

Why Hare Must Hound the Gods

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DISCUSSION

WHY HARE MUST HOUND THE GODS

Friend and former colleague John King-Farlow usually goes straight to the heart of an issue at once. This time he stumbled at first but happily did not fall flat. He made it on the second try. So we shall consider his Question II first.

Between the two articles cited by King-Farlow we have written several others in which we indicate what we take to be the really crucial problem of evil.¹ We are grateful for the chance to extend and emphasize this fundamental issue.

The riddle of God and evil, we believe, is not one of formal inconsistency, as King-Farlow and Pike would have us believe. We do *not* believe that the following statements constitute an inconsistent set: God is almighty, God is all-knowing, God is infinitely good, and evil, created by this being, exists in the finite world. To state the problem in this way misses the crucial point at issue, namely, whether or not the evil which is plainly evident is gratuitous or serves some purpose. Moreover, it ignores what we take to be the fact that some evil serves good ends which could not otherwise be achieved, as in the spiritual growth attendant upon experiencing certain types and amounts of suffering. The very possibility of stating the problem of evil as a formal contradiction depends upon claiming that 'There is no morally sufficient reason for an all good and powerful God to allow any instance of evil' is necessarily true. But it is clear from the above that we not only deny this to be necessarily true but indeed claim it to be false. Clearly some evil serves good ends that could not be achieved in any other way. But the nature, extent, and distribution of much evil resists simple explanation; it is *prima facie* gratuitous. The really interesting problem of evil is whether the apparent gratuity can be explained away by more ingenious measures

¹ Edward H. Madden and Peter H. Hare, "Evil and Unlimited Power," *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 20 (1966), pp. 278-89; Hare and Madden, "A Theodicy for Today?" *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 4 (1966), pp. 287-292; and Madden, "Evil and the Concept of a Limited God," *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 18 (1967), pp. 65-70.

or whether the gratuity is real and hence detrimental to religious cosmology.

If the problem of evil were formulated foolishly as a formal contradiction, the theist would have no difficulty whatever in rebutting it. He would not have to show even that there is a *reasonable* or *probable* explanation of evil. To rebut the alleged self-contradiction he only has to show that there is some *possible* explanation of evil, whether it take the form of saying that some higher good may be served or that any creation may entail the existence of some evil. Such an issue and such an answer do not begin to do justice to the great and subtle thinkers of various religious traditions. They make foolish Saint Augustine's tremendous effort to solve what he took to be — and rightly so — a great issue. The issue he saw was that of *prima facie* gratuitous evil — its nature, extent and distribution. It is time for King-Farlow and Pike to see what the real issue is and stop hiding behind a pseudoissue. For heaven's sake, Job was not a querulous old man who was reprimanding God for not having created a perfect world!

King-Farlow's stumble in Question I can be seen for what it is by examining the contexts where we urge an existential "feel" for the fact of evil and applaud Ivan Karamazov's moral indignation. Tillich, we pointed out,² says that religious belief is existential in nature and not rational. There would be something strange about a man who "believed in" God as a result of the cosmological argument. We agree. But we criticized Tillich for not allowing the feel for the depth and extent of evil as equally legitimate existential grounds for not believing in God at all. We are not ourselves pushing for either existential "feel"; we only wish to see fair play. If the one is legitimate, so is the other. Tillich has no right to use existential grounds for believing in God and then to use man's deep sense of darkness as grounds only for changing belief from a traditional theistic God to a quasitheistic God which is not a Being but rather the Ground of Being.

Ivan is indignant about the ultimate harmony solution to the problem of evil for various reasons. We are indignant about it because it entails the falsity of every ordinary judgment that *x* is wrong. On this view, whatever is, is right; evil is only an illusion. If King-Farlow is not indignant about always being wrong when he claims something is wrong, no matter. He can take any of the three or four other reasons we gave for rejecting this view, reasons which require no accompanying indig-

² "On the Difficulty of Evading the Problem of Evil," this journal, Vol. 28 (1967), p. 63.

tion.³ Moreover, our indignation with the ultimate harmony should not be construed as indignation with all theistic efforts to solve the problem. Many of them seem morally shipshape, but unfortunately encounter other difficulties. (We have, by the way, analyzed the ultimate harmony solution in far greater detail elsewhere than in the article mentioned by our critic.⁴)

King-Farlow suggests that we have left certain problems unanswered — the free will solution, the problem of good, reincarnation and so on. We have, of course, discussed these matters at length elsewhere (reincarnation only grudgingly), and do not have the space to amplify them here, but the important point to notice is that King-Farlow's questions show the narrow range of possible strategies that he envisages as available to the believer. He limits himself strangely by thinking only of possible theistic *solutions* to the problem of evil, thereby missing much of the fun of contemporary writing in this area. Rather than giving "solutions" to the problem, many writers nowadays are denying that there is a problem, or evading the problem, or changing their metaphysics in some sophisticated way so that the problem does not arise. The deniers of the problem claim that while religious language in general is meaningful, the problem of evil, for reasons indigenous to it, is meaningless. Evasions of the problem come from proponents of either a theological or a linguistic circle. Writers like Brightman, Whitehead and Hartshorne modify in various ways the characteristics of a theistic God yet try to salvage his worshipability and capacity to guarantee the growth of value in the world. We have called these writers quasitheists and have criticized them in detail along with the deniers and evaders of the problem. The reason that Hare (and Madden too) must hound the gods is that they have been defended and upheld in the most sprightly and original ways lately. But the hounding cannot be done systematically in a series of articles. By the time this piece is published, Madden and Hare's *Evil and the Concept of God* will have appeared,⁵ and the interested reader can pursue there the labyrinthine ins-and-outs of this perennially fascinating problem and find answers to some of the other questions only dimly hinted at by our critic.

We are charmed by John King-Farlow's reference to us, in his footnote 1, as the unholy binity. We have sent him a copy of *Evil and the*

³ E. H. Madden, "The Riddle of God and Evil," in *Current Philosophical Issues: Essays in Honor of Curt John Ducasse*, ed. F. C. Dommeyer (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1966), pp. 185-200, particularly pp. 190-95; and Madden, "The Many Faces of Evil," this journal, Vol. 25 (1964), pp. 487-92.

⁴ Cf. Madden, "The Riddle of God and Evil," *op. cit.*, pp. 190-95.

⁵ (Springfield, Illinois; Charles C. Thomas, Publisher, 1968).

Concept of God and hope that it, plus this piece, will assuage his doubts and that he will be prompted to join forces with us, thereby increasing our number to the proper celestial figure.

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