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The
Deansgate
Lectures.

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL.

By

REV. HASTINGS RASHDALL,

D.LITT., D.C.L., CANON OF HEREFORD.

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NOTE.

This Lecture, delivered in the Milton Hall, as one of the series of the "DEANSGATE LECTURES" on "RELIGION AND MODERN THOUGHT," is printed in response to a general desire to have it published in a form suitable for local circulation. The Committee wish to express their indebtedness to the Lecturer for kindly giving his consent to such publication.

J. ROSS MURRAY.

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH HOUSE,
MANCHESTER.

Oct. 31st, 1912.



THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

THERE are points of view from which the problem of evil cannot be said to exist. To the perfectly contented believer in pure Materialism or pure Naturalism there cannot be such a thing as a problem of evil. If any one supposes that the Universe is simply a huge machine which was at one time a *mere* machine—mindless, unconscious, purposeless—but which at some late period in its history suddenly delivered itself of consciousness, a consciousness which, nevertheless, even now takes no real part in the working of the machine—for him the existence of evil in the world involves no difficulty. From such a point of view it cannot be a matter of surprise that the machine should produce results which are very much contrary to the wishes, inclinations, the so-called purposes, of the little creatures who fondly imagine themselves to be taking some small part in the working of the machine. If anyone finds it reasonable to believe that such things as pleasure, pain, thought, conscience, goodness, sin, remorse, purpose, are so many mere waste bye-products of the vast machine, which would go on just in exactly the same way even if these things had never come into being—from this point of view there is nothing to explain in the fact that among these conscious bye-products

of the Unconscious some should seem highly unsatisfactory to the individuals who are conscious. For those who believe that there is no such thing as *purpose* in the world, the fact that the actual results should be different from those which a rational and righteous human being would purpose, or (if we adhere to the materialistic position) would imagine himself to purpose, is not a circumstance which requires any explanation at all. But at the present day a contented acquiescence in such a view of the Universe is much less frequently met with than was the case a generation or two ago. Even the Agnosticism which contemplates such a view of the Universe as a possible one, without positively affirming it to be true, is very much less common than it used to be in the days when Huxley and Tyndall were generally accepted as the leaders of scientific thought.

From the most opposite points of view we find a growing disposition to suspect at least that the Universe has a purpose of some kind. Even from the purely scientific point of view it is found increasingly difficult to explain the phenomena of living organisms without assuming that there is some sort of purpose, some tendency to an end, some striving, either on the part of the organisms themselves or of the Whole which has produced such organisms. And among professed philosophers—amid the widest differences in other respects—the disposition to explain the world teleologically is all but universal. I will just mention two of the best known philosophers of the present day. I mention these particular thinkers because they are men whose names are well known outside the circle of professed students of Philosophy. In other ways the philosophy of Bergson and that of our present philosophical Lord Chancellor are poles asunder; but in their demonstration of the impossibility of explaining biological phenomena in terms of mechanism they are absolutely at one. I could not suggest a better corrective of the tendency to imagine that the world is a mere mechanism than

a perusal of Bergson's "Evolution Creatrice" or of Lord Haldane's "Pathway to Reality." And directly you begin to attribute to the world a purpose, the problem presents itself: "Why, if there is a purpose in the whole, should so much of that whole be so unlike anything which a good and reasonable man would be likely to purpose"? Not all the thinkers who believe that the Universe has a purpose are what we call Theists—believers in God—in the full sense of the word. There are those who talk about an unconscious purpose in the Universe—a very unintelligible self-contradictory conception to my mind—but I must not stop to criticize. There are others whose conception of God hovers somewhere between that of a conscious purposive Will and that of an inanimate force. There are again Pluralists who fully admit that a purpose implies a purposer, but who regard the events of the world's history as due not to the purpose of one single all-controlling Mind, but to a multitude of independent minds, uncreated, co-eternal, each controlling bits of nature but none of them controlling the whole. To all these alike the existence of evil is a difficulty which has got to be explained. But it may be admitted that the difficulty is greatest to the thorough-going Theist who explains the course of Nature as due to the volition of a single, conscious, rational Will, which, with all due recognition of the inadequacy of such a mode of expression, he does not hesitate to call a Person. It is from such a point of view that I propose to approach the subject myself this evening.

Why we should suppose that there is a purpose in the world, and why we should think that the hypothesis of thorough-going Theism offers a more satisfactory explanation of that purpose than any other form of Spiritualistic belief, I cannot fully set forth this evening. That is the supreme problem of Metaphysic, and if I were to attempt to deal with it at all seriously, I should not have time to reach my proper subject, which is the problem how this Theistic view of the Universe

is reconcilable with the existence of so much evil in the world—so much pain, so much ugliness, so much error, so much of the worse evil which we call sin.

And yet I do not like to pass over that greater and wider question entirely. I should just like to indicate some of the lines of thought which lead to that great conclusion. You must regard what I shall say as rather a personal confession as to my own reasons for accepting it than as an attempt to argue the matter out and to meet the objections which may be made to it.

(1) In the first place there is the fact of the existence of the Self and its activity. The theory that our thoughts, emotions, volitions and other psychical experiences are the mere bye-product—Epiphenomena as they call it—of purely physical processes is one which on the face of it will strike most ordinary minds as incredible. Actually to disprove this theory would require a long argument. Those who care to go to the bottom of the matter may be referred to Dr. McDougall's recent book "Body and Mind." Dr. McDougall discusses the subject from a purely scientific point of view, and shows how utterly destitute of empirical justification the theory is. I must not go into his arguments now, still less can I discuss the matter from a more metaphysical point of view. And yet after all the most that either psychologist or metaphysician can do is to show the unsoundness of the reasons which have been given against acquiescing in the plain man's immediate conviction that he himself both exists and acts—that whatever the relation may be between mind and body, he is at least something more than a mere series of conscious states produced by purely physical causes, that he really does determine in some measure the direction of his own thought and the motion of his own limbs. Now if *we* are spiritual, if *we* are active, is it probable that the ultimate cause of all phenomena should be something unconscious, inactive, unpurposeful? The

common-sense of mankind will, I believe, in the long run reject such a suggestion as entirely incredible.

No doubt if you are not contented with this appeal to what strikes the ordinary mind as probable or improbable, you will have to come to closer grips with the metaphysical problem, and if you do so, you will perhaps discover that on further reflection, not only is it incredible that mind should actually be evolved out of a mindless and purely material Universe, but the very notion of matter without mind is incredible and self-contradictory. Matter is a thing which we know only as entering into the experience of mind, and it is quite a gratuitous assumption to suppose that matter does or can exist except as the object of some mind. That is the solution to the philosophical problem which is commonly called Idealism. I cannot stay to unfold the argument which leads up to it. I will only just say in passing, that to myself this line of thought constitutes the surest and most strictly scientific proof of Theism.

(2) After this glance at a more difficult line of metaphysical thought, I will just touch upon another which is less difficult. Even if it be supposed that there is no impossibility about supposing matter to exist without mind, I would remind you that our experience of material things tells us nothing about causes. We see one event following upon another, we do not *see* one event cause another. So far Hume's contention has never been refuted. Everywhere in Nature, so far as external experience goes, we discover sequence but not causality. And yet we undoubtedly have got in our minds this idea of a Cause, nay more, we cannot help supposing that every event in the Universe must have a cause. Where then do we get this idea of Causality from? I answer confidently and boldly "from our own consciousness of volition." I am immediately conscious of willing some things—the succession of thoughts for instance which I am endeavouring to set before you this evening. I am

conscious that *I* am a cause. And from that it seems reasonable to infer that if the events in nature have a cause—the events not caused by myself or any other human or animal intelligence—they too must be willed, and must be willed by a conscious, rational Being, which we can best think of after the analogy of our own conscious wills. That is one of the most convincing lines of Theistic thought, and it is one which is sanctioned by a whole line of philosophical thinkers widely differing in other respects. Some of you will be surprised to learn that Mr. Herbert Spencer must be included in that number. Mr. Herbert Spencer distinctly held that our idea of Causality was derived from our conscious experience in willing. And, in his own words, “This necessity in our minds to think of the external energy in terms of the internal energy, gives rather a spiritualistic than a materialistic aspect to the Universe.” We are accustomed to hear Mr. Spencer spoken of as the typical Agnostic, but surely in the face of such a declaration the appellation is a misnomer. If the energy which causes all the events of the Universe is to be thought of as something like our own personalities and not as something like inanimate matter, we do know a great deal about it, and something which it is very important to know. This is one of the passages which go to prove Mr. F. H. Bradley’s famous remark that Mr. Spencer has told us more about the Unknowable than the rashest of Theologians has ever ventured to tell us about God.

(3) And now I will go on to a further step. If the Ultimate Cause of all things is purposeful, He must aim at some end which seems to Him good. We, in proportion as our conduct is rational and reflective, always do aim at some end; but we do not on reflection look upon all ends as equally good. We are conscious of drawing a distinction between ends. We distinguish between some ends which we think good and others which we look upon as bad, and that not merely from our private and personal point of

view but from a universal point of view also. We are conscious of regarding some ends to which we might personally be inclined, as bad, and others to which (apart from such reflection) we might feel no inclination as good. Sometimes we regard one end of action as intrinsically higher and better for ourselves; at other times we think of one end as better than another because it is a universal end—a good for society so great as to outweigh our own private and personal good. We are conscious that we ought to aim at the higher rather than the lower, at the universal good rather than at the private and personal, even when in point of fact we do aim at the lower or the personal. We think it rational to act in this way, we condemn ourselves when we do not so act. It is not merely that certain kinds of conduct excite in us certain emotions—that we individually like one kind of conduct and dislike another, but we regard one kind of conduct as intrinsically rational, the other as irrational. And that means that we believe that all other rational beings must think the same. In other words these moral judgments of ours claim objectivity. For our mere likings or dislikings we claim no such objectivity. We don't insist that, if we like mustard, another man who dislikes it must be wrong. We should think it ridiculous to dispute whether mustard is objectively nice or objectively nasty. We are content to say that mustard is nice to one man, nasty to another. If our moral judgments were matters of feeling or emotion (as has of course sometimes been contended) they would be in the same case. But most of us find it quite impossible to acquiesce in that way of looking at Duty. Certain ends present themselves to us as ends which *ought* to be promoted. And we have every bit as much right to claim objectivity for these moral judgments of ours as for the proposition that three and two make five, or that two straight lines cannot enclose a space, or that one syllogism is a good and valid argument, and another—with some of the recognised logical

fallacies in it for instance—is a bad, invalid argument which does not prove its conclusion. Why do we believe these things? Because we immediately see them to be true. We believe them for exactly the same reason that we believe anything—because we cannot help believing them. We have exactly the same reason for believing the proposition that the good of many is more valuable than the good of one, or that pleasure is better than pain, or love better than cruelty. This involves, observe, no claim to personal infallibility. We may make mistakes in detail in our moral judgments, just as we may make mistakes in doing a sum. The rules of Logic are not shown to be invalid because at every general election more bad arguments are used, on both sides, than good ones. What we mean by claiming objective validity for these moral judgments is that we judge them to belong to the same class of truths as matters of science or matters of history—the truths which are true for everyone, so that if A is right in asserting them, B who denies them must be wrong—not like matters of taste in which two men may differ without either of them being wrong.

Now if these moral judgments of ours are objectively valid, observe what follows. We have every reason to assume that they are valid for God as well as for man. We always do that with such matters as Arithmetic. We don't suppose that Arithmetic is a purely human affair; we do not believe that for human beings, indeed, two and two make four, but that to God they may for all we know make five. What is really true, we believe, must be true for God as well as for man. We have every bit as much right to assume that the idea of Good is valid for God as well as for men; and even that, though doubtless our moral judgments are often wrong in detail, the most fundamental of our moral judgments are revelations—imperfect, inadequate, fragmentary revelations of the truth as it is for God. If therefore we are justified in assuming that these truths hold for God, and that the course

of the world's history is willed by God, we must suppose that they are willed because they promote the end which presents itself to Him as good. We must suppose that God, too, is aiming at an end not fundamentally different from the ideal which is set up before us by our own moral judgments. That is only to put into a more exact and philosophical form what is more popularly expressed by the old doctrine that the voice of conscience is the voice of God.

And now we come back to the problem which I have promised to discuss this evening—the problem why it is that a world which we have so much reason for believing to be willed by a rational and righteous spirit, should, in fact, contain so much that strikes us as evil.

As to the matter of fact I suppose no one will have any serious doubt. As to the proportion of good and evil in the world, men will differ according to their temperaments, their circumstances, their experiences: but that there is in the world very much suffering, much undeserved suffering, a distribution of happiness and misery which strikes us as unjust, arbitrary, and capricious in the highest degree, and that there is a worse evil in the world called sin—an evil which (however we dispose of the Freewill difficulty) cannot in all cases be put down wholly and solely to the undetermined choice of the individual evil-doer—this much I suppose nobody will seriously question. The problem is why should there be any evil at all in a world ruled by a good and wise God?

There are three possible ways of meeting this supreme difficulty: (1) In the first place it may be denied that evil is really evil. This is a very fashionable doctrine among philosophers; and we often find something very like this theory in more popular forms of religious teaching—in the speculations of the Christian Scientists for instance. The people who hold this view do not of course deny for practical purposes the authority of Conscience or the difference

between right and wrong. They admit that we as men are bound by the moral law : and many of them may practically, as men and as moralists, be quite enthusiastically on the side of the angels, as it is called. But from a speculative point of view they hold that after all morality is a merely human affair. It is merely due to our too limited point of view that we cannot rid ourselves of the obstinate prejudice that pain or sin is a bad thing. They are no doubt bad, or at least they necessarily seem so to us, when looked at in themselves and apart from their relation to the whole. But when looked at from the point of the whole, from the point of view of absolute knowledge, they will be seen merely to add to the perfect beauty and harmony of the Universe. The man who would will them away is like the crude art critic who would paint out the shadows in the picture as so many blemishes, or who would strike out the discords which when duly "resolved" (as musicians say) do but add to the perfection of the symphony. For chloroform to have been discovered a century before it actually was discovered, or for Cæsar Borgia to have committed a crime or two less than he actually did commit, would have only marred the perfect æsthetic effect of the world's history which such persons are disposed to look upon as a highly entertaining tragi-comedy got up for the amusement of a few non-moral savants and perhaps of a Deity also is thought of as very much like those savants. All such speculations must, as it seems to me, founder upon this rock. Either our moral judgments are valid or they are not. If they are not valid, you have no right—it is, indeed, meaningless—to say that the world is very good. You derive that idea of good from your own moral consciousness ; and you can derive it from no other source. If the moral consciousness is an organ of truth, if the distinctions which it draws are truthful and valid distinctions, what reason have you for reversing the judgments which your moral consciousness actually pronounces? As a matter of fact we judge that

pain and ugliness and sin are bad. To treat the bare notion or category of good in general as possessing objective validity, while you say that all the things which we judge bad are really very good, is just like pronouncing that our category of quantity does indeed possess objective validity and is true even in and for God or (some philosophers would say) for the Absolute, but nevertheless to assert that the multiplication-table in detail is all wrong, and that for God or the Absolute two and two make five.

To put the matter still more simply, either the human Conscience tells us the truth or it does not. If it does not, we have no reason whatever for thinking that God is good; we have no reason indeed for supposing that anybody or anything in the world is either good or evil. If it does speak the truth, we have no reason for thinking that pain and sin are anything but the evils which Conscience undoubtedly pronounces them to be.

(2) The alternative way of dealing with the difficulty is to suppose that, while the designs or intentions of God are good, He is prevented from carrying them out without allowing or (to put it more frankly) causing some measure of evil. That is exactly the way we should explain the action of a good and wise man whom we actually find causing evil—a surgeon causing exquisite pain by an operation, a wise administrator of the poor law refusing to relieve suffering which in the particular case may well be quite undeserved, a religious-minded statesman sentencing thousands of men to death and torture by declaring war. We say that he adopts means in themselves evil because they are means to a greater good which he cannot attain without them. We don't say, be it observed, that he is doing *wrong*: because it is not wrong to do evil as a means to the good—if the good is really sufficient to outweigh the evil. We don't say *he* is evil, but on the other hand we don't say that the evil which he thus causes ceases to be evil because it leads to good.

But whence arises for God this impossibility of getting the good without the evil? Whence comes the lack of power to do the good without the evil? The first answer that may be given to this question is to suppose that the lack of power arises from outside—from the existence of obstacles outside Himself. This is of course, strictly speaking, to go back upon Theism in the sense of which I have defined it, and in which it is generally understood. But I do not at all wish to exclude *a priori* the possibility of such a combination of Theism with some measure of Pluralism—a combination which has sometimes been attempted by religious and even Christian thinkers. God may be supposed to be the supreme and directing principle in the Universe while there are other forms of being too, not created by Himself, which are capable of offering a certain amount of resistance to His will. The most natural and obvious way of thinking of such a principle is to identify this obstructive element with matter. Now this was to the naïf intelligence of the ancient world a very natural hypothesis. To Aristotle of course matter was eternal; it was controlled by Mind, but not wholly controlled. Nature wants, he tells us, to make all things for the best, but sometimes it cannot. Nature wants to make all cows four-legged: the idea of a cow, the typical cow undoubtedly has four legs, but occasionally one is born with six legs. The vagary is due to the imperfection—the original sin we may call it—of the particular piece of matter on which Nature was trying to stamp its universal type of a cow. All the peculiarities of individual things were accounted for in that way; they were just like the varying impressions of a single seal upon different pieces of wax. The imperfection of the wax accounts for the varying degree of imperfection in the impression. Now it must be admitted that in the superficial aspects of Nature there is much which suggests such a hypothesis. Things do look very much as if there was an Intelligence at work struggling

against obstacles. But such a mode of thinking does not in general commend itself to the modern mind for two reasons. In the first place it seems inconsistent with the modern conception of laws of nature, which are obeyed always and not only, as Aristotle thought, "for the most part": Aristotle had not the slightest notion that the *lusus naturæ* (such as the birth of the six-legged cow) could be accounted for by fixed laws just as much as the normal case of the four-legged individual. And, secondly, it implies a distinction between what matter is and what matter does, which is entirely opposed to the tendencies of modern Physics. The theory in question regards matter as a dead inert stuff which has no definite qualities, which can only derive its distinguishing qualities from an externally imposed "form," and which cannot move without being set in motion from the outside either by other matter or in the last resort by an external mind dwelling outside the material Universe. This view of things is not open to those who regard the power of attracting other matter as an essential part of what is meant by matter, who tend to regard matter and force as inseparable, if they do not actually resolve material atoms or their ultimate constituents into "centres of force." The conception then of a dead, brute, inert matter which offers resistance to Mind is not welcome to the man of Science, while the idea of such an absolute antagonism between matter and mind is repugnant to all metaphysicians whose tendencies are at all in an idealistic direction. For these reasons we do not hear much of such views in recent times. I may therefore be excused from saying more about them. As a matter of fact the attempt to think of God as existing from all eternity side by side with other beings not of his own creation is generally made from a spiritualistic or idealistic point of view. The outside resisting principle is supposed to consist in minds or souls, whether the minds of men or animals or possibly another kind of souls, which are supposed to be the reality which

underlies what we call matter considered as uncreated and pre-existent. The hypothesis of eternally pre-existent souls is no doubt in many ways attractive. It offers an easy explanation of evil. It enables us to say simply, "it is an ultimate fact that so many independent centres of consciousness have existed from all eternity—some good, some in various degrees bad." The world-process can then be looked upon as a process by which the evil is gradually being eliminated, and the good developed, by a perfectly good Being who is the most powerful Being in the Universe but not all-powerful. In this way it becomes possible to regard God as not only good but as not in any sense whatever the author of evil. The hypothesis is in many ways attractive, and it is one which does not admit of absolutely conclusive refutation; but it does to my mind involve immense difficulties—difficulties which are enormously greater than those which it avoids. Here I will only mention one. Whatever our exact view may be as to the relation between mind and body, it will scarcely be denied that they are in some way or other very closely connected. The development of mind goes on *pari passu* with material processes in the brain and nervous system. The natural inference is that whatever power it is which causes the successive steps of the material process causes also the accompanying psychical or mental changes. If the physical changes are caused by God, so must the psychical or mental changes be. It is an extraordinarily difficult supposition to hold that the bodily changes and all that happens to the soul from without, are, indeed, caused by God, while the original existence of the soul to which these changes occur, and all that results from its original nature, are quite independent of His Will. And this difficulty is increased ten-fold by the facts of heredity. Children have a way of resembling their parents; yet we must suppose, on the pre-existence hypothesis, that there is no causal connection between the mental qualities of the parent

and that of the child. Shakespeare's soul must then have been kept waiting in some limbo of disembodied spirits till a couple happened to marry at Stratford Church whose mental characteristics presented a sufficiently close resemblance to Shakespeare's to afford a delusive appearance of having had something to do with his appearance on this earth, and whose physical structure was such as to give rise to a body with a brow sufficiently massive to suggest the semblance of having been in some way utilised for the production of Hamlet, and then just at that moment the soul of Shakespeare was introduced into the infant or the embryo or the germ-cell or whatever it may be. The underlying motive, I cannot help suspecting, of these theories of pre-existence is a sort of anthropomorphic desire to make the task of the Deity easier by relieving Him of the responsibility of creation, and reducing His function to mere direction. It is supposed to be so much easier to control than to create. But I cannot help thinking that creation is a task whose difficulties sink into insignificance compared with the task of assigning suitable bodies to so many souls with whose existence and characteristics the assumed ruler had nothing to do. These are but a few specimens of the difficulties which such theories present. They will not of course be regarded as final by those who have definitely adopted the theory, but I must go on to explain what I regard as the right answer to our problem.

(3) If the limitation of power which explains the causality of evil by a perfectly righteous Will is not to be explained by the existence of beings or forces which are outside of Him, it must be due to an internal or original limitation of Power. There is, of course, nothing at all novel in this solution of the difficulty. God, according to this view, causes evil as a means to the greatest possible good on the whole. It is substantially the explanation which is accepted by all theistic philosophers and theologians who do not take refuge in some form or other of the doctrine that what we call evil is not really

evil. Only, too many of these have combined the explanation with all sorts of doctrines or assertions which are really inconsistent with it. Too many, who have actually offered this explanation of the existence of evil, try to conceal or evade the necessary implication that God is not Omnipotent in the popular sense of being able to do anything that we take into our heads to imagine. I say the popular sense, for it is not really the orthodox sense. A philosopher so conservative as Leibnitz thought it enough to maintain that the world was the best of all possible worlds, not the best of all imaginable worlds. Omnipotence is defined by St. Thomas Aquinas as the power of doing all possible things. The theology of St. Thomas is taught in every Roman Seminary. It is the theology of the Pope. You can't be more orthodox than St. Thomas, though I find myself accused of all sorts of heresies when I venture occasionally to agree with him.

Before I go on to consider some of the difficulties or objections which this theory has to meet, I should like to call attention to the absolute baselessness and gratuitousness of the contrary supposition. Theists and non-theists alike often talk as though there were some strong *primâ facie* reason for believing that, if there is a God at all, He must be of unlimited power as well as of unlimited goodness. I venture to suggest that the theory of unlimited power is one which has simply nothing to be said for it. It was pointed out long ago by Kant that no finite exhibition of wisdom or power which we may discover in Nature will prove unlimited power; it could only prove the existence of power sufficient to cause the actually observed effects, although in other ways he attempted to get rid of the natural inference from this observation.

It is curious what difficulty some minds, especially among the professional philosophers, seem to find in the notion of an intrinsic original limitation of power—not caused by the existence of concrete, outside independent obstacles to the exercise of power. This is due largely, I think, to that old

source of philosophical error—the abuse of spacial metaphor. They seem unable to understand the idea of a limit except in the form of a limit in space created by the existence of material things or at least of spirits which in this connection they generally talk about as if they occupied space. They suppose that a limit to the power of God can only spring from the existence side by side with Him of some other things or forces or spirits which He did not create, which offer a resistance to His will and which He can but imperfectly control. But surely this is not necessary to the idea of a limit. After all, the most orthodox do admit some limit of the power of God. It is not considered necessary to the omnipotence of God to suppose that He can change the past or cause 2×2 to $= 5$, or construct triangles with their interior angles not equal to two right angles. The limit that I assume is of exactly the same nature. It will be suggested that these last limitations mentioned are not really limitations, for the idea of freedom from such limits is really meaningless. Be it so. Then I will venture to contend that at bottom the idea of unlimited power is quite equally meaningless. A being who could do anything whatever—any possible combination of things—would be a being without any distinct properties or attributes in nature. To explain events by referring them to such a Will is not an explanation; it is the negation of explanation. A cause is something which necessarily produces or accounts for a certain effect. To say that God caused 2,000,000 souls to be in existence at a certain date, when He might just as well have caused 3,000,000 does not explain why there should be in point of fact 2,000,000 souls and not 3,000,000. God is limited simply by His own eternal Nature. This is generally admitted by theologians as regards limitations arising from the character of God. It is not considered necessary to the Omnipotence or to the freedom of God to maintain that He could do things inconsistent with His character, that He should be able to cause

evil for instance otherwise than as a means to good—except by those theologians, neither numerous nor very important, who have frankly denied all intrinsic distinction between good and evil, and made morality itself depend upon the arbitrary will of God. Why should there not be a limitation of the same intrinsic nature to the power of God? And it is, I contend, demonstrable that unless you do admit such a limitation, you simply cannot maintain the unlimited goodness of God, except by the aid of some one or other of the sophisms which seek to show that an evil which tends to good is not really evil. And even then you do not escape. Let us assume that there is no positive evil in the Universe. Even so, the amount of good in the world must surely be limited. No matter what we consider to be the Good—pleasure, virtue, knowledge, or any combination of these—still the number of souls enjoying that good at a given time must be a limited number. The existence of twice that number would be a greater good. Why was there not that greater good? If you say “God could have created twice that number, but did not,” you surely represent Him as deficient in goodness or love. He would have shown His greater love by doubling the number. And so on *ad infinitum*. No matter how many souls you suppose to be in existence, you could always conceive more, and the existence of that more would always be a greater good.

Another fact which accounts to some extent for the difficulty which some people experience in grasping this idea of an inherently limited power is the undoubted fact that there does not exist any perfectly satisfactory analogy for such a conception. From the nature of the case, we cannot point to any other thing or being whose powers are limited merely by its own internal nature and not also to some extent by its environment. Shakespeare’s power of literary production was no doubt limited *in part* by the nature of his own mind, but the nature of that mind was itself partly

determined by its relation to his brain, by his education, by his being an Englishman of the sixteenth century and so on; and his powers of production were further limited by the physical inability of his hand to write more than a certain number of words per minute. It is not therefore due entirely to an internal limitation that he only produced some thirty-five plays, and only some half-dozen masterpieces up to the level of Hamlet. It is partly due to the environment—to things outside himself. But still there is no difficulty in the conception of a being whose limitations should be purely internal. It is not impossible to suppose Shakespeare's mind altogether isolated from its surroundings; if it were so, we should not then feel bound to say that the fact that he was incapable of writing the *Novum Organum* and discovering the circulation of the blood besides producing his thirty-five plays must have been due to the jealousy or the mean intrigues or the physical interference of Bacon and Harvey. We should say he did not do these things because he had it not in him to do them, or that (if he had) that would have demanded such a concentration of his powers upon Philosophy and Science as would have been incompatible with his also producing thirty-five plays in a given number of years.

Before I conclude, there is one objection that I should like briefly to meet. It has been urged by Dr. McTaggart, of Cambridge—a philosopher who does not believe in anything like a personal God at all, though he does believe in a personal Immortality—that the notion of a creative God who is nevertheless a God of limited power, involves this difficulty. A limited God, he suggests, might be a defeated God. The existence of such a God would supply no guarantee not merely for the goodness of every particular thing in the Universe but even for its goodness on the whole. It does not assure us even that "Good must be the final end of ill." Such a God might do His best for the world but He might fail; the forces of evil might prevail in the end. I answer

“Not so. This is a mere caricature of the theory.” On my view there are no forces of evil in the world except the forces which God has caused and continues to cause; and God would not have caused them at all unless he had been conscious of the power to overcome them sufficiently to produce a balance of good on the whole. This much we may assert confidently. Our whole view is based upon the theory that there is no cause in the world ultimately but a rational Will; and a rational Will can only be supposed to will evil as a means to good. The amount of good in the world must certainly preponderate over the evil, or there would have been no creation at all. I think we may go a step further than that, and say that the good must very enormously preponderate over the evil; for the mere non-existence of good seems on rational reflection to be a much less evil than the existence of positive evil. And this consideration, I would add, as it seems to me, carries with it the postulate of Immortality. I do not think we could reasonably regard the world as involving an enormous preponderance of good over evil, unless we did suppose that for the higher and more developed spirits at least the life that we know of on this earth is but a part of the whole—a discipline, a preparation, an education for something indefinitely better. But however high in fact the amount of good that may hereafter be realized in a future state of being, that will never actually cancel the evil which has been experienced on the way to it. The good without the evil would always have been better, if it had been possible to attain the good without the evil.

Why all this evil should be necessary as the means to an ultimate good on the whole, why God should not be able to attain His highest ends *per saltum* as it were, by a sudden creation of the highest spirits that this earth has known and not by a slow process of evolution from the *amæba* to man, involving so much suffering and so much baseness of life on the way, wherein lies the meaning and necessity of each

particular evil—these are questions, of course, which we can never answer. We can see that, under the artificial conditions of human life, evil is often a condition of good. We see how the faculties of animals and men have been developed and improved by the struggle with what often seems a cruel and pitiless nature; we see how individual character is tried and strengthened by the struggle with temptation and difficulty, with evil within and evil without. But why there should be this conditioning of good by evil, we cannot say. We can only say that we have every reason to believe it to be part of the ultimate nature of things, which (if we are Theists) means the ultimate nature of God. There is, be it observed, a limit to all possible explanation. We cannot explain everything. To explain means to show that something is what it is because something else is what it is. We must at last come to something or some Being which simply *is* what it is. If we find that something in the eternal nature of one Spirit, we can only explain the presence of evil in a world which that Spirit causes either by supposing Him to have a limited amount of Power, or a limited amount of Love or Goodwill. I cannot understand how anyone who thinks that Christ's conception of the Heavenly Father was the true one should have any hesitation as to which alternative to prefer.

And now let me briefly point out what a much more bracing and stimulating view of the Universe this conception supplies us with than the common popular notion of a God who could cause all the good without the evil, but simply does not choose to do so. The notion that God can do all things, and that therefore what we do or don't do cannot in the long run matter very much, has been, I believe, a fruitful cause of moral indifference and social apathy. I don't mean that people have very often said this to themselves in so many words, but at the bottom of their hearts there has lurked the idea that, if they can just secure personal forgiveness for themselves before they die, what they have done or not done

won't matter. All the evil they have done can be neutralised some day by the fiat of Omnipotence. It is well that we should remind ourselves that the pain and suffering we have caused by our conduct, the lives that have been spoiled by our neglect, can never be made as though they had never been. Good may be brought out of evil; the good that we might have done may be done by another hereafter, the people who have been made miserable or base by our neglect, may hereafter be made happier and better; but the particular good there might have been had we acted otherwise will never be. It will always remain true that the world *with* the good that we did not do would have been a better place than the world without such a good. The conception of a God who might have produced all the good there is without the evil, and simply did not choose to do, contains in it little to excite reverence, little to inspire love or to stimulate endeavour. Far more consolatory, bracing, stimulating is the conception of God who calls upon men to become, in a quite literal sense, fellow-workers with Him who works in and through human wills, and who through the co-operation of those wills is conducting the Universe to the greatest good that He knows to be possible of attainment. That is exactly the conception of God which St. Paul seems to have had before his mind when he spoke of himself and his colleagues as workers together and fellow-workers with God, and called upon his converts also to co-operate with God ("we, then, as workers together with Him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain,") or again when he invited them to work out their own salvation, "*for* it is God that worketh in you."

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