possible sufficient reason for evil might actually obtain. The thought that all natural evil might be caused by fallen angels seems to many a particularly implausible view. This criticism does not especially worry Plantinga, however, because his purpose was to show not what God's reason for allowing evil is but rather just that there could be such a reason; and this is all he needs to show in order to refute those who think that the existence of God is logically incompatible with the existence of evil. Plantinga's strategy is similar in his arguments against those who hold the weaker view that the existence of evil renders it *improbable* that God exist.[11] He does not attempt a justification for God's allowing evil which would diminish the critic's sense of the improbability of God's existence. Rather he argues that the critic has not made his case. Judgments of a claim's probability are relative to a knower's whole set of beliefs. But a theist's set of beliefs includes the belief that God exists, so that atheists' assessments of the probability of God's existence given the existence of evil will not be the same as theists'. Therefore, the atheist critic's argument that God's existence is improbable is not telling against theism.

The problem with Plantinga's general strategy for the defense of theism against arguments from evil is that it leaves the presence of evil in the actual world mysterious. Plantinga's tendency is to show the weaknesses inherent in arguments from evil, not to provide a theodicy, and so it yields no explanation for why we in this world suffer from evil if our world is governed by a good God. No doubt many people, including Plantinga, would not find this result problematic. In fact, in a recent paper Steven Wykstra has argued that given the limitlessness of God's intellect and the finitude of ours, the mysteriousness of evil in our world is just what we might expect;[12] it is reasonable to suppose that we cannot understand why an omniscient and omnipotent entity does what he does. I think that there is some plausibility in Wykstra's thesis; and if all efforts at theodicy fail utterly, no doubt theists will be glad of arguments like Wykstra's and content with strategies like Plantinga's. The problem with such arguments and strategies,

to put it crudely, is that they leave people on both sides of the issue unsatisfied. The atheist is inclined to claim, as William Rowe does in a recent paper,[13] that it is apparent there is *no* justifying or overriding good for some evils that occur in the world. To tell such an atheist that he hasn't succeeded in undermining theists' beliefs in the existence of such a good although they don't know what it is, or that his inability to see such a good is just what theists would expect, is likely to strike him as less than a powerful response. As for the theist struggling with the problem of evil, even if he entertains no anxieties about the rationality of his theistic belief in consequence of the existence of evil, he may well still be weakened in his religious belief by the consideration that the deity in whom he is to place his *trust* seems to act in ways which are unintelligible to him at best and apparently evil at worst. So, if it is at all possible to do so, it seems worth trying to construct a more positive explanation for the compatibility of God and evil; and such an explanation is in fact what we find in the work of Swinburne and Hick.

Swinburne's recently published solution to the problem of evil involves in effect an alteration of (7). What we value about free will, according to Swinburne, is not merely our possession of it or the balance of moral good over moral evil which it produces but rather our ability to exercise it in significant ways in the "choice of destiny and responsibility."[14] Without significant exercise of free will, Swinburne argues, we would live like God's pets, inhabiting a toy world in which God would reserve to himself all the important decisions.[15] To accommodate Swinburne's view, then, we ought to reformulate Plantinga's (7) as

> (7') Significant exercise of free will with a choice of destiny, with "the opportunity to bring about serious evils or prevent their occurrence,"[16] is of such great value that it outweighs all the evil in the world.

Swinburne builds his own solution to the problem of evil on (7'). The morally sufficient reason for God's allowing instances of evil is that the significant exercise of human free will is worth the evil it involves. Moral evil is readily explicable on this view: God does not prevent human beings from accomplishing the ends of their evil wills, because to do so consistently would be to deprive them of the significant exercise of their free wills and reduce them to the status of pets. But natural evil, evil not caused by human choices, is harder to explain. Swinburne tries to justify it by claiming that natural evil is necessary for a certain sort of knowledge, which is itself necessary for significant exercise of free will, so that God could not take away instances of natural evil without also taking away the significant exercise of human free will. The connection between natural evil and free will Swinburne explains in this way. We could not know the consequences of our choices, according to Swinburne, without the existence of natural evil. Unless someone died accidentally of cyanide poisoning, for example,

or unless people died of rabies, we would not have the significant choice of trying to prevent cyanide poisoning or rabies. Similarly, if there were no earth-quakes, we would not have the choice of building or refusing to build cities on fault lines, of helping or refusing to help earthquake victims.[17]

The weakest part of this solution to the problem of evil seems to me to be its attempted justification of natural evil.[18] Contrary to Swinburne, I think that the knowledge Swinburne values does not require natural evils; it can be acquired in a number of other ways. In particular, for example, God could inform men, directly or indirectly, of the consequences of their choices, and it is clear from various Biblical stories that God could do so without infringing the human freedom which Swinburne is concerned to safeguard.[19] Furthermore, the particular knowledge gained from the occurrence of natural evil and the choices it provides is valuable, Swinburne seems to argue, simply because free will can consequently be exercised in serious choices. But the world would contain ample opportunity for significant exercise of free will even without natural evil. Belsen and Hiroshima were the results of significant exercises of free will, and those free choices would have been possible even if the world contained no birth defects, cancer, tornadoes, or drought. So I think Swinburne's solution cannot justify the natural evils of this world even if his case concerning moral evil is convincing.

Hick's solution to the problem of evil, like Swinburne's, consists in effect in an alteration of (7); and though Hick's work was published before Swinburne's, it can be conveniently thought of as providing a complicated addition to the formulation of (7) underlying Swinburne's solution.[20] On Hick's view, (7) should be reformulated in this way:

> (7″) Significant exercise of free will in the enterprise of soul-making is of such great value that it outweighs all the evil in the world.

Soul-making, on Hick's view, is the process by which human beings develop certain traits of character, such as patience, courage, and compassion, as a result of struggling with evils. Those who successfully complete this process will be admitted to the kingdom of God, in which there is no evil. The evil in the world is logically necessary for soul-making and so cannot be prevented if the process of soul-making is to be preserved.

Hick's solution to the problem of evil has received a great deal of attention in the literature,[21] but the most effective criticism of it, I think, is Stanley Kane's.[22] He argues that the traits of character so valued by Hick in fact do not require the existence of evil for their development or display:

> Courage and fortitude, for instance, could manifest themselves as the persistence, steadfastness, and perseverance it takes to accomplish well any difficult or demanding long-range task—the writing of a doctoral

dissertation, for example, or training for and competing in the Olympic Games .... Compassion could be evidenced in the sympathy and fellow-feeling that a person could show for someone engaged in one of these long-range enterprises. ... It is hard to see why a man or a woman cannot develop just as much patience, fortitude and strength of character in helping his or her spouse complete a doctoral dissertation as in caring for a sick child through a long and serious illness. It is hard to see why people cannot learn just as much of the spirit of help and cooperation by teaming together to win an athletic championship as by coming together to rescue a town leveled by a tornado or inundated by a flood.[23]

Even apart from this objection, Kane argues, Hick's solution is vitiated by an absurdity in the general scheme he postulates. According to Hick, evil is justified by man's acquisition of intrinsically valuable character traits which require the existence of evil for their development and display. Those who develop these character traits will be admitted to heaven where there is no evil and where, consequently, it is impossible to manifest the character traits they have acquired. But this is senseless, Kane maintains. On Hick's view, all the evils in the world are justified as a means of developing traits of character which it will be impossible to maintain thereafter in heaven, the reward for having developed such character traits. Why should we value a process which results in a character which cannot then be manifested? And if it is the possession rather than the manifestation of these character traits which is valued, so that what is wanted is a certain dispos-ition, which can be had in heaven even in the absence of evil, then it is not clear why God could not have imparted the disposition without the evil or why evil in the world is justified by the acquisition of such dispositions.[24] I think Hick has no good answers to these questions.[25]

II

No doubt there are other ingenious ways of altering (7), but the many objections to the carefully worked-out solutions by Plantinga, Swinburne, and Hick suggest that (6) and a version of (7) by themselves are an insufficient foundation for a satisfactory solution to the problem of evil. Reflection on the nature of the problem seems to me to confirm this suggestion. The problem of evil is generally presented as some sort of inconsistency in theistic beliefs, and (1)-(4) present the relevant theistic assumptions. And yet *mere* theists are relatively rare in the history of religion. Most people who accept (1)-(4) are Jews or Christians or Muslims. If we are going to claim that *their* beliefs are somehow inconsistent, we need to look at a more complete set of Jewish or Muslim or Christian beliefs concerning God's goodness and evil in the world, not just at that limited subset

of such beliefs which are common to all three religions, because what *appears* inconsistent if we take a partial sampling of beliefs may in fact look consistent when set in the context of a more complete set of beliefs. I do not of course mean to suggest that an inconsistent set of propositions could become consistent if we add more propositions to it. My point is simple and commonsensical: that the appearance of inconsistency in a set of beliefs may arise from our interpretation of those beliefs, and our reinterpretation of them in light of a larger system of beliefs to which they belong may dispel the appearance of inconsistency.[26] A more promising foundation for a solution to the problem of evil, then, might be found if we consider a broader range of beliefs concerning the relations of God to evil in the world, which are specific to a particular monotheism.

Furthermore, attempted solutions to the problem of evil based solely on a few theistic assumptions common to the major monotheisms are likely themselves to be incompatible with Jewish or Christian or Islamic beliefs. Swinburne's attempted solution, for example, seems incompatible with traditional Christian beliefs about heaven. On Swinburne's account, we are more like pets than humans unless we have significant exercise of our free will, and natural evil is necessary for such a significant exercise. But there is no natural evil in heaven and so, according to Swinburne's position, no significant exercise of free will either. Hence, on Swinburne's account, persons in heaven are not perfected in virtue of their translation to heaven, as Christian doctrine has traditionally claimed, but rather diminished in status. Thoughtful Christians troubled by the problem of evil, then, are not likely to be reassured by Swinburne's solution.

For these reasons, in what follows I will focus on one particular monotheism, namely, Christianity; I do not know enough about Judaism or Islam to present a discussion of the problem of evil in the context of those religions. In fact, my account will not deal even with all varieties of Christian belief. Because my account will depend on a number of assumptions, such as that man has free will, it will present a solution to the problem of evil applicable only to those versions of Christianity which accept those assumptions. Christians who reject a belief in free will, for example, will also reject my attempt at a solution to the problem of evil.

Besides (1)-(4), there are three Christian beliefs that seem to me especially relevant to the problem of evil. They are these:

(8) Adam fell.
(9) Natural evil entered the world as a result of Adam's fall.
(10) After death, depending on their state at the time of their death, either (a) human beings go to heaven or (b) they go to hell.[27]

It is clear that these beliefs themselves raise a host of problems, partly because they seem implausible or just plain false and partly because they seem to raise

the problem of evil again in their own right. In this section I will consider worries raised by these beliefs themselves; in the next section I will argue that these three beliefs together with a new formulation of (7) provide a basis for a Christian solution to the problem of evil for those varieties of Christian belief which accept (1)-(4) and (6)-(10). The applicability of this solution to monotheisms other than Christianity depends on whether they accept these beliefs.

It would, of course, make a difference to my solution if any of the beliefs added in (8)-(10) could be *demonstrated* to be false, and so I will devote this section of the paper primarily to arguing that though (8)-(10) are controversial and *seem* false to many people, they are not *demonstrably* false. The fact that the problem of evil is raised again by (8)-(10) in conjunction with (1)-(3) is also worrisome. If a solution to the problem of evil relies on (8)-(10) and (8)-(10) themselves raise the problem, the problem is not solved but simply pushed back a stage. If (8)-(10) are to serve as the basis for an effective solution, the appearance they give of being inconsistent with the existence of a good God must be dispelled; attempting to do so is my other main concern in this section. If I can show that these beliefs are not demonstrably false and are not themselves incompatible with belief in a good God, which is all I want to do in this section, it will then be possible for me in the next section to use (8)-(10) in my attempted solution to the problem of evil.

The Christian belief summarized as (10) appears to raise the problem of evil because it gives rise to questions such as these:

> (Q1) If an omnipotent God could bring it about that all human beings be in heaven and if a good God would want no human beings in hell, wouldn't a good, omnipotent God bring it about that all human beings be in heaven?
>
> (Q2) Even if an omnipotent God does not bring it about that all human beings be in heaven, how could a good omnipotent God allow any human beings to suffer torment in hell?
>
> (Q3) How could a good, just God decree that some human beings suffer torment for an infinite time for evils done during a finite human lifetime?
>
> (Q4) Wouldn't a good God give all those in hell "a second chance," thereby ensuring that all human beings, or virtually all, be brought to heaven?

No doubt (10) raises more questions concerning God's goodness, but these are the ones most commonly raised by philosophers and other reflective people concerned with these issues.[28] I cannot do justice to these difficult questions in this paper; but without destroying the usefulness of (10) in my solution to the problem of evil, I can do enough, I think, to show that (10) can be interpreted in a way which significantly diminishes or dispels the appearance that it is

incompatible with God's goodness.

To begin with, on Christian doctrine heaven should be understood not as some place with gates of pearl and streets of gold but rather as a spiritual state of union with God; and union with God should be understood to involve as a necessary (but not sufficient) condition the state of freely willing only what is in accordance with the will of God. This understanding of heaven, which is traditional in the history of Christian thought,[29] goes some way towards answering (Q1). If, as I think and as has been well argued elsewhere,[30] it is not logically possible for God to make human beings do anything freely, and if heaven is as I have described it, then it is not within God's power to insure that all human beings will be in heaven, because it is not within his power to determine what they freely will.

An answer to (Q2) also can be sketched by looking more closely at the Christian doctrine being questioned. Hell is commonly regarded as God's torture chamber, and it is considered fearsome because of the unending physical torments imposed by God on those sent there. This is, of course, a conception of hell which has been promoted by various popular preachers and has its roots in biblical Christianity; passages such as Matt. 25:41-46 and Luke 16:19-26 have been cited in support of it. And yet even a cursory look at traditional Christian writings shows that this is a crude and simplistic account of the doctrine of hell. For example, Dante, who has given perhaps the most famous Christian description of hell, includes as part of hell something like what Socrates was hoping for as other-worldly bliss:[31] a beautiful, bright place with green meadows and gentle streams in which the noblest and wisest of the ancients discuss philosophy.[32] This is part of Limbo, and on Dante's view it is in hell and fearsome. What makes Limbo awful is not physical tortures or spiritual torments, of which there are none, but rather the fact that the people there are separated from union with God and will always be so; and for Dante, I think, that is the fundamental awfulness of all the rest of the hell, too.

Dante, of course, has also given us some of our most graphic images of hellish tortures, but there is something odd about the tortures in Dante's hell. Dante portrays Ulysses as perpetually in the process of being consumed by fire, and yet he also has Ulysses deliver a long and elaborate speech; Farinata is being tortured in a burning iron tomb but he engages in a proud and leisurely conversation with Dante the traveler. In short, although Dante is the source for some of the most frightful representations of hell's punishments, he does not represent the people in hell as suffering from those punishments in the way human beings ordinarily would suffer them; no man who was on fire and had been so for some time would be capable of the calm, lengthy speech Ulysses makes. One might, of course, suppose that putting such speeches into the mouths of the tortured damned is just a poetic device for Dante; but such a supposition seems implausible

to me for several reasons. To state just one, I think it highly unlikely that Dante meant to portray hell as a place where people are being literally burned by real fire because none of the persons in Dante's hell other than Dante the traveler is embodied, and it is improbable that Dante believed fire could burn souls in the way it burns bodies. Rather Dante's idea of hell, which strikes me as philosophically and theologically interesting, seems to have been that the pains a person such as Ulysses suffers are not so much an externally imposed physical punishment as they are an external manifestation of a person's inner state, resulting from that person's previous and current free choices. Thus, on Dante's view, if I understand it correctly, the torments of hell are not physical pains which God has chosen to add to the burden of hell's inhabitants but the natural psychological state of those who have habitually made bad choices and whose will is not conformable to the divine will.

On Dante's view, then, the essence of Hell consists in the absence of union with God, a condition entailed by a person's psychological state which is a result of that person's free choices and which is naturally painful. (By a naturally painful psychological state I mean that human beings, in consequence of the nature they have, experience the state in question as painful; it is open to God to produce that state in people without the pain but only at the cost of altering their nature. Humiliation and grief seem to me examples of naturally painful psychological states.) On this view of hell which I have been attributing to Dante, an answer to (Q2) might go along these lines. Everlasting life in hell is the ultimate evil which can befall a person in this world; but the torments of hell are the natural conditions of some persons, and God can spare such persons those pains only by depriving them of their nature or their existence. And it is arguable that, of the alternatives open to God, maintaining such persons in existence and as human is the best.[33]

I am not arguing that this view of hell is the only one or even necessarily the right one for Christians to have; nor have I presented any argument for the account of human psychology on which this view is based. What I am claiming is that the view described here, which I will call the Dantean view, has a place in traditional Christian theology and that a philosophical case could be made for it. For present purposes I will take the Dantean view as the Christian view of Hell, and I will take (10b) and all other talk of hell in this paper as referring to hell in the Dantean sense. Of the various views of hell I know, the Dantean view seems to me the one most likely to be philosophically defensible, and it is entirely adequate for the solution to the problem of evil I will develop. But the Dantean view is a comparatively mild view of hell. Many Christian thinkers have believed God imposed terrible physical torments on those in hell as punishment for their sins in addition to their natural psychological pains. This is a much stronger view of hell than the Dantean view, and it raises a host of problems.

The strong version of (10b), for example, raises the problem of evil in a way that can be settled only by considering whether retributive punishment is morally justifiable, what criteria we use to determine the degree of punishment appropriate to a crime, what the nature of the crimes punished in hell is, and many other questions, which plainly require lengthy treatment and cannot be dealt with in passing in this paper. If hell understood in this strong sense as including retributive punishment can be shown consistent with the existence of a good God, then my solution will be compatible with that strong interpretation; nothing in my solution rules out the strong version of hell if such a hell can be shown to be founded on justice and love, as Dante claimed for his version of hell.[34] On the other hand, if hell on the strong interpretation cannot be shown consistent with God's goodness, my solution will still hold; but there will be a dilemma for Christian belief: either to give up the strong interpretation of hell or to accept it and with it a version of the problem of evil which is insoluble by rational means.

The answer to (Q2), then, is also the answer to (Q3): on the Dantean view, hell is the natural state and, even understood as unending, it is arguably the best possible state of those whose free wills are not in conformity with the divine will, on the assumption that continued existence as a human being even with pain is more valuable than the absence of that pain at the cost of one's existence or human nature.

As for (Q4), I do not think it poses much of a problem. It seems reasonable to suppose and it is traditional Christian doctrine,[35] that God always wills the good for its own sake. So to will in accordance with God's will, a man must also will the good for its own sake. The assumption behind (Q4) is that anyone who has once had a taste of hell would henceforth do whatever he had to do to avoid hell. But then such a person would be willing the good not for its own sake but for the sake of avoiding hell. Such a person's will would thus not be in conformity with God's will, and so it would not be possible for God to bring it about that such a person participate in the union with God which is essential to life in heaven.[36]

The Christian belief in the fall of Adam, expressed in (8), has been interpreted in many ways.[37] Some (but not all) of these interpretations are incompatible with the theory of evolution; and if the current theory of evolution is provably true, such interpretations can be shown to be false and so cannot be used in any effective attempt to solve the problem of evil. My solution, however, will rely on only a few elements which are common to many interpretations of (8) and not incompatible with the theory of evolution, namely, that

> (8′) (a) at some time in the past as a result of their own choices human
> beings altered their nature for the worse,
> (b) the alteration involved what we perceive and describe as a change

in the nature of human free will,[38] and

(c) the changed nature of the will was inheritable.

(8′) is compatible with the denial (as well as with the affirmation) that there once was a particular man named Adam who fell from a better to a worse state in consequence of a bad choice, but for the sake of convenience I will continue to refer to the events described in (8′) as 'Adam's fall'. Nothing in the theory of evolution entails the falsity of any part of (8′), and (8′) is compatible with any number of interpretations of (8).

Of course, the fact that the theory of evolution does not entail the falsity of (8) understood as (8′) does not rule out the possibility that (8) is demonstrably false for some other reason. The historical claim of (8′a) will strike many people as implausible, unsupported by evidence, the product of neurotic psychological forces, and so on. But although such reactions show that (8′) is controversial, they are of course not sufficient to show that (8′) is false. A more promising line of attack on (8′) involves (8′b) or (8′c). What a change in the nature of the will is supposed to be is unclear, but any sensible account of such a change would, it seems, have to be incompatible with the notion that such a change in the will is inheritable. A reply to this objection requires a closer examination of the traditional Christian understanding of the will and its post-fall alteration.

One of the classic expositions of this understanding is that given by Anselm.[39] Anselm's theory of the will is very different from most contemporary accounts,[40] and I cannot do it justice in this paper. I want to present just enough of the theory to show the difference it makes to an evaluation of (8). According to Anselm, human beings originally had wills disposed to will as they ought to will and an ability to preserve that disposition. This ability is what Anselm calls free will. On Anselm's view, free will is a strength. The capacity for either getting sick or staying healthy, Anselm would say, is not a strength, only the capacity to stay healthy is. Similarly, Anselm maintains that the ability to will what one ought to will or what one ought not to will is not a strength and cannot count as free will: only the ability to will what one ought to will is a strength and it alone is free will. Human beings in their pre-fall state could do evil because as finite beings they could be less than they had the strength to be. They could fail to use their strength to preserve the uprightness of their wills and so fall into evil. Adam's fall consists in such a failure. In consequence of past failure of this sort, human beings have lost their initial disposition to will what they ought to will and acquired instead a disposition to will what they ought not to will. This acquired disposition consists primarily of an inclination to will one's own power or pleasure in preference to greater goods;[41] it was and is inheritable. Although human beings still have some sort of ability to do good after the fall, because of the disposition of their will they find it very difficult (but not impos-

sible) to resist evil. To this extent, then, their free will (in Anselm's sense of 'free will') is diminished.

The notion of a disposition of the will which is operative in this account needs to be understood in light of Anselm's unusual definition of free will. A free will is a will disposed to will the good and able to maintain such a disposition. In Aquinas's development of Anselm's account, recognition of what is good is the job of reason; and the righteous disposition of free will is a function of a right relationship among reason, the will, and desire.[42] For the will to be free, desire must be subject to reason, and reason must guide both the will and desire to what really is good. The post-fall disposition of the will is the result of a disordered relationship among these three. Desire is not subject to reason; often enough it governs reason instead. And rather than being guided by reason, the will tends to be moved by irrational desire, so that it wills an apparent or partial good rather than what is really or wholly good. This disordered relationship among reason, the will, and desire on Aquinas's view constitutes the change in the will produced by Adam's fall.[43] The original inclination of the will to will the good proposed by reason has been lost and replaced by an inclination to will what is sought as good by the appetites. These inclinations are inclinations of the will itself, not external constraints on the will; and they are only inclinations or tendencies, not necessitated willing. Post-fall evil is voluntary, not compelled. On the other hand, this account lends plausibility to the claim that the altered disposition of the will is inheritable. What is said to be inherited is not a certain set of acts of will or a specific habit of willing but rather a weakened influence of reason and strengthened influence of appetite on the will, a loss of the will's natural inclination to follow reason. There is nothing obviously incoherent, as far as I can see, in supposing this change in the relationship of reason, will, and desire to be inheritable.

(8) also raises the problem of evil in two ways which must be briefly considered here:

> (Q5) In view of all the subsequent evil occasioned by Adam's fall, shouldn't a good God have destroyed the human race immediately after Adam's fall?
>
> (Q6) Couldn't God have prevented the human race from inheriting this evil inclination of will after Adam's fall, by some miraculous intervention in human history if necessary?

The answer to (Q5), I think, is that 'ending is better than mending' is not a principle appropriate to Christianity. On Christian doctrine, persons once created are everlasting and infinitely valuable; if they become defective, it is up to a good God not to eliminate them but to fix them if he can. This view, of course, is not peculiar to Christianity. If a family has a child with a possibly terminal,

genetically transmissible disease, it does not usually consider destroying the child, but instead puts the child and the rest of the family to a great deal of pain and trouble caring for the child and trying to alleviate or cure the disease.

(Q6) is harder to deal with. Without destroying any of his creatures, God could have prevented the transmission of a defective free will in any number of ways. He could have prevented procreation on the part of the defective people, for example, or he could miraculously have prevented the transmissible defect from actually being transmitted. But I think there are two things to be said against these alternatives. In the first place they constitute in effect the abrogation of God's first creation; they put an end to the first human beings God produced. If God were then to replace these human beings by others and they also corrupted their wills, God would then presumably replace them also, and so on, in what appears to be a series of frustrations and defeats inappropriate to a deity. It seems to me arguable that there is more power and dignity and also more love and care in restoring fallen humanity to a good state than in ending and replacing it. Secondly, Swinburne seems to me right in maintaining that what makes God's human creatures persons rather than pets is the ability to exercise their free will in serious choices. If God immediately removed or prevented the consequences of any free choice eventuating in major evil, his creatures would not have that significant exercise of free will and would thus not be persons.

As for (9), it can be read in either of these two ways:

(9') There were no diseases, tornadoes, droughts, etc. in the world until Adam's fall;

or

(9") no person suffered from diseases, tornadoes, droughts, etc. until Adam's fall.

The weaker assumption, of course, is (9"), and it is all I need for my purposes here. The ways in which an omnipotent God might have brought about (9") are limited only by one's imagination, and there is no need to specify any one of them here.

In this brief account of (8), (9), and (10), I cannot hope to have given either an adequate presentation of these doctrines or a sufficient answer to the questions they raise. But my sketchy treatment indicates, I think, both that none of these three beliefs is demonstrably false and that there are some reasonable arguments against the charges that (8) and (10) are themselves incompatible with God's goodness. Those results are enough to enable me to use (8)-(10) in an attempt to show how on Christian beliefs the existence of evil is compatible with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God.

III

According to the Christian beliefs summarized as (8), (9), and (10), all human beings since Adam's fall have been defective in their free wills, so that they have a powerful inclination to will what they ought not to will, to will their own power or pleasure in preference to greater goods. It is not possible for human beings in that condition to go to heaven, which consists in union with God; and hell understood in Dantean terms is arguably the best alternative to annihilation. A good God will want to fix such persons, to save them from hell and bring them to heaven; and as the creator of these persons, God surely bears some responsibility for fixing and saving them if he can. How is he to do so?

It seems to me clear that he cannot fix the defect by using his omnipotence to remove it miraculously. The defect is a defect in *free* will, and it consists in a person's generally failing to will what he ought to will. To remove this defect miraculously would be to force a person's free will to be other than it is; it would consist in causing a person to will freely what he ought to will. But it is logically impossible for anyone to make a person freely will something, and therefore even God in his omnipotence cannot directly and miraculously remove the defect in free will, without destroying the very freedom of the will he wants to fix.

Someone might object here that if the defect in the will is inheritable without prejudice to the freedom of the will, then it is also removable without detriment to the freedom of the will; and if it destroys freedom to have God remove the defect, then it also destroys freedom to have the defect inherited. This objection, I think, is based on a mistaken picture of the inheritance of the defect. If the traditional doctrine were that after the time of Adam's fall, human beings whose wills were in a pre-fall state suddenly acquired fallen, defective wills, then this objection would be sound. And perhaps the use of the word 'inheritance', with its suggestions of one individual suddenly receiving something from another, invites such a picture. But in fact the doctrine of Adam's fall makes it clear that in the transmission of the defect there is no change of will on the part of post-fallen men. What the doctrine specifies is that individuals conceived and born after Adam's fall have defective wills from the very beginning of their existence. There is no change of will in this process; rather the process consists in the generation of persons whose free wills from birth are strongly inclined to certain sorts of evil actions. If God were to destroy such post-fall persons and generate new ones with non-defective wills (as I have argued he should not), he would not be violating the free wills of the new persons by so creating them any more than he violated Adam's free will when he created Adam in his pre-fall state. But if God intervenes to remove the defect in the wills of post-fall persons, he brings about a *change* in their wills; and this, I think, he cannot do if their wills are to remain free.[44]

If God cannot by his omnipotence directly fix the defect in free will, it seems that human beings must fix it themselves. Self-repair is a common feature of the natural world, but I do not think self-repair is possible for a person with post-fall free will. People, of course, do sometimes reform their lives and change their habits; but one necessary condition for their doing so is that, for whatever purpose or motive, they will something different from what they previously willed. Analogously, to reform the will requires willing something different from what one previously willed; that is, it requires a change of will. But how to change the will is the problem in the first place. If we want to know whether a man himself can fix a defect in his will, whether he himself can somehow remove his tendency to will what he ought not to will, it is no help to be told that of course he can if he just wills to change his will. We know that a man *can* change his will for the better; otherwise his will would not be free. The problem with a defect in the will is not that there is an inability to will what one ought to will because of some external restraint on the will, but that one does not and will not will what one ought to will because the will itself is bent towards evil. Consequently, changing the will is the end for which we are seeking the means; if one were *willing* to change one's will by willing what one ought to will, there would be no problem of a defect in the will.[45] Self-repair, then, is no more a solution to the problem of a defective will than is God's miraculous intervention.[46]

If God cannot and human beings will not fix the defect in their wills, what possible cure is there? Christianity suggests what seems to me the only remaining alternative. Let a person will that God fix his defective will. In that case, God's alteration of the will is something the person has freely chosen, and God can then alter that person's will without destroying its freedom. It is a fact well-attested in religious literaturé that people who find it next to impossible to will what (they believe) they ought to will may nonetheless find it in themselves to will that God alter their wills. Perhaps two of the most famous examples are the sonnet of John Donne in which he prays for God to overwhelm him so that he will be chaste[47] and Augustine's prayers that God give him continence.[48] The traditional formulation of the crucial necessary condition for a person's being a Christian (variously interpreted by Protestants and Catholics) is that he wills God to save him from his sin; and this condition is, I think, logically (and perhaps also psychologically) equivalent to a person's willing that God fix his will. Willing to have God save one from one's sin is willing to have God bring one to a state in which one is free from sin, and that state depends essentially on a will which wills what it ought to will.

What role God plays in man's coming to will that God fix his will is controversial in the history of Christian thought. Some Protestant theologians have argued that God bears sole responsibility for such willing; Pelagius apparently argued that all the responsibility belongs to man. The first of these positions

seems to me to have difficulties roughly analogous to those raised above by the suggestion that God might miraculously fix man's will, and the difficulties in the second are like those in the suggestion that a man himself might fix his own will. Perhaps the correct view here too consists in postulating a cooperative divine and human effort. Perhaps Socrates's way with those he encountered can serve as a model. When Socrates pursued a man with wit and care and passion for the truth, that man sometimes converted to philosophy and became Socrates's disciple. Such a man converted freely, so that it is false to say Socrates *caused* his conversion; and yet, on the other hand, it would be ridiculous to say in consequence that the man bears sole responsibility for his conversion. The responsibility and the credit for the conversion belong to Socrates, whose effort and ingenuity were necessary conditions of the conversion. That they were not sufficient conditions, however, and that the man nonetheless freely willed his conversion is clear from the cases of men such as Alcibiades, whom Socrates sought but did not succeed in converting. Without rashly trying to adjudicate in a paragraph an old and complicated controversy, I think that something along those lines can also be said of the process by which a man comes to will God's help. God's efforts on behalf of Augustine are the necessary condition of Augustine's conversion, and the credit for his conversion belongs to God; but God's efforts are not a sufficient condition, and so Augustine's free will is not impugned. Or, as Anselm says with regard to the fall of the angels, "although the good angel received perseverance [in willing what he ought to will] because God gave it, it is not the case that the evil angel did not receive it because God did not give it. But rather, God did not give it because Satan did not receive it, and he did not receive it because he was unwilling to receive it."[49]

At any rate, if a man does will that God fix his will or save him from his sins, then I think that God can do so without detriment to free will, provided that he does so only to the extent to which the man freely wills that God do so. There is in principle no reason why a person could not will at once that God fix the whole defect of his will; but in general, perhaps because of the extent of the defect in the will, people seem to turn from their own evil in a series of small-scale reforms. In Book VIII, chapter VII, of the *Confessions*, Augustine describes himself as praying that God give him chastity and making the private reservation 'but not yet'. If God were immediately to give Augustine chastity in such a case, he would in fact be doing so against Augustine's will. And so, in general, God's fixing the will seems to be a lengthy process, in which a little willing produces a little fixing, which in turn promotes more willing of more fixing. On Christian doctrine, this is the process of sanctification, which is not finally completed until after death when it culminates "in the twinkling of an eye" in the last changes which unite the sanctified person with God.[50]

The fixing of a defective free will by a person's freely willing that God fix

his will is, I think, the foundation of a Christian solution to the problem of evil. What sort of world is most conducive to bringing about both the initial human willing of help and also the subsequent process of sanctification? To answer that question, we need to consider the psychological state of a person who wills God's help. Apart from the obvious theological beliefs, such a person must also hold that he tends to do what he ought not to do and does so because he himself wills what he ought not to will, and he must want not to be in such a condition. He must, in other words, have both a humbling recognition of himself as evil and a desire for a better state. So things that contribute to a person's humbling, to his awareness of his own evil, and to his unhappiness with his present state contribute to his willing God's help.

I think that both moral and natural evil make such a contribution. The unprevented gross moral evils in the course of human history show us something about the nature of man, and our own successful carrying out of our no doubt smaller-scaled evil wills shows us that we are undeniably members of the species. Natural evil—the pain of disease, the intermittent and unpredictable destruction of natural disasters, the decay of old age, the imminence of death—takes away a person's satisfaction with himself. It tends to humble him, show him his frailty, make him reflect on the transience of temporal goods, and turn his affections towards other-worldly things, away from the things of this world. No amount of moral or natural evil, of course, can *guarantee* that a man will seek God's help. If it could, the willing it produced would not be free. But evil of this sort is the best hope, I think, and maybe the only effective means, for bringing men to such a state.

That natural evil and moral evil, the successful carrying out of evil human wills, serve to make men recognize their own evils, become dissatisfied with things of this world, and turn to God is a controversial claim; and it is clear that a compelling argument for or against it would be very difficult to construct. To produce such an argument we would need a representative sample, whatever that might be, of natural and moral evil. Then we would need to examine that sample case by case to determine the effect of the evil in each case on the human beings who suffered or perpetrated it. To determine the effect we would have to know the psychological and moral state of these people both before and after the evil at issue (since the effect would consist in some alteration of a previous state); and we would have to chart their state for the rest of their lives after that evil because, like the effect of carcinogens, the effect of the experience of evil may take many years to manifest itself. Even with the help of a team of psychologists and sociologists, then, it would be hard to collect the data necessary to make a good argument for or against this claim. Hence, I am unable to present a cogent argument for one of the main claims of this paper, not because of the improbability of the claim but because of the nature of the data an argument for

the claim requires; and perhaps it should just be categorized as one more Christian belief and added as (11) to the list of (8), (9), and (10) as a traditionally held, not demonstrably false Christian belief.[51] Still, there is *some* historical evidence for it in the fact that Christianity has tended to flourish among the oppressed and decline among the comfortable, and perhaps the best evidence comes from the raising of children. The phrase 'spoiling a child' is ambiguous in current parlance between 'turning a child into a unpleasant person' and 'giving a child everything he wants', and the ambiguity reflects a truth about human nature. The pains, the hardships, the struggles which children encounter tend to make them better people. Of course, such experiences do not invariably make children better; children, like adults, are also sometimes made worse by their troubles. But that fact would be a counter-example to the general claim about the function of evil in the world only in case it maintained that evil was *guaranteed* to make people better; and that is something this claim could not include and still be compatible with Christianity as long as Christianity is committed to the view that human beings have free will.

Someone may object here that the suffering of children is just what this attempted solution to the problem of evil cannot explain. In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky provides the most eloquent presentation this objection is likely ever to get, concluding with Ivan's passionate insistence (implicit in a question addressed to Alyosha) that even if the whole world could be saved for eternal bliss by the torture of one innocent child, allowing the torture of that child for that purpose would be horribly wrong. I am in sympathy with the attitude Dostoevsky has Ivan express and in agreement with Ivan's conclusion. The suffering of children is in my view unquestionably the instance of evil most difficult for the problem of evil, and there is something almost indecent about any move resembling an attempt to explain it away. The suffering of children is a terrible thing, and to try to see it otherwise is to betray one's humanity. Any attempt to solve the problem of evil must try to provide some understanding of the suffering of children, but it must not lessen our pain over that suffering if it is not to become something monstrous and inhumane.

With considerable diffidence, then, I want to suggest that Christian doctrine is committed to the claim that a child's suffering is outweighed by the good for the child which can result from that suffering. This is a brave (or foolhardy) thing to say, and the risk inherent in it is only sharpened when one applies it to cases in which infants suffer, for example, or in which children die in their suffering. Perhaps the decent thing to do here is simply to sketch some considerations which may shed light on these hard cases. To begin with, it is important to remember that on Christian doctrine death is not the ultimate evil or even the ultimate end, but rather a transition between one form of life and another. From a Christian point of view, the thing to be avoided at all costs is not dying, but

dying badly; what concerns the Christian about death is not that it occurs but that the timing and mode of death be such as to constitute the best means of ensuring that state of soul which will bring a person to eternal union with God. If children who die in their suffering thereby move from the precarious and frequently painful existence of this world to a permanently blissful existence in the other world and if their suffering was among part of the necessary means to effect that change, their suffering is justified. I am not trying to say here that the suffering which a child or any other person experiences is the only way in which that person could be brought to God. Rather, I am trying to avoid constructing the sort of explanation for evil which requires telling the sufferer that God lets him suffer just for the sake of some abstract general good for mankind. Perhaps it is true that such a general good—the significant freedom of created persons, for example—is the ultimate end for the sake of which God permits evil. It seems to me nonetheless that a perfectly good entity who was also omniscient and omnipotent must govern the evil resulting from the misuse of that significant freedom in such a way that the sufferings of any particular person are outweighed by the good which the suffering produces *for that person*; otherwise, we might justifiably expect a good God somehow to prevent that *particular suffering*, either by intervening (in one way or another) to protect the victim, while still allowing the perpetrator his freedom, or by curtailing freedom in some select cases.[52] And since on Christian doctrine the ultimate good for persons is union with God, the suffering of any person will be justified if it brings that person nearer to the ultimate good in a way he could not have been without the suffering. I think that Christianity must take some such approach to the suffering or death of children; and perhaps something analogous can be said in connection with the hardest case of all, the suffering of infants. Psychologists tell us that the first year of a child's life is tremendously important in molding the personality and character. For some persons the molding of the personality produced by suffering in infancy may be the best means of insuring a character capable of coming to God.[53]

In all these hard cases, the difficulty of formulating a Christian position which does not appear either implausible or inhuman will be diminished if we have clearly in mind the view of man Christianity starts with. On Christian doctrine, all human beings are suffering from the spiritual equivalent of a terminal disease; they have a defect in the will which if not corrected will cost them life in heaven and consign them to a living death in hell. Now suppose that we are the parents of a child with a terminal brain disease, which includes among its symptoms the child's rejecting the notion that he is sick and refusing to cooperate in any treatments. The doctors tell us that there are treatments which may well cure the child completely, but they hurt and their success is not guaranteed. Would we not choose to subject the child to the treatments, even if they were very

painful? The child's suffering would be a terrible thing; we would and we should be grieved at it. But we would nonetheless be glad of the treatments and hope of a cure. And yet this example is only a pale reflection of what Christianity claims to be the case for all human beings, where the loss inflicted by the disease and the benefits of its cure are infinitely greater. If moral and natural evil contain an essential ingredient of a possible cure, surely the cure is worth the suffering such evil entails.

It might seem to some people that if this is God's plan, it is a tragic failure because the amount of evil in the world produces so few cures. The vast majority of people in the world are not Christians or theists of any kind; and even among those who are Christian many die in serious unrepented evil. But this complaint rests on an assumption for which we have no evidence, namely, that the majority of people end in hell. That even an evil-doer who dies a sudden, unexpected death may not die impenitent is shown vividly by Dante:

> I am Buonconte ... wounded in the throat, flying on foot and bloodying the plain [I came]. There I lost my sight and speech. I ended on the name of Mary, and there I fell, and my flesh remained alone.... The Angel of God took me, and he from Hell cried, 'O you from Heaven, why do you rob me? You carry off with you the eternal part of him for one little tear which takes him from me'.[54]

As for those who live and die without the religious knowledge necessary for redemption from evil, it is not incompatible with Christian doctrine to speculate that in the process of their dying God acquaints them with what they need to know and offers them a last chance to choose.[55] Such a speculation might seem to vitiate the justification for evil which I have been developing in this paper, because if the whole process of redemption can be begun and completed in a person's dying hour, why do we need evil in the world? But this is a mistaken objection, because surely in any sort of deathbed repentance the sufferings of the dying person will have had a significant effect on that person's character and consequently on the choices he makes on his deathbed. So as long as some such speculation is not incompatible with Christian doctrine, it is not at all clear that the majority of people end in hell. And without that assumption the complaint that God's plan for the use of evil is a failure is altogether unwarranted.

Someone might also object here that this solution to the problem of evil prohibits us from any attempt to relieve human suffering and in fact suggests that we ought to promote it, as the means of man's salvation. Such an objection is mistaken, I think, and rests on an invalid inference. Because God can use suffering to cure an evil will, it does not follow that we can do so also. God can see into the minds and hearts of human beings and determine what sort and amount of suffering is likely to produce the best results; we cannot. (Our inability

to do so is in fact one of the things which make it so difficult to discuss cases of infant suffering, for example.) Furthermore, God as parent creator has a right to, and a responsibility for, painful correction of his creatures, which we as sibling creatures do not have. Therefore, since all human suffering is *prima facie* evil, and since we do not know with any high degree of probability how much (if any) of it is likely to result in good to any particular sufferer on any particular occasion, it is reasonable for us to eliminate the suffering as much as we can. At any rate, the attempt to eliminate suffering is likely to be beneficial to our characters, and passivity in the face of others' suffering will have no such good effects.[56]

IV

The solution to the problem of evil I have been developing will be clarified further by being applied to an individual instance of evil. The instance I want to consider is the Old Testament story of Cain and Abel.[57] For my purposes here, this biblical story of an instance of evil has several advantages over a description of an instance of evil drawn from such sources as the newspapers. The biblical story contains a description of God's intervention or lack of intervention in human history, and it includes an account of the inner thoughts and motivations of the principal characters. To the extent to which Christians are committed to accepting the Bible as the revealed word of God, to that extent they are committed to accepting this story as veridical also; and that fact obviously contributes to the use I want to make of the story. Finally, although the story of Cain and Abel is regularly taken by Christians as a paradigmatically moral and religious story, suitable for the edification of children, the incidents related in the story are such that a twentieth-century atheistic philosopher might have invented them as a showcase for the problem of evil.

Cain and Abel are two brothers who bring offerings to God.[58] Abel's offering is accepted, but Cain's is not—why, the story does not say.[59] In consequence, Cain is very angry at Abel. The story suggests that acceptance or rejection of the offerings is an (at least temporary) acceptance or rejection of the offerer; and Cain's anger at Abel apparently stems from jealousy over God's favoring Abel rather than Cain. Now there is something double-minded in Cain's anger and jealousy. Either God is right to reject Cain's offering—because there was something about it or about the person who brought it which made it objectively unacceptable—and in that case there are no grounds for anger; or God is wrong to reject Cain's offering—because it was a perfectly good offering brought in an altogether appropriate spirit—and in that case *God* is not good. And although one might then still be afraid of the consequences of incurring God's displeasure or resent those more favored by God, a single-minded belief that God's standards

for accepting offerings are bad precludes jealousy towards those who are accepted. That Cain is angry and jealous indicates that he is double-minded about whether God is right to reject his offering.

Although he does reject Cain's offering, God does not leave Cain to himself in his double-minded anger. He comes to him and talks to him, asking Cain Socratic questions designed to get him to recognize and resolve his double-min-dedness: "Why are you angry?"; "If you do well, will you not be accepted?". And God goes on to give Cain a warning, that he is in danger of sin. So God apparently anticipates Cain's attack on his brother, and he intervenes to warn Cain.

But Cain attacks and kills his brother. Abel, who has just been accepted by God and is evidently righteous, suffers violent and untimely death. When the killing is over, God speaks to Cain again, asking him more careful questions designed to lead him to confess his deed: first, "Where is Abel?", and then after the evasive response to that question, the stronger question "What have you done?". When Cain is obstinate in his evil, God punishes him by miraculously intervening in nature: the ground will be barren when Cain tills it, and apparently only when Cain tills it. Finally, we have the last piece of God's care for Cain in this story: Cain says his punishment is more than he can bear, and God comforts him by protecting him against being killed by other men, a danger Cain had understood to be part of his punishment.

Now consider God's actions in this story. In the first place, he punishes Cain for the murder of Abel, showing thereby that he regards the murder of Abel as bad and worthy of punishment. And yet he himself allowed the murder to take place, although obviously he could have prevented it. Any decent person who was present when Cain attacked his brother would have made some effort to rescue Abel; but God, who is always present everywhere and who even seems to anticipate Cain's attack, does nothing for Abel. On the other hand, consider what God does to or for Cain. He comes to him and warns him of the coming temptation. After the murder he returns to talk to Cain again, in a way designed to make Cain acknowledge his true state. When he imposes punishment, he does it in a way that seems to require a miracle. He banishes Cain from his land. And when Cain complains that his punishment is too much, God is merciful to him and guards him from being killed by other men. In short, God interferes in Cain's affairs to warn him; he talks to him earnestly to get him to see his true situation; he performs a miracle on his behalf; he sends him away from his own place; and he protects him from being murdered. Clearly, any *one* of these things done on Abel's behalf would have been enough to save him. But God does none of these things for *Abel*, the innocent, the accepted of God; he does them instead for *Cain*, a man whose offering was rejected and who is murderously angry at his brother. When it comes to righteous Abel, God simply stands by and watches him be killed. Why has such a story been allowed to stand as part of the canonical

Scriptures?

On the solution to the problem of evil which I have been developing in this paper, if God is good and has a care for his creatures, his overriding concern must be to insure not that they live as long as possible or that they suffer as little pain as possible in this life but rather that they live in such a way as ultimately to bring them to union with God.

Abel presents God with no problems in this respect. He is apparently righteous at the time of his offering; and hence that is a safe, even a propitious, time for him to die, to make the transition from this life to the next. Given that he will die sometime, Abel's death at this time is if anything in Abel's interest; he dies at a time when he is accepted by God, and he enters into union with God. It is true that Abel dies prematurely and so is deprived of years of life. But on Christian doctrine, what he loses is years of a painful and spiritually perilous pilgrimage through this life, and what he gains is eternal bliss.[60]

Cain, on the other hand, is in trouble as regards both his current moral state and his prospects for the next life. If God were to rescue Abel by striking Cain with heart failure at the outset of Cain's attack on Abel, for example, Cain would die in mortal sin and so would go to hell, while righteous Abel would continue the morally dangerous journey of this life only to die later, perhaps in some less virtuous state. There are, of course, many other ways in which God could have stopped Cain and rescued Abel without going so far as killing Cain. But perhaps stopping Cain even in those other ways would not have been good for Cain. Because God does not step in between Cain's willing and the successful realization of that willing, Cain is brought as forcefully as possible to a recognition of the depth of the evil he willed. And that forceful recognition is, I think, the most powerful means of bringing Cain to an acknowledgment of his own evil and a desire for help, which is a necessary condition for his salvation.

On the solution to the problem of evil which I have been developing here, then, God does not rescue Abel because contrary to appearances Abel is not in danger; and God's failure to rescue Abel, as well as all the other care for Cain recorded in the story, constitutes the best hope of a rescue for Cain, who is in danger, and not just of death but of a perpetual living death.

V

I think, then, that it is possible to produce a defensible solution to the problem of evil by relying both on the traditional theological and philosophical assumptions in (1)-(4) and (6), and on the specifically Christian doctrines in (8)-(10). Like other recent attempted solutions, this one also rests fundamentally on a revised version of (7), namely, this:

(7''') Because it is a necessary condition for union with God, the signif-

icant exercise of free will employed by human beings in the process
which is essential for their being saved from their own evil is of such
great value that it outweighs all the evil of the world.

(7‴) constitutes a morally sufficient reason for evil and so is a counter-example
to (5), the claim that there is no morally sufficient reason for God to permit
instances of evil. Like the positions of both Plantinga and Swinburne, this solution
ties the justification for natural evils to free will, but in a way, I think, which
does not raise the problem of evil all over again (as Plantinga's free will defense
seems to do by leaving unjustified the successful acting on evil free will) and
which shows a necessary connection between natural evil and the good that
justifies it (as Swinburne's solution does not). Of the three solutions initially
sketched in this paper, it is Hick's approach which my own solution most
resembles; but the resemblance is only superficial. In reality, my solution is
fundamentally different from Hick's both in its view of human beings and in its
analysis of the function of evil, and so it escapes the basic criticisms of Hick's
theodicy mentioned above. The changes in human beings which evil is said to
produce on the solution I have developed here are logically necessary for union
with God and life in heaven, as is not the case in Hick's account. And because
of the particular nature of these changes, involving a fundamental change in the
will, they could not be produced in any other way; unlike the changes which
evil produces on Hick's view, these changes could not be brought about just by
training for the Olympics or by writing a doctoral dissertation, for example.

Although I have argued against the solutions proposed by Plantinga, Swin-
burne, and Hick, I think that each of them makes an important contribution to
a successful solution of the problem of evil; and what I find right in their work
is, I think, compatible with the solution I have presented here. For example,
there is a sense of

> (7) 'The possession of free will and the use of it to do more good than
> evil is a good of such value that it outweighs all the evil in the world'

which is true on Christian beliefs, I think, and compatible with my solution. On
my solution, Christianity must assign an enormous value to free will, because
the evil of Adam's fall and all subsequent moral and natural evil could have
been prevented if human beings had never been given free will in the first place.
But the good which free will produces and which outweighs subsequent evil
should be understood, on my account, not just as morally good choices but rather
as willing in accordance with the divine will and thus making possible union
with God.

Furthermore, although I have argued for one particular good as the good which
justifies moral and natural evil, nothing in my account rules out the possibility

that either sort of evil may produce other goods as well. Thus I think Swinburne is right in his claim about the importance of our ability to act on our free will in significant ways. If our use of free will were restricted to trivial choices to prevent the possibility of our doing any major harm or if God always stepped in to remove the evil consequences of any bad act of will, I think Swinburne is right to claim we would be more like pets in God's dollhouse than like persons. So it seems to me that significant exercise of free will is a good which could only be produced by God's allowing evil and which therefore partially justifies the moral (but not the natural) evil in the world. On my account, however, what ultimately gives exercise of free will its main value is its necessary role in producing union with God; and it is this significant exercise of free will, a bent free will cooperating in its own cure, which I have argued outweighs all the evil in the world. So there is a sense of (7') too which is true on my solution.

I also think Hick is clearly right that some of the suffering produced by moral and natural evil results in character-building, so that some moral virtues are *another* good produced by evil. The problem with Hick's account is that the character-building he picks out to discuss could apparently be produced without any major moral or natural evil; hence the good produced by evil on Hick's account is not a good which can justify the evil in the world. But if we take character-building in the way I have described in my solution, not (like Hick) as an evolution from good to better, but as an alteration from a destructive psychological state to a life-giving one, then I think there is a reading of (7″) too which is true on Christian doctrine and compatible with my solution.

Finally, for the many other goods sometimes said to be produced by evil, such as punishment for sins or aesthetic completion of the whole canvas of creation, if any of these are in fact both good and produced by evil, I welcome them into my account. In (7‴) I have singled out one good produced by evil as the good which justifies all the evil in the world, but nothing in this claim rules out the possibility that evil produces various other lesser goods as well which may contribute to the justification of some sorts of evil.

In the brief exposition of this solution in this paper, I cannot hope to have given anything but a sketch and a preliminary defense of it; to do it justice and to consider carefully all the questions and objections it raises would require book-length treatment. For all its complexity, the story of Cain and Abel is the story of a simple instance of evil, which is easily dwarfed by any account of evil culled at random from today's newspapers; and I am under no illusions that by providing an explanation for the simple evil in the story of Cain and Abel, I have given a sufficient and satisfying explanation of even the commonplace evils of ghetto violence, much less the almost unthinkable evils of Belsen or Hiroshima. What I would like to believe I have done is to have shown that with good will and careful attention to the details of the doctrines specific to a particular

monotheism there is hope of a successful solution to the problem of evil along the lines developed here.[61]

NOTES

1. For a review of recent literature on the problem of evil, see Michael Peterson, "Recent Work on the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 20 (1983) 321-340.

2. Cf. Nelson Pike, "Hume on Evil," *The Philosophical Review* 72 (1963), pp. 180-181.

3. See "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind* 64 (1955) 200-212.

4. "God and Evil," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1960) 97-114.

5. Cf., e.g., Nelson Pike, op. cit.

6. Cf. John Stuart Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1875), pp. 176-190, 194.

7. John Stuart Mill, *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1865), chap. 7.

8. Cf. Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defense," in *Philosophy in America*, ed. Max Black (London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), pp. 204-220. A revised version of this paper is included in *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 131-155. Cf. also "Which Worlds Could God Have Created?" *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973) 539-52.

9. Among the most interesting criticisms of Plantinga are the following: Robert M. Adams, "Middle Knowledge and the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977) 109-117; George Botterill, "Falsification and the Existence of God: A Discussion of Plantinga's Free Will Defense," *Philosophical Quarterly* 27 (1977) 114-134; Robert Burch, "Plantinga and Leibniz's Lapse," *Analysis* 39 (1979) 24-29; Nelson Pike, "Plantinga on Free Will and Evil," *Religious Studies* 15 (1979) 449-473; William Rowe, "God and Other Minds," *Nous* 3 (1969) 271-277; William Wainwright, "Christian Theism and the Free Will Defense: A Problem," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 6 (1975) 243-250; William Wainwright, "Freedom and Omnipotence," *Nous* 2 (1968) 293-301; and Peter Windt, "Plantinga's Unfortunate God," *Philosophical Studies* 24 (1973) 335-342.

10. *Analysis* (1975) 110-112.

11. See "The Probabilistic Argument from Evil," *Philosophical Studies* 35 (1979) 1-53.

12. Steven Wykstra, "The Humean Obstacle to Evidential Arguments from Suffering: On Avoiding the Evils of Appearance," forthcoming in *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion*.

13. William Rowe, "The Empirical Argument from Evil," in *Rationality, Religious Belief, and Moral Commitment: New Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. R. Audi and W. Wainwright, Cornell University Press, forthcoming.

14. Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 200-224. See also "The Problem of Evil" in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 3-19.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 219-220.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 211.

17. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 206-208.

18. For a detailed criticism of Swinburne's solution, see my "Knowledge, Freedom, and the Problem of Evil," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 14 (1983) 49-58. See also David O'Connor, "Swinburne on Natural Evil," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983) 65-74.

19. Cf., e.g., I Sam. 23:9-11 and 30:7-8, Jeremiah 42:1-16, and Daniel 8-10.

20. John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966).

21. See, e.g., L. T. Howe, "Leibniz on Evil," *Sophia* 10 (1971) 8-17; Roland Puccetti, "The Loving God—Some Observations on John Hick's *Evil and the God of Love*", *Religious Studies* 2 (1967) 255-268 and Illtyd Trethowan, "Dr. Hick and the Problem of Evil," *Journal of Theological Studies* 18 (1967) 407-416.

22. G. Stanley Kane, "The Failure of Soul-Making Theodicy," *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 6 (1975) 1-22.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 8ff.

25. For Hick's defense of his solutions against objections in the literature, see, for example, "God, Evil and Mystery," *Religious Studies* 3 (1968) 539-546; and "The Problem of Evil in the First and Last Things," *Journal of Theological Studies* 19 (1968) 591-602.

26. This sort of resolution of apparent inconsistencies can be found in contemporary scientific work. Earlier in this century, for example, biologists believed that cancers such as the Rous sarcoma could not be caused by a virus, because the Rous sarcoma was known to run in families and viral infections are not genetically transmissible. Given what was then known about cancer and viruses, the belief that a tendency to a certain cancer is inheritable seemed incompatible with the belief that cancer is virally caused. But in the broader context of current beliefs about the etiology of cancer, the beliefs which early in this century seemed inconsistent can be interpreted in such a way that they are compatible after all. We now believe that a cancer such as the Rous sarcoma is caused by a virus which acts on a certain inheritable genetic make-up, and so we have come to understand that cancer's being virally caused does not preclude the genes' having a role in the emergence of the disease.

27. For an example of this view in prominent Catholic and Protestant theologians, see, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia-IIae, q. 87, q. 3, and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. III, chap. xxiv, esp. section 6.

28. For recent discussions of some of these issues, see, e.g., Marilyn Adams, "Hell and the God of Justice," *Religious Studies* 11 (1975) 433-447, and "Divine Justice, Divine Love, and the Life to Come," *Crux* vol. 13, no. 4 (1976-7) pp. 12-28; and J. H. Hick, "The Problem of Evil in the First and Last Things," op. cit.; and Richard Swinburne, "A Theodicy of Heaven and Hell," in *The Existence and Nature of God*, ed. Alfred J. Freddoso, (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), pp. 37-54.

29. Cf., e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra Gentiles*, Bk. III, chap. 37, 48, 51; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. III, chap. 25, sections 2 and 10.

30. See, e.g., Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 132-148.

31. Cf. Plato, *Apology* 41a-c, *Phaedo* 63b-c, 108a-c, 109b-114c.

32. *Inferno*, Canto IV.

33. I have given the outline of such an argument in "Dante's Hell, Aquinas's Theory of Morality,

and the Love of God," forthcoming. Frank Burch Brown has suggested to me that we in fact often make just the opposite evaluation, that people in the pain of some terminal illness frequently reject medical efforts to prolong their lives and insist that they prefer death to the continuation of such an existence. But such cases are disanalogous in important ways to the case of persons in hell. The pain of the terminally ill in such cases is usually great; the technology needed to prolong their lives often enough increases their pain; and what is purchased by that pain is only a very limited prolongation of life. It is not surprising that persons in such circumstances prefer death. But on the view of hell I'm attributing to Dante, the level of pains of the damned, however great, does not interfere with their ability to think and converse in a leisurely way; the prolongation of their existence does not depend on increasing their pain past that level; and their life is prolonged *indefinitely*. For the terminally ill, the choice is between great pain with death due soon, and greater pain with death due only slightly later. But for the persons in hell annihilation would put an end to an everlasting existence whose accompanying pain is compatible with reflective conversation. And so the fact that many terminally ill people prefer death sooner rather than later is no evidence that they would also prefer annihilation to life in hell.

34. *Ibid.*, Canto III.

35. See, e.g., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 19, a. 2.

36. Someone might object here that a short experience of hell might provide the sort of information or insight which would make a crucial difference to a person's doing what he needs to do to be saved. For some consideration of a Christian position of those who lack the information they need in order to be redeemed, see the discussion of death-bed repentance in Section III.

37. For a brief historical review, see the entry on "Sin" in *A Religious Encyclopedia*, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1891); for discussion of more contemporary approaches, see, e.g., "The Fall of Man" in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967). Cf. also Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 77, a. 4 and 5, q. 82, a. 3, and q. 83, a. 3; and John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk. II, chap. 1, section 8.

38. Free will has, of course, been variously understood by both philosophers and theologians. Augustine, for example, defined free will as the power of choosing. On his view, Adam was free to choose either to sin or not to sin; fallen man is free to choose to sin but not free to choose not to sin. (Cf. *Enchiridion*, XXVII, XXX, and CV.) Aquinas took the will as a natural disposition to seek the good as apprehended by the intellect (cf. *Summa theologiae* Ia, q. 19, a. 1) and free will as the power of being inclined to various courses of action (*Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 83, a. 1); in consequence of Adam's fall, on Aquinas's view, the will has become inordinately inclined to mutable good (*Summa theologiae*, Ia, q. 82, a. 3). Contemporary literature on the will is vast; perhaps a good place to begin (for a historical survey and a consideration of contemporary issues) is *The Will. A Dual Aspect Theory*, Brian O'Shaugnessy, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). For some recent discussions, especially helpful in this context, see Roderick Chisholm, "Freedom and Action," in Keith Lehrer (ed.), *Freedom and Determinism* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 11-44; Harry Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971) 5-20; Wright Neely, "Freedom and Desire," *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974) 32-54; Peter Van Inwagen, *An Essay on Free Will* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983); Garry Watson, "Free Agency," *Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1975) 205-20; and Susan Wolf, "Asymmetrical Freedom," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980) 151-66.

39. For a study of Anselm's position, see e.g., *Anselm of Canterbury. Truth, Freedom, And Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues*, ed. and tr. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, (New York:

Harper and Row, 1967), pp. 26-44; *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*, Jasper Hopkins, (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), pp. 122-186; and *Anselm's Doctrine of Freedom and the Will*, G. Stanley Kane (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1981).

40. Though it has some affinities with the views presented by Susan Wolf in a recent paper; see the citation in note 38.

41. For a clear statement of this point, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia IIae, q. 77, a. 4 and 5.

42. See, for example, *Summa theologiae* I, q. 82, articles 3-5 and q. 83, articles 1 and 3.

43. See, for example, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 82, articles 1 and 3.

44. Someone might also object that if post-fall persons inherit a disordered will, they are not responsible for the evil they do and so should not be punished for it. But this objection misunderstands the nature of the defect post-fall persons inherit. It is not an external constraint on the will; it is a tendency within the will to will evil. A person with post-fall will *can* will only right actions, but tends not to *want* to do so. Such a person, who can will the right action in certain circumstances but who does not do so because he does not want to, is generally held to be responsible for what he does.

45. I do not mean to suggest that changing one's character is accomplished by a single act of will of any sort, only that a particular sort of act of will is a prerequisite for a change of character.

46. This very sketchy discussion suggests a solution to the sort of quarrel engaged in by Luther and Erasmus. Even the defective will is free, in the sense that it *can* will the good; and to this extent it seems to me that Erasmus was right. But if this ability is not exercised because, in virtue of a defect in the will, the will *does not* will the good, then for practical as distinct from theological purposes Luther was right. Of himself, man will not do what is right; to do so he must have external help. See Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, tr. J. I. Packer & A. R. Johnston (London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957); and Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio, Discourse on the Freedom of the Will*, ed. & tr. Ernest F. Winter (New York, 1967).

47. "Batter my heart, three-personed God; for You
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurped town, to another due,
Labor to admit You, but O, to no end;
Reason, Your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love You, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto Your enemy.
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again;
Take me to You, imprison me, for I,
Except You enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me."

48. Augustine, *Confessions*, tr. Edward Pusey (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1961), Bk. viii, pp. 125, 130: "But I wretched, most wretched, in the very commencement of my early youth, had begged chastity of Thee, and said, "Give me chastity and continence, only not yet." For I feared lest Thou shouldest hear me soon, and soon cure me of the disease of concupiscence, which I wished to have satisfied, rather than extinquished. ... [Now, however] I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig tree, giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an

acceptable sacrifice to Thee. ... I sent up these sorrowful words: How long, how long, "tomorrow, and tomorrow?" Why not now? Why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?"

49. Anselm, *The Fall of Satan*, tr. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, op. cit., p. 157.

50. See, for example, the articles on sanctification in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962) and in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: Macmillan Co., 1950), and the article on grace in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles Herbermann *et. al.* (New York: Robert Appleton Co., 1909).

51. That this is a claim Christians are committed to is clear from even a brief perusal of the Old Testament. The Old Testament prophetic books abound with statements such as these: "In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction" (Jeremiah 2:30); "Oh Lord, ... thou has stricken them, but they have not grieved; thou has consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction" (Jeremiah 5:3); "The people turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 9:13). Amos 4:6-11 is a particularly clear statement of this claim. The story of the blind man in John 9:1-38, which culminates in the blind man's expression of faith and worship, is an example of a New Testament story illustrating this claim.

52. For a Biblical story showing God protecting the victim while allowing the perpetrator the freedom to act on his evil will, cf., e.g., Daniel 3:8-25; a clear cut story showing God preventing suffering by curtailing the freedom of a human agent to act on his will is harder to find, but cf., e.g., Genesis 19:1-11, Genesis 22:11-12, and such stories of relief from oppression as Judges 6:11 ff.

53. The death of infants has been variously handled in the history of Christian thought. It seems to me not so much a hard case as a borderline one. Like the suffering of animals, the death of infants is hard to account for in large part because we have an inadequate understanding of the nature of infants and animals. Do infants have free will? Do some of the more intelligent species of animals other than man have free will? If they do, maybe some version of the solution I am developing here applies to them also. As for creatures to whom no one would want to attribute free will, such as worms and snails, what sort of suffering do they undergo? Until we have a clearer account of the nature of infants and animals, it will not be clear what to say about the death of infants or the suffering of animals in connection with the problem of evil. For that reason, I leave both out of account here.

54. Dante, *Purgatorio*, V. 98-107; tr. Charles Singleton, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 51.

55. For an interesting variation on such a speculation, see C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (N.Y., N.Y.: MacMillan, 1946).

56. I have made no attempt in this section to discuss the connection, crucial for Christianity, between salvation from one's sins and the Incarnation and Resurrection of Christ. I intend to examine that connection in a forthcoming paper on the Atonement.

57. In what follows I am not concerned either to contribute to or to take account of contemporary biblical scholarship. I want to consider the story of Cain and Abel not as it contributes to our understanding of Israelite history, ancient Hebrew theology, the composition of the Old Testament, or anything else of the sort. I am interested in it as a story in the canonical Christian Scriptures; I am reading it in light of Christian doctrine to see what contributions it makes to Christian theology.

58. Literary analysis of the story suggests, however slightly, that the idea of bringing an offering was Cain's and that Abel was following Cain's lead: "And in process of time it came to pass that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock ..." (Gen. 4:3-4). Furthermore, there is no suggestion that the offerings were

anything but gifts of love. There is no hint that Cain is afraid of God or has a guilty conscience and wants to propitiate God or wants to lessen the post-fall alienation between him and God. On the contrary, when we find Cain talking to God later in the story, he speaks to him familiarly and without fear, and without surprise either, as if he were used to talking to God. These two suggestions taken together considerably increase the poignancy of the story. Among other things, they make the rejection of Cain's offering much harder for him to accept and for us to understand; they make more plausible the depth of the anger against Abel which the story attributes to Cain; and they suggest (again, however slightly) a loving relationship between Cain and God, in the context of which God's subsequent talking with Cain should be considered.

59. There is nothing in the story to suggest directly that there was anything wrong with Cain's offering. The story does say that Abel brought of the "firstlings" of his flock, suggesting that there was something specially reverent or respectful about his offerings; but the text says nothing to indicate that there was anything shabby or improper about Cain's offering. It seems to me that there is admirable artistry in the story's omitting to explain why Cain's offering was rejected. By doing so, it leaves its readers with the same choice Cain had: to believe either that God is good and Cain's offering was rightly rejected, or that Cain's offering was rejected arbitrarily and so unjustly by a God who is in consequence not good. The story, then, artfully forces its readers into Cain's shoes and faces them with Cain's temptation, the first recorded temptation after the fall, namely, the temptation to believe that God is not good.

60. As for the manner of Abel's death, we reasonably tend to assume that it was painful, but nothing in the story prohibits our believing that Abel died instantly, without pain. If we think that Abel in the story is spotlessly righteous, then since the story gives us the option, it is more consistent to assume he died painlessly. On the other hand, if we are inclined to maintain that Abel's death was painful to some degree, then that pain is explicable as a last safeguard against pride and self-will for the first of the sons of Adam to die. There is also Adam and Eve's loss to be taken into account. On our ordinary unreflective intuitions about this story, Adam and Eve suffer the loss of their son Abel, a loss for which they are apparently uncompensated. But as I have tried to show, on Christian doctrine the story is much more complicated. Once Cain becomes murderously angry at his brother, God has a choice only between evils for Adam and Eve. They can suffer the pain of the physical loss of their son Abel, or they can suffer the pain of having their son Cain spiritually lost. The arguments I have given for my solution to the problem of evil are also arguments for thinking that by choosing to let Abel die God picks the lesser of two evils for Adam and Eve also.