THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

I

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL IN THE GREAT RELIGIONS

A precise definition of Pessimism cannot be offered at the outset, and it might prejudice our inquiry were we to attempt it; for the more carefully we survey our field, the greater appears the variety of views which are styled pessimistic. The antonym superlative, Optimism, has been championed by so many theologians and philosophers with theological commitments and predilections, that we should not be surprised if a common stock of axioms and a largely predestined type of reasoning has made likewise for more consistent uniformity in definition and in conclusion. Even here, though a dozen theodicies should declare that this is the best of all possible worlds, the sentence, eulogistic in some systems, is in others of a decidedly apologetic tone. Should we now, by way of distinction, follow a contemporary and define a pessimist as one who fears that this is the best possible world, we would only be brought to realize how astonishing is the range of negation. Orthodoxy may not be quite one, but heresy is surely legion. The Aye of docile acquiescence is a drilled choir chant, but like the thousand-voiced tumult of a troubled multitude is the Nay of discontent, disdain, and despair. Layer beneath layer of

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truth lies in the first words of *Anna Karenina*: “All happy families are more or less like each other; but every unhappy family is unhappy in its own particular way.”

Evil and the problem of evil seem to arise from an experienced clash and disaccord of the actuality with the ideal, whatever this may be. The consciousness of this frustration may be so intense as to lead to a settled conviction that the clash and the disaccord are irremediable, that frustration is the primal and the final fact of life. This conviction, if reasoned, provides the texture of pessimistic philosophy, which may go to such an extreme painful sense of despised actuality that the cherished ideal is pronounced illusory, and the world is conceived in terms which consistently preclude the reality of positive worth. Evil, in such a philosophy of despair, becomes the fundamental reality. But when this type of mind comes to itself, it finds itself confronted with—a problem of good! For if in theological optimism it is difficult to show why there should be any need of salvation in God’s own world, the extreme pessimist’s perplexity is no less: in a world essentially and irremediably bad, irrational and meaningless, how could there be, not only salvation, but even the demand for it: how could such a world include the disdain of it, to wit, pessimistic philosophy? This is the pessimist’s problem of good.

When the consciousness of frustration is dominated, not only by a practical demand but also by a theoretical conviction that actuality should and must accord with the ideal, then we have the several varieties of reasoned optimism, claiming that the alleged clash or disaccord is exaggerated, and that in any case it is not ultimate, that harmony is primal and fundamental and will somehow be final in the universe. The question, Why should there be such disaccord at all, becomes pressing for the theologian whose definition of the
Creator precludes the belief that any such clash is part of the divine experience. For such a mind the problem of evil demands a theodicy: exculpation of God for the presence of evil. Consistently it should likewise demand the metaphysical depreciation, if not indeed the excogitation, of evil. This excess of logic is exhibited by lay minds in behalf of theology, but not usually by theologians; for the theological view of life is essentially a perception of its evil and of man's need of redemption.

This initial glance at the movement of thought shows a willy-nilly tendency from the two extremes towards the middle. Optimism and pessimism represent views of life which are not described with literal accuracy by these superlative terms. We shall use these two words to indicate estimates of the world and of human life which are dominantly approving or condemnatory. Philosophically a double problem of evil results. The pessimist asks: What is the ultimate nature of this evil and miserable world, and is there any way out of its woe? The optimist: Why should this fundamentally good and perfect world include any evil, and how can we acquiesce in it loyally and wholeheartedly?

The fundamental available alternatives are suggested by the questions: Are good and evil coördinate and both ultimate; or are they both somehow mixed in a world in which it is futile to look for any ultimate rhyme or reason; or is one subordinate to the other, though forever related to it in perennial antithesis, each one requiring the other; or is one subordinate to the other in the sense of being episodic, transitory, actual perhaps, but extinguishable and ultimately unreal? With regard to evil in particular: is it somehow involved as evil in the very stuff and substance of the one ultimate reality; or, dualistically, is it a principle of being
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coordinate with the principle of perfection and opposed to it; or is evil a permanent characteristic of finite existence; or are we responsible for the experience of evil, whether owing to our immoderate zeal, which leads both intellect and desire to overreach themselves, or else owing to our limited knowledge which enslaves us to illusion, or to our hazardously unlimited freewill which plunges us in sin?

These questions, and the answers to them, sometimes distinctly perceived, but more often confused, or else intertwined and embroidered in the figured speech of mythology, or trimmed and fitted in theological doctrine, provide man's pre-philosophical estimates of life.

That evil as evil is rooted and dominant in the very heart of ultimate reality can be the claim only of a Pandiabolism, blackest embittered despair. Philosophic pessimism scarcely reaches this extreme: Schopenhauer's Will-to-live is blind and irrational; Hartmann's Unconscious is metalogical and Mainlander's pre-cosmic Will-to-die is pitiable and pitifully inconsiderate; but not one of them is strictly hateful. The pessimistic poet lets himself go more violently: pity for the woeful creature rouses in him hatred for the Creator of woe. Most wicked and miserable must be the Author of wicked misery. Burning lines from Alfred de Vigny come to mind, and the first and only written stanza of Leopardi's Hymn to Ahriman, and this blasphemy of despair from James Thomson's City of Dreadful Night:

The vilest thing must be less vile than Thou
From whom it had its being, God and Lord!
Creator of all woe and sin! abhorred,
Malignant and implacable. . . .

Logically distinguishable from this, but practically tantamount, though without the intense feeling of abhorrence expressed in the above lines, is the view of life which like
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a load of lead bore down the soul of Brahmanic India. Evil is inherent in finite existence; woe is irremediably bound up with life and with the attachment to life. Man is doomed to rebirth; doomed to expiate the sin and folly of unremembered past lives. To be sure, his present life, if good, will have its good results in some next life, but not at all assuredly in the next life. We reap today the harvest of unknown past sowing, to harvest in some unknown future the sowing of today. The thought of this unending nightmare of reincarnation roused in the heart but one longing: not to be. “In this sort of cycle of existence (samsara) what is the good of enjoyment of desires, when after a man has fed on them there is seen repeatedly his return here to earth? . . . In this cycle of existence I am like a frog in a waterless well.” Thus the one path of salvation for man was to cease existing: by absorption in the Infinite Brahman.

But if this whole world of finite existence is thus reckoned as a woeful blunder, is Brahman then the blunderer in having become manifest in this world of misery? There is comprehensible reluctance to undertake the explanation of this riddle, how or why Brahman should become so woefully individualized, and the Hindu theologian does not hold fast to the idea that the finite world is the self-outpouring and externalization of Brahman. A more profound insight leads the Upanishadic seer to proclaim all finite existence as unreal, a veil of illusion, Maya. Real, alas, is the soul which must expiate in the woes of transmigration its attachment to illusion, until it has been chastened and purified and enlightened, and in the end extinguished in absorption. So the immobile eye of the ascetic saint, waiting for the hour of release, looks with disdainful equanimity on this wretched riot of illusion.

Woe had thus its source in individual existence. Yet the
perception of the identity of the individual soul with the Universal Soul was the quintessence of Upanishadic wisdom: "That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is Atman (Soul). That art thou, Svetaketu." To the Brahmanic list of illusions, the Buddha added the soul, individual and universal. All alleged substantial reality is Maya, and the self-identical substantial soul is also illusory. There is a condition of individual existence; it is a process of combination, but it is also a process of change, and inevitably a process of dissolution. The passing illusion is not an illusion by contrast to something real and stable. All is passing, becoming, coming together, dissolving; nothing is fixed and permanent. Really no thing is; only a complex of activities obtains.

In this complex of activities, however, an impersonal law of retribution operates ruthlessly: in it complexes of acts that make for attachment to individual existence result in successive rebirths; in it complexes of acts that make for release from self-engrossment result in the dissolving of self and the extinction of all that is involved in self. There is no stable reality, finite or infinite: there is stable cosmic order with which we must reckon and on which we can rely: it is the law of Karma.

Buddha saw error, lust, anger, pride, all evil and woe in attachment to self, finite individual existence, but he provided a cosmology and a gospel calculated to assure direct deliverance from self-engrossment. Misery is universal, and it arises from self-engrossment, and can be extinguished through the emancipation from self-engrossment, by following the Buddhist path of life. The resulting state would be extinction of self, and of all the lusts of self, Arhatship, Nirvana.

That extinction of individuality should have been pro-
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posed as the true goal of existence, indicates clearly the profound pessimism of the Brahmanic-Buddhist philosophy of life. Brahmanism hoped for deliverance from evil through eventual absorption in Brahman; its pessimism was relative and its path of salvation uncertain. More confirmed in his pessimism, more assured in his gospel of redemption was the Buddha. Buddhism brought cheer, for it brought promise of the utter and unqualified extinction of self and all its woes. Salvation is in non-existence. So Gautama is the progenitor of Schopenhauer and Hartmann.

The evident influence of Brahmanism and Buddhism on Schopenhauer and Hartmann and their successors should not confirm us in the misleading tendency to regard modern philosophical pessimism as an exotic Oriental plant on European soil. While it is true that the religious and philosophical spirit of negation is not as characteristic of the West as of ancient India, calling the West optimistic is too offhand and does not dispose of our problem. Again, when in our survey of the history of morals we contrast the Hellenic world-affirmation with the Christian world-denial, we should not overlook the fact that while the Greek, unlike the Christian theologian, did not feel in duty bound to contemn this world, he did in fact perceive abundantly its evil and undertook to meet and to explain it. Consider the judgment of life in Graeco-Roman wisdom, from Theognis and Sophocles to Menander and Seneca, Pliny and Plutarch: a proverb of life-disenchantment: Plutarch cites it on the authority of Aristotle as very ancient wisdom: man’s greatest boon is the brevity of his life. Not to be born at all were of all things the best; but, if born, then to die as soon as possible.

Only the unthinking could fail to perceive the misery of existence, and indeed, to the early Greek, man’s thought and
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outreaching zeal seem to have been the roots of evil. But why? Because man does ill to think and aspire, or because the gods are envious of thinking and ambitious men? Very significant are the myths of the Promethean cycle. When Zeus overcame the Titans, he denied man his due share of good fortune; Prometheus thereupon took up the cause of men and became their champion. He stole the celestial fire of Zeus and gave it to men, thus making possible human conquest of nature and civilized life. For this, Prometheus was affixed by Zeus on a rock in Caucasus; daily his liver, the organ of insatiable desire, was pecked by Zeus' eagle, and daily it grew again. Thus did Divinity punish the divine aspiration and achievement of the culture-hero. To the rest of us Zeus sent as a gift Pandora, divinely beautiful and with a mysterious box for her dowry. The pliable, sensuous, unreasonably curious Epimetheus, disregarding all the warnings of his brother Prometheus, took Pandora and opened the casket. Out flew all the woes and torments and pests: only hope remained under the lid as a last relief for unhappy man.

Here is profound legend, of which the story in Genesis is a parallel. Eating of the tree of knowledge, curiosity, the desire of men to rise above and depart from nature, the lure of the unattained, these forces which lift man from the brute to civilized existence, these are also the roots of all his woes and misery. Later thought will come to regard man's desire as sinful, his will as wilful, and his suffering as deserved.

With regard to the problem of evil, Greek thought is seen to exhibit an indecision of procedure due to a vacillation between monism and dualism, giving rise not only to different traditions, but to opposed motives in the same tradition. The fountain-head of perplexity appears to be Plato.
On the one hand is the joyous acquiescence in nature, the belief that, through the dominance of reason, virtue and perfection are within the reach of man. On the other hand is a certain nostalgic sense of alienation, depreciation and distrust of nature, metaphysical as well as moral contempt of matter, asceticism, and a mystical reach after the beyond-rational which is decidedly sceptical in its implications. On the one hand, the Idea of the Good is Supreme Reality, and matter, imperfection, somehow is not; on the other, the conflict is somehow ingrained in the very stuff of Being, and "evils can never pass away." Aristotle resists Plato's mystical depreciation of matter, but he is enabled to treat it as an integral moment and aspect of reality because of his objective scientific approach to his problem, because he lacks the Platonic tragic sense of imperfection in nature, and because, unlike Plato, he is never a stranger here below. The Stoic cosmology would overcome completely the antithesis of rational form and irrational matter by adopting the idea of a hierarchy of material existence; but the Stoic ethics, keenly sensible of the moral antithesis between reason and the passions, demands its overcoming in heroic, ascetic apathy; while Stoic theodicy proclaims the course of material existence to be a pageant of Divine Providence precluding any evil, and at the same time attempts to justify evil as a spur to greater good. The Epicurean dismisses the Platonic difficulty by adopting a materialism which, unlike the Stoic, is antiteleological: there is pain and pleasure in the world, but there can be no problem of evil. Things simply are.

Unlike the Stoic insistent fortitude and loyalty to the cosmos, and against the Epicurean disdainful naturalism, the mystic-religious tradition of later Greek thought manifests a more or less explicitly pessimistic attitude towards
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existence. It were better had there been no matter, for then there would have been no world, only the eternal perfect silence of the One. Gnostic, Neoplatonist, and Neopythagorean emphasized Plato's sense of nostalgic alienation, and the result was a manifold wail over the cosmic pity of it: that there should be a world at all was the essential tragedy, for from the very first the cosmic self-manifestation of God involves a downfall and a degradation. The original sin took place, not at the close of creation, but in the first verse of the first chapter. The first and essential blunder was not in existence, it was and is existence itself.

These conflicting motives and demands reach their culmination in Plotinian Neoplatonism. Plotinus would not only explain, he would also vindicate the outpouring of the Eternal One in the cosmos. A sufficiently clear and comprehensive view of the world would serve to clear it of the evils which so impress the one-sided observer. One who has seen or listened to God can see the reflections of him and hear echoes of the divine harmony even in this discordant world of matter. But while Plotinus is not a pessimist by temperament, his view of reality imposes grave burdens on his theology. Either emanation proceeds in a moral sense and gradually from a plenitude of good and utter absence of evil towards complete extinction of good, or else what is called 'evil' in matter is metaphysically rather than morally 'the last' or 'the ultimate least' of Being, to wit, Non-Being, and in that case we cannot speak of any theodicy.

The dualism God-Matter which Greek theodicy resisted was primarily metaphysical and only secondarily moral; and that is perhaps the chief reason why it could not be sustained. But if metaphysical dualism seems inevitably bound for the rocks, to a moral interpretation of the world dualism appears imperative. In a mind intensely moral but relatively
untouched with metaphysics, dualism could maintain itself with greater assurance. So it is that the first principle in the Zoroastrian philosophy of life, which is not speculation but an act of heroism, is the principle of the essential duality of the cosmos. To the Greek philosopher, God, by whatever name he was called, in the end signified ultimate and unqualified Reality. The moral antithesis Good-Evil, tagged onto the metaphysical antithesis of Being and Non-Being, had to do the best it could. The chief difficulties in Greek as in some modern theodicies are traceable to this insistence on reducing a concretely moral to an abstractly metaphysical distinction.

The Zoroastrian began with the antithesis good-evil and deduced the rest from that. Good and evil could not issue from the same source; there is accordingly a duality of cosmic principles. More intent on preserving the moral than the metaphysical reputation of Deity, the Zoroastrian held fast to the goodness of Ahura-Mazda. The evil in this world is not his work: he neither caused it nor permitted it; his only relation to it is what yours and mine should be—unremitting opposition. The world is a battle-ground in which Ahura-Mazda and Ahriman, creating and counter-creating, strive for mastery. As truth and falsehood, purity and pollution are struggling for the mastery of man's soul, so health is battling with disease, and life with death, and grain with weeds, and life-giving rain with destructive storm, and light with darkness. No one so refused to blink at evil, no one perceived the universal conflict so compendiously as the Zoroastrian. The moral struggle was nothing mysterious or exceptional or illusory to him; it was the outstanding and ever-present fact of all existence, in which from the God Ahura-Mazda clear down to the least item of goodness and life and light the evil creation of Ahriman was being
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opposed in mortal combat. Here was a stirring sense of co-warriorship with God against the hosts of evil.

The struggle was not illusory, for Ahriman was real. Into the metaphysical problem of Ahriman's coördinateness with Ahura-Mazda the Zoroastrian does not seem to have cared particularly to inquire. "Is Ahriman coëternal with Ahura-Mazda?" seems to have meant: "When did Ahriman start his dirty work?"—a question which he answered: "As soon as Ahura-Mazda began to create." Does this answer suggest possible Brahmanic ideas? Does it mean that evil appears whenever finitude appears, that it is a function of finitude? Or didn't the Zoroastrian rather mean to say that evil, Ahriman and his work, could be nothing recent and exceptional, but that the struggle between good and evil was as old as existence itself? So evil is and has been right here; it is not to be prayed or excogitated out of existence; it is real enough and calls for real opposition.

Evil is real, but it does not deserve to be real. The moral intensity which begins with an insistence on the antithesis good-evil demands the assurance of its ultimate overcoming. The struggle is real, but it is not futile. A day of days is coming when, under the leadership of Saoshyant, the hosts of Ahura-Mazda will utterly put to rout the vile cohorts of Ahriman. The world will then be consumed and refined in a universal conflagration; remolten and transfigured, all things will then be pure and perfect, and evil will be no more.

The story of the Garden of Eden has probably Babylonian origins or kinship, and partakes of a common stock of primitive folk-lore in which it shares elements with Semitic and non-Semitic races. Its significance, as we have noted, resembles strikingly that of the Promethean myths. Man
lost Paradise because he was lured into eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was later theology which, imposing later views on this primitive legend, transformed its meaning. In the story itself Adam and Eve seem to have been banished from Eden because they had actually eaten of the tree of knowledge, and lest they should proceed further to eat of the tree of life and become immortal. Later thought stressed the disobedience of man, and ascribed to that sin his subsequent woes.

The Greek, in one way or another, ascribed evil to a certain fatal flaw or imperfection in the constitution of reality, yet somehow not in its ultimate constitution; so he called it Matter. The Zoroastrian saw in evil the evidence of the operation of a cosmic principle opposed to God and everywhere at war with the good. Neither of these views was entertained in Israel. Excelling in moral vigor rather than in speculative genius, and bent more on perceiving evil and avoiding it than on explaining its ultimate origin, the Hebrew found a ready explanation of all things by attributing them to God as their source. God brings good and also evil, but he sends them to man wisely and justly. Israel from the start regarded man as standing in a contractual relation with his Maker. Fidelity to his laws God rewards with prosperity, and if evils beset men, the reason is not far to seek: it is due to men's remissness, disobedience, and sin towards God. When Israel came to think of Yahveh as author and director of the entire world-course, the elements of the standard theodicy were at hand. The first Psalm is an epitome of it, and should we compare the moral record of king and people during various reigns with their record in outward prosperity as chronicled in the Historical Books, we should see how firmly fixed was the idea that God brought success to his faithful people, and punished them when they
departed from his law. Most striking because of its sinister irony in conjunction with what follows, is the statement of this view of life in the first three verses of the Book of Job: "There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and turned away from evil. And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the children of the east."

Two points should here be kept clearly in mind: this contractual relation was limited to the here and now, and it was a relation of Yahveh to his people Israel. Now so long as the latter idea prevailed, the former was not likely to cause insuperable difficulties in theodicy. When, however, Israel was led, particularly by the prophet Jeremiah, away from the nationalistic towards a personal conception of religion, the inadequacy of the contractual idea to explain the facts of this life’s experiences became apparent. For while in the lives of the peoples ‘honesty is the best policy,’ and one can with some assurance ascribe a country’s stable well-being and prosperity to soundness of national character, in the lives of people we cannot apply the formula with equal confidence, and, placidly attributing good fortune to goodness, rate every poor devil a devil.

The days of the Babylonian exile, which chronicled Israel’s perception of the monotheistic idea and Israel’s approach to the notion of personal and therefore universal as distinguished from nationalistic religion, provided the Hebrew mind with grave perplexities. In the sack of Jerusalem bad men as well as good had managed to escape personal disaster, and by the rivers of Babylon good men as well as bad bewailed their lot. Ascribe God’s amazing
patience with the wicked to his infinite loving-kindness; still, if He is one and supreme in power and justice and wisdom, how is the apparently undeserved suffering of the righteous to be explained? Before us is the masterpiece of Hebrew tragic genius, the *Book of Job*.

The obvious and complacent answer of orthodox tradition was that the suffering in question was not undeserved. This is the theme which Job's three friends play in a variety of keys, first in a reluctant obbligato, with distant and compassionate intimation; then, failing to evoke the expected repentant antiphony in Job, crescendo, more and more bluntly and insistently: Eliphaz the Temanite resting his orthodox assurance on the rich harvest of a long life's experience, Bildad the Shuhite appealing to the verdict of immemorial tradition, and Zophar the Naamathite reaffirming and exhorting and confidently challenging experience. The kindliest of admonitions change to increasingly violent upbraiding, but end on a promissory note of restoration to prosperity if only Job will repent and acknowledge his sin. This triple challenge of Job rests on alleged manifold evidence of experience, but ignores the very experience which has brought the three to the side of the former prince of the desert, now a mass of sores atop the ash-heap:

Who ever perished, being innocent?
Or where were the upright cut off?

Who and where indeed? The author is not content to observe that prosperous vice and long-suffering godliness do not invariably meet with appropriate reversal in accordance with orthodox specifications at the end of the chapter. Against the cruel complacence of orthodoxy, the poet masses with tragic intensity the anguished conviction of an upright man who, never arrogant or vain of his own perfection,
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and ever vigilantly on his guard lest he fall by the way unwittingly, is yet adamant in his assurance of lifelong, unwavering devotion to the Divine Will. To this witness of Job's own conscience, the Prologue (whether or not we regard it as part of the original poet's work) adds God's own twice repeated testimony: "Hast thou considered my servant Job? for there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and turneth away from evil."

The explanation of misery which the Prologue provides, that it is a testing of righteousness, is patently inadequate in a theistic system. Considering with Job that only too often

The tents of robbers prosper,
And they that provoke God are secure;
Into whose hand God bringeth abundantly,

and, on the other hand, remembering the friends' recital of the evil fortune of the wicked, while at the same time observing the trio of presumably righteous men without memory or anticipation of trouble, we may well doubt whether experimenting of the sort suggested in the Prologue is a settled policy of the Almighty. And furthermore, and more to the point, in view of the omniscience of God, we may inquire: For whose information are such tragic experiments conducted, and at whose expense?

The question which Satan asks ironically in the Prologue: "Doth Job fear God for nought?" is implied with tragic significance throughout the poem. Job's tragedy is not in the fact of his affliction, but rather in what his affliction means to his religion, which is the heart of his being. Unable, in the face of the facts of his own experience, to regard his sufferings as appropriate punishment for sin, and yet regarding his suffering as coming, together with all else,
from God, he sees the former ground of his confidence in God's justice disappear, and no new ground in sight:

For the thing which I fear cometh upon me,
And that which I am afraid of cometh unto me.

Hence his repeated plea to have it out with God: in his heart's anguish it is his mind's plea for a new theodicy that does not outrage the facts of life. Such a theodicy the poet does not provide; undeserved suffering was a fact which Jewish theism could not comprehend: a yawning mystery in which man, face to face with his Maker, can only be utterly humbled and must abhor himself in his nothingness.

The Epilogue, reporting Job's restoration to prosperity, so apparently in accord with the friends' orthodox promises and so out of accord with God's explicit condemnation of the trio, is probably a later addition to the poem, or else a concession in the nature of a happy ending, and in any case a flaw. But God's approval of Job, in conformity with the spirit of the poem, is conceivable only on the supposition that the answer to Satan's question is in the case of Job an affirmative answer. Job has really feared God for naught: here through all suffering and agony, doubly hard because not understood, he has remained loyal to God, but—or should we not say because—he has refused to ignore the facts of experience, or to force them into prefashioned molds.

Thus while the Book of Job offers no new formulated theodicy, it is a profoundly significant realization of the need of one, and a dramatic expression of the sort of spiritual attitude and temper of soul which alone could achieve it. The poet of Job faces heroically the problem of evil. What he sees and exhibits might make many another a pessimist, but has not made him one. Compared with the
buoyant optimism of the typical Israelite, who saw abundance of sin, but no occasion for being tragic about the cosmos, here is a world-view grim indeed. But it is a view heroic and defiant rather than hopeless. It is in a different strain of Jewish thought that we catch distinctly the note of weariness and cosmic disenchantment. It is the note of Ecclesiastes.

Job's dismay arises from intense and baffling suffering; the despondency of Ecclesiastes is due to surfeiting but yet unsatisfying pleasure. In Job is the tragic mystery of misery; in Ecclesiastes the tedious vanity of happiness. Here is a man of rich and varied experience, yet he finds his life to be poor monotony. The wisest in Jerusalem, he has found wisdom to be but madness and folly. He is a connoisseur in delight; he is rich and a man of property and power; he builds houses, pools of water, gardens and parks and orchards; at his beck are troops of man-servants and maidservants, singers and musicians to do his will and pleasure, to serve and entertain him. And seeing and having done all that is seen and done under the sun, behold for him "Vanity of vanities, . . . all is vanity and a striving after wind. . . . That which hath been is that which shall be; and that which hath been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."

To be sure he sees evils about him: injustice, wickedness, oppression. He conceives that some things are worse than others, and much of his thought is a play with comparisons; yet, be things better or worse, is there aught in life really good? How can good be good, or evil evil; how is wisdom to be preferred to folly, or anything to anything, or anything really cherished, if all things finally end in dust? Ample variety of experiences he has had, but no variety of conclusion. "For that which befalleth the sons of men
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befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; and man has no preëminence above the beasts: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

Despairing of lasting value in this pointless existence, and seeing no likely prospect of work, or device, or knowledge, or wisdom in Sheol, what is Ecclesiastes to do? He would eat his bread, and drink his wine, wear his garments white, oil his head, live joyfully with his wife, and make the best of a tedious bargain. But, adds the writer, or may be a later editor, Ecclesiastes would also keep in mind a certain grave *Perhaps* after the grave. Confronted with the possible alternative of a divine judgment in the hereafter, which he can neither anticipate nor evade with assurance, he would in any case fear God and keep his commandments. So the mind that had started a dirge of sceptical-cynical weariness ends, or is made to end, on a note of cautious piety. It is a politic conclusion of a calculating philosophy of life.

The weary sense of universal vanity and the tragic anguish of unvindicated justice were transformed by the Christian gospel into intense vigilance and confident hope. God is in His heaven, a loving Father, and in and through Christ the stain of evil and the sting of death are removed and turned to God's greater glory in salvation. But the theological problem still remains: what, whence, and whither evil? St. Paul's treatment of these questions is meant to ascribe evil to man's wilful disobedience, to regard it as a departure from the way of the Lord into the selfish way of the flesh, and to see its consummation in death and damnation, or its extinction through the love of Christ in the life of the
new man. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." Here is the most intense abhorrence of the body and a yearning to be freed from the bonds of the flesh: "Wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?"

But there is no despair of ultimate victory through Christ: "For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." In the very contempt of the flesh, and in the very evils of the world is the joyous certainty of final triumph which marks the saint's and the martyr's bliss: "For which cause I suffer also these things: Yet I am not ashamed; for I know him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to guard that which I have committed unto him against that day." The eschatological sense of the speedily forthcoming end of all things was the assurance of a blissful prospect: even the original downfall gained sublime dignity as the medium in which the eternal Divine plan of redemption was wrought out.

Between the revulsion and the ecstasy, Christian theology seeks a middle that is yet in touch with both extremes. The orthodoxy that is to be is the more opposed to the incipient heresies just because it has so much in common with them. Heresy is mainly twofold: excess of revulsion and contempt for the world (leading consistently to despair of redemption), and excess of sanguine confidence in man's inherent capacity for good (depreciating the solemnity of redemption). The first type of heresy is Gnostic and Manichean; the second is notably Pelagian. Combating them both and steering them, is the orthodoxy of St. Augustine.
The Gnostic view of the world as an inverted hierarchy of divine self-degradation involved not only utter disgust for material existence but also a condemnation of the self-outpoured One, and in good logic, nihilism to cap its pessimism. The Manicheans, combining the Persian dualism of Good and Evil with the Greek dualism of God and Matter, cast serious reflections on the all-primacy and omnipotence of God, and regarded man, not as the wilful prodigal son of God, but rather as the devil-fashioned battle-ground on which God and the devil are contending for dominion. Manicheanism took Satan too seriously, it appears, and man’s sin and guilt not seriously enough. Adam, we are told, was created by Satan in his own image; and although, by depositing portions of stolen light in the first man for safekeeping, Satan prepared trouble for himself and made the redemption of man possible, yet the fact of man’s dual nature stands out. Man’s wickedness is not wilfully acquired, but is rather inherent in his material nature as a son of darkness. The salvation of man demands the releasing of the rays of light from the darkness in which Satan ever seeks to imprison them.

Both Gnostic and Manichean emphasized mortification of the body; the ascetic bias which was gaining in the early Church found in them both strong confirmation. This ascetic abhorrence of the material was apt to develop into a studied contempt of material beauty wherever found and even into a cult of ugliness and filth. Loveliness, attractiveness, and all that is pleasant are of the devil. Do we say: Cleanliness is next to godliness? The hermit thought otherwise: godliness is marked rather by scorn for the body; the more famished, the more neglected, the more repulsive and mace-rated and vermin-infested the body, the more emphatic is the expression of the saint’s holy contempt for it. So we are
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told Justin Martyr and Tertullian could not tolerate the idea that Jesus the Lord was handsome to look upon, and represented him rather as the ugliest of men. St. Augustine finds no special holiness in the ascetic neglect to wash, but he also, as he urges himself to take food as physic and to resist the manifold allurements of taste and touch, smell and color and sound, would at times even "wish the whole melody of sweet music which is used to David's Psalter banished." To be sure Augustine's good sense comes to his rescue here, and in general we may say that this dismal view never quite prevailed; in the course of time Christian art was to reveal the manifold meaning of the beauty of holiness; yet the Gnostic and Manichean revulsion regarding matter expressed something not wholly alien to the early Christian; it was an extreme form of some real aspects of the Christian view of life.

Too great emphasis on the inherent evil of our material nature involved certain moral hazards. 'Human frailty' was apt to be used as an excuse for dissipation. The doughty virtue of the British monk Pelagius was outraged by this cowardly surrender which he found all too common. He refused to admit that man's will lacked the power to fulfil what man's duty required. "If I ought, I can." In the name of liberty he renounced libertinism. God is just and will punish us for our evil deeds; our wills could have refrained from the evil, and we are thus responsible and blameworthy. So much for the sterner side of the Pelagian doctrine; what impressed the age of Augustine was the sanguine hope which it entertained regarding man. Rejecting the teaching that man is innately corrupt, the Pelagians held that each infant is in the condition of Adam before the Fall, that man's will can turn away from evil and choose the good. While Christ proffers man a grace which was unavailable for Jew or
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Gentile prior to his coming, yet the Christian has the power of will freely to avail himself of this divine assistance. Adam's sin set a bad example, which the rest of us have been unhappily only too apt to follow. This example, however, holy men in all ages have freely resisted, and the blessed counter-example of Christ can stimulate us all freely to exert our wills and attain unto salvation. In the life of the Church our capacity for good is perfected, and the evil example of Adam loses its influence. Here then was stalwart devotion to virtue, but also a sanguine view of man's lot and of his prospects.

St. Augustine attacks Manicheanism all the more vigorously because the heresy had claimed him for about ten years prior to his conversion; to root it out, therefore, was his first duty as a laborer in the Lord's vineyard. Holding fast to God's omnipotence, he rejects all dualism. There can be no evil power in the universe coördinate with sovereign Deity. And since the world is the work of an almighty, all-wise, and infinitely just and good Creator, no essential flaw in nature imputable to God can be admitted. All that is positive and substantial in the universe is and manifests divine perfection. There is no duality of cosmic principles, nor a duality of souls in us, nor is the world-process one of self-degradation and self-dissipation of Deity. Evil is no-wise substantial in this world; there is nowhere and at no time an evil nature. Matter is not evil, nor body, nor the flesh: "Every nature, as far as it is nature, is good; . . . Take from waters their thickness and muddiness, and pure clear water remains; take from them the consistence of their parts, and no water will be left." So with everything else in nature. On a dozen fronts Augustine maintains this position: that which is called evil is nothing but corruption, perversion of nature. "When the will abandons
what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil—not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked. Therefore it is not an inferior thing which has made the will evil, but it is itself which has become so by wickedly and inordinately desiring an inferior thing.” Not the beast, but man alone is beastly; a beast’s nature is in man a vice. The will is made evil by nothing else than a defection from God and from good, by inordinate and unnatural self-degradation, in the literal sense of the term. Were it unwilling to become so, the will could not become evil; our sins, being not necessary but voluntary, are therefore justly punished.

There is an optimistic note in this eulogy of uncorrupted nature and in this libertarian doctrine which Augustine was compelled later to modify or disavow in order to render his own maturer views more distinct. While he rejected evil as a cosmic principle, pronounced all things good in their proper order, and called evil a corruption and unnatural, his libertarianism and even his optimism were solemn rather than sanguine. He had defended the cosmos from the calumny of the Manicheans; was he now to yield to the Pelagian complacency about sinful human nature? God forbid! This was to him an equally fatal though opposite abyss of error. “Your doctrines are amazing, they are new, they are false.” Maintaining against the Manicheans that all nature is appointed by God, Augustine now turns with equal resolution to maintain against the Pelagians that in all ages human nature must be sought after as ruined. For as it seemed to St. Augustine, Pelagianism not only ignored light-mindedly the gravity of the evil in which we are embroiled, but it was flagrantly unchristian. Is man an active contributor to his own salvation, and is ‘grace’ simply “a help towards good living . . . through the inspiring
influence of a burning and shining charity?" Thus conceived, the divine plan of redemption loses all solemnity, and indeed loses meaning. This cannot be Christianity.

How then is the actuality of evil in this world to be recognized, and man's ruined state and utter need of divine redemption emphasized, without on that account implicating God as responsible for the evil in the world and disparaging either his omnipotence or his infinite wisdom or goodness? *The City of God* is, among other things, a resolute portrayal of the wickedness and the countless miseries of our human estate. "For what flood of eloquence can suffice to detail the miseries of this life? . . . Its brevity . . . does not clear it of misery; neither ought it be called happiness because it is a brief misery." Evil is here in abundance in God's own world, but God is not to blame for it. Who then is to blame? The initial defection of man's will from God is to blame is Augustine's answer. If Adam's will had not been free, his choice would have lacked moral quality. So God could not deny to Adam the possibility of a good or an evil choice. In the exercise of this his freedom man actually made an evil choice, and in the fatal consequences of this evil choice the whole human race is involved. God "foreknew what he would do in unrighteousness; foreknew, however, but did not force him to this; but at the same time He knew what He Himself would do in righteousness concerning him." So God did not compel, but only did not prevent the evil choice; foreseeing completely what He did not in any way predetermine, God justly foreordained the inevitable consequences: consequences utterly and eternally disastrous to man but for the infinite grace of God. Grace and salvation God owes to none, yet vouchsafes it: whether to all or only to some, is a point too long disputed to allow of being maintained unflinchingly.
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This masterpiece of theological ingenuity which, in one doctrine, emphasizes the actual evil in the world, yet exculpates the Creator of the world from any responsibility for it, but ascribes it rather to man's evil choice, therein also recognizing God's tragic respect for man's moral freedom: this theodicy sets its mark on all subsequent Christian thought, but is itself constituted of elements so incongruous that Augustine's successors have had to interpret and reinterpet and trim and fit and adjust. If we observe the moral tone which Augustine maintained in ascribing to man responsibility for the evil which his choice has brought into the world, then that disastrous choice could not be regarded as a matter of unaccountable chance. It was a choice representative of the chooser. But in that case, even granting Adam's immediate responsibility for the particular choice, the more ultimate question arises whether the Creator is nowise accountable for the sort of chooser He had in his creature. The point is even sharper if we ask: Was it impossible for God to create an Adam who could freely choose good as He did create one who freely chose evil? The dilemma which would follow the asking of this question is decidedly embarrassing to Augustinian orthodoxy. Furthermore if Adam deserved the evil consequences of his freely chosen course, how is it with the rest of us? Can we also, as he hypothetically could, choose of our own free will either good or evil? But that alternative would surely betray us into the hands of the Pelagians. Or are we, as Augustine indeed maintains, utterly incapable of any good choice of our own, tainted as we are with the taint of original sin? Then on this latter supposition, is the individual damnation of those of us who are not elected to grace, or at any rate do not attain unto it, a damnation morally justifiable? Are we to suffer eternally as individuals for a sinful
nature for which no free choice of our own, but rather a fatal racial inheritance, was responsible?

Should we, in order to evade these difficulties, regard Adam and his evil choice, not as referring to an individual and a particular event, but as truly representing humanity, then the same dilemmas simply spread out and cover a larger canvas: Either the moral freedom, involving the possible choice of evil or good, is admitted, in which case Pelagianism meets us at the turn of the road; or else man’s allegedly free will in actuality always chooses evil, in which case the gravity of the former dilemma, hard enough for the one chooser Adam, is multiplied a thousandfold. It is hard for original sin and moral freedom to keep company in the same logical head.

The idea of an evil worldly state brought about by man’s self-will, and the consequent advocacy of the denial of self as essential to godliness characterize the medieval conception of life. Modern man, however, does not philosophize in sackcloth and ashes, nor on bended knees. Though the old controversies may be resumed, as by Leibniz against Bayle, modern science and philosophy have won their autonomy, and the theologian no longer directs the course of the debate. The shafts of Voltaire’s satire pierced the foundations of Leibniz’s theodicy, and, as a result of the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant, the problem of value, just as all other ultimate problems, was placed on a new basis. Instead of beginning dogmatically with a certain definite conception of God, and imposing on the mind an estimate of the world consistent with this initial definition of Deity, or else lapsing into quandary and scepticism, the modern mind now undertakes an examination and estimate of the world of our experiences, resolved to accept whatever conclusions seem necessary regarding the values of
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life. But modern thought is by no means coldly impersonal: here temperamental bias seems to replace theological commitment. Optimism and pessimism are thus apt to express the poetic and the religious, rather than the scientific aspect of philosophy. As we have sought to point out elsewhere, there is at least as much temperament in Schopenhauer's pessimistic philosophy as there is philosophy in the pessimistic poetry of a Leopardi.¹ Some of these versions of modern disenchantment and gloom will be considered in the two essays that follow.