The Problem of the Existence of Moral Evil.

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IN a previous article I endeavoured to show that the problem of suffering or of physical evil does not present insuperable difficulties to Christian or theistic belief, because in our developing world all things, which hang together as one whole, work together for good, *i.e.* for the establishing and perfecting of man's moral status; and that the actuality of physical evil is a logically necessary concomitant of an ordered evolutionary world. And in passing now to the further problem of moral evil, a similar mode of argument will be followed. But whereas in dealing with physical evil our main presupposition was the necessity of nature's uniformity, when we come to reckon with the existence of moral evil our chief presupposition is the necessity, for a moral order, of human freedom.

It was remarked that indictments of the world as productive of pain always proceeded from the hedonistic standpoint, and otherwise could have no point; and we have now to observe that in so far as those indictments are dictated by concern for the moral evil of the world, they proceed from a similar fallacious assumption, namely, that the best possible world would be one in which there was no room for freedom and the choice of moral evil. Both kinds of objection overlook the fact that the best world must be a moral order, not a paradise of unalloyed animal contentment. And if uniformity, with its involved productiveness of suffering, be a *sine qua non* for any theatre of intelligent life, so now it must be emphasized that freedom, and therefore the possibility of moral evil, is a *sine qua non* for a realm of morality. For this, strange to say, is often overlooked. Huxley, for instance, tells us (*Collected Essays*, i. 192) that if a higher Power would undertake to make him always do right on condition of 'being turned into a sort of clock,' he would close with the offer; the only freedom he cared about was the freedom to do right, while freedom to do wrong he would gladly part with on the cheapest terms. But of course the 'freedom' of a clock is rigid necessity, and has no connexion with morality. Similarly Dr. McTaggart (*Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 165)

remarks: 'If God had to choose between making our wills undetermined and making them good, I should have thought He would have done well to make them good.' But, again, such 'goodness' has nothing to do with morality, unless the correct time-keeping of a 'good' clock, such as Huxley would have liked to resemble, be moral conduct. Without needing to attempt a definition of freedom, we can distinguish between the behaviour of an automaton or a puppet, even if sentient, and a man who pursues ends of his own; and it is to beings of the latter class alone that we apply the category 'moral.'

The best possible world, we have said, *must* be a moral order because moral character is the best finite thing that we can conceive; and we now see that morality implies self-determination or freedom. Without the possibility of choice between incentives to actions of different moral worth, without opportunity to choose evil in the presence of a possible alternative choice of good, moral conduct is precluded. The really good world, then, as distinguished from the merely pleasant, implies the existence of moral agents with their freedom to sin; the crown of creation cannot be the puppet or the automaton. A world from which all possibility of sin were excluded, would not be a moral order at all. The crown of creation must be a creator as well as a creature. So God stands 'a hand-breadth off,' as it were, to give His creature scope to grow and act; and again the Divine motive is love. We are made fellow-workers together with God in the realization of His purpose. For the actual evil introduced into the world, man's will and not God's will is directly responsible. Man's sin is not God's act. No doubt God's foresight contemplated the possibility of human sin, and He is responsible for that possibility. But He is not the author of our moral evil; conceivably there might have been none. But even if, as some would argue, He, as the cause of us who cause evil, is its ultimate cause, we need not be perturbed; because the highest good which He directly wills could not be had without permitting such evil as is necessarily incidental to its

attainment. The freedom which is the condition of 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' is at the same time man's burden because of its outcome; but we cannot have the one aspect without the other, any more than, as we saw when discussing pain, we can have reason without tears. There is neither too much necessity in nature nor too much freedom in humanity to allow of the world being good; all there is of each is essential to the world's moral value.

But if the possibility and even the actuality of moral evil be thus no disproof of the goodness of God, but rather evinces the fact that God at all costs seeks our highest good, it has also been objected that it is incompatible with His almightiness. We shall have an opportunity later to discuss the meaning of omnipotence as an attribute of God; but in the present connexion we may consider it in so far as is necessary to deal with the common suggestion that an omnipotent God could at least intervene to protect us from the severer forms of temptation and so prevent our most miserable and hurtful acts of sin. Such promiscuous resort to miracle would not only convert the order of the world into an unintelligible chaos; it would also destroy the very freedom which is the essence of a moral order. Appeals of this kind to omnipotence are really demands for Divine self-contradictoriness. Were we safeguarded at every turn so as to be immune from temptation to do wrong, objective rightness or correctness of behaviour might certainly be ensured; but only at the cost of all moral worth. It is not so that we can acquire moral strength or moral character. For character is made, not born; and any coercion or confining of the moral agent is so far to exclude him from the conditions that alone make for moral betterment. Doubtless such promiscuous intervention in human affairs as we have been considering would spare mankind much misery, and God is not to be conceived as indifferent to human suffering. Nay, we must believe that in so far as He can do so without cancelling the very conditions of the realization of His world-purpose, the moral order as a whole, God works to overcome the moral evil of mankind. But any sparing of men the consequences of their wickedness, or even preventing that wickedness by the suppression of their temptations, would mean surrender of the ideal which the world embodies and the purpose towards which it tends. When morality and freedom

from unhappiness conflict, as often they necessarily must, morality must be achieved at the expense of happiness, and not *vice versa*. A world in leading-strings, as one of our philosophers has remarked, may realize an ideal, but can have no ideal that is truly its own, no moral ideal.

But, for us, the moral ideal which is at the same time our own and God's for us, expresses the very nature of God; and if the ideal be good, the conditions on which alone it can be realized must also be instrumentally good. So much our intelligence tells us; and our hearts acquiesce. Confronted with the choice between the innocent and contented life of the brutes, on the one hand, and the life of a being who can 'look before and after,' the life of moral endeavour and advance through failures towards perfection, on the other hand, men certainly rejoice that the dignity of the moral status is their prerogative. Even the wicked recognize the supremacy of moral ideals, while the good condemn any kind of life that is incapable of satisfying the soul's nobler needs as unworthy of them even as they now are. We accept 'the chance of the prize of learning love,' and recognize that the attainment of character is worth the cost. At least we do so if allowed to entertain the belief that moral evil, while not superfluous to a moral realm while in the making, is not supreme, or necessarily destined to become supreme.

As to the latter of these conditions something now needs to be said. If moral evil were known to us to be ultimately insuperable, to be purely and absolutely evil in that it ministered to nothing but further evil and was never subservient to the good; then, though the world might be a moral order, it would be a mockery of man's aspirations rather than a good world. Hence the theist is required to do more than prove, as we have so far striven to prove, that the possibility of moral evil is a logical necessity and its actuality is due to man's freedom; he must further be able to meet the objection that human freedom and the divine self-consistency to which we have appealed as against arbitrary 'omnipotence,' imply that possibly sin may abound more and more, or that human freedom be destined for ever to thwart God's purpose.

Looked at in the abstract, freedom and contingency, as contrasted with coercion and necessity, certainly imply the theoretical possibility that the good will never be realized. But a naked possi-

bility, as Leibniz said, is nothing. As a matter of fact, the history of free humanity has so far been a history, on the whole, of moral progress. Truly we are not entitled to generalize from this fragment of the race's experience to the indefinitely long future. But there are certain qualities intrinsic to goodness and evil respectively which afford ground for reasonable belief that in the long-run evil is self-destructive and that therefore the world will continually improve. Continually, but not necessarily continuously. There have been, and doubtless will be, grave set-backs such as that which drove the world aghast a few years ago, when the profoundest immorality disclosed itself as having possessed one of the most civilized nations of mankind. The faith of Christians in the coming of the kingdom of Heaven on earth was disturbed ;

and men found it hard to acquiesce in the so slow grinding of the mills of God. But if we contemplate long vistas of time we can hope that progress will maintain itself and perhaps proceed in future ages with increased speed ; for the gains of self-conserving moral goodness over unstable and self-disrupting wickedness would seem to be cumulative. We need not appeal therefore to God's power to subdue all things to Himself, even if we interpret that power in terms of love or fuller self-revelation ; though doubtless this may be taken into account in establishing our hope that evil is not destined to become supreme. And if this hope be trustworthy, the existence of moral evil in a developing moral order would not seem, any more than the existence of physical evil, to present an insuperable obstacle to religious faith.

Contributions and Comments.

Two Notes on the Acts of the Apostles.

A. iii. 16.—Professor Torrey's recent study on the *Composition and Date of Acts* (1916) has much in it that is helpful towards the restoration of the Aramaic background to Ac 1 to 15. There are as well in it other points which will raise almost the same degree of criticism as that which should be raised over his view of the Codex Bezae (p. 40. 1).

Such a point is in his interpretation of Ac 3¹⁶. The question raised concerns the repeated phrase in that verse, 'his name': καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ πίστει τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ τούτον ὃν θεωρεῖτε καὶ οἶδατε ἔστερ-
έωσεν τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ κτλ.—i.e. 'and by faith in his name to this man whom ye see and know his name hath given strength.' Recent textual critics, like Preuschen, want to excise the second occurrence of the phrase ; recent translators, like Moffatt, drop it ; and recent Aramaists, like Torrey, offer an Aramaic original which smooths away the possibility of what he calls 'an outcropping bit of popular superstition.' His Aramaic turns into English as : 'And by faith in his name he hath made strong this one whom ye see and know.' But is there need to deny the second phrase ? And if it is denied, is it not done in the interest of modern sensitiveness rather than in the interest of

early simplicity ? It is to be recalled that so early a writer as Irenæus would have preserved the second occurrence of the phrase. In his valuable little treatise the *Demonstration of Apostolical Preaching*,¹ 96-97, is the following passage : 'The (name) is that of God, that is of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which the demons themselves obey, as well as evil spirits and all inimical forces, by the invocation of the name of Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate.' This statement of the Bishop of Lyons comes after his citation of J1 2³² and Ac 4¹². Again, Justin Martyr, who is another inheritor of first-century exegesis, says in *Apol.* ii. vi, 6 : 'We Christians adjure them (the demoniacs) in the name of Jesus Christ, crucified under Pontius Pilate.' It is not Folklore that is in the Acts or in the second-century writers. Nor is the problem here of this sort that a pristine declaration in the terms of Faith has become stained with second-century Magic. If in these late days the meanings of Jesus Christ have not yet been found, it ought not to be a matter for surprise that the

¹ Barthoulot, the Armenian scholar who has died recently, was the first to point out that the close of c. 96 and the opening sentence of c. 97 were to be joined together if sense was to be made of Irenæus's statements, see *Démonstration de la Prédication Apostolique*, 1917, 427. 5. In this place also Professor Tixeront draws attention to the same Justin passage that is used above.