

God: III – Evil

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At least in the western tradition nothing so affects our attitude to God as our recognition of evil and suffering. An important factor in the modern bourgeois indifference to God has been a cultivated exclusion of evil from our consciousness. It is not long since English moral philosophers searching for an example of moral evil could only come up with promise breaking; the liberal imagination shied away from real sin, just as commercial advertising shies away from suffering. It is a commonplace that prisons and hospitals are not only institutions for dealing with crime and sickness but also for hiding them.

If we break out of this cosy world and face the real state of affairs we are liable to two apparently contrasting reactions. We may reject God as infantile, as unable to comprehend or have compassion on those who suffer and are made to suffer in his world. On the other hand we may find, as Job did, that it was our own view of God that was infantile, we may in fact come to a deeper understanding of the mystery of God. The first 'atheist' reaction may indeed be a part of the second.

It is not my purpose here to offer positive suggestions about the transition from an inadequate view of God, through 'atheism', to a deeper understanding. I have set myself the minor task of removing one impediment on the way. We will not pass through this transition successfully if we let ourselves be trapped in the *philosopher's* problem of evil.

As it seems to me there is the problem or mystery of evil which is a dark entry into the mystery of God. Not to be aware of this, not to be confounded and overthrown by it is not yet to have recognised God's love. But there is also a philosophical muddle about God and evil, and there is no reason at all to be confounded or overthrown by this.

This article is not, then, intended as some kind of anodyne for those who are facing the mystery of evil – whether they express their understanding in the form of 'atheism' or of a deeper awareness of mystery. It is a philosophical reply to philosophers who seek to show that the reality of evil proves that the ultimate source and meaning of the universe *cannot* be unconditional compassion and love.

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I appear then as though in a lawcourt as counsel for the defence of God against his philosophical accusers. I seek to do no

more than to answer *their* arguments.

The prisoner stands accused of wreaking all kinds of murder and mayhem, of running a world full of misery and malice. Evidence for the crimes lies all around us, and the question is whether God is really responsible, whether he should be judged guilty and perhaps whether he should get off on a plea of diminished responsibility due to unsound mind or natural ignorance.

May I say at once that I shall be falling back on that sound principle of English law that a God is innocent until he is proved guilty. It is not my job to prove that God is innocent; I am not going to explain how and why his activities have been good. I am simply going to refute the charges brought against him. I shall be dealing, in fact with what his accusers have said about him.

At the end of this hearing I hope you will agree that God has not been proved guilty, but I expect you will be as puzzled as I am about his innocence. In other words I hope it will remain a mystery to you why God has done what he has done; but you will at least agree that what he has done does not prove his guilt.

First of all what is the charge? The world is full of suffering and sin; and God committed this world; he openly admits to having done so. Nobody else interfered, there is no one else to take the blame from him. You might imagine a defence on the lines that the poor fellow couldn't help it, he's only a God after all. But this cannot be my defence for I hold that he is omnipotent and can do anything he likes that you could mention. (The only reason why you would have to say that he can't make square circles is that you can't mention them; the words cancel each other out so that you haven't said anything.)

But anything you *could* describe or think of God could do, and it is not difficult, surely, to think of a world with less suffering and sin than this one has in it; indeed it is hard *not* to think of such a world.

So here stands the accused, perfectly capable of making a delightful, happy, painless world but instead he has deliberately made this dreadful place. What possible defence can be put up for him?

Before I start my case for the defence may I just say what I will *not* resort to. I have already said that I am not going to make a plea of diminished responsibility on the grounds of incapacity. I am not going to say that God is innocent because he is not omnipotent. Secondly I am not going to question the evidence: there are some people who would say that evil is not real, that it is only an illusion and if we look at it the right way it disappears like the ghost at the corner of the stairs. But I shall not be arguing that "it's all in the mind", that nothing's good or bad, but thinking makes it so. I admit wholeheartedly that when someone says: "My tooth-

ache hurts like mad”, or “that cow is suffering from a disease”, or “Charlie is a wicked and depraved man”, he is making quite literal true statements, just as literal and true as the statement that London is in England. So I accept the evidence; evil is real. I shall not be using the ‘unreality of evil’ defence.

Thirdly, another defence is not open to me. This is the defence that at least some of the evil in the world is not caused by God but by the free actions of people. God, this defence goes, can hardly be held responsible for what men do freely, and a great deal of the awfulness of the world is due to the viciousness of men and women. Now, [as I said in the previous article,] I hold that all my free acts are caused by God, that I do not act independently of God, and so I can hardly get my client off the hook by putting the blame on someone else.

So I shall not defend God on the grounds that he is incompetent, or that the evidence is phoney or on grounds of mistaken identity – that someone else did it. God is omnipotent, the world he made is full of evils and they were not put there by human beings independently of God.

1 I am going to argue that everything good in the world is brought about by my client.

2 I am going to argue that some kinds of evil – suffering – what I shall call ‘evil suffered’ is a necessary concomitant of certain kinds of good, and God can only be said, therefore, to have brought it about in the sense that he brought about that good.

3 I am going to argue that another kind of evil – sin – what I shall call ‘evil done’ is not brought about by God at all. I shall grant that he could have prevented it, but I shall give reasons why this does not make my client guilty by neglect.

So God brings about everything that is good and he does not directly bring about anything that is evil; if this can be shown it seems a sufficient defence, even if it leaves a great deal that we do not understand.

Let us now consider the evidence: and first of all let us ask what it is supposed to be evidence of. It is evidence of evil; but what do we mean when we say that something is evil or bad. I am using the words more or less synonymously but I suppose that ‘evil’ has a rather more sinister ring in English than ‘bad’. A bad man and an evil man are much the same, but a bad washing machine wouldn’t ordinarily be called evil. Perhaps we usually keep ‘evil’ for moral evil, for the evil that belongs to human beings or to other creatures that are free and act deliberately, like human beings, devils and such like.

Let us look then, first of all at badness. The charge is made that God made a bad world, when he could have made a better one. Let us see what this means.

First of all, I suppose you will agree that there is no such *thing* as badness just as there is no such thing as redness. There are just bad things, as there are red things. You never get badness unless there is first of all something that exists that is bad, just as you never get redness unless there is first of all something to be red.

Badness is not like milk or chewing gum, something that a cow or a man or God might make, it is the *character* of something that has been made. The charge against God, then, is not that he made something called badness, there is no such thing. The charge is that some of the things he made are bad, just as, some of them are red.

Now what exactly are we saying when we say that a thing is bad? Here we come immediately to a difference between badness and redness. For all red things share a *property* in common, the property of being red. If you know what it is like for an apple to be red then you more or less know what it is like for a pencil or a nose to be red.

But this won't work with badness; if you know what it is like for a deckchair to be a bad deckchair you do not for that reason know what it is like for a grape to be a bad grape. A bad deckchair collapses when you sit down, but the fact that a grape collapses when you sit on it is not what would show it to be a bad grape.

We call something a bad deckchair when it doesn't come up to our expectations for deckchairs, and we call something a bad grape when it doesn't come up to our expectations for grapes. But they are different expectations. And similarly when we say that a thing is a good grape or a good deckchair we mean that they do come up to our respective expectations for grapes and deckchairs. Goodness, like badness, is different from redness in that what it is like for one thing to be good isn't the same as what it is like for another. The fact that wine can be made from good grapes has no tendency at all to suggest that wine can be made from good deckchairs.

Now notice that whenever we say something is bad we are saying that it *doesn't* come up to expectations; we are saying, in fact, something *negative* about it. A bad washing machine is one that won't wash the clothes properly — notice that this makes badness a good deal less *specific* than goodness. If someone says he has a good washing machine you know pretty well what it is like — it cleans the clothes quickly and efficiently and quietly and cheaply and so on. But if someone just says his washing machine is a bad one, you don't know yet whether it tears the clothes into strips or soaks them in oily water or just doesn't move at all when you switch on, or electrocutes the children when they go near it. It can be bad for an indefinite number of reasons so long as the one negative thing is true: that it doesn't come up to expectations for a washing machine.

So badness is a negative thing. Please notice carefully that this does *not* mean that a bad washing machine always has to have a part missing – it is not negative in that sense. A washing machine may be bad not only because it has too little – as when there is no driving belt on the spin drier, but also because it has too much, as when someone has filled the interior with glue. Badness is negative just in the sense that a bad thing doesn't succeed in measuring up to our expectations. Badness, then, is always a defect, an absence, in this sense.

So not only is there no such thing as badness in the sense that there is no such *thing* as redness (for redness, even if it is not a *thing* is at least a positive quality of a thing); but badness isn't even that, it is the *lack* of some positive quality in a thing – the positive quality of being a clothes-cleaner for example. And do remember that it is a lack of precisely that positive quality which we think is to be *expected* of a thing. We say "That is a bad bottle" because it won't hold the liquid as we expect bottles to do; we don't say it is bad because it hasn't got a ten-foot neck as we expect giraffes to have. So badness is just a lack, but a particular lack.

Now does this mean that badness is unreal? Certainly not. Things really are bad sometimes and this is because the absence of what is to be expected is just as real as a presence. If I have a hole in my sock, the hole is not anything at all, it is just an absence of wool or cotton or whatever, but it is a perfectly real hole in my sock. It would be absurd to say that holes in socks are unreal and illusory just because the hole isn't made of anything and is purely an absence. *Nothing* in the wrong place can be just as real and just as important as *something* in the wrong place. If you inadvertently drive your car over a cliff you will have nothing to worry about; it is precisely the nothing that you will have to worry about.

So badness is quite real even though it isn't the name of a stuff like milk or even the name of a quality like redness.

Everything I have said about bad washing machines and bottles is just as true of bad men and women. We call a person bad (or in this case sometimes, evil or wicked) just because he or she doesn't measure up to what we think we can expect of human beings. Cruelty, injustice, selfishness, are just dispositions or activities that don't measure up to our idea of what a proper human being should be like, they are not fitting to a human being. We may find it a lot harder to be clear about what *is* fitting to a human being than we are about what is fitting to a washing machine, because all a washing machine has to do, so far as we are concerned, is wash the clothes properly; it is an instrument that we expect to function in a certain way. People, of course, aren't instruments in that way; they are not just good because they do some job well, and so the

whole thing is more complicated. But it doesn't matter how we decide this matter and it doesn't matter whether we disagree about *what* makes a human being a proper human being; the thing is that if we call a man bad we mean he doesn't measure up to whatever it is that we expect of a man.

Let us remember that with people, as with washing machines, to say that they are bad is not always to say that they lack some part or other. A washing machine may be bad and defective for very positive reasons like being full of glue, and a man may be bad and defective for very positive reasons like being full of hatred or lust, but what makes us call this bad is that just as the positive glue stops the washing machine washing, so the positive hatred or lust stops the man being human enough.

Now let us also notice that since badness is a defect it is always parasitic on good. I mean by that that you can't have badness unless there is at least some goodness, whereas you can have goodness without any badness. The two are not symmetrical, so to say. I mean that if a washing machine is to be a bad one it must be at least good enough at being a washing machine for us to call it one. If I produce a cup and saucer and complain that it is a useless washing machine because it never gets the clothes clean, you will gently correct me and explain that what I have is not a washing machine at all. So even the worst washing machine must be a little good, otherwise it is not even a washing machine and cannot therefore be a bad one. But it doesn't work the other way round. Goodness does not mean a defect in badness. You could, theoretically, have something that was just very good with no defects at all. You could probably have a perfectly good washing machine with nothing wrong with it at all, were it not for built-in obsolescence and the capitalist modes of production.

So now if we are fairly clear about what, if you want to be pompous, you can call the logic of the words 'bad' and 'good' and 'evil', we can take a look at some of the pieces of evidence against my client, God. There are I think two main exhibits:

There is the badness that *happens to* people and things; that is exhibit A. Then there is the evil that people *do*, that is exhibit B. I think this covers all the evil there is. The first kind is evil that comes to something from outside, as when bacteria attack a healthy horse and it falls sick, or when a lion attacks a lamb and chews it up. The agent that brings about the unpleasantness is separate from the one that suffers.

The second kind of evil is evil that is not brought about by some outside agent but is self-inflicted, and this is moral evil or sin. I mean by this that if a man can show that what he did was not really due to him but was caused by something outside him — he was acting under the influence of drugs or hypnotism or some-

thing — then we stop blaming him, we say he hasn't really sinned, we sympathise with him as one who has *suffered* evil rather than as one who himself *inflicts* it.

Let us look first at the evil suffered in the world. Let us be clear that by no stretch of the imagination can this be attributed to the viciousness of men and women, or hardly any of it can. For millions upon millions of years before the human race even appeared, dinosaurs were setting upon each other or upon harmless plants and chewing them up, undoubtedly inflicting evil on them; a plant that has been chewed by a dinosaur is nothing like as good a plant as it was before. The lamb that is attacked by a lion speedily becomes a very defective lamb.

When however, we look into the business of the lion eating the lamb we see that necessarily what is a defect suffered by the lamb is at the same time a fulfilment or achievement for the lion. The lion is being fulfilled, indeed he is being filled, precisely by what damages the lamb and renders it defective. In fact there can never be a defect inflicted on one thing except by another thing that is, in doing so, perfecting itself. When I suffer from a disease it is because the bacteria or whatever are fulfilling themselves and behaving exactly as good bacteria should behave. If we found a bacterium which was not engaged in inflicting disease on me we should have to judge that, like a washing machine that did not wash clothes, it was a defective or sick bacterium. The things that inflict evil on me, therefore, are not themselves evil; on the contrary, it is by being good in their way that they make me bad in my way.

Being eaten by a lion is undoubtedly bad for a lamb; it is not just that it *seems* bad from some point of view; it actually *is* bad from the lamb's point of view. On the other hand, it actually is good from the lion's point of view. Good and bad are relative but they are not just subjective.

Thus if God is to make a lion, and a good lion, he cannot but allow for the defect of the lamb, that is the kind of things that lions and lambs are. It is no reflection on God's omnipotence that he cannot make good lions without allowing for damaged lambs. However omnipotent God may be he cannot compose a string quartet for three instruments or five. It belongs to being a quartet that it is for four instruments; and in a somewhat similar way it belongs to being a lion that it wants to eat lambs.

In general, it seems to me that you cannot make material things that develop in time without allowing for the fact that in perfecting themselves they will damage other material things. Life evolves in the course of the constant interaction of things which includes the damaging and destroying of things. But every occasion of destruction is, of itself an occasion of good for the thing that is doing the destroying — always with the single exception of

the free creature which may sometimes while destroying something else be simultaneously destroying itself, but of that more in a moment.

Ordinarily it is by being good little bacteria or good healthy lions that the agents of destruction work, and it is God who makes them to be good bacteria and good lions. He does not directly cause the defectiveness of the sick animals and chewed sheep that are the concomitant of this; for defectiveness as such does not exist, it is a mere absence. But in creating good lions we can certainly say that God brings it about *indirectly* that there shall be evil suffered. He brings it about because it is not possible to bring about this good without allowing for the concomitant defects. None of this, I submit, shows that God is guilty of deliberately proposing and bringing about evil.

You may be tempted to argue that it would be better not to have any lions at all – but if you think along those lines you have to end up thinking that it would be better not to have any material world at all – and indeed I think that some Buddhist thinkers have reached this very conclusion. But then you do have to change the charge against my client; it is not that he has made a bad world but that he has made a material world at all. This does not sound a very damning charge; most people are rather glad that he did so and even sometimes thank him for it.

Now it may be argued that God could have made a material world without *so much* sheer pain in it. But let us look at what is being said if we say this. Ordinarily if I have a headache the doctor will explain what brought it about – it was that fifth whiskey last night. It was the whiskey behaving like good whiskey – as whiskey may be expected to behave – which brought about my headache. There is no mystery about my headache. Similarly with my cancer or my influenza – always there is a natural explanation and always the explanation is in terms of some things, cells or germs or whatever, doing what comes naturally, being good. Sometimes of course and rather more often than he admits, the doctor is baffled. But he puts this down to his own ignorance; he says: “Well eventually we may hope to find out what is causing this, what things are bringing it about simply by being their good selves, but for the moment we don’t know”. What he does *not* say is this: there is no explanation in nature for this, it is an anti-miracle worked by a malignant God.

But that is what he would *have* to say if he thought there was more pain in the world than there need be. More suffering than there need be would be suffering that had no natural cause, this was not the obverse of some good, that was scientifically inexplicable. Now I do not think that any one in a scientific tradition would believe in the existence of such suffering, except perhaps in

one case, in the case of evil inflicted by a malignant free cause such as a wicked man or a demon. Given that his acts are free, then they are not caused and thus cannot be explained by the fulfilment of natural things like germs and viruses. But leaving aside for the moment, the pain and agony of the world is just what you would expect to find in a material world – no more and no less. If we think otherwise we do not just give up belief in a good God, we give up belief in the rational scientific intelligibility of the world.

Of course God could have made a kind of material world and then by a series of miraculous interventions prevented any suffering in it. He could have fed the lion miraculously without damaging any lambs, and so on throughout the order of nature. But such a world would have no reason or order within itself. Lions would not do things because they were lions, but simply because of the miraculous action of God. What we mean by the miraculous action of God is indeed simply the non-presence of natural causes and explanations. A miracle is not God intervening in the world – God is always acting in the world – a miracle is when *only* God is acting in the world.

A world without any defects suffered, then, would be a world *without any natural order in it*. No reasonable person objects to an occasional withdrawal of natural causes, a miracle from time to time; but a world without *any* natural causes, entirely consisting of miracles, would not be a natural material world at all. So the people who would like my client to have made a material world without suffering and defect would have preferred him not to have made a world subject to its own laws, an autonomous scientifically explicable world. But here again I would say most people are pleased that he made such a world which, so to say, runs by itself according to its own scientific laws. The accusation that God made it does not seem very damning.

Perhaps I should add a little note here about pain. You might find some people saying: yes we can see how if lions are to be good lions then lambs will have to die, but why does it all have to be so agonisingly painful? Surely God could have stopped that. Not so; pain is, in fact, a good and necessary thing from one point of view. If the lamb were not hurt by the lion it would not be afraid of it – except maybe by a miracle, and then we are back with the previous discussion. I happen to know of a young girl who is highly intelligent but by some malfunctioning of the brain or nervous system is incapable of feeling pain – she once left her hand in a pan of boiling water and damaged it terribly because she was not warned by pain. She had a special frame strapped to her because of the damage she has done to her limbs by unnoticed collisions and accidents. Her case shows the value of pain, its evolutionary significance. If pain were unnecessary for our survival we

would long ago have discarded it like our tails.

It is true of course that some pain seems to go above and beyond the call of duty – we can understand why it needs to hurt but not why it needs to hurt so much. Take dying of rabies for example. But I think if you investigated the matter, and taking into account that it is not just the human animal but all the other animals and even the rabies virus that has to be considered, you would find that none of this was without scientific explanation. The pain of rabies is not, like the warning pain of boiling water, useful to *us*, but it follows necessarily on what is good and useful for other things. I think, then, that Exhibit A, the pain and suffering of the world, has not sufficed to convict my client, God, of crime in creating this world. Let us then turn to Exhibit B, the wickedness of the world.

Here I am bound to admit, my client faces his most dangerous threat. There are, as I have said, those who think otherwise. For them, wickedness, at least, is not due to God; it is an offence against God which he would rather not have happen. It is due to wicked human wills and the actions of these, being free, are not caused by God. God, they will argue, could have prevented evil, but only by making humans unfree; and just as it is a great glory to have a real material world with its own laws of action even though this has to involve pain and suffering; so it is a great glory to have free creatures even if this involves at least the risk of some sin and wickedness.

This cosy escape route is not, however, open to me. I hold that there is nothing existing in the world that he did not create. There is no being which does not depend on him. All my good acts, are more due to him than they are to me, since it is due to him that they are due to me. He makes me *me*. So what about my bad deeds?

First I think we need to be clear that unlike evil suffered, evil done, sin, is *not* an inevitable concomitant of good in the world. There could not be a material world, developing according to its own laws, without evil suffered but there most certainly could be a material human world without evil done. A world without selfishness and greed and cruelty and domination would obviously be a happier, pleasanter, livelier, more sensuously enjoyable world than the one we have now. Evil suffered is the obverse of good achieved but evil done has no connection with good at all, except accidentally. That is to say God may bring good even out of my evil acts but in themselves they have no good aspect. This is because evil done, moral evil, is self-inflicted. Whereas in evil suffered there are two beings to be considered, the one inflicting the harm and the one suffering it: (for one what is done is good; while for the other, it is evil); in evil done the harm is done to the agent which causes it.

In the case of the lion eating the lamb, what makes this bad for the lamb is that its lambness, so to say, is diminished. It becomes less like what we expect of a lamb; but what brings this about is the lion. But in the case of, say, Fred being unjust what makes this bad for Fred is that his humanity is diminished, he becomes less like what we expect of a man, but what brings this about is Fred himself. In the lamb/lion encounter at least the perpetrator, the lion, is benefiting, but in Fred's act of injustice the perpetrator, Fred, is precisely the one who suffers.

Perhaps I should make that a little clearer because there may well be those who think that what makes an action morally wrong is the harm it does to others, and they may be a little surprised that I say that what makes an action morally wrong is the harm it does to the perpetrator. An action may be morally wrong *because* it does harm to others, but what we *mean* by saying that it is morally wrong is that it damages the perpetrator. I can after all do a great deal of harm to others without doing morally wrong at all. I may bring with me to a foreign country some deadly infectious disease that I don't know about, so that in a few weeks people are dying in agony because of my arrival. If so, I have certainly harmed them by my arrival but I have not done anything morally wrong. If however I knew about it and went all the same, then you could well say that I was acting unjustly, that I was behaving in an irresponsible way in which no human being should behave, that I was defective in my humanity, that I was committing a moral evil. The moral evil would *consist* in the injustice and the way that I had diminished myself in acting like that.

When I am the cause of frightful things happening to others, the evil suffered is in them and is inflicted by me, but if in doing this I am acting unjustly (as would ordinarily be the case if I did it deliberately) the evil done is in me and consists in the diminishment of my humanity that injustice means. I do not mean by this that acting unjustly has a bad *effect* on me (making me a drearier person or whatever) I mean that acting unjustly *is* a bad effect on me, it *is* a diminishment of me, just as not being able to rinse the clothes *is* a diminishment of the washing machine. And the point is that this diminishment of me is brought about by me. So there is no separate agent to achieve something by diminishing me, as the lion achieves something by diminishing the lamb; evil done is evil to the perpetrator himself. It is a dead loss with no good aspect to it.

Of course morally evil actions may have good *effects*, my injustice may benefit my family, my adultery may give birth to a child, but what we mean when we say they are morally bad, if we think *they are* bad, is the defect that they are in me.

You will remember that when God was accused of damaging

lambs, I was able to reply for him that what he was really doing was creating and sustaining lions: this was the good thing he was engaged in doing; the evil to the lamb was merely a necessary concomitant to this. But now in the case of moral evil, no such course is open to me. Moral evil is not the concomitant of some good. It is, as I said, sheer loss.

Of course God may bring good even out of my evil actions, and good may even be the ordinary consequence of my evil action, but that is not the point. The action itself has no good in it, and we cannot exonerate God simply on the grounds that it is for good ends that he uses evil means.

My defence is quite different, it is simply this: since there is no good at all, except incidentally, in a morally evil act, in evil done, there is nothing created there, hence no action of God. A morally evil act as such is an absence of something, a failure on my part to live as humanly, as intensely as I might have done. Evidently God does not bring about failure as such, for failure is not there, it is an absence. When, as in the case of the lamb, the failure is brought about by the fulfilment of something else, then indeed God can be said in a Pickwickian way to have brought about the failure, but only because he brought about the fulfilment of the lion. But here there is sheer failure on my part, not brought by the fulfilment of some outside agent, but simply allowed by me. So God has no hand in it at all.

When I do evil I have a choice between what will fulfil me as a human being, as what I truly am, and some lesser good which conflicts with this fulfilment: say I have to choose between being just and being rich. There is no harm in being rich of course, unless, as it usually does, it conflicts with being just. If I then choose the riches unjustly I have failed in being human, and that is moral evil.

I could not, of course, act unjustly unless I existed and were sustained in being by God, I could not do it unless every positive action I took were sustained in being by God. My desire for riches is a positive thing, and a perfectly good positive thing, created by God — the only thing is that it is a *minor* thing. I should desire other things more than this. My failure to seek my true happiness and fulfilment, of course, since it is a failure, an absence, a non-being, is not created or sustained or brought about by God.

There are no such things as evil desires, there is only evil disproportion in our desires; human evil, moral evil lies in sacrificing great things for the sake of trivial things, it lies in the failure to want happiness enough.

It is evident, then, that though it is due to God that any good and positive thing is due to me, it is not due to God that any moral failure is due to me. God does not make absences, non-beings, failures. On this count then my client is fully exonerated

and his character has no visible stain on it.

But, and I think this will be the final argument from the prosecution, must we not admit that although God did not, of course, bring about my failure he could, instead, have brought about my success? In fact it was the fact that God did not cause me freely to succeed that brought it about that I freely failed. There can be no doubt, then, that had he wished to do so God could always have prevented me from sinning – without, of course, in any way interfering with my freedom. For freedom does not mean independence of God. It means independence of other creatures. Thus although God does not cause me to fail of choosing the good, he could easily have caused me to choose the good. In what way, asks the prosecutor, is my client's position any different from that of the careless helmsman who fails to steer the ship clear of the rocks? Is he not guilty of neglect in permitting me to sin.?

Let me say just once more that there is no question of God *having to* permit me to sin in order to leave me with my freedom. *That* kind of argument belongs to a theory that freedom makes me independent of God. In fact God could have made a world in which nobody ever sinned at all and everyone was perfectly free. In such a world, if it were material and historical, there would certainly have to be suffering as the obverse of the good of material things, but there would be no need whatever for sin. Sin has no useful function in the world except by accident.

Is God, then, guilty by neglect? I think that he is not, for this reason. You can only be guilty by neglect if you have some kind of obligation to do something and you do not do it. It is the helmsman who is accused of neglect, and not the cabin-boy, because it is the helmsman's *job* to steer the ship. Now by no stretch of the imagination is it God's *job* to prevent me from sinning. In his mercy and kindness he frequently does so, and frequently he gives me the grace to repent of the sins I have committed, but this is not his job, his *métier*. There can be no sense in the idea that God has *any* job or is under any obligation; if he were, there would be something greater than God which constrained him. God is no more under an obligation to prevent me from sinning than he was under an obligation to create the world in the first place. He cannot therefore be said to be guilty by neglect.

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I think I have shown that so far as evil suffered is concerned there is no more in God's world than is required by the existence of a natural material world subject to its own laws – indeed if you reckon in the miracles of healing there is slightly less suffering than would be expected. On the premiss, which I think you will accept, that the natural material world is a good thing to have

(including, as it does, ourselves), we cannot then blame God for the necessary concomitant of some suffering. I think I have also shown that although there is no such case for the natural necessity of *moral* evil, the most we can say is not that God causes moral evil but that he does not prevent it – that he permits it; and I think I have shown that in not preventing it God is not failing in any duty and thus cannot be charged with neglect.

It remains of course, that I have not the faintest idea *why* God permits moral evil. I know why there is suffering, without it there would be no real animals, but I do not know why there is sin. This is an unfathomable mystery but it is not a contradiction.

Suffering (of the lamb) is not, of course, a perspicuous sign of God's goodness, but the fulfilment (of the lion), which is its concomitant *is* a sign of God's goodness in sin however, there is no *manifestation* of God's goodness at all. But it is one thing to say that sin is *not a manifestation* of God's goodness and quite another to say that sin is a manifestation that God is *not good*. We do not know *why* the good God has made a world which does not at all times manifest his goodness, but the notion is not contradictory. Somehow the infinite goodness of God is compatible with his allowing sin. We do not know how, but it is good to recognise this for it reminds us that we know nothing of God and his purposes except that he loves us and wishes us to share his life of love.

Genesis and Patriarchy

Angela West

Part I What has feminist discourse got in common with the language of biblical theology?

The authors of Genesis, and other books in the Pentateuch, created their text by taking myths and stories that had arisen in various sections of their society at different stages of its development, and by means of a process of combination, re-arrangement and redaction, they re-wrote them to provide an interpretation suitable for their society in quite new historical circumstances. These circumstances were extreme – they were a people cut off from their homeland and their origins, exiles in the superior and sophisticated civilisation of imperial Babylon.¹ In his account of the Creation and the Fall, the Yahwist historian (as scholars refer