



GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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BY ROBERT LEADER

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God, Faith and Reason is a readable survey of philosophy which examines the whole metaphysical jig-saw and explains why belief in God is rational and reasonable, and why all faith must lead to God.

What are the relationships between God, faith and Reason?

Can God still exist in a world dominated by Science, materialism and skepticism?

The author is a prolific novelist who studied philosophy at the University of East Anglia as a mature student, after traveling extensively through the heartlands of all the world’s great religions. His answers to these questions are therefore based upon both a formal study of the great philosophers and practical human experience.

This book argues that God probably does exist, and that the uncertainties and cultural differences which cloud the true understanding of His nature are a positive factor which cry out for a greater tolerance between religions.

In our modern world, as religious faiths collide, this timely book offers a new perspective for all believers to co-exist in peace and harmony, and points a clear way forward, for religious belief into the third millennium.

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INTRODUCTION

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Since the dawn of civilization there have been philosophers who have tried to define the spirit of every age. The fundamental questions have always remained the same, but for the thinkers and searchers after the fundamental truths, the answers have always seemed in need of reviewing, or updating, with every new blossoming of human knowledge, and every new illumination of the human or universal condition.

The ancient Greeks made the first clearly recorded efforts in the western world to understand the workings of the natural world, and of man's place within it. Later the great Catholic thinkers of the middle ages rediscovered Plato and Aristotle, and sought to reunite the Greek world views with their own Christian concepts of God and His Creation.

The Renaissance brought the weakening of the iron control of the Catholic Church over man's thinking and saw a brilliant flowering of new ideas and understanding. But God was still the centre of most thought, and the great metaphysical systems of Descartes and Spinoza tried to show how God could exist in relation to, or as the essence of, the increasing complexity and diversity of His wonderful creation.

The ages of Romanticism and The Enlightenment brought new waves of thought and world views, tumbling over each other like vast breakers on the new intellectual and spiritual shores, some of them generated in Europe, and others brought in or influenced by the widening contacts with other vital and exotic cultures such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism.

The discoveries of the dawning age of science, and of Darwin's epic voyage on the Beagle, brought the most violent upheaval of all. Philosophers struggled with the new revolution in human knowledge, and either tried to abandon God, or to re-cast him as the Divine Architect of this radical new theory of evolution.

Now the science of physics has revealed that our earthly home is not only an insignificant little planet orbiting a minor star, which is only one among the billions of stars that make up our galaxy; but that the galaxy itself is only one of the billions of galaxies in an expanding universe -- a universe which began with a Big Bang, and may end with a similar Big Crunch.

We have come a long way from the world of the ancient Greeks, who believed that our earth was the centre of the universe, and, it might seem, a long way from God. But religious faith and belief in God still flourish, even in this new age of scientific wonder and new discovery. So perhaps it is time to again ask the questions where can philosophy and religious faith go from here.

If we look at the Christian faith, which is still the predominant faith in the western world, we can see that the advent of the third millennium must have a particularly deep significance. Jesus Christ, The Messiah and the Son Of God, was expected to return to this world at the end of the first millennium, calculated as one thousand years after his birth in Bethlehem. It didn't happen. Christianity was by then a well-established religion with popes ruling in both Rome and Constantinople, but Europe was still in the grip of the Dark ages. In England Ethelred the Unready was king over an island raided and ravaged by the rampaging Vikings, and in the Holy Lands where Christ had walked and preached Islam and the Arabs were then its masters.

Now the year AD2000 has also passed, and we have entered the Third Millennium. England and Europe are faring better, but the ancient lands of Palestine are still torn by bloody battles between Arabs and Jews. Christianity itself seems assailed on all sides, by the advancement of science and technology, and by other faiths and creeds. Christ has again failed to return as we have passed the crucial date of the Second Millennium. Instead we have seen a terrifying upsurge in religious terrorism, the murderous attack on the World Trade Centre towers in New York, and the resulting horrors of the war in Afghanistan and Iraq as the West retaliated and strove to exterminate the perpetrators. The vast majority of Muslim peoples are peaceful, moderate believers in God, but the possibility of more of their moderate governments being taken over by extremists like the Taliban in Afghanistan is very real. It seems that we may have survived the Cold War and the threat of nuclear annihilation only to face the new dangers of blind fanatics promoting Holy Terrorism and Holy War. So where will Christianity and religion in general go from here?

In the past the vast majority of the world's people were extremely limited in their knowledge and experience, knowing little beyond their own daily lives and the landscape within walking distance of their homes. Now that has all changed, our horizons are infinitely widened, but they are breached walls, admitting a bewildering flood of new sensations. No longer does any individual, or faith, or nation, live in comfortable isolation.

Instead we virtually all live today in some form of multi-racial, multi-religious society. Not only does the modern wonder of television bring the religions, cultures and beliefs of other countries regularly into our living rooms, but we also have Moslems, Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus and Jews living among us. They are often our neighbors, and in many of our larger cities we can find their mosques, temples and synagogues, adding to the architectural splendors of our own Christian churches and cathedrals.

In this glorious intermingling of faiths and cultures it would be folly to see only dangers, there are challenges and opportunities too. But all too often it does seem all too daunting and bewildering, and that brings its own danger, the danger that we may lose sight of God altogether. Amid all this change and confusion about what is true about God and religion, it is perhaps not surprising that most people are in some degree agnostic.

Most of us still profess to a belief in some kind of Creator God, but have no clear idea of what sort of a god, He, She, or even It might be. Even some of our bishops are of no help to us here.

Most of us do not regularly go to church, and yet we still generally join ranks and attend for those all-important rituals of birth, marriage and death, when the central participants come, or are carried, to have these significant events blessed and brought to God's notice. We are not all sure if we believe that God is actually watching and listening, but we do not disbelieve enough to stay away when we think that perhaps He might.

In the same way we generally respect those who do profess their faith and witness their religion, but at the same time we try to steer clear of them if they attempt to preach their message too fervently. Uncomfortable embarrassment is the usual response when we open the door to find the earnest, Bible-bearing evangelist urging us to hear about God and His word.

We do to some extent want to believe in God and an afterlife, but we are not so sure that we want to be convinced of the powers of Sin and Satan. We generally feel that we are somehow more than just physical beings, and that there may be some sort of spiritual essence within us, and yet we stop short of believing in the whole package with its traditional view of Heaven and Hell.

We feel that there must be something at the root of all the religious experience of men and women everywhere, and yet we are not sure of what bits of what beliefs we can logically accept. Many of us fall short of committing ourselves to any religion, because we are not sure of what we are, or of what is true, and of what we should be committing ourselves to.

Now that the end of the second millennium has passed without the return of Christ, is there still room for Christians to believe?

Is there a God, Christian or otherwise?

And if there is such a being or essence, is there a religion which truly knows God?

And one final question, which brings us to the content of this book, is there any way in which the continuing intellectual endeavor of philosophy can help us?

The immediate answer would seem to be no, because modern philosophy, and most modern philosophers do seem to have given up on the concept of God. With science offering a whole range of new answers to all the old fundamental questions there seems to be no real importance in the eternal argument over the existence or non-existence of God. Can there be anything meaningful in such a concept when so many different religions offer us so many different and often conflicting interpretations of God. And for the non-academic majority can there be anything meaningful in the hair-splitting intellectual quibbling of the logical positivism school of most modern philosophers? Mainstream philosophy today argues that what cannot be logically and positively defined cannot be legitimately discussed, and so it no longer attempts to understand human spiritual experience and the spiritual nature of things as philosophers did in the past. Having become blind to any spiritual reality the new philosophers accept only human and physical realities, and the study of these they prefer to abdicate to the new gods of science. Philosophy itself has been developed into a sub-science of logical argument analysis which finds its only purpose in serving true science as a kind of queenly referee.

Most modern philosophical thinking is that science will ultimately explain everything. Science will ultimately provide man with the best total understanding of all things - a level of understanding which was once believed to belong only to God. And if there is no understanding of God in this overall understanding which is to be achieved by science, if God Himself cannot be investigated, or measured, or analyzed scientifically, then this can only be because God does not exist.

Philosophy then, with a few notable exceptions, is generally against God. Philosophy and science have failed to prove on their own terms that God exists. They can find no objective, empirical evidence for His existence. And so they argue from this that God does not exist.

Are they right?

Does it matter?

I believe they are wrong, and that the issue is still crucially important. Those who have faith in God have no need for philosophical proofs, and are not much impressed by the difficult and often almost incomprehensible arguments of most academic philosophers. Their faith is a matter of personal awareness or experience; it is rooted in something which has happened or is happening in their own lives in which they sense the presence or existence of something spiritual. Theirs is the quiet confidence of an inner and subjective knowledge which frustrates and exasperates all objective efforts of analysis and definition.

At the other pole those who firmly reject God will not be much interested in philosophical arguments either. Perhaps they will have accepted the ideas of scientific materialism, believing that man is just another sort of matter, a kind of organic machine in a chance universe of exploding matter from the Big Bang. Or perhaps they have accepted the ideas of humanism, which argues that man is the ultimate of all things, he may be conceded as more than a machine, but there is nothing that transcends him and God is his own invention. Or perhaps they are living comfortably in this physical world, and simply feel that they have no need for God, and no need to even think or worry about the mysteries of His, or even their own, existence.

However, there are many -and I suspect the majority - who are less certain; who are undecided about the issue, and confused about what they can rationally believe, and about what they should spiritually believe. They have neither the quiet confidence of faith, nor the brash carelessness of rejection. They will probably have had inner experiences, thoughts and emotions, which they do not in all honesty know how to interpret, together with unresolved moments of self-questioning and doubt. This book is written mainly for them, although those who already have a positive faith in God, and those who have rejected the idea of his existence, may also find something revealing in its pages.

This book will attempt two different but related tasks. The first is to challenge mainstream philosophy on its own terms, and show that even at the logical and intellectual level it is still rational to believe in the probable existence of God. Here I deliberately say probable, because, in my view, it is on the very uncertainty of God's existence that the probability of His existence can be based. This may seem a very difficult and paradoxical idea, but I hope to make it clear by the time you are half way through this book.

The central argument of these opening chapters hinges on the belief that human beings do have some freedom of will, and a final statement of the argument could be summed up as follows: --

IF GOD EXISTS THEN THERE MUST BE DOUBT AND

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT HIS EXISTENCE AND HIS NATURE IN ORDER

FOR HIS EXISTENCE TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH ANY GENUINE FREEDOM OF WILL FOR INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS.

However, there is much more to be said before the belief that human beings have some freedom of will, together with the truth probability of my final statement, can have any reasonable justification.

If we can first show that religious faith and a belief in God is neither illogical nor irrational, then the next question is to ask in which faith, or in which God, we should believe? This will bring us to the second task of this book, which will be an attempt to argue from the universality of all human religious experience to the idea that all faith leads to one God. The argument here is that the similarities of human religious experience are more meaningful than the culture induced differences of context, and that they are all attempting to define the true interpretation of the same spiritual reality.

It does seem that almost all religions and almost all philosophies contain some perspectives of truth, although their usual claims to present an exclusive and comprehensive truth, outside of which all other claims and speculations are false and harmful, are both arrogant and misleading. The secret of life is not as simple and rigid as many closed dogmas and creeds would have us believe. Like the multitude of stars in the night sky there are many truths, and many of them do seem to shine with equal brilliance.

We live in a dangerous age where our world is contracting as peoples and cultures become better known to each other, and yet it is also a world where human knowledge is ever expanding as we probe into particles of the atom, and into the galaxies and beyond. For most people this multiplies confusion with uncertainty, until it all becomes incomprehensible. The human mind reaches saturation point and gives up the unequal battle.

My hope is to unravel at least some of this confusion and uncertainty, to show that all religious faith is reasonable, and to show how different faiths can hope to co-exist with mutual tolerance and understanding. I have tried to signpost where this book is going as clearly as I can, for I know that some parts of it will be complex and difficult to follow. Every religion, and most philosophies, offer some kind of blueprint for ideal human behavior, and so the final chapters of this book will attempt to draw some moral and political implications from its conclusions. But thinking is a continuous process, we can never fully know and understand all that there is to know and understand, so we cannot afford to let our minds close as we close this book, no more than we can allow our minds to be closed by any other doctrine, creed, or "ism."

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CHAPTER ONE

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A NEW LOOK AT THE FREE WILL ARGUMENT

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It seems to me that after more than two millennium of heated debate there are only four possible outcomes to the eternal arguments about whether or not God exists:

One is that God does not exist and that science will eventually be able to prove this.

Two is that God does exist, and that eventually He will show Himself, or science will be able to discover Him.

Three is that God does not exist, but that science will not be able to prove this.

And the fourth and final possibility is that God does exist, but that again science will not be able to prove this.

The first two possibilities, that God can be shown to exist, and that God can be shown not to exist, have been debated ad-infinitum throughout the whole history of religion and philosophy without reaching any proven conclusion. Most religions claim that God has shown Himself in one way or another, but these revelations all seem to have occurred among primitive or ancient peoples whom we can reasonably suppose to have been hopelessly superstitious, gullible or naive. We can believe their stories only through faith as all the witnesses and all the factual evidence have long since been buried by time. The atheist challenges such faith with impertinent questions -- If God showed Himself so regularly to men in scriptural times, then why doesn't He do so today? If God performed miracles so often in the past, then why doesn't He do so today? -- And when believers answer that God is working and revealing Himself in their experience and in their lives, the atheist demands to know why God does not do these things in ways in which science can check out their validity for us all. These are difficult questions for the believer to answer without sounding evasive or obscure.

A vast amount of intellectual effort has been spent on trying to show that God does or does not exist, and in my view there can be little that will be new or useful that can be added to this particular area of debate. However, the third and fourth possibilities, that the existence or non-existence of God cannot, and will not, be conclusively proved, do appear to be a more promising area for further consideration.

I have to concede at this stage that the third possibility -- that God does not exist although science cannot prove it, is a logical possibility. At the same time I do not believe this to be the most likely possibility. The enduring power of religious faith and the universal extent of human religious experience all weigh against it. I shall have to deal with these points in more detail, and with their counter arguments, later in the book, but in these early chapters it is on possibility number four that I intend to concentrate. I believe that the possibility that God exists, but that science will never be able to prove it, is the strongest possibility, strong enough to be stated as the most probable of all the four possible outcomes.

This brings us back to the challenging questions of the atheist. If God does exist in any meaningful sense today, then why does He reveal Himself only to the inner experience and insights of some people and not to others? And why should He remain hidden from all the investigations of science, or from any other form of objective or empirical proof?

One answer is that science studies the way in which things work, while God is the explanation of why things work in the way they do. The scientist and the believer are thus approaching the issues from different directions with different perspectives, and so their findings, and their understanding of what they find, must necessarily appear different.

However, there is another answer to the atheist questions; and that is that God wills this state of affairs because it is only the uncertainty of whether he exists or not which can allow men the free will to make their own choices. This idea -- that if God exists then he must exist necessarily as a mystery in order for men to have any meaningful freedom of will, is the main theme of this book.

This statement of the central idea brings us directly to the free will argument, or the free will defence, which is traditionally used in the philosophy of religion as one of the ways of explaining the problem of evil. Therefore, it will be useful to look at the free will argument as it is generally used, before attempting to see how it fits into my own argument for a rational belief in the probable existence of God. But before we can do either of these things there is another philosophical hurdle to be cleared away. This is the free will against determinism issue which questions whether we can ever claim to act freely at all.

The problem is this. We like to believe that our thoughts and actions are freely performed, and that therefore we have both responsibility for our own actions, and some element of control over our own destinies. If we cannot believe this, then all considerations of morality and such things as praise and punishment become totally meaningless, and the same applies to all our efforts and striving toward either our own selfish aims or a better world. However, philosophers point to the seemingly logical truth that every event must have a cause. Our thoughts and actions are events and therefore they too must have a cause. If they are caused then they are pre-determined. The idea that our thoughts and actions are pre-determined contradicts directly with the idea that they are freely performed.

The idea that every event must have a cause is a logical truth; it is like the truth that "two plus two equals four", in that we cannot see how it could ever be false. On the other hand the idea that we have freedom of will is a common-sense sort of truth, in that it is the sort of truth that most people will take for granted without giving it any questioning thought. However, philosophers have a tendency to give much more weight to their logical truths than they give to the common-sense truths of the majority of people, and if we are to challenge their denial of God's existence on their own terms then we must make some attempt to resolve these philosophical issues as we go along.

Therefore, I will suggest that the problem of every event having a cause being incompatible with our belief that we have freedom of will, is only a problem for two reasons. One is that the philosophers seem to be arguing that either there must be absolute freedom of will, or that absolutely everything is pre-determined. The other is that their thinking is too materialistic, and they have not made sufficient distinction between the animate and the inanimate; that vital distinction between the material object and the thinking, reasoning, decision-making human being -- in short the distinction between a mindless lump of matter and a man.

Before we consider these two points further, perhaps it will be useful to briefly consider the other obvious question which cannot be isolated from our problem. Is it true that every event does have a cause?

The answer, it seems, must be yes, because it is impossible to conceive of an event occurring without a cause. However, this does not mean that every cause will be followed by an event, nor does it mean that any given cause will always be followed by the same, or even a similar event.

Imagine that my pen is lying on the table. If I touch the pen with my finger and move my finger forward I push the pen and it rolls across the table. We have a simple cause, the pushing movement of my finger, and a simple event, the pen rolling across the table. However, if I make the same pushing movement with my finger in the air above the table we have the same initial action, the same potential cause, but no visible event. There is in this case no pen hovering in the air to be pushed and rolled. Thus for a cause to be followed by an event there must be two objects involved, or two forces, or a combination of force and object; add to this the further complications of space and time, and the variations in possible results are limitless.

So every cause does not necessarily have an event. Even more important, a repeated cause does not necessarily lead to similar repeated events. There can be no event, or there can be alternative events, and this leads us to that vital distinction between animate and inanimate objects.

For example, if I kick a football, then provided it is not fixed in place by some even stronger force, and is not affected by the wind or some similar consideration, then usually there will be only one sort of event: the football will be propelled away from me in the direction in which I have kicked it. But if I kick an animate object, perhaps a philosopher who has irritated me with his logical objections, then there are a whole range of alternative events which could follow this initial causal action. The philosopher might run away, he might admonish me with abuse or with logical argument to explain why I should not have kicked him, or he might kick me in return, or call upon a policeman to charge me with assault. He has, in fact, a whole range of possible choices in his reaction. We can see now that we do not have to make a stark choice between the idea of an absolute freedom of will, and the idea that absolutely everything is pre-determined. Our actions are caused, and so they can never be wholly free, but our ability to make choices gives us varying degrees of freedom within the framework of our causal limitations. As man has developed his powers of reason and widened his fields of knowledge and understanding, so he has increased his degrees of freedom by being able to calculate the effects of an increasing number of his possible actions and responses.

Therefore we can argue that our concepts of morality and our tendencies to praise and punish are not meaningless. Man has the ability to predict and understand the results of his actions, and because of this he is responsible for those actions. For the same reasons he does have some degree of control over his own destiny.

Obviously his freedom is not absolute. He cannot choose not to be born; he cannot choose not to die. His physique, health, mental capacity, bodily needs, character and biography are either born with him, developed within him, or imposed upon him. He will develop his own value judgments and moral considerations, either as an individual, or by taking on those of his society, or by a mixture of both. His opportunities and experiences will provide an ever-widening range of reference points. All these factors will be influences on his decisions, either consciously, or sub- consciously, and so he can never be absolutely free. But within that framework of influences and limitations I will maintain that man does have degrees of freedom. His decision-making and reasoning abilities enable him to make choices, and so he can exercise some freedom of will over how he responds to whatever motivates him as a cause.

If I am hungry, then in a sense I have to eat, but nothing pre-determines that I have to eat a ham sandwich, even if that is what I do choose to eat. I am free to choose anything on the available menu that will satisfy my hunger. Or, as an extreme measure, I am free to starve. I am free to love my neighbor, or to cheat him. I am free to break my promises, or to keep them. I am free to believe in God, or not to believe in God. My freedom of choice is my freedom of will.

There is much more that could be said about free will and determinism, or about cause and effect, and philosophers have written reams of articles and tons of books on these related subjects. However, I hope I have shown that we do have a reasonable justification for believing that we do have some freedom of will, in which case we can regard this particular philosophical hurdle as cleared and go on to the next step.

The next step is to look at the free will argument as it is used as one of the major explanations of another eternal philosophical problem, the problem of evil.

The problem of evil can be stated as follows: God, especially in Judaic/Christian thought, is held to be all-powerful, all-knowing, present everywhere, all-loving and all-good -- and yet, as we all know, the world contains a great variety of evils. Therefore, the concept of God, the atheist logically argues, is simply incompatible with the reality of the existence of evil.

This statement of the problem contains the Christian definition of God but let us consider for a moment the definitions of the terms good and evil. The latter breaks down into two forms; physical evil and moral evil. Physical evil is any form or natural disaster or danger beyond the control of man, such as storms, floods, famine, poisonous snakes, predatory animals, sickness, disease, ect. Moral evil is the evil caused by man through his own cruelty or greed, by the means of crime, conquest and war. The two forms of evil can best be summed up as anything which causes, or has the potential to cause, human misery, pain or suffering.

By contrast good is defined as happiness, and freedom from suffering and pain. But -- is this perhaps too simple a definition of what we mean by good? Can we equate real happiness with nothing more than freedom from suffering and pain? A rabbit in a hutch which has a kind owner will be fed, watered and sheltered, and as far as possible kept free from suffering and pain. Presumably the rabbit in this situation should be happy, all its needs are provided for and it has no fears or worries. But would it not perhaps be happier if it had some real measure of freedom, and a life of challenge, opportunity and variety, instead of its pointless and negative existence in the hutch. If being happy is what is good for us, then which of these alternatives is the greater good?

If we want to say that the protected life in the hutch, or even in a perfectly safe flower garden flowing with streams of milk and honey, is really the greater good, then it would seem that with the problem of evil the atheist has a sound argument to challenge the believer in God. On the other hand, if a life of true freedom, with all the challenge and variety such a free life entails, is really the greater good, then the atheist argument collapses. Challenge implies risks from dangers, and the risks must materialize sometimes if they are to be real, and variety means some variation from the negative good.

If we can term the life of the rabbit in the hutch, or the flower garden, where nothing can possibly harm it, as a life of negative good, then we can term the much richer and more varied life of the free rabbit, despite the inherent risks it runs of encountering harm, as a life of positive good. With this distinction in mind, we can look again at the question of whether the existence of evil in the world constitutes evidence against the existence of God. The answer must depend now upon whether we chose negative good or positive good as the greater good. If we wish to argue that negative good is the greater good then the atheist wins the main argument. However, I would argue that positive good is the greater good, as Shakespeare wrote: "What's won is done, soul's joy lies in the doing!" A world with everything done and nothing to be won would never be able to experience the joy of any kind of achievement. It would be a stagnant world, pleasantly so, perhaps, but still stagnant, with no swirl of events and no motivation. Therefore I think it can fairly be said that positive good can justify the existence of some evil.

I think that what I have said so far in forcing the distinction between negative and positive good is in effect combining three of the traditional defenses against the problem of evil. These are: (A) the free will defense, (B) the logical impossibility of any meaningful (or positive) good without the existence of evil, and (C) the argument that overall the natural laws of the universe do operate for the general good. It is the first of these which I need to make clear in order to move on to the main theme of this book, but I shall look at each of them in turn.

The logically necessary view of evil is an argument which helps to explain away the necessity for physical evil as well as moral evil. The argument is that God could not have made the world so that good existed without evil. The implication here is that there are two sides to every experiential coin. To experience joy we must know the meaning of despair, to appreciate good health we must know the meaning of pain, and so on. I think that here it can be conceded that perhaps a world of negative good can be conceived without evil, but I think I have already shown that a world of positive good could not exist without evil. It might be counter- argued that positive good only requires the risk, or possibility of evil, and not the existence of actual evil, but I cannot see how the risk or possibility could be real if there was no actual evil. Therefore I conclude that evil is logically necessary for positive good.

A similar argument applies with the claim that the natural laws governing the universe do operate for the overall good. Adverse elements and dangers help to unite men, forging bonds of fellowship, and allowing scope for the virtues of human courage, sacrifice and compassion. It is possible to conceive of a world God might have created where the winds are always fair and gentle, the rain always soft and just sufficient, the sun is almost always shining, the nights never cold, and dangerous animals are non-existent; but once the possibility of climatic extremes and other natural dangers is removed, then we are moving back toward a dull, still-life world of only negative good.

I have digressed into these other arguments because the problem of evil is a major issue which a book of this kind could not by-pass, and having raised it is important to give some answer to the side issue of physical evil. Having done this we can now concentrate on the free will defense, which applies mainly to moral evil, the evil that is directly or indirectly caused by the actions of man.

The traditional free will defense of classical theism is that God, in order to give to man a life of positive good, to make him more than a negative automaton or a pampered but impotent rabbit, gave man freedom of will. This freedom of will is a freedom of choice over his own beliefs and actions which allow man to sometimes chose evil. Creating men with freedom of will entails the logical necessity of permitting the mistaken or wrong choices they may make.

The normal form of the free will defense is that this lets God off the moral hook, because the blame for moral evil can then be placed directly on man. This is open to further argument from the atheist who will claim that God could and should have made men without freedom of will. However, having forced the distinction between negative and positive good, I will maintain that the positive good that can be derived from giving men freedom of will is a greater good than the negative good that would be derived from making men as mere automatons.

There is a further atheist argument that God could have made men so that they always freely chose the good, and that the fact that he did not do this shows that he cannot be both omnipotent and wholly good. But how can it be possible to always freely chose the good? The idea is surely a self-contradiction. For if I must always chose the good then I would not have any alternatives. I would not have a genuine freedom of choice. My actions would be pre-determined with no degree of freedom.

And how would men who always freely chose the good be any different from our impotent rabbits? And what would such placid, harmless creatures have of interest in their lives? If variety is the spice of life, then conflict is its essence. Any author knows that if his novel is to be read then it must contain conflict, between the characters themselves, and between the characters and the elements and their situations. Any composer knows that if is symphony is to be played and enjoyed then it must contain contrasts of melody, mood and drama. In Beethoven's 9th Symphony the theme of the final movement, the great song of joy, fights its way through the previous movement until it soars pure, clear and triumphant. It seems to me that a novel without conflict would be as dull as a telephone directory; a symphony without themes and contrasts would be as flat as an endless, droning snore; and a universe without conflict, challenges, stimulus and variety, would have no meaning either for its Creator, or for those he creates. What some atheists try to show as God's inconsistency or failure, is in fact God's triumph.

So far in this chapter I have tried to show that in his reasoning power to make decisions and choices man does have some freedom of will. This provides the foundation for the classical free will defense against the problem of evil. Freedom of will means freedom to be creative, to experiment, to seek diversity and variety; for each human being to seek his or her own self-fulfillment. Only with freedom of will can all the possibilities of human potential be set in motion. Therefore it follows that a world in which men have freedom of will is precisely the kind of world that an all good and all powerful God would chose to create.

However, it seems to me that the traditional free will argument can be logically carried one step further, and that is the final step we have to make to complete this chapter. If we accept the argument of the preceding paragraph, then it is clear that God would have to make some sort of decision in determining His own relationship to these creatures which He has created with their own freedom of will. In making this decision he would have three logical choices. With the first choice he could make His existence clearly known to all His creatures. In the second choice he could keep His existence hidden and unknown to all His creatures. Or he could make the third and middle choice of keeping his existence for ever uncertain, with belief in Him a matter of faith and free choice.

The first choice would seem to contradict His original purpose, for it would automatically undermine any real freedom of will for mankind. For if all men knew, or could be shown for certain, that God existed, and that he was all-powerful, all-good and all-knowing, then this certainty would prove a powerful constraint on their freedom. Men would be much better behaved, but fear and the impossibility of escaping retribution might well have us all sacrificing, worshipping and praying in a world where there would be no individual spirit, because no man would dare to follow his own desires or in any way risk offending God. This would be a slave-like existence which could only appeal to a blind God's vanity, and not far removed from the pointless world we envisaged for our impotent rabbits.

The second choice that God might have made, that of keeping his existence completely unknown and unsuspected, might well open the way to the opposite extremes. There might be no moral checks at all, and men would simply pursue their own selfish instincts on a level worse than the wild beast laws of the jungle. Life would then be, as Hobbes described it, "Nasty, brutish, and short."

Of course it could be argued that without God a total lack of morality is not a logical necessity. There are concepts and philosophies such as humanism, communism, practical necessity or utilitarianism which could establish an alternative moral order without any belief in God or any sort of divine retribution. We shall come back to the subject of morality in a later chapter, but for the moment it seems sufficient to say that in a world that only partially believes in God there is still more than enough violence, greed and selfishness to make these other concepts seem less than ideal in practice. Thus it seems reasonable to suggest that a world in which even the concept of God was non-existent would in all probability be a far worse world than the one we inhabit now.

And so we come to the third choice, whereby God could arrange a state of affairs in which proof of His existence or non-existence is impossible to obtain. At the same time, in ways that can never constitute the definite scientific proof which science and modern philosophy demands, he could make His presence known to those He chooses, so that all can be aware of the possibility of His existence. In this way men could be given a genuine free will, and be provided with an inner basis for morality. And finally, for those of sufficient faith, there is still the possibility of spiritual awareness, or even spiritual communion with God.

It is the argument of this book that this third choice is the choice that an all-powerful, loving God would probably make. It is the only choice that would be compatible with giving human beings any genuine freedom of will. For many of us who are lacking in any firm commitment to faith the belief in God will be over-shadowed by an eternal question mark. But that belief will be sustained by the faith of the believers, and their belief can be shown to be reasonably justified.

The free will argument not only solves the problem of evil, it also answers the question of why science and philosophical logic cannot prove whether or not God exists. Such proof is not possible because God wills that it should not be possible. It is God's will that His nature and existence must forever remain a mystery shrouded in uncertainty. This is the state of affairs we find in the world today, it is the state of affairs which has always been sustained, and so it is this very mystery and uncertainty which provides reasonable justification for a logical belief in the probable existence of God.

GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER TWO

BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

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If you have not read any academic books on philosophy then the conclusions of the previous chapter may already seem convincing. But there are objections that can be made, and the majority of professional philosophers would, I suspect, raise them most strongly.

For example, if we look back at the problem of evil, there are many modern philosophers who would argue that such things as the Nazi holocaust, the continuing patterns of terrorism and political atrocities in the world today, and the droughts and famines which afflict most of North Africa, all constitute an excess of evil and suffering far over and above the requirement for positive good. Thus the problem of evil does still present the believer in God with a genuine and difficult problem. We might argue that perhaps we over-estimate the amount of evil that exists against good, simply because it is only the dramas containing evil which make news and which have made most of world history. But even this does not seem wholly satisfactory. As the atheist charges, there does often seem to be a case for some subtle interference by God to reduce superfluous human suffering, and if He is All-loving and All-powerful it is difficult to understand why He does not interfere.

Perhaps there is an explanation here only at the cost of modifying one of the orthodox concepts of Christian theism. It may be that God is not absolutely omnipotent, and that having created men with free will, and set other universal laws in motion, He cannot now intervene in the way things are arranged without serious cosmic consequences.

Let us be honest here and admit that if the vast amounts of money, time, and other resources that are spent on maintaining armies and stockpiling weapons were to be spent instead on humanitarian causes, then much of the moral and physical evils of this world could be alleviated. Man has received the gift of free will, but it may be that he is not only a disappointment to God, but also a frustration to God, in that he does not use his freedom wisely.

It may be that God's relationship to this world is like that of the designer or engineer who builds a huge juggernaut truck. If the driver who eventually takes the wheel develops into a madman who prefers to drive around wildly running over people when he could be ferrying food to them, can that really be fully the fault or responsibility of the engineer who designed the truck?

The atheist will jump in here and claim victory in the argument because we have to consider the possible concession of one of God's traditionally claimed attributes. But I am not arguing for any particular religion's definition of God, and neither do I pretend to have all the answers. I am only trying to show that there is logical justification for belief in the probable existence of God, even if we cannot know everything about Him, and even if we cannot conclusively prove any single thing about Him.

So let us move on to what I expect will be the strongest and loudest objection from science and mainstream philosophy. This would be that so far I have not shown anything at all, and that trying to build a logical argument for the probability of God's existence on the uncertainty of His existence is only an elaborate evasion -- a cop-out, because there is no answer to the scientific demand for empirical proof.

How can we answer this objection? In a sense there is no answer: modern philosophy says that we cannot sensibly believe in God if we cannot show that He exists, and my argument says that we cannot show that God exists because this is in all probability the way in which He has arranged things.

However, I believe that I can strengthen the foundation of my argument without leaving the philosophical arena. Clearly any explanation or theory of whether God exists or does not exist would have to be consistent with a compatible explanation or theory in all the other fields of philosophy. There are various divisions of philosophical debate, such as modern metaphysics, which studies the problems of belief and knowledge; the philosophy of mind; moral philosophy and the philosophy of religion; all of which interlock like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. It would not be logical or consistent to hold to a belief in the probable existence of God in one field, and yet to hold to a materialistic belief in another. Therefore, it would seem that if we can show the materialistic or atheist arguments to be true in any major field of philosophy, then this would undermine the argument I have so far made. On the other hand, if we can show the materialistic and atheist arguments to be false or inconclusive in all the major fields of philosophy, then my argument will be strengthened.

Consequently I shall now try to show that a similar inconclusive uncertainty exists in all the key areas of these interlocking fields of philosophy. This fact, I shall then argue, maintains the plausibility and probability of my main thesis.

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Let us begin with metaphysics. In one sense the word metaphysics means to go above and beyond physics, to inquire into the fundamental or ultimate reality of things or being. A metaphysical theory is a theory about what exists, and about how and why things exist and most of the great philosophers of the past were metaphysicians in that they attempted to discover or define a cohesive conception of what reality might be. Until the seventeenth century the majority accepted the core idea of God as the Creator of the Universe, and attempted to fit their understanding of all other things around a justification of this central concept.

Metaphysics in this sense would combine a ontology and a epistemology. The word ontology describes a list of things which we might believe to exist in the world; and a typical example might be that we believe the world to contain physical objects, or matter, energy, minds, souls, and God. In conjunction with this we would have to offer an epistemology, which is a theory of knowledge, or an account of how we can adequately justify our claim to know that these things exist.

Modern philosophers no longer attempt such grand designs or total explanations. They leave most of the ontological inquiries to science. However, the modern philosophers still concern themselves very much with questions of epistemology. Modern metaphysics has, in effect, been reduced in focus to this study of belief and knowledge.

There are two important questions here. The first is how can we differentiate between belief and knowledge? Or, to put it another way, how can we know that what we believe to be true really is true? The second question is even more skeptical than the first, it asks -- is true knowledge ever really possible?

Clearly these questions must be an important consideration behind any other questions we might ask in any field of philosophy. Consequently whole libraries of books have been written in trying to solve these basic epistemological questions, and many modern philosophers are of the opinion that it is pointless to even ask any further questions until these two can be resolved.

The key issue at the root of these basic questions is this: What is an adequate justification for a belief? Through what kind of testing process can we pass a belief before we can confidently conclude that it is true knowledge?

There are two kinds of knowledge. One is direct knowledge by experience; such as when I see an apple, or touch it or taste it, or when I smell the fragrance of apple blossom, or hear the breeze rustling the leaves of the apple tree. The other is what philosophers call propositional knowledge, which is our knowledge of things or events that are described to us by other people, either in direct conversation, or in books, newspapers, on the radio or TV, or any other kind of media. We usually believe what we directly experience, and generally we accept most of what we learn second-hand, so to speak, although we may take some of the latter with the proverbial pinch of salt. However, skeptical philosophers argue that our beliefs, from both sources, are no more than beliefs. We can never justifiably claim them to be more than that. We cannot claim them to be true knowledge.

If we consider propositional knowledge or knowledge by description, then it does seem that this sort of knowledge has to be taken largely on trust. For example, it may be that I have never traveled to India and have never seen the Taj Mahal. However, a friend of mine returns, so he tells me, from his travels in India, where he has seen this wondrous building the Taj Mahal. I may believe him because I believe he has no cause to lie to me, but I cannot know that he is telling the truth. He may be lying, or he may be exaggerating his story to impress me, or he may be imparting a story that he has heard at second or third hand. If I read about the Taj Mahal in a book, then no matter how detailed the story of its construction may be, or the descriptions of its marble towers and screens, or its hypnotic beauty be moonlight, it is still possible that the author is making the whole thing up. Even if I see the Taj Mahal on the cinema or TV screen it is still possible that the image is only that of an elaborate model in a studio. Nothing guarantees that the Taj Mahal actually exists, or even that the country of India exists. I may believe what I have heard or seen, but I cannot know that it is true.

For this reason the skeptical philosopher argues that every propositional statement must have some further evidence to support it. The problem is that if that further evidence is also in the form of a propositional statement, then it is also open to the same doubts as the first propositional statement For example: we have the statement, "There is a wonderful building in India called the Taj Mahal." How do I know this? Because my friend told me so. But how do I know that my friend is telling me the truth? Because my friend does not tell lies. But how do I know that my friend would never tell a lie?

And so it goes on -- and on -- and on --ad infinitum! For every statement that we might bring in as supporting evidence for the statement that has gone before, we must always ask again the ever pertinent question, how do we know that this new statement is true. Every propositional statement which we think is true is just a belief, and we cannot show a belief to be true by relying on another belief, or even a whole succession of beliefs. We therefore have a major problem of finding a terminal or a basic adequately justified belief. Only then can we establish a valid claim to knowledge.

This is what philosophers call the infinite regress problem, and they insist that it is a very serious and genuine problem. Some philosophers will argue that it has no solution, and for many of them it casts the shadow of doubt on all forms of proposed knowledge by description.

However, even if all forms of communicated knowledge are slightly suspect, what about direct knowledge by experience? Surely if I travel to India and actually see and touch the Taj Mahal, then I must have true knowledge of its existence. If we must have adequate justifications for our beliefs then surely they can be based on direct links to our senses?

Well, perhaps? Some philosophers will argue that our sense experiences, what we actually see, hear, touch, taste or smell, do constitute the basic building blocks of our edifice of knowledge. Our sense data, as they call these sensory experiences, can provide a foundation which will support the body of propositional knowledge we add on top. On the other hand, they point out with their irritating logic, there are still problems of perception.

The problem is that I perceive things as they appear to me. You perceive things as they appear to you. But our perceptions may not match, and even if they do it still does not follow that together we perceive things as they really are. It is always possible that appearance is not reality.

For a start objects can seem to have different colors when seen in a different light. The Taj Mahal by moonlight may have an ivory gleam, but in bright sunlight its marble dome will appear dazzling white. In central Australia there is a huge rock called Ayers Rock which seems to change color constantly throughout the day. Because any object can appear to be a different shade of color at different times, depending on viewing conditions, then how can we ever know that what we are seeing is the true color?

Or, consider the problem of shape. Objects appear to have different shapes when viewed at different angles. If we take a walk around the Taj Mahal, then its towers will take up a different relationship to the central dome with every step we make. Ayers Rock can have a multitude of different shapes, depending upon where we stand looking at it. How then, can we ever know that we are seeing the true shape of any object?

To add to these difficulties there are factors such as distance, light refraction, and other forms of optical illusion, all of which can play tricks with the way that we see things A mirage looks real at the time of seeing it, but there is nothing there.

Finally we interpret all of these perceptions of ours through an understanding based on the totality of our individual life experiences, with sensory organs tuned to different intensities and expectations, and all of it filtered through mental processes structured by different beliefs and outlooks.

This is a survey in a nutshell, but it clearly shows that there are many complications casting doubts upon the truth validity of our sense perceptions. Yet this is still not the end of the story. There is also the problem of perspective.

Consider for a moment the table at which I am sitting. To a fly on the ceiling the table may appear as a vast flat plain, perhaps a hunting ground for food crumbs invisible to my naked eye. To an ant on the floor of the room the leg of the table may appear as some unclimbable pillar into infinity, (Perhaps the ant believes that God sits on top.) To some microscopic life form the whole table is perhaps a honeycomb of loosely connected atoms through which it can pass at will. From different perspectives the table can be all of these things, and perhaps many more. I can argue that I am not a fly, nor an ant or a microbe, but a human being, and that therefore I can only interpret the table in the way that is practical and meaningful to me. That is that to me the table is just a table. This may be sufficient for most people, but philosophers will argue that this does not show that the table is any more real from my perspective than it is from any other.

So our perceptions may not be true and our perspective may not be true. And if this is not enough there is still the question of whether we are perceiving anything from any perspective at all. There is always the possibility that anything we believe we are experiencing may be only a dream, a hallucination, or some other process of the imagination. Some philosophers have even claimed that nothing exists at all except ideas. Bishop Berkley thought that there were only ideas and human minds in the mind of God. For him all our perceptions consisted of partial participation in God's perceptions. His idealism was at the opposite pole to extreme materialism which argues that there is nothing mental at all, only material things, or matter.

There are not many philosophers who would wish to go to either of those extremes today, but many do concede the possibility that any of our experiences may be only mental. Let us suppose that last night I dreamed that I was a lion roaming the jungle. But today I believe that I am an author writing a book. But is it possible that I am really a lion who is just dreaming that he is an author? How can I ever know for certain whether I am awake or dreaming? How can I even know if I am ever awake at all?

By now it begins to seem as if modern philosophy has got itself into a right skeptical muddle with its logical objections and its insistence on adequate justifications for beliefs. However, there is a possible third kind of knowledge which may be able to help us. This is knowledge as a kind of acquired ability, like knowing how to swim, or how to ride a bicycle. An acquired ability in this sense is something we learn to do through practice, and we just know we are doing it right because otherwise we would sink in the water, or fall off the bicycle. Being able to recognize reality may also be such an acquired skill, which together with common sense offers us some return routes out of all this doubt and uncertainty.

When we walk around the Taj Mahal, in sunlight and again by moonlight, we build up a whole library of perceptions, a kind of unity of perceptual experience, or a composite image. No single perception is the whole reality of the Taj Mahal, but they are all part of its reality, and we just know that the Taj Mahal exists. We know because the only adequate explanation for the general coherence of our experience is that we are seeing the reality of the Taj Mahal.

In a similar way we recognize the reality of being awake and can distinguish our awake experiences from our dreaming experiences. The consistency and coherence of our waking life, compared to the briefness and the inconsistency and incoherence of our dreams, makes our waking life the most probable reality.

So one possible answer to all the problems we have discussed so far is coherence and consistency. These factors, as a justification for our beliefs, are an acceptable alternative to the foundations we could not previously find. Perhaps, then, the world as we perceive it is the real world after all? Perhaps -- but just as we seem to have made some sense of it all, back come those maddening philosophers with their next logical objection, the problem of induction.

An inductive argument is one which reasons from particular instances to a general conclusion. It takes two forms, one is what philosophers call induction by simple enumeration, and the other is by inference to the best explanation. For example, let us imagine that I spend six months in the city of Agra in India, and every day I visit the Taj Mahal. I shall have experienced seeing the Taj Mahal on more than one hundred and eighty different days, and so I shall have every reason to expect to see the Taj Mahal again on the next day. This is induction by simple enumeration. Induction by inference to the best explanation is something we have already done by assuming that the cohesion of all our experiences of seeing the Taj Mahal can best be explained by the idea that the Taj Mahal does actually exist.

But induction, some philosophers will argue, is not a reliable process at all. The reason why is best explained by Bertrand Russell's story of the naive chicken. The chicken lived in a farmyard and every day a man appeared to throw it handfuls of corn. The chicken thought of the man as a benevolent friend, and grew to expect its handfuls of corn as confidently as we expect to see the sun rise every morning. But eventually Christmas Day arrived. The man appeared, picked up the fattened chicken, and wrung its neck. The chicken had harbored a totally false belief about its own relationship to the man, and about the man's character and motives. Its beliefs were based upon the cohesion and consistency of its daily experiences, but those beliefs were proved wrong.

Another example which philosophers are fond of reciting is the fact that millions of our ancestors watched the patterns of sunrise and sunset and firmly believed that the sun revolved around the earth. Again that belief, constructed out of the coherence and consistency of their experience, was wrong.

So a belief arrived at by the process of induction can never carry any guarantee that it constitutes true knowledge. And yet, when we stop to think about it, we can see that almost all our thinking and almost all that we would count as our knowledge, is in some way based upon an assumption that induction does provide a basis for justified belief. To behave as if induction is a sound basis for belief is in fact the only rational way for a human being to behave.

If a certain person has known me all my life, and has greeted me every day as a friend, then it still does not follow from this that he must necessarily greet me as a friend on the next occasion that we meet. It may be that he will have lost his memory, or that he will have learned something about me that makes him decide that he no longer wants me as a friend. No matter how remote they are, these are always possibilities, and no doubt there are many more such possibilities that we might think of. However, even on the basis of this understanding, it would still be totally irrational for me to behave as though he were not still my friend. Just as our legal system acts upon the assumption that a person is innocent until proven guilty, so we have to act upon the assumption that the pattern of our previous experiences will prove true until they are proven false. The fact is that we cannot escape from using the assumptions that we base on the processes of induction. If we do not base our present actions and decisions on the expectations constructed from our past experience, then we cannot rationally base them upon anything at all.

This is what is known as the consequentiality justification of induction. What it means is that the consequences of acting on the basis of our reasoning from particular facts of experience to general conclusions is that we could be wrong in our beliefs, just like Bertrand Russell's chicken. But on the other hand, if we do not act as though these general conclusions are generally reliable, then we simply cannot act. Thus the consequentiality justification of induction provides us with a rational justification for our actions and decision-making, even if we cannot find an adequate justification for our beliefs.

Once again we seem to have come full circle to our starting point, where it seems that any claim for a belief to be knowledge must carry with it a shadow of doubt, and here I intend to leave the issue. There is much more that can be said about the problems of belief and knowledge, but for my purpose this brief sketch is sufficient. Any reader whose interest has been stimulated to inquire further will find other books which go into far greater depth and detail of argument. In this book all I wish to show is that these problems of knowledge do exist, and that by philosophers they are taken seriously. They are taken so seriously that Bertrand Russell has argued in this field that we cannot ever know for certain whether any belief we hold is true knowledge, and that therefore all that we believe to be our body of knowledge can at best be defined only as "probable opinion."

It would seem then, that there is little in the study of metaphysics to bolster the arguments of either the believer in God, or the atheist. We cannot ever know that God exists. And neither can we ever know that God does not exist. In fact, according to some modern philosophers, we cannot ever actually know anything at all!

What they are saying, in effect, is that whatever we believe we have to believe with a certain amount of faith in our experiences. We have no rational choice except to act as though our present and future experiences will conform to the unity of experiences we have accumulated in our memory of the past.

However, if they are saying that we can only function rationally with faith in our experiences, because we can never know when a belief constitutes knowledge, then it seems to me that philosophers are not on any firm foundation to argue that belief in God is irrational because we cannot prove that He exists. If it is rational for all of us to believe in our experiences as being in all probability valid in every other aspect of our lives, then surely it is just as rational to believe in the probable existence of God if our experience suggests that He does exist. If faith is all we have, then why should religious faith be less valid than any other?

So now it begins to look as though faith in God is not blindly irrational as many philosophers would insist that it is. Faith is not necessarily, as Marx would have it, "the opium of the masses."

However, before we close this chapter, there are two more points that I wish to draw out of this discussion:

First, if it were possible to be certain that we have true knowledge of anything then it might be possible to have true knowledge about the existence or non-existence of God.

But second, as we have clearly seen, there is dispute and uncertainty among philosophers over the possibility of whether we could ever have true knowledge of anything at all. This is a consistent state of affairs with the plausibility of my main argument that for man to have a genuine freedom of will, then the existence and nature of God would have to remain in permanent doubt.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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# CHAPTER THREE:

# THE PROBLEMS OF THE MIND

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This far our brief survey of modern metaphysics has shown no contradictions at all to my main argument, and, if anything, all the problems of knowledge would seem to support it. I have already explained why I believe that man's freedom of will as a gift from God could only be bestowed by God arranging things so that certain knowledge of His own existence would be always out of our reach. The fact that many modern philosophers believe that any certain knowledge of any sort is always out of reach is surely compatible with this concept. We are all governed by a sort of faith, even if for many of us it is not a religious faith.

Perhaps we could leave philosophy at this point and sweep it all to one side as irrelevant. But that would be much too hasty. Philosophy, despite all its faults and its seemingly endless strings of logical objections, is still a fascinating and challenging study. The lure of philosophy is that it faces up to the eternal mysteries that have baffled men since the dawn of human thought, sometimes in support of religious ideas and sometimes in opposition. Many philosophers have offered their own answers to the eternal questions about the nature of things, together with plausible arguments to show why they believed their particular answer to be the right answer. I hope that I, too, am constructing a plausible argument, although I do not claim that I know it to be the true answer. I can only claim that to me it seems the most probable answer to the mystery of God's existence and the mystery that has always surrounded that question. The very nature of this belief precludes me from proving it, but I can hope to show that this is wholly consistent with the way things are.

With this aim before us it can still be relevant to enquire into those other fields of philosophy. Before the ascent of scientific materialism one of the major areas of contention was the definition and nature of human life itself. The concept of the eternal soul was a central puzzle in this respect, and the belief that we have souls is still essential to anyone who wants to believe that there is some kind of existence after death. This kind of belief usually goes together with other spiritual beliefs, such as belief in the existence of God. If, in some sense, life is the soul, as opposed to a mere biological cycle, then there seems to be a third link in this conceptual chain. If any aspect of me is to survive my bodily death, then it must in some way contain some residue of my memories and experience, otherwise it could no longer be said to be any aspect of me. Therefore this third link must be some aspect of what I call my mind.

We can separate the ideas of what we mean by life and soul and mind, so they are not identical ideas, and yet they do seem to have this logical linkage. When a person dies his life is clearly extinguished, and his mind, or whatever it is that thinks, stores memories, feels, experiences and imagines, is also no longer evident. His soul, if there is such a thing, must also depart in the same moment. The corpse is just so much dead matter that will soon stiffen and decay. Therefore, if the concepts of life and mind and soul are meaningful, then their joint departure would seem to indicate that in some way they are all aspects of the same non-physical or spiritual essence.

Most modern philosophers are very reluctant to concede that there could be anything which could be described as a non-physical or spiritual essence. They do not argue much over what life is all about, leaving all that, as usual, to science, in this case biology; and the soul is considered an old-fashioned and obsolete concept which rarely gets mentioned in serious philosophical discussion. However, modern philosophy has failed to completely dismiss the whole chain and its exponents still argue very much over the final link, the nature of the mind. To many of them it is an awkward embarrassment which science cannot yet explain away. They emphasize yet because they insist that eventually science will explain away the nature of consciousness and our mental life to their materialist satisfaction. In the meantime the philosophical problem of the mind exists, and lurking in the background, even though they are no longer asked, there are still the old questions about life and the soul.

Let us look then at the current state of affairs in the philosophy of mind. To simplify very crudely, the basic issue here is to define the mind: to decide whether our mental states, such as thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires, fears, dreams, pains, ect, can constitute something that is non-physical, or whether these are nothing more than physical processes of the brain. In a nutshell the question is: do we have a mind and a brain, or is there just the brain?

There are in fact whole clusters of over-lapping arguments on each side of this dividing line, and any serious academic book on the philosophy of the mind would separate them out with great care. I hope most of my readers will regard this as a serious book, but it is not a serious book of that sort, and I do not intend to simply re-state all the theories that have been argued elsewhere.

Briefly then, on the mind side of the issue, we have the arguments for some sort of dualism, which is the idea that there is something non-physical, and possibly capable of independent existence after the death of the physical body. To my knowledge there has never been a society or group of people, no matter how sophisticated or how primitive, who have not had ideas about souls or spirits involved in their religious beliefs or folklore, and this universal experience of the idea of some sort of spiritual or non-physical essence makes it a very tenacious idea indeed. It is so tenacious that even in our modern scientific world which generally rejects the possibility of there being such things as souls or spirits, the belief that there may be something analogous in the mind lingers stubbornly on.

This first argument for dualism is usually known as the argument from religion. A second argument is the argument from introspection, which points out that when we think introspectively -- that is when we think about our own thoughts, beliefs and desires, ect -- then it does seem that there is something thinking which is specifically me. My body may be of the same physical structure as every other human body, give or take an inch or two of height or a pound or two of weight, and yet whatever it is inside this body of mine which thinks does seem to be uniquely me. In the famous words of the French philosopher Rene Descartes, "I think, therefore I am," which for Descartes seemed to indicate that the thinking thing was even more certain of existence than the physical thing which housed it.

A third argument for dualism is derived from the notion of intentional existence. What is meant here is that the content of our dreams, the events we create in our imaginations, the fears we have which prove unfounded, and all similar mental phenomena, are all phenomena which do not really exist. Physical objects do actually exist -- or to be strictly philosophical, we can rationally believe that they exist -- but we can clearly perceive that much of the stuff of mental phenomena has an "intentional existence" only in the mind. This seems to define mental phenomena as something different from physical phenomena.

A fourth argument for dualism comes from the fact that any purely physical explanation of the mind, such as saying that it is only the working of the physical brain, would have to be inadequate. All the triumphs and advances of physical science still cannot tell us what consciousness is. Nor can it explain feelings. To understand the full meaning of grief or joy you have to actually experience those feelings. A scientist could study and even dissect a weeping person, and still he would never understand the emotion which caused the weeping unless he had experienced a similar emotion himself. Similarly a deaf scientist could examine the workings of the inner ear, but he would never know what it is like to hear a Beethoven symphony. Or a color-blind scientist could spend a lifetime examining dissected eyeballs and optic nerves, and he would still never know what it is like to see colors. Physical explanations, so this argument insists, simply cannot tell us everything.

This is not a complete list of the arguments for dualism, but they are the major ones and they are enough. To many people they may seem wholly persuasive, but there are counter-arguments to each argument, and there are two powerful arguments against the idea of dualism as a whole. These latter are the argument from the impossibility of interaction, and the problem of other minds.

The dualist position is that we each have a physical body, but we also have a non-physical or mental something that we call the mind, and that the mind somehow controls, directs or influences the behavior and actions of the body. But how can this interaction take place between something which is physical and something which is non-physical? How can a non-physical thing move a physical thing? The materialist view is that these are questions which a dualist must be able to answer in order to give a credible account of the mind. In the absence of such an account the way in which the mind causes its effects on the body is not just a mystery; instead, the materialist argues, the whole dualist account of the mind becomes simply unintelligible.

The main difficulty, then, is to conceive of how the mind can relate to the body? It is the question of how can a non-physical mental something, mingle with, act upon, or in some way bridge the logical gap to a non-mental physical body?

The other major objection to dualism is that if the mind is essentially private, as arguments like the arguments from introspection and the Descartes approach seem to suggest, then how can I know that other minds also exist. I can know from my own introspective inquiries that I have thoughts, feelings, beliefs, desires, fears, dreams, pains, ect; but I can never be directly acquainted with any of these mental states in any other being than myself.

I can argue that I know that I can and do express my feelings and other mental states in my speech and in my behavior, so when I hear other people speaking and observe them displaying similar behavior then I can rationally assume an association with similar mental states. Yet this is not a certain guide because I also know from my own case that I do not always express my true thoughts and feelings in my speech and behavior. I am capable of deception and pretences: of acting out behavior signs which are not true of my mental states; and of suppressing behavior signs which would be true of my mental states.

All of this presents no problem in my own case because I have a complete knowledge of both sides of the picture, of my own mental states and of my own behavior signals. However, with other people I can only see one side of the picture. I can only see their behavior and never their mental states. So, with only half the knowledge necessary to know that another mind exists, how could I ever fully justify a claim to know that other people are also thinking and feeling beings and that they too have minds?

One answer that most people who are not philosophers would find acceptable is the inference to the best explanation. This is the claim that I am justified in believing that other minds do exist in other people, because it is only by accepting this assumption that I can make sense of, or explain, any of the various forms of behavior displayed by the people around me.

When other people make sensible responses or contributions to a conversation, which seem to suggest that they do understand what is being said, then it seems absurd to argue that it is purely by some sort of coincidence that they make these appropriate responses and contributions. The idea that every conversation is only a string of coincidences of this sort then seems totally unbelievable. But this seems to be what we must believe if we refuse to accept that in seeming to understand our conversations other people really do understand our conversations. And if people really do understand our conversations, then the concept of understanding surely implies the working of another mind.

However, as we have already seen with the problem of knowledge, an inference to the best explanation is an inductive argument, which is not necessarily reliable. We can infer what seems to be the only plausible explanation from all the available evidence, but we cannot know that other minds exist. Thus there are some philosophers who will argue that dualism must inevitably collapse into solipsism, which is the doctrine that I alone exist and that all the world which seems to be around me is only the contents of my own consciousness.

So far dualism has led us into the interaction problem which nobody can solve, and the other minds problem which leads to a bizarre conclusion which no one except the most perverse logician would want to accept. These factors have led to a general rejection of dualist ideas, so let us now look at the alternative theories that modern philosophers have put forward to explain the nature of the mind.

The first of these is behaviorism, which again comes in various forms. I shall leave it to other books to distinguish between them, but generally speaking the behaviorist argument is that having a thought, or any other mental activity, is just another way of saying that we have a disposition to behave in a certain way. Either the thought is identical to an act of behavior, or there are no thoughts, or any other mental activities, there are only acts, or dispositions, of behavior.

For example, if I am clumsy enough to drop my typewriter on my foot, then in all probability I will shout, groan, curse, and hop about holding the affected foot. On the behaviorist account this is not because I am feeling pain in my foot, or even because I think that I am feeling pain in my foot. It is simply that I have a sudden disposition to exhibit shouting, groaning, cursing, hopping and foot-holding behavior. To describe myself as feeling pain, or even thinking that I am feeling pain, are misleading descriptions of what are only modes of behavior. Claims about the mind are just claims about behavior, or abbreviations of claims about behavior.

Well, some modern philosophers have again written much about the theory of behaviorism, but I don't think that I shall bother. I just don't have any disposition to behave in such a silly fashion. Some thoughts and feelings may have a parallel explanation in behavioral terms, but others clearly do not. Suppose that I think about the starvation problem in the drought-stricken parts of Africa, and then I suffer a pang of conscience because I have more than enough to eat. But then I decide that there is nothing practical that I can do about the problem and carry on eating anyway, pushing the starving Africans out of my mind. How, then, could any behaviorist ever know that I have had this chain process of thought, guilty conscience and final decision? He might have been able to measure my brain activity and be able to concede that my brain had been active, but he could not determine that the sequence of mental events as I have described them had occurred. The mind can work without any signs of outward behavior, and this seems to me to be enough to illustrate the inadequacy of the behaviorism theory.

The most serious contender to dualism is the argument that the mind and the brain are identical. We do not possess a mind and a brain, there is only the brain. On this account all our sensations of thinking and feeling are in fact just brain processes. This explanation fits perfectly with scientific materialism and automatically solves the two major problems of dualism. The interaction problem disappears because the explanation only recognizes one substance, the physical brain. There is no longer any supposed mental or non-physical substance to present a problem of interaction. The problem of other minds also disappears because if minds are brains then medical science can examine as many brains as it needs to establish that other brains do exist. Consequently the mind-brain identity theory, or some version of it, is currently advocated by most modern philosophers.

This seems a plausible enough argument at first sight, and if we have no religious or spiritual beliefs, and no desire to cling on to any conception of ourselves as in any way different from the rest of the physical world, then it may be perfectly acceptable. But its claims have not yet been proved and there are difficulties in seeing how they could be proved.

Let us look at the arguments which support the mind-brain identity theory. The main thrust here seems to come from the argument for the unity of science. We are all impressed with the wide-ranging achievements of science over the past three hundred years. From the age of the horse-drawn cart we have shot spectacularly forward to the point where we can put men on the moon and send our satellite probes out to the furthest reaches of the solar system. From the age of the bow and arrow we have leaped forward to the age of the thermonuclear inter-ballistic missile. And from an age which believed in demons and witches and a whole variety of primitive superstitions we have moved into an age in which many of us believe in nothing except that which science can dissect and explore experimentally in the laboratory.

Increasingly this triumphant march of progress seems to be dealing with a single substance, which is physical matter. Thus the goal is to show that there is nothing which is beyond physical science. Unfortunately for this ideal there is still the mystery of consciousness and the mental world of our thoughts, beliefs, ect, which cannot be studied under the microscope, and which stubbornly refuses to fit or be adequately explained away by the ideal of a unified science. However, science has produced a hypothesis to tidy up this last 'superstition' which we call "the mind", and that is the mind-brain identity theory. But here science seems to be hoisted on its own petard, for by its own rules it must prove this hypothesis by empirical means, and at this moment in time it seems that it cannot do so, and does not know how to do so. Its supporters can only say that given time a more advanced science of the future will provide all the answers.

Go to church and the priest will tell you that God will provide all the answers -- someday, when He is ready.

Go to the laboratory and the scientist and his attendant philosophers will tell you that science will provide all the answers -- someday, when it is sufficiently advanced.

Both statements begin to sound suspiciously like the same kind of statement, and that is like articles of faith. Philosophers generally dismiss religious faith as primitive or naive, or as some kind of mental crutch for the weak or the oppressed, and yet they have their faith in science.

The argument for the unity of science seems to have an element of wishful thinking attached to it, so let us consider the other major argument in favour of the mind-brain identity theory. This is quite simply based on the failure of dualism to resolve the causal link problem. The dualist cannot show how a mental to physical causal link could work, so the materialist argues that there can only be a physical to physical link. That is, there is no such thing as a mind to brain link, nor any need to postulate one. There is only the brain to body link, which is clearly the physical central nervous system.

This sounds plausible, but can we really accept a materialist hypothesis that has no more solid foundation than the failure of a dualist hypothesis, especially when it tells us that we do not have any mental sensations at all? The problem is that no matter how we juggle around with thoughts, beliefs, desires, sensations, ect, they still cannot be reduced to purely physical terms, and neither will they go away. They remain what we have always understood them to be, mental terms, related to that concept we call the mind.

The identity theorist says that the mind just is the brain, but our thoughts, beliefs, desires, and all the rest, are still there, inexplicable in materialist terms, mystifying, and confusing the physical picture. The identity theorist has in one sense demystified the mind by saying that it is the brain, but only at the cost of making just as large and inexplicable a mystery of the brain. Some philosophers have gone a step further to argue that our psychological states are only conditions of the body as a whole, and so they have succeeded in demystifying the brain, but only at the cost of transferring the whole frustrating puzzle of what are thoughts, beliefs, desires and sensations, ect, from the brain to the body. Shifting the problem around just doesn't seem to get us any nearer to solving it.

It begins to seem that the mind-brain identity theory, like behaviorism, is leading us into the absurdity of denying that we have any mental life, even though it is clearly obvious to all of us that there is a continuous thinking, dreaming, reasoning, imagining process going on inside our heads, which can only be adequately described as a mental life. However, the materialist philosophers have only got to this point because they are committed to a rejection of dualism.

They are so committed because they make the assumption that everything must be explainable by science on its own terms. In this they are making the parallel assumption that man is the ultimate being, and that there is no possibility of there existing any higher level of mental or spiritual life which is beyond the reach of science.

In religious and dualist terms these assumptions are simply not true, and even in materialist terms they are only pre-supposed. As the religious dualist sees the world man is not the ultimate; there is a spiritual life beyond the physical life, and God is the ultimate at the spiritual centre. Just as cultural thought concepts overlay and permeate through every form of human society, so, in religious and dualist thinking, does God's Will overlay and permeate the entire physical universe. The roots of the dualist belief lie not only in the mental-v-physical issue of the mind, but in the whole mapping of metaphysical concepts that includes minds, souls, God and moral order.

How any of us will reach a conclusion on this thorny philosophical problem of the mind will depend, I suspect, upon own overall view of the whole realm of philosophy. If we wish to leave room in our thinking for religious faith and a spiritual life, for the concept of God and the possibility of some aspect of mind or soul that can survive beyond the death of the body, then we will find some form of dualism not only an acceptable but a necessary view. On the other hand, if there are people who have no religious belief, and no awareness of the possibility of anything spiritual within themselves, then for these people something like behaviorism, or the mind-brain, physical-chemical view of man will suffice.

However, at this point perhaps we have seen enough. Again this review is far from complete but it is sufficient. It shows that in the philosophy of the mind philosophers are again deeply divided by conflicting views, and from this I can draw the same two points that were evident from our study of the problems of belief and knowledge.

First it seems clear that if we could have conclusive knowledge about the true nature of the mind, then it would have to weigh for or against the probability of the existence of God. This follows from the fact that the ideas of mind, soul, and the possibility of transcendence or survival beyond the physical life are all linked as part of the general body of religious ideas of which the existence of God is the central idea.

And second, there is dispute and uncertainty over the true nature of the mind, which is a consistent state of affairs with my thesis that for men to have any genuine freedom of will, then the existence of God, and such closely related issues such as the nature of the mind and the possibility of the soul, would all have to be issues of permanent doubt.

GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER FOUR:

THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

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This far we have dipped into two of the major areas of philosophy and from both of them we have been able to draw similar and encouraging conclusions. Wherever a piece of certain true knowledge might tip the balance for or against the probability of God's existence we find only uncertainty.

Perhaps for many readers I have already made my point, but philosophers are notorious for finding hairline cracks into which they drive their wedges of objection, and so it will be wise to tighten up the argument by hammering it home from all angles. So, let us go on to the core of the matter.

For many philosophers the philosophy of religion is now a peripheral field, a part of philosophical antiquity only re-visited with annoyance because people like me will keep digging it up after they have tried so hard to bury the issues involved. However, for any person with religious faith or anyone who still has an open mind on these issues, this has to be a central field of philosophy, regardless of how aggravating its continuing interest may be to the scientific materialists and humanists alike. I said earlier in this book that there is little that is new or useful that can be added to the debate that tries to prove whether or not God exists, but a short review of the arguments there will be sufficient to yield yet another picture of division and uncertainty.

There are five main arguments, or clusters of arguments, with which philosophers in the past have tried to prove the existence of God. Two of these, the arguments from morality and the argument from religious experience, relate to areas which require separate chapters, and so they will be left until later in the book. Here I shall simply set out the remaining three. They are: the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the teleological argument.

The teleological argument is perhaps the easiest one to understand. It is also the argument with the most intuitive appeal and the one that has been most widely held, so we will take the arguments in reverse order and deal with the teleological argument first.

Quite simply the teleological argument is an argument from regularity to purpose and design, and hence from the regularity of the universe to the conclusion that God must exist as the Designer fulfilling His purpose. At the heart of all the versions of this argument there is the idea that the design and operation of the universe must somehow be controlled by a Divine Will or a Universal Intelligence. If you have ever been moved by the splendor of a sunset, by the beauty and mystery of a flower unfolding, or by the miracle of a baby being born, and if you have ever felt that things like these could not have come about by blind chance out of primordial chaos, then you have experienced the force of the teleological argument.

This argument, that the world operates or is created or designed for an end or purpose and that this points to the existence of an intrinsic intelligent operator, or creator or designer, was a very popular view until Charles Darwin came on the scene to explain the processes of natural selection and evolution. Darwin shocked, dismayed and outraged the religious believers of his day, for at first sight it seemed that his findings were in direct opposition to the idea of a pattern of design and purpose by a Creator God. The choice of belief was no longer limited to either a blind accident or a creator God, and this, the atheist philosophers could now argue, was a false dilemma. Instead there was now a third choice of belief, a middle way of slow and natural evolution, which every subsequent discovery in biology and natural history seemed to show as the most plausible explanation.

Thus most philosophers saw the impact of Darwin's discoveries as fatal to the argument from design. However, the theory of evolution and the argument to design can be combined and do not necessarily stand as contradictory. It may be that the process of evolution is just the process which God works through to achieve His design.

To make a rough analogy: a man who builds a house undertakes its construction one job at a time, first he lays the foundations, then he builds the walls, laying each brick individually, then he raises the roof timbers, and so on. But the house is not any the less his creation because he has to work one stage at a time. Creation is more likely to be the gradual shaping of something, and not necessarily a magic wand waving that produces something out of nothing. On this view, that the stages of evolution are the way in which God works, then the theory of evolution can contradict only one mythological story, that of the Garden of Eden. It certainly does not show in any overall sense that the teleological argument must be false.

The fact remains, that either God is the conscious purpose and ultimate explanation of all things, including the process of evolution; or there is no conscious purpose or ultimate explanation, and ourselves and everything around us, including the process of evolution, all came about by blind chance. The choices are still reducible to two, and each of us has to make his or her decision as to what seems to be the most probable explanation. And here even David Hume, the great Scottish philosopher of the Enlightenment, who was most admired for his work in undermining religion, had to admit that the only difference between the atheist and the theist is that one stresses the difficulties of showing the existence of God, and the other stresses the necessity of it. The proof, Hume had to concede, cannot be shown either way.

The teleological argument is inconclusive, and no amount of further analysis or argument can make it into anything else, so let us move on to look at the next argument. This is the cosmological argument, which comes in several versions, all of them seeking to demonstrate from general observable facts about the universe, such as chains of cause and effect or the laws of motion, that there must be a First Cause or First Mover, who can only be God.

As an example from this group of arguments let us look at the First Cause argument. In our observations of the world around us we seem to see continuous chains of cause and effect. My fingers hitting the keys of my typewriter are a cause and the words appearing on the screen in front of me are an effect. But my fingers hitting the typewriter keys are also an effect, caused by my desire to write a book. My desire to write a book was caused by my belief that I have something important to say. My belief that I have something important to say was caused by my studies of religion and philosophy. My studies of religion and philosophy were caused by my early travels which brought me into contact with other religions and philosophies. And so it goes on into an infinite regress where every effect has a cause, and every cause is also an effect. We cannot comprehend how there could ever be any effect without a cause, and yet when we attempt to reason our way back through past time and past causes we are faced with a difficulty. Either we must accept that there is an infinite regress of causes and effects, or we must accept the idea that there must have been a First Cause that was not itself caused by something else. In this way we arrive at the idea of an original, uncaused, self-created Creator who continues to sustain his own creation.

However, if we try to accept the idea of God as the First Cause and Creator, there are still more problems. Even if we do decide that in all probability there must have been a first cause, the argument still does nothing to justify the conclusion that this first cause must necessarily be identical with the Christian God, nor with any of the definitions put forward by any other religion. Also, even if God was the first cause of creation, the argument cannot show that He still exists now. A painting, a symphony, a novel, or anything else we can think of, can all continue to exist long after their creators have ceased to exist. A candle can light the first of a succession of fires, and the last fire can still be burning long after the original candle flame has blown out. So it is a logical possibility that the universe may continue to exist without the first cause which brought it into existence.

Philosophers have thought of all these logical objections to counter the cosmological argument, but their major objection is simply this: if all existing things really do require a cause then how can there have been a first cause which did not itself require a cause? It is true that an infinite regress of cause and effect is difficult to comprehend, but the idea of an uncaused first cause is no more comprehensible and by introducing the second idea we are only replacing one incomprehensible idea with another.

If we think back to the teleological argument we can see that the same kind of criticism has a similar force there. When we try to explain material order in the natural world with the concept of a Designer with a Divine Plan, then we still have to explain the mental order of the Divine Mind. In the teleological argument the major objection becomes the question of who designed the Designer? And in the cosmological argument the major objection becomes the question of who, or what, caused the First Cause? In any form of argument which introduces God as the explanation for creation, or for any other aspect of the universe or its behavior, then -- the philosophers insist -- we are justified in demanding an answer to the question -- what explains God?

Again we reach confusion and the argument is inconclusive. How God came into existence is a mystery, and we have to ask ourselves which is the most likely possibility, the existence of an inexplicable God, or the brute fact existence of an uncaused universe in which the regress of cause and effect just is infinite? Even the Big Bang / Cosmic Egg theory of modern science is of no help to us here, because we still have to ask what caused the Big Bang? And what caused the formation of the Cosmic Egg?

Another form of the cosmological argument is the argument from contingency. Contingent is the opposite of necessary. A contingent object may exist, but does not necessarily have to exist. A contingent event may occur, but does not necessarily have to occur. A contingent truth may be true, but does not necessarily have to be true. With these points in mind we can see that we ourselves and all the events and objects of our perceptions are only contingent. All things come into being and pass out of being. Human beings like ourselves are born and die. The greatest empires that rise also ultimately fall. Even the stars have their own life cycle. None of these things can last for ever, and none of them can be said to exist necessarily. If any particular person, or empire, or star, had simply never existed then it is difficult to see what ultimate difference this might have made to the universe as a whole.

And yet it does seem that there must be something that holds all things together. The idea that everything in space and time is contingent and therefore dispensable weakens the whole structure of things toward the point where it is difficult to imagine how it is all capable of sustaining itself and surviving. It seems, therefore, that there must be something which is not contingent, but which is necessarily continuous and permanent. This something, the argument goes, is what we have come to experience and understand as God.

If everything can cease to exist, the argument continues, it is possible that at sometime nothing existed. But if at sometime there was no form of existence, then nothing could ever begin to exist. Therefore the fact that there is an existing universe shows that there must be something that is not contingent; it shows that there is something which continuously and necessarily exists.

Unfortunately, this argument from contingency founders on the same rock as the previous two cosmological arguments. The idea of something that continuously and necessarily exists seems as difficult to comprehend as the idea of there being nothing in existence. It is all beyond the scope of the human mind and understanding.

None of these forms of the cosmological argument can conclusively show that there is a God, for in each case the proposed explanation creates a mystery as much in need of explanation as the universal mystery it is trying to explain. So, although there is much more that could be considered here, it does not seem as if there is much more to be gained. Let us move on, then, to look at the last of the three classical arguments for God's existence which we intend to examine in this chapter. This is the most obscure argument of them all, and it is known as the ontological argument.

We have met with the word ontology before. In one sense it is a set of assumptions about existence, about the things we assume to exist, and which underlie any conceptual scheme or system of ideas. In another sense it is the study of existence itself, differentiating between real existence and appearance or illusion. The ontological argument, and again it comes in several versions, seeks to demonstrate the existence of God simply from His definition.

Well, I did warn you that this particular form of argument is rather obscure, perhaps it will become clear if we look at two of the most famous examples.

The first of these was put forward by Bishop Anselm in the eleventh century. Anselm defined God as, "A being other than which nothing greater can be conceived." And on this definition he built the following argument:

Whatever is understood exists in the understanding, but something of which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist in the understanding alone. In other words, something which exists in reality must logically be greater than something which exists only in the mind. Therefore it followed logically, in Anselm's view, that God must exist in reality as well as in the mind, because if God existed only in the mind and not in reality, then God could not be,"a being other than which nothing greater can be conceived."

What Anselm had shown here was that it was absurd to believe that an idea in the mind could be greater than the existence of a corresponding object in reality. Unfortunately though, it does not logically follow that because we have a certain object in our mind then its corresponding object must necessarily exist in reality, as Anselm thought that it did. The problem with Anselm's line of reasoning is that if it could prove that, "a being other than which nothing greater can be conceived," must necessarily exist, then it would also prove the necessary existence of anything which our minds can imagine. It would prove that, "a being other than which nothing fatter can be conceived," must also necessarily exist, and that, "a being other than which nothing dirtier can be conceived, must also necessarily exist. And so on with any kind of being we might conceive. This is what is known as the Floodgates Objection, and it is the major objection to any form of the ontological argument.

The ontological argument was revived in a slightly different form in the seventeenth century by the great French philosopher Rene Descartes. Descartes method of philosophical inquiry was what he termed, "the method of doubt." This was an initial position of total skepticism where he refused to believe in the existence of anything unless he could find something in which it was impossible to doubt.

He eventually found his starting point with the realization that in order to be able to doubt then it must be certain that at the very least he must exist himself as a thinking thing. "Cogito ergo sum -- I think, therefore I am!" This is Descartes famous phrase which we have noted before, and from this foundation stone he attempted to build up an ontology of things, or list of categories of things, which he could be certain of as existing.

Descartes next began examining all the other ideas in his mind in order to ask himself whether these might be illusions or figments of his imagination, or whether they might be caused by some corresponding, existing object in reality. In this process he finds that he has one idea in his mind which is different from all the others, and this is his idea of God. Now his idea of God is the idea of a Supreme Being who is totally perfect in every way. Descartes knew that he was a finite and imperfect being, and so he concluded that it was not possible for this idea of an infinite and perfect being to have been conceived in his own mind. Also he argued that a perfect supreme being must logically be a being who necessarily exists, because a non-existent being could not be perfect and supreme

Because the idea of a supreme and perfect being was in his mind, Descartes conclusion was that there must be a supreme and perfect being in reality who was the cause of this idea in his mind. This supreme and perfect being could only be God Himself, and so, Descartes argued, God exists.

Descartes argument can be simplified as follows:

God is the perfect being.

Existence is necessary to perfection.

Therefore God exists.

The problem here, as later philosophers were soon to point out, is that after we define a concept, such as defining God as the perfect being, there still remains the question of does this concept actually exist. You cannot defeat or evade the question by the simple device of building the term existence into your definition of the concept.

And if this is not enough, then Descartes argument is again open to the same floodgates objection which told against Bishop Anselm. If Descartes reasoning could prove that the perfect being must necessarily exist, then it would also prove that the perfect fairy must necessarily exist, or that the perfect werewolf must necessarily exist. Again we are led into this absurdity.

This argument appears in Descartes Third Meditation, but to be fair he did try to make a distinction in his Fifth Meditation between the idea of God as being an idea of something which is, "True and Immutable," and other ideas which are arbitrary fictions. But there isn't any rule to help us determine what a, "True and Immutable," idea might be. What the ontological argument has to do in order to work is to somehow, logically and acceptably, separate the idea of God from the whole body of fictional ideas which the human mind has invented, and so far, with both Anselm and Descartes, it has failed to do this. If we could begin to isolate the idea of God in this way, then we could begin to argue that the cause of this idea must lie outside the inventive capacity of the human mind.

So what can we conclude from all this? Quite simply that the state of affairs in the philosophy of religion is pretty much as we expect it to be. All the arguments are inconclusive. One modern philosopher, Richard Swinburne, in his book The Existence Of God, does argue that despite all the counter arguments, there is still enough weight in each of the classical arguments for them altogether to tip the balance of the scales of probability in favour of God's existence. Against him other philosophers argue an analogy that ten leaking buckets still cannot hold water. But logically this depends upon the location of the holes in the buckets. If the buckets are holed in the bottom then they will not hold water, but if the holes are part of the way up the sides then each bucket will hold some water. So the question now becomes one of how do we rate each of the arguments we have studied to the analogy of a holed bucket. Do we rate them all as totally worthless, or can they each carry some weight of conviction. As always, division and uncertainty prevail.

At this stage in our inquiry, it seems to me, we are entitled to ask a very pertinent question -- why, in all the key areas of philosophy, does this uncertainty prevail so stubbornly?

Why, after all the investigations of modern science, and all the thinking and theorizing of all the philosophers and theologians from antiquity to the present day, have they all failed to show conclusively whether or not God exists? If God does exist, then why should it be that science and philosophy cannot prove it? And if God does not exist, then why should it be that belief and claimed experience of His existence continues to be held among all peoples as evidenced by the enduring strength of all the religions all around the world?

The simple answer is that although many of us believe, we cannot know whether God exists or not. And if God does exist, then His nature, or His intention, is such that we cannot prove His existence. Belief in God can only rest on faith and subjective inner experience; it cannot be found in the kind of objective knowledge for which science and philosophy vainly seek.

Again, it seems to me, we are entitled to ask another very pertinent question -- if the nature or intention of God is such that we cannot prove His existence, then why should God hold to this nature or intention?

One answer, and it seems the only logical answer, has already been given at the beginning of this book. It is because God has chosen to give to human beings freedom of will. The two major arguments against the existence of God, the problem of evil and the impossibility of proving the existence of God, are both answered by our own freedom of will. It is God's gift to mankind that in our finite and limited degree we should share in His own infinite and unlimited powers of choice and freedom, rather than that we should be merely dependent upon or subservient to those powers.

In the introduction to this book I offered a presumptuous final statement of my argument, which at that stage lacked justification. However, I think that now we have made our survey of three of the major parts of the philosophical jig-saw, we can see how they begin to fit together, and so I can re-state my conclusion with some rational justification.

The main argument of this book is that --

IF GOD EXISTS, THEN THERE MUST BE DOUBT AND UNCERTAINTY ABOUT HIS EXISTENCE AND HIS NATURE IN ORDER FOR HIS EXISTENCE TO BE COMPATIBLE WITH ANY GENUINE FREEDOM OF WILL FOR INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEINGS.

The question mark in the word IF still remains, but it is my further conclusion that because the state of affairs in the fields of philosophy, faith and knowledge, are all exactly as a loving God who intended us to have a genuine freedom of will would logically have to arrange them, then this points to the probability of God's existence.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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# CHAPTER FIVE: ISSUES OF MORALITY

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There is one more field of philosophy where any certain conclusions would have to weigh for or against the probability of the existence of God, and this is the field of moral philosophy. Our morality is what guides us on how we should live in our relations with other people, and with the world around us. In a sense it is our rules of conduct and our ideas of what is right and what is wrong. Our moral view goes beyond mere self interest to the good of our society as a whole, or, if our understanding can comprehend that far, to the good of all things. All religions are also moral systems, and within each religion its moral system is held to be the Will of God, it defines the way, each religion believes, that God wants his creatures to behave.

The central question here, then, is whether there is some universal objective basis on which our moral feelings and judgments are founded, and which could be explained as the Will of God. Or whether our moral feelings and judgments are entirely subjective, which means they are merely the expression of each individual or each society's own attitudes.

Materialism and humanism both take the view that there are no objective moral facts, there are only subjective feelings and social rules derived from practical necessity. They argue that because our moral judgments can't be proved as true in the same way that scientific statements can be proven as true, or false, then, they must be merely matters of individual opinion or social invention. They support their argument by pointing to the wide variety of different and sometimes conflicting moral systems of different societies.

However, we can still ask whether we are in some sense aware of an underlying moral framework which all societies are trying to follow despite their surface differences. It does seem that even between societies, disagreements on the ground rules of morality exist only in detail. All societies ban incest, rape, theft and murder; and a study of all the great moral systems, the Ten Commandments of Christianity, the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism, and the ethics of Islam, Hinduism and Confucius, all say basically the same things. The name by which God is addressed and the ritual surrounding His worship will vary from culture to culture, but the moral drive is always beyond self interest. Morality is always found in compassion and concern for others, and for the world around us. Its antithesis is in personal lust, envy and greed. We may all fail by varying degrees to live up to our own awareness of what morality means, and some of us may reject it altogether in preference for its antithesis of pure selfishness, (our freedom of will enables us to make that choice), but we all have roughly the same understanding of what morality means. We can distinguish the meanings between right and wrong, although often we cannot decide whether a particular action would be right or wrong, and even though we sometimes deliberately chose to do wrong.

By now you are probably ahead of me and will have anticipated what I am about to say. The questions about morality are very important, but again the answers are all inconclusive. The state of affairs in the field of moral philosophy is as undetermined as in the philosophy of knowledge, the philosophy of mind, or the philosophy of religion. But let us look at the arguments anyway, they are too important to simply pass them by.

Let us begin, then, with the question of objectivity. Is our moral awareness due to something objective, something that is external to ourselves and our particular society, something that could be explained as the Will of God; or is it subjective, that is internal to ourselves or our own particular society? Is morality absolute, in the sense of being an awareness of something universal and eternal, or is it merely relative to our own place and time?

This is the dividing line. On the one side stand the arguments that morality is objective and absolute, and on the other side the arguments that morality is subjective and relative. Philosophers have taken up many different positions on either side of the line, but it is the fundamental division.

If we seek for an objective grounding for morality then the history of philosophy offers us two main possibilities, and these are to be found in the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, and the eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant.

Aristotle's answer to the question posed by one of his predecessors, the philosopher Socrates, "What is the good life?" was that it was a life which promoted the well-being of man. In this concept the well-being of man was promoted by the fullest possible development of man's special characteristics and virtues. Man, as Aristotle saw him, was a rational animal, and so the development of his intellectual capacities, and his pursuit of knowledge, were the highest priorities. To achieve this man also needs to live in social harmony with his fellows, for without security and friendship such achievement would not be possible. Thus, for Aristotle, morality was objectively grounded in facts of human nature, facts about what a man is and what his needs are. In short, Aristotle attempted to ground the objectivity of all ethical life in the fact of human reason.

A humanist would be content to let Aristotle's argument rest there, but a believer in God might be tempted to argue further that human reason must have its objective grounding in God's reason. On this account the total knowledge and all-encompassing understanding toward which human reason strives would be the total knowledge and all-encompassing knowledge of God.

Kant's approach was different. He did not see morality as being grounded in bringing about certain states of affairs to facilitate man's needs, or to further man's goals, no matter how rational and reasonable these might be. Kant rejected all the ideas which try to ground morality in consequences, and argued instead that true morality could only be grounded in motive. True morality, in Kant's view, could only stem from a sense of moral duty -- it was derived from man's will to achieve the Highest Good.

On this account the believer in God can argue that man's will to the Highest Good can be simply identified with his awareness of God's will to the Highest Good.

For Kant the moral duty, or the moral law, was a categorical imperative that could not be conditional upon man's particular needs. To explain this more clearly we can contrast what is meant by a categorical moral judgment with the idea of a hypothetical moral judgment.

A categorical moral judgment is one that is held to be an absolute command. It is not a judgment that can be based in any way upon self interest, or personal inclinations or dispositions. Thus the commandment --"Thou shalt not kill." -- would be held to mean exactly what is says, with no exceptions.

On the other hand a hypothetical moral judgment is one that is seen to be conditional, either on personal inclinations, self interest or consequences. On this account the commandment --"Thou shalt not kill." -- would be held because society could not exist without rules of this sort, and therefore it is in my self interest to abide by this rule, and by all the other moral rules which enable social orders to exist. It is in my self interest because I need the stability and protection of organized society, and because I fear the consequences of living in a society where there would be no social and moral rules. However, if society orders me to kill, in time of war perhaps, or because it has appointed me the public executioner of criminals, then this basic rule of, "Thou shalt not kill," can and should be ignored.

Clearly the idea of a categorical moral judgment lies on the objective and absolute side of the dividing line, while the idea of a hypothetical moral judgment belongs on the subjective and relative side of the line. Most philosophers today have shifted to the latter side of the line and tend to argue that all moral judgments can only be hypothetical. They claim that there is no moral law or duty in the sense of objective moral facts, and that the foundations for what we term moral judgments are no more than prudence and practical necessity. We fear the strength and greed of other men and so it is only prudent for each of us to endorse a system of rules which constrains others, even though it means submitting ourselves to the same restraints. Society cannot exist without moral rules, and so moral rules are a practical necessity.

Kant saw the essence of morality in our duty to the Highest Good, and as such it was distinguishable from self interest and all thought of consequences. He defined what for him was The Categorical Imperative in the statement: "I ought never to act except in such a way that I can also will that my maxim should become a universal law." The thinking here is that the rules which we would want to see adopted consistently and universally for all men, must logically prove to be the rules which will generate the Highest Good. Kant's Categorical Imperative is also known as a Golden Rule, and other golden rules in this class would be statements like those of Jesus to "Love thy neighbor as thyself," or to "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Generally speaking all golden rule arguments are arguments for role reversal where we are asked to imagine ourselves in the position of the other person, or persons, who will be affected by our actions or in some circumstances by our failure to act.

The idea of a golden rule is thus linked to the idea of universalization, where the universalization of a moral principle is held to mean that although a principle may be regarded as subjective to a particular person, it will in fact be generally applicable to all similar persons in similar circumstances. For example, if you are drowning in a fast-flowing river and I am in the position of witnessing the scene from the river bank, then we might say that I have a moral duty to attempt to rescue you. But this is only reasonable if I have the strength and ability to rescue you. If I am not a strong swimmer, or if I cannot swim at all, then it would be foolish for me to enter the river. There can be many variable factors which will determine whether it is possible for me to rescue you, or whether I can reasonably be expected to make the attempt. From this simple illustration we can see why it is necessary that the conditions of relative similarity for both agents and circumstances have to be built into any universalizable rule.

However, given conditions of relevant similarity, the concept of universalization holds that what is right or wrong for me must also be right or wrong for all persons like me in similar situations. So we can state as a moral principle that if I am a strong swimmer and that it would be wrong for me to ignore your cries for help if you were drowning and I could easily rescue you, then by that same reasoning it would be wrong for any person who is a strong swimmer to refuse to go to the aid of any drowning person whom he or she could easily rescue. The argument here is that for any principle to be a truly moral principle then it must be universalizable in this way.

This definition, that moral principles have to be principles which would find acceptance among all rational and reasonable men and women, helps us to understand the meaning of morality, but unfortunately it does not help us to determine whether such moral principles are subjective or objective. The question remains as to whether there is an absolute moral duty to will the Highest Good, which Kant claims as the foundation for all true moral principles, or whether morality is simply the result of practical necessity as his opponents claim.

Kant argued that his claim could only be shown a priori, that is by theoretical reasoning. We know the truth of the moral law, as he defines it, by reason alone, because the wide variation between different types of society and their different moral frameworks make any sort of empirical testing impossible.

However, the counter claim is that because any kind of empirical testing is impossible the truth of Kant's claim cannot be shown at all. The standard example of an a priori truth is that two plus two equals four, because we can clearly see that two plus two will always equal four. But Kant's claim that there is an absolute moral duty to will the Highest Good is not like this. It may be argued that the will to the Highest Good is what many of us intuitively feel, but some of us, it seems, do not have this intuition, and many of us do ignore it to act from motivations of personal greed or power. This demonstrates that the will to the Highest Good is not always the case. Kant's argument has to be diluted to the statement that the will to the Highest Good is what we should feel, not that it is what we do feel. But there is no way to show conclusively that we should feel anything. This leaves Kant's claim wide open to attack from the subjective side of the divide.

In fact, philosophers on the subjective side make a strong point of showing that ours is a contingent world, that nothing is necessary, and that therefore nothing compels any of us to do anything. On this view it just happens that we do generally abide by whatever framework of morals our society adopts, but there is no particular framework that has to exist. Even within a framework there is nothing outside of society itself, either by means of its laws and punishments or by the pressures of public opinion, which can actually make us act morally. The world is full of criminals and cheats who bend the rules or create their own, and it can be argued that provided they can escape censure and retribution then it is quite rational for them to do so. The immoral man may be a plague or parasite on his neighbors, but if he is clever enough to get away with it, then it cannot be shown that he is in any way irrational. A successful thief can surround himself with luxury, while honest men frequently starve.

What follows from this, the subjective philosophers can argue, is that because nothing can be shown to compel us to act morally, then there is no objective morality. But does this conclusion logically follow? Let us consider for a moment a simple analogy. I intend to fasten two pieces of wood together with a screw, therefore, I should use a screwdriver. The subjective argument applied to this situation is that this does not follow. Nothing compels me to use a screwdriver. If I want to I can drive the screw home with a hammer, or I do not need to do the job at all.

However, if I do want to fix my two pieces of wood together with a screw, then I only need to look at the screw to see that it is designed to be screwed home with a screwdriver. The spiral shank and the slot in the head of the screw combine to tell me how the screw was designed to be used, even though nothing can actually compel me to use the screw in this way.

In a similar way I would suggest that when we look at ourselves, when we introspectively examine our own intuitions and our own sense of what is right and wrong, then we too may be aware that we are designed to function toward a common purpose. That is, we are designed to act morally. Of course there is nothing to say that we should act morally in the sense of there being some sort of compulsion to act morally, because we have the freedom of will to chose whether we will act morally or not. But at the same time we do have an inner awareness of what is right and what is wrong, and we know that we should act as far as is possible to do what is right. Should, in this sense, is not a form of compulsion, but simply an awareness of what is right. It is the awareness that we are designed as moral beings.

This is a substantial claim to make, but Aristotle was surely right when he defined man as a rational animal, and part of our reasoning faculty is our ability to evaluate our desires and instincts into categories of what is right and wrong, noble and base, just and unjust, and so on. Furthermore, a second element of what constitutes our essence as men would seem to be that we do feel a sense of responsibility when we make our choices within any of these pairs of categories. We are moral beings in that we are aware of what is right and what is important, and because we are aware of our own responsibility when we make decisions in these areas.

In moral philosophy seminars one of the standard issues of debate is over the imaginary situation of "Jim and the Indians." Jim, in this situation, is an explorer who arrives in a remote jungle township where the local military commander is about to execute twenty dissident Indians as a grim example to the rest of the population. Jim is offered the opportunity to save the lives of nineteen of the condemned Indians, but in order to do so he must undertake to shoot number twenty who must still be executed as an example. Jim is in a classic moral dilemma. Should he commit one immoral act of murder, in order to save nineteen lives, or should he refuse to participate and allow all twenty Indians to be killed.

In most seminars a majority of students spend most of their time in trying to evade the issue and find a third possible outcome for the unfortunate Jim. There is always a great reluctance to actually chose between two basically immoral acts, even though one is mathematically preferable to the other. Even when we have to acknowledge that it may be necessary to chose one immoral act in order to prevent another immoral act of even greater proportions, we still have to anguish over the exact terms and limits of its justifications. This, I suggest, is because we are aware, deep inside ourselves, that issues like these are moral issues, and not merely mathematical issues of simple calculation. We are aware of the nature of a moral issue because we are designed as moral beings. When we think deeply about these issues we are aware that we cannot abdicate the degree of responsibility we feel for the consequences of our decisions.

We have returned to the notion of consequences, so let us go back for a moment to the argument between the idea of morality as a moral law that can only be founded on motive, and the idea of morality as being derived from the desire to achieve certain goals and consequences. The issue here seems somewhat irrelevant, like an area of dead wood that can be usefully cleared away. Whether my sense of morality causes me to act to motivate the Highest Good, or whether my sense of morality causes me to act to bring about the consequences of the Highest Good, then where is the meaningful difference? The idea that we can divorce motives from consequences seems to me a peculiar one. If I have a motive to do something then it must be because I desire to bring about certain consequences, even if those consequences are in the abstract form of the Highest Good which no one has yet been able to perfectly and conclusively define. The motive to the Highest Good is surely to bring about the consequences of the Highest Good, and to try and separate motive and consequences into totally separate compartments and then argue that true morality can only lie with one or the other seems both bizarre and unhelpful.

This would seem to bring us back to the objective or subjective arguments if we want to continue our attempt to understand the meaning of morality. We do seem to have an awareness of ourselves as moral beings, but is this because we are in some sense designed in this way, as I have suggested, or is it at root no more than rational self-interest, grounded in practical necessity and structured by the techniques of social control?

To answer this question it would seem that there would have to be some way to show a clear difference between the kind of society that would evolve from practical necessity and social control, and the kind of society that would evolve from a moral will to the Highest Good. The problem is that any society which enables men to move freely and without fear among their fellows, knowing that they can confidently expect friendship and support rather than enmity and danger, seems to fit the needs of both practical necessity and the Highest Good. To my mind it does not seem possible to clearly separate practical necessity from the Highest Good, because we cannot hope to achieve the latter without the conditions which would have to be established by the former. The different moral systems that men have established to support their different societies can all be described in terms of practical necessity, and as attempts to achieve the Highest Good for themselves as they have perceived it, or as they have perceived the Will of God.

It does seem that the morality of self interest is in fact embraced within the wider morality that goes beyond it. There are, I will suggest, two levels of morality. The first, and the lower level, is the one that can be reduced to egoism and practical necessity; that is the morality of reciprocal obligations that are in everyone's interest because society cannot survive without them. Because it is in all our interest that society should survive and that harmony and good neighborliness should prevail. The second level of morality, the higher level is the sense of morality which goes beyond self interest and the immediate society in which we live. It is the morality of the Good Samaritan which reached out to a total stranger of another race with no tangible benefit to the Samaritan himself; it is the morality which, as our understanding grows, is extended to all human beings and all nature.

The first level is where we are as individuals, or as members of our separate societies, and it is a subjective and relative level. The second level is where we aspire to be as human beings, as moral beings, and as a part of the whole of nature, and which our intuition senses as the objective and absolute level. The problem here is that as individuals or as members of our separate societies we are also all human beings and all part of the whole of nature. The two levels merge and cannot be neatly divided as most philosophers would assume.

Those who argue that all morality is subjective point to the fact that what is immoral in one society may be morally acceptable and even socially necessary in another. An example would be one of the primitive societies in Borneo where a young man could not marry until he had collected a sufficiently impressive number of enemy heads. But if everything in nature evolves, and science and the idea that God creates through the process of evolution both suggest that this is so, then we can see that man's moral sense will need to be developed and refined just as all his other abilities need to be developed and refined. By this reasoning the Borneo head-hunters were simply at a low stage of moral awareness. They would just have a foothold on the first level of morality which does not extend beyond the village, or the tribe.

It seems clear that the more we come into contact with other cultures and societies, the more deeply we have to think about our own moral frameworks as we make the inevitable comparisons. In this way our moral sense is refined and developed. As we evolved from animals into human beings, so we evolve from human beings into moral beings. Eventually the idea of what it means to be a human being blends into the idea of what it means to be a moral being. We sense that there is something that is morally objective and absolute in the overall conception of the eternal universe, and yet we become aware that for us in our limitations of time and space there is also a high degree of relative subjectivity in our moral rules. We are bound by the latter, but we begin more consciously to aspire to the former. From our foothold on the first level of morality we can chose to strive to reach the second level.

At this stage it is our freedom of choice, our freedom of will, which confuses the issue. We can sense what God wants, for us to act morally, to keep evolving, to grow spiritually; but because God does not compel there is scope for philosophers to argue, and for alternative explanations to appear plausible.

If my reasoning is correct then we have now paved the way for a return to those arguments from morality to the existence of God which I held in abeyance from the chapter on the philosophy of religion. In the previous paragraph I wrote as though I had already shown that God exists, but this was presumptuous for I have only argued that there is an objective level of morality which transcends the subjective level. Many philosophers will still want to contest this point, but even if we accept it, then there is still the question of determining what, if anything, this objective level of morality might imply.

Obviously a person who has religious faith will want to argue that an objective level of morality does imply the existence of God. One argument for this conclusion is that because there is no natural explanation for an objective level of morality in a purely physical world, then, our world cannot be a purely physical world. Our awareness of a higher level of morality is held to be part of our spiritual essence linked to the dualist concepts of mind and soul, which is best explained by acknowledging that there is an Eternal God who imposes an awareness of His Morality on to the physical world.

There is also an argument from the fact that we do feel that our moral judgments are also moral imperatives. Most of us do feel that we ought at least try to do what be believe to be morally right in the way we live our lives, and we feel guilt when we know we have failed. Therefore, our moral judgments, our inner prompting of conscience, can be understood as moral commands. The notion of a command implies a commander, but here we can look to no human commander, not even in the sense of social controls, for all too often the failings we feel guilty about are inner failings which no human commander could ever come to know about. Therefore, we must be either our own moral commander, or our moral commander must be non-human, a non-physical or spiritual power that can create a moral sense within us. It can be shown that it can be both rational and in an individual's own self-interest to behave immorally, and so the idea that we can be our own moral commander has no foundation. Only the idea of a non-human commander is left, and the best explanation of who, or what, this non-human commander might be, is our idea of God.

As we have already seen, there is a flaw in the traditional form of this argument. We have freedom of will. God does not compel us to do anything. Therefore, our moral judgments cannot be commands. But surely our moral judgments, our pricks of conscience, are a voice of guidance. And if we substitute guidance for command then the argument does hold. A voice of guidance implies a guide. And the idea of a non-physical spiritual guide who does not command or compel, but who does make us aware of the direction in which we should strive, is best explained by our idea of God.

For the final argument from morality to the existence of God we have to turn again to Kant. He argues that there is a compulsion which all rational men feel to seek the Highest Good, or the realization of the ideal moral world. He further argues that there is an understanding within us that in an ideal moral world our moral virtue would be balanced by its due reward in terms of happiness. It would be pointless for us to attempt to achieve this ideal moral world with its just balance of virtue and happiness if it were not in fact achievable.

However, it is plain to see that this just and ideal state of affairs simply does not exist anywhere in this physical world. We see immoral men who are happy and rich, and moral men living unselfish lives who are nevertheless unhappy and poor. Nowhere can we see any prospect for the Highest Good. Therefore, Kant argues, what is not achievable by men alone in this physical world must be achieved in the spiritual world with God's help. From this argument Kant postulates both the existence of God, and a spiritual immortality for mankind.

Again I will insist that guidance would be a more accurate term than compulsion, but even with this alteration there is still a flaw in Kant's argument: he cannot show that what we feel should be achievable must necessarily be achievable. He may be right, but he cannot make an unchallengable argument.

There are then, facts about morality and ideas about morality, which can be taken as pointing toward the existence of God, although it cannot be stated conclusively that morality itself is only explicable on the assumption that God exists.

But this is a state of affairs with which we are now familiar. In the final analysis there has to be uncertainty about the nature of morality, just as there has to be uncertainty about the possibility of knowledge, the nature of the mind, and the existence of God. This uncertainty is necessary to leave room for free will and religious faith, and the philosophical pieces of the metaphysical jig-saw all have this one factor in common.

GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER SIX:

INTELLECT AND EXPERIENCE

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At the beginning of this book I stated there were only four possible outcomes to the arguments about the existence or non-existence of God. I stated that after all the religious, philosophical and scientific efforts that have already been made the discovery of any certain evidence in either direction would seem to be highly unlikely. Having thus ruled out two of the four possible outcomes I suggested that a more useful area of study would begin by accepting that proof of God's existence or non-existence could not be conclusively shown. Only two possibilities then remain: One is that God does not exist, although science and philosophy cannot prove it, and the other is that God does exist, although again science and philosophy cannot prove it. I have rejected the first of these possibilities, although I have had to concede that it is a logical possibility, and instead I have argued that the balance of probability tilts toward the second. Now I have reached the stage where I can suggest three reasons why it is rational, despite the lack of conclusive evidence, to believe in the existence of God.

The first is the line of reasoning that I have argued in every subsequent chapter of this book. For God to create mankind with a genuine freedom of will He would have to ensure that the question of His own existence remains both a matter of faith, and a permanent scientific and philosophical mystery. And because the major fields of philosophy interlock, so that any breakthrough of certain knowledge in any one field would tend to throw light on the others, then He would also have to ensure that the major questions in each of these fields also remain forever undetermined. This is the way things are. The state of affairs that God would have to bring about to make us a gift of a genuine free will is the state of affairs that exists. This argument to the existence of God can be summed up as an argument from the consistency of uncertainty.

My second reason is the one which I have just expounded in the previous chapter. It does seem to me that there is an objective level of morality to which moral man aspires, a level that is transcendent over the subjective level of morality to which social man is bound. We do not have to argue against the credibility of one level to establish the credibility of the other. There is not a divide between two alternative and exclusive explanations of morality, but rather a merging of two moral realities, the subjective seeking to evolve into the objective. If this reasoning is correct, then it further seems to me that a plausible explanation for our awareness of an objective level of morality is that it is an awareness of what God wants us to be. This further implies the probable existence of God.

My third reason is one that we still have to discuss. In the chapter on the philosophy of religion I held back the arguments from man's religious experience, and it is this universal weight of experience and awareness of God which, in my view, can also tip the balance of probability toward the existence of God. These three factors together, although open to argument as the consistency of uncertainty demands, make possible a rational and reasonable belief in the probable existence of God. Such a belief does not insult the intellect, it is philosophically respectable.

Again many philosophers will insist that I claim too much, and especially they will argue that nothing at all can be shown by religious experience. Human religious experience is essentially subjective; it can be collective on a surface level, such as when a congregation worships together, but what happens, when it happens, is a spiritual awareness within us as individual human beings. It can be described as an awakening of the soul, or an understanding of the heart, but many philosophers will argue that these descriptions are intellectually meaningless. What each individual experiences within his or herself, cannot be objectively tested by science and logic. No amount of open heart surgery will ever reveal the mechanism by which a heart understands. And no amount of logical analysis will ever show that there can in fact be such an event as the awakening of the soul. Thus philosophers argue that descriptions like these, and religious experience itself, cannot be taken into any logical or intellectual account.

Ironically, among many religious believers it is the intellect which is too readily dismissed. To question the established doctrines and the dogma of revealed Gospel, to try and interpret ancient writings with modern understanding, are all seen as being both foolish and sinful. I have heard Christian teachers insisting that if you do not accept every single word of the Bible as literal truth then you will be surely damned to eternal hellfire, and most other religions similarly have their thinking straight-jacketed by their Holy Book. Any attempt at "intellectualizing" the given word is seen as a cardinal crime. Blind Faith and unquestioning belief are all too often held out as the only keys to the gates of heaven.

Consequently a gulf exists between philosophy and religion. The philosophers reject faith and experience and argue that only the intellect and the power of reason can have any real validity. The believers reject the intellect and insist that faith alone will be weighed on the final day of judgment. Both arguments, I dare to suggest, are absurd. As human beings we have both our subjective experiences which no other person can directly perceive, which we call our internal perceptions, and we have our objective experiences of objects in the physical world. Many of us have an inner spiritual awareness, and our powers of reason. To attempt to separate our kinds of experiences, and our intellectual and spiritual lives, into categories that are valid and invalid is an incomprehensible lunacy. Therefore it is another important argument of this book that there can be no hope of a true account from any argument which dismisses as invalid either the intellect or experience.

I have already shown how an intellectual enquiry at a purely philosophical level can lead to the conclusion that it is wholly rational and reasonable to have faith and believe in the probable existence of God. So let us now look at the experience side of the present issue. There are many varieties to the claims of religious experience. The Bible and other Holy Books are full of testaments and miracles. Prophets have claimed to receive their revelations or their message directly from God in the form of visions and dreams. Many saints and mystics have claimed a spiritual awareness of God, or a sense of communion or Oneness with God that defies explanation or expression and must be experienced to be understood. Millions of more ordinary people have believed that God is somehow guiding the world about them and their lives, and that their prayers are heard and sometimes answered. In most parts of the world religious observances and beliefs whether Christian, Moslem, Hindu, Buddhist or many others, play an important if not vital part in state, social and private life.

The western world is supposedly becoming more secular, with measurably declining levels of participation and interest in religion. But even here gallup poll surveys can record some surprising revelations. Despite low figures for church attendance, the direct personal question -- Do you believe in God? – has received high affirmative response rates. In Great Britain 76% of those questioned said yes, they did believe in God, although only 14% attended church services. In the rest of Europe the figures ranged from 52% to 95% for believers, with between 3% and 52% for church attendances, the higher rates being recorded in the predominately Catholic countries. In the USA the figures were 95% for believers, with 43% attending regular religious services.

These figures show a consistently high discrepancy throughout the western world between the high percentage of people who believe in the existence of God, and the relative few who actually attend church services. Possibly this has something to do with the pace and pressures of modern life, and the numerous other demands on our time; or perhaps it reflects a feeling that God is somehow more, or different, to how He is represented in church. What it does seem to signify clearly is that belief in God exists far more widely outside the churches and the organized Christian religions, than the secular thesis would have us believe. This in turn must suggest that the lives and thinking of millions of people who do not attend church have also been touched, or influenced in some way, by some form of experience that has indicated to them that God and the spiritual plane are a reality.

We have returned to our central subject of religious experience, and here the questions and the difficulties begin. For a start how are we to analyze the vast, varied, and all-too-often nebulous or abstract character of religious experience? Can we even begin to take the claims of religious experience as seriously as we take our other claims of perception? From most philosophers and scientists the short and often emphatic answer is "No, we cannot."

For the sake of convenience we can divide the claims of religious experience into roughly two kinds of claim. One kind of claim we can label as miracles and these will be the claims of people to have witnessed some kind of miraculous event, or simply to have received an answer to their prayers by some occurrence in the external world. The other kind of claim we can label under the general heading of Spiritual Awareness.

First let us briefly consider the concept of a miracle. For a working definition we can say that a miracle would be some unusual, surprising and beneficial event, which would either bring some wonderful gain, or avert some distress or disaster, or would seemingly answer a prayer. Many such events have taken place, but on closer inspection it has usually been found that there is also an alternative natural explanation for what has occurred.

Let us suppose that I pause in writing this paragraph and say a short prayer to God in which I ask Him to ensure the eventual publication of this book. When the book does get published I can point back to this paragraph and say, "You see, God does answer prayers." But the materialist philosopher will quite logically reject this. The book is published, he will argue, simply because the publisher saw it as a commercial proposition. If the publisher could not see the book as generating enough sales to make a profit on the enterprise, then it would not have been published. My prayer and the idea of God intervening, were both irrelevant. Or, let us suppose that I am suddenly assailed by a madman wielding a large axe. I pray quickly to God for my deliverance and my assailant is immediately struck down by a heart attack. Again it can be argued that a heart attack is a perfectly natural event in an over-excited person with a weak heart, and that my prayer was not necessarily the cause of any divine intervention. Answers to prayers, and similar miraculously seeming events, can all be dismissed as coincidence miracles. The non-believer can concede that such coincidences do occur, and yet deny the miraculous interpretation put upon them by the believer.

However, this is not to say that all miracles can be dismissed as coincidence miracles. There is another concept of a miracle and these have been defined as violation miracles. The idea here is that such a miracle would be a violation of natural law which could not occur by some kind of coincidence but only by some form of divine intervention. For example, science tells us that it is a natural law that water cannot be turned into wine, that is, not without the addition of other ingredients and sufficient time for the process of fermentation to take place. And yet the Bible tells us that Jesus was instantly able to turn water into wine.

The problem here is that these are two contradictory statements, and we cannot logically believe them both. If there was such a violation of a natural law, then it could only prove that such a supposed natural law was not, after all, a true natural law. Any evidence that counts toward establishing the truth of either of two such contradictory statements is automatically evidence against the truth value of the other.

The scientific argument, then, is that an event like the instantaneous changing of water into wine just could not have happened, because violation miracles are logically impossible. The general philosophical view, first put forward by Hume, is that in cases of this sort the claims of the witness, or witnesses, must always be assessed on the basis of probability. There will always be three possible explanations to such a claim. The first is that the witness is lying. The second is that the witness has been deceived, either by others, or by his own hopes or fears or hallucinations. The third is that a violation miracle has in fact occurred. In every case, Hume further argued, it will always be much more likely that one of the first two explanations will be true. Any claim to have witnessed a violation miracle must therefore be highly suspect.

All forms of miracle are clearly wide open to argument, and all that we can hope to establish here is once again the consistency of uncertainty. But what of that second great body of religious experiences which I have grouped together under the general heading of Spiritual Awareness?

The great problem here is that these experiences are always internal perceptual experiences which the skeptic can label and dismiss as subjective. The difficulty is to show that what is experienced internally is in fact caused by a corresponding external reality. The person who claims to feel the presence of God really needs to be able to point to some supporting outside evidence outside in order to convince the skeptic. Otherwise he is open to charges of dreaming, hallucinating, being subject to chemical or emotional disturbances, of being under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or quite simply of lying.

When we consider our ordinary, every-day external perceptual experiences, such as eating cornflakes for breakfast or watching TV, we find that these experiences all have a variety of supporting factors which religious experiences do not have. They cohere with our own other perceptual experiences: that is the cornflakes look and taste the same every morning, even though they are different portions of cornflakes, and when I press the buttons on the TV remote control I cause the machine to function in exactly the same way in which it has functioned hundreds of times before. There are also causal interactions with the rest of the physical world: the cornflakes packet and the TV set both occupy physical space, I can touch and feel them, and move them, and if I shine a light on them they cast shadows. Their existence can also be corroborated by other people: anyone else in the room can taste the cornflakes, and can see and touch the TV set. On the other hand, religious perceptual experiences usually fail most or all of these kinds of tests.

But are we simply confusing the issue when we talk about testing the validity of a religious experience? Surely when we think of God our understanding is of some form of metaphysical Being or Power, and so how can the idea of testing for a physical external object have any kind of logical application? This is a point that may meet with a large measure of approval from a believer, but will only be regarded as a cop-out by the logical philosopher. For the latter will groan with exasperation and ask what sense can we ever make of the idea of a personal experience of God, if all parallels with normal perceptual experiences are ruled out as inapplicable.

Perhaps we can make another approach on this issue, and meet the philosopher on his own ground. Consider again the arguments we studied in the chapter on metaphysics. There the basic problem of knowledge is that of how can we justify any claim to any sort of knowledge at all. As we have already discussed, when we try to justify any given piece of propositional knowledge we are automatically faced with the infinite regress problem. This brings us down to our immediate sense data as the only possible foundation for any certain knowledge, and even here we have to face the possibility that our own interpretations of the data brought to us by our senses can still mislead us. We may be mistaken in what we think we perceive, or, as the extreme sceptic argues, the world around us, and even our own existence, could all be a form of hallucination.

In my conclusion in the chapter on metaphysics it seemed that at the root of all philosophical analysis even the external physical world, with which we all believe ourselves to be familiar, has to be taken with a certain measure of faith. Why then, should the internal perceptions of religious faith be denied the same credibility?

Some modern philosophers have in fact argued along these lines. They suggest that a person who experiences God by hearing something, or seeing something, or sensing something, within himself, or around himself, which he genuinely believes to be a sound or visual or spiritual experience of God, will have just as much justification for his claim to knowledge as the person who claims to eat cornflakes or see the TV set.

Richard Swinburne puts this sort of argument with what he defines as the principle of credulity. He argues that if we do reject our own perceptions then we must logically end up being skeptical about everything, not only our own internal feelings but also our belief in the existence of external physical objects. The general argument here is that it is reasonable to put our trust in our own cognitive faculties unless there is reason to doubt them. This means that we can reasonably accept that our perceptions are not misleading or deceiving us until it can be proved that they are. Skepticism, for its own sake, is a spiritual and physical emptiness, devoid of all meaning.

However, these efforts to put the faith we have in our internal perceptions on the same weighting level as our faith in our perceptions of the external world do not wholly succeed. The weakness of all these arguments is that where our ordinary perceptions of the external world occur regularly and with constant corroboration from the experiences of others, religious experiences, or experiences of God, are usually solitary and irregular. There have been exceptions where a religious experience has been met by a group of believers, but it can usually be argued that in these cases all of those concerned were in some highly-charged emotional or psychic-expectant state. What the counter argument boils down to is that only a small amount of faith is needed in order to believe in the reality of the external physical world, so small that most of us do not even recognize that it is there; while on the other hand religious belief is built in a very large part out of faith. The two kinds of faith do not have an equal weighting.

It would seem, then, that the principle of credulity needs some supporting argument to explain why religious experiences do not occur regularly to everyone, and why, when they do occur, they cannot be subjected to any conclusive scientific or epistemological test. There is a supporting argument in what a theologian would call "God's Grace," and what Swinburne has defined as "solitarily perceivable objects." The thinking here is that although objects are usually multiply perceivable, that is all of us can see the TV set or the cornflakes packet, some other objects may be only solitarily perceivable, such as when the Christian closes his eyes and sees, or senses, the presence of Jesus. In other words it may be that we are all spiritually blind, but that God has the power to enable those whom He selects to spiritually see. Thus the perceptions that are genuine experiences of God can only occur to those who have religious faith and who have earned God's Grace.

Again we seem to have explored the whole philosophical labyrinth of our subject without finding any definitive answers. The question remains as to whether the possibility of a person having a genuine external religious perception, and thus a true experience or awareness of God, is a coherent concept and a real possibility. The theist will argue that it is, and the atheist will argue just as forcefully that it is not. We know that the human mind can experience extraordinary realistic visions under the influence of hallucinatory drugs such as LSD, and so it may be possible that intense emotional needs or psychic pressures can trigger similar reactions in the brain -- or the religious experience may be exactly what the religious believer believes it to be.

Also it is not logically necessary that all claimed religious experiences must have the same explanation. Some may be hallucinations, some may be forms of self-deception, some may be deliberate fraud -- and some may be genuine experiences of God.

I almost hesitate to bore my readers by observing that we have yet again confirmed the consistency of uncertainty, and indeed I promised more. At the beginning of this chapter I implied that our examination of religious experience could provide some independent support for the probability of God's existence, and not just a mere continuation of what has already been established. Consequently there is still more to be said on the subject.

This far we have been looking rather narrowly at the individual religious experience, and asking, in effect what can any single claim to religious experience say to us that would in any way substantiate the claim that God exists. And the answer is nothing. The individual experience is subjective. It is not tangible evidence of an objective reality. But the overwhelming evidence in my view, is the belief in God itself, which endures and grows in the hearts and minds of millions of people throughout the world, and has done so in virtually all societies and at all times. Religious belief, of one sort or another, is universal. There are many differences in ritual and related religious practices, but basically the great theological world views contain many similarities. Religious belief forms the central and sustaining structure of almost every world view, not only among naive, simple and superstitious peoples, but also among all the great sophisticated civilizations. From antiquity to the present day it has been not only the humble and the ignorant, but also the most gifted minds and sharpest intellects that have looked for faith in God. And as we have noted, even in the materialistic, market-economy, industrialized and scientific-leaning nations of the modern western world, there are still a few philosophers among the faithful.

Thus the important question for this chapter is this: What explanation can we give for this universal and eternal flowering of belief in some form of spiritual existence in which God, by some definition, is the spiritual creator and sustainer? Can there be any explanation which would be more plausible and logical than the simple explanation that we do have a spiritual awareness of something eternal, of which we are a part, but which is infinitely more than ourselves?

In Chapter Four we looked at Descartes question, "How did the idea of God occur in my mind? ", and saw that it can be answered by saying that it is possibly a construction of his own imagination. The same answer or the answer that it has been placed there as a legitimating idea by those who articulate the values of his society, can apply to the idea of God in the mind of any individual. But the question of how is it that the twin concepts of God and of a spiritual life are universal in all levels and complexities of all human societies is not so easily dismissed. Since Descartes time anthropologists and archaeologists have studied a vast diversity of cultures, both past and present, and these two universal ideas have made their appearance in every culture -- first the idea that there is something answering to the general notion of God, and second that we do have some sort of spiritual life. It would seem, then, that there has to be a root answer to the question of how and why did these twin concepts develop which must go far beyond the experience of any individual, and indeed of any single society.

Descartes himself hinted at the importance of this question and suggested that the idea of God is implanted in all our souls, "As the mark of a workman imprinted upon His work." This is close to my suggestion that all societies have had an awareness of God and of their own spiritual potential, which is most logically explained by the probability that God does exist, and that human beings do have a spiritual potential.

However, to let my reader decide whether this is the most plausible explanation, it will have to be weighed against the available alternative explanations. These come mainly from the work of sociologists and anthropologists, where religion is defined in two broad approaches. The first follows Emile Durkheim, who defined religion in terms of its social functions as a sacred binding force for society. The second follows Max Weber, who defines religion as the human response to those things which concern us all ultimately.

For Durkheim, God is society, and religion is, in essence, society worshipping itself. Religious rituals and practices are no more than social solidarity rites. Religion and all that is involved performs the function of holding a community together. It legitimizes the moral world view and is a mechanism for social control.

For Weber religion is defined as any set of coherent answers to the dilemmas of human existence. Religion evolves to meet man's needs in searching for the meanings of life, birth, death, fortune and misfortune. Religious beliefs attempt to explain why things happen, which people feel is different from and far more important than the question of how things happen. We can usually see how things happen, but we want to know why.

For these sociologists and their followers, religion and its essential concepts of God and Spirit have their roots in functional forms of explanation. For one group the function is to bind society together; for the other group the function is to provide society with meaning in times of individual and social crisis.

For Hume the natural history of religion has evolved...."From the incessant hopes and fears which actuate the human mind." These hopes and fears, he argued, lead men naturally into polytheism. Men look to the powers which they see in the forces of nature, and in good and evil, and these sources of power, or supposed power, are then worshipped as gods. The gods are modeled on the power-relationships of human existence and so they become celestial lords or kings, or the tribal All-Father. Out of polytheism monotheism eventually emerges as one god becomes elevated above all others to the position of Supreme Being or Creator.

The idea of power as the hidden focus within religion emerges in another sociological definition. Here religion is seen as attempts to conceptualize what we cannot control, then to form relationships with these conceptual beings, and finally, through begging, bribing and extorting, by means of prayer, sacrifice and worship, we attempt to control these beings. If with beings we include powers, then this definition can include with religion those thought-systems which give a central place to magic and witchcraft, and explain them all as modes of attempting to gain control.

All of these sociological definitions see religion as man-made, as evolving naturally to meet men's fears and needs. They can perhaps be summed up by Berger, who defines all religion as: "The establishment through human activity of an all-embracing sacred order." In his view, "Religion constitutes an immense projection of human meanings into the vastness of the universe, which then comes back as an alien reality to haunt its producers."

These, then, are the mainstream of sociological theories that have been put forward to explain the universal phenomenon of religious experience. They can be listed briefly as the idea of religion as a binding force for society, as a means of social control, as a quest for meanings, or as attempts to control power. To this list we must add the explanation of religious experience as a genuine awareness of God and our own spiritual potential. The problem now is how to decide upon what credibility we can give to each of these different explanations, and how can we decide as to which is the most plausible.

It seems to me that if we do attempt to isolate any one of these explanations into a single absolute fact, that is a kind of exclusive truth that reduces all other explanations into misconceptions or fictions, then we will be able to argue for ever. I do seriously doubt whether there can be an exclusive truth in this sense about anything. For example: we can say that Alaska is the largest state of the United States of America; we can also say that it is the coldest state of the United States of America, or we could say that it is the state nearest the Soviet Union. All of these statements I believe to be true, but none of them is an exclusive truth in the sense that it can exclude the other two statements and make them false. Each statement is a different truth about the same thing, the piece of land that we call Alaska.

In the same way it does appear that all the alternative explanations we have looked at to the phenomenon of religious experience are also stating different but not incompatible truths. There are clearly elements of truth in all the natural explanations; religion does function as a social binding force, religion has been used, often with total ruthlessness, as a means of social control, religion does function as the main vehicle in man's eternal quest for meanings, and religion is used by man in his attempts to tap sources of hidden power. But just as clearly, it seems to me, religion has also evolved from man's awareness of God.

I will go further and argue that man's religious experience is based essentially upon his awareness of God, and that this spiritual awareness is the foundation upon which all the other uses and functions of religion have been built. If we look back to our analogy with Alaska we can see that all the statements about Alaska, relating to its size, its coldness, its proximity to the Soviet Union, and so forth, are all based upon the fact that there is a piece of land which we call Alaska. Alaska is the foundation, so to speak, for all the other statements we can make about it. In the same way I am suggesting that that our awareness of God is the foundation for all the functional and sociological truths about religion which we have discussed. If that awareness was not there then we could not use it as a basis for social bonding, social control, ect, ect.

If we reject God as an explanation for the collective religious experience of mankind then we face a problem that can be likened to that of trying to explain how Alaska could provide an export of its resources, such as gold and oil and timber, if Alaska itself did not exist. Those who advocate any of the sociological explanations of religion as the absolute and exclusive truth are in fact saying that all the millions of people, in all societies and at all times, who have believed themselves to be involved in an awareness of God and their own spiritual potential, have all been deceived in what they are experiencing. Instead we are asked to believe that by some incredible and never-failing series of coincidences, man has always invented the same form of religious mechanism to satisfy his hopes and fears, and his aspirations to power.

The existence of God, or an eternal and universal coincidence of human invention, a foundation of false hope, or a genuine subconscious awareness of something other and greater and more enduring than our physical selves? These seem to be our main areas of choice.

At this point I will suggest that the human need is not to invent God, but to personify God. It is to make that spiritual essence of which we are aware into an understandable concept to which we can more easily relate. Consequently the personifications and definitions of God have differed from culture to culture, as they have all attempted to interpret this basic human awareness within the limits of human understanding. Every society and every age has struggled to find its own understanding of God compatible with its own stage of social and intellectual development. These differences of understanding are basically only different stages of understanding, coupled with the differences in the way in which the concept of God has been personified by different cultures.

In the chapter on morality I concluded with the view that there are two levels of morality, both the subjective level where individual and cultural views can vary, and the objective level to which they all subconsciously aspire. In the same way I will now suggest that religious experience also has two levels which will eventually merge together. There is the subjective level of individual and cultural experience where different cultures propose different definitions and personifications of God, and the transcendent objective level of which all peoples are aware, and which they strive in their own ways to interpret and understand.

Here the logical philosopher will automatically claim that I still have not shown in any way that there is anything about either religious experience or morality that can be properly defined as an objective fact. But their minds are still locked into the idea that all objective facts must be physical, capable of being weighed and measured and scientifically determined. However, I am not using the description of objective in the sense of describing some physical object, but in the sense of describing a reality that exists. That reality is spiritual. It is the spiritual essence of God and His Will.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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# CHAPTER SEVEN

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WHICH RELIGION?

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We have looked at both faith and reason and seen that one does not necessarily contradict the other. We do not have to chose between them, for both faith and reason can lead us to acknowledge God. But the God we have acknowledged is a transcendent spiritual reality, an inter-religious God, who is in a sense for ever hidden behind the human interpretations and personifications of His essence. So which is the way forward into the third millennium? How can we chose between the different beliefs, or different bodies of belief, about the nature of God? Which religion offers the true path of faith, or approximates more closely in its beliefs to the hidden reality?

These are, of course, impossible questions to answer, for the uncertainty generated by the conflicting dogmas and beliefs is again necessary to maintain what I have called the consistency of uncertainty. If the nature, or intention, of God, is such that we cannot ever know whether He exists or does not exist, then it follows that we can never know whether any particular definition of God, or belief about God, is in fact a true definition or belief. However, as God has arranged this state of affairs, it would seem that He cannot logically or justifiably hold man responsible for any misinterpretations of His nature. Therefore, if God is just and compassionate, and most religions do acknowledge that He has these essential qualities, then it is reasonable to believe that He will have the wisdom and understanding to accept all faith as valid. Consequently this chapter argues for the second major theme of this book, which is that all faith which is genuinely held must surely lead to God.

It is my belief that there are threads of truth in most philosophies, and in almost all religions, but that woven with, and often almost obscuring the truth threads, there are other threads of superfluous theological and metaphysical baggage. Or, to use another analogy, I will suggest that that the whole area of truth and ultimate reality is like a metaphysical diamond with many facets, each one reflecting different angles and intensities of inner light. All philosophers, theologians and religions, have glimpsed and attempted to define just one or two beams of light from the diamond. The light beams have been refracted through the social and cultural realities of finite time and space, and the resulting distortions are then maintained as an exclusive body of truth.

Threads of truth! Beams of Light! The logical philosophers will be accusing me of unintelligible obscurity. But analogies like these are the only way in which we can hope to understand these issues.

However, let us look briefly at the mainstreams of religion themselves, and then perhaps we can determine whether or not they can be seen as approximating to these analogies. To do full justice to a study of comparative religion would entail the research and writing of a massive volume, the very size and detail of which would only serve to deter the general reader. There are already excellent books of this kind available, (The Religious Experience of Mankind, by Professor Ninian Smart, springs immediately to mind), and so I see no point in adding to them. This survey, then, like my brief survey of the major fields of philosophy, can only be a brief introduction to the subject matter.

Let us begin with Christianity, with which I would expect most of my readers to be the most familiar. The foundation stone of Christian belief is that there is one God by whom the world was created. God is generally held as the Father of mankind, but specifically He is believed to have revealed His will through His only begotten son Jesus Christ who was born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. By His life and teaching Jesus laid great emphasis upon moral conduct. The two great commands which He revealed from His Father in Heaven were that men should "Love God," and that they should "Love one another." Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, His body was buried, but after three days He rose again from the dead, and finally He ascended into Heaven. The death of Jesus upon The Cross is seen as the ultimate sacrifice, and a symbolic atonement for all the sins of all those who acknowledge Him as their Savior and their mediator before God.

Christianity, then, is essentially a sense of living in Christ, in acknowledging Him as Savior, and endeavoring to live by the example of His life here on earth, but always looking forward to a unity with God in a spiritual life beyond the grave.

Here we can see clearly the two fundamental concepts which underlie all the great religious faiths; belief in God, and belief in a spiritual existence which now we only partly sense, but in which ultimately we will wholly share.

It seems to me that Christianity also expresses another fundamental truth, and to bring this out we must recap briefly on what I have said before. First, if God exists, then free will in human beings is only made possible by God's existence remaining forever uncertain. From this it follows that if God has arranged this state of human uncertainty about His own existence in order to allow free will in human beings, then His understanding will allow for our misinterpretations of His nature and render all faith acceptable to Him. However, if our reasoning is correct this far, then we can logically take it one step further. If God does have the qualities of justice and compassion which most religions ascribe to Him, then in allowing our freedom of will, and in understanding that that in some circumstances it will be used mistakenly or wrongly, it follows logically that God will accept some degree of responsibility for the behavior He has made possible in His creation. Consequently it follows that in all probability God is a Forgiving God. The path of philosophy that I have taken leads us to the Christian message that God does forgive us for our mistakes and our sins.

But, some of my readers may object, why should we believe that God will accept some degree of responsibility for the behavior He has made possible in us? To answer this I will have to refer back to the chapter on morality, where I concluded that our sense of morality was, in part, the sense of our own responsibility for our own actions. Even in the situation such as that imagined for the luckless explorer Jim, who had to chose whether or not to take one life in order to save nineteen others, we found that there was still a certain amount of moral anguish that could not be wholly resolved. The problem was that although the circumstances were not of Jim's choosing, and although one alternative was clearly mathematically favorable over the other, we still had to acknowledge that Jim's decision would affect the outcome, and that therefore he did have some degree of responsibility. My final conclusion in that chapter was that our sense of morality was, in all probability, our spiritual awareness of God's moral will, and if this reasoning is correct, then it does follow that God will also feel a certain degree of responsibility for allowing us to have the freedom of will which we so frequently misuse.

Christianity is one of the three great religious traditions which have flowered in the fertile historical and cultural soil of the near east, the cradle of all western civilization. From the very same roots emerged Judaism, which accepts as God's word the Old Testament of The Bible, but rejects the New Testament which proclaims the divinity of Christ. In fact, Christianity was initially a cult of Judaism before it attained its independent character and status.

The Jewish faith believes in the Divine Unity of God's attributes and purposes, and in the need for mankind to strive to live in accordance with God's ideals. God is held as the Lord and Creator of all. He is omniscient and his reward and retribution will be found in this world and the world to come. The Old Testament also makes many promises of the coming of a Messiah, one Anointed by God who will bring deliverance to the children of Israel. For Christians, Jesus Christ is the promised Messiah, but having rejected Christ in this role the Jewish faith still waits for the Messiah to come.

The belief that there is but one God, the Supreme Being and Creator of all things, is reaffirmed even more forcefully in Islam, which also has its roots in Jewish and Christian teaching. The Muslim name for God is "Allah," and the pronouncement of their faith is that, "There is no God but Allah!" The word Islam means "submission," and sums up the code of faith which is one of total submission to the will of God.

Islam recognizes many of the Jewish prophets of the Old Testament, and even accepts Christ as a prophet, but for Islam The Prophet of God is Mohammed, who was born 750 years after the birth of Christ. Islam also has its own Holy Book, The Koran, which is held to be the revealed Word of God as given to Mohammed, and the transcript of an original tablet kept by God in Heaven. In Islamic belief Allah works through created angels, and an eternal paradise is promised after death for the faithful.

Islam imposes a strict moral code, which includes alms-giving, pilgrimage and fasting, and a strict daily timetable for worship and prayer. It is perhaps the least cluttered of the monotheistic religions, to the point of abhorring Christianity as a form of debased polytheism because of Christianity's insistence upon the doctrinal trinity of Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Islam describes Allah in all its supplications as, "All-Merciful and All-Compassionate," and yet paradoxically sees Him as an Avenging God of stern retribution. Another holy duty laid upon the faithful of Islam is that of Jihad, the spiritual struggle against evil. There are four ways to fulfill Jihad: the first is with the heart, and refers to the believer’s inner battle against his own vices and passions, the second is with the tongue, which means spreading the word of Islam to others, the third is by the hand, in choosing to do good and avoid evil with one’s hands, and the fourth is by the sword. The majority of modern Muslims pursue the first three ways, and only the fanatics still believe that God actually wants them to slaughter all non-Muslims with terrorism and the sword

This far we can see that despite the proclaimed variations in dogma and belief and despite the profound disagreement over the exact status of Jesus, there is an underlying foundation common to Christianity, Judaism and Islam. This is the belief in one supreme Creator God, whose will is the moral law that all men should strive to understand and follow, together with a belief in a heaven, or paradise, which waits beyond death for the faithful. But what happens when we look further east, away from the once fertile crescent of the Middle East and beyond the ancient desert barriers of Persia and the Afghan mountains. Here, among the teeming multitudes of the Indian sub-continent, we encounter our next great stream of religious thought and experience -- Hinduism.

At first sight there is an immediate fundamental difference between the One God of western belief and eastern polytheism. Hinduism accommodates a bewildering variety of cults worshipping a whole pantheon of exotic gods. It is without doubt the most tolerant of all the great world religions, embracing almost everything from primitive animism at village level, to an elaborate form of philosophical monotheism at its intellectual heights.

If this sounds like an impossible contradiction then we must look more closely at the structure of Hindu belief, and it may be helpful here to think of western monotheism as a kind of One-God tower of belief, whereas Hinduism is more like a pyramid maze. At the ultimate point of the Hindu pyramid stands Brahman, the Creator God and the Holy Power which sustains all things. But Brahman is also in all things, and therefore all things are also Brahman. Brahman appears in many roles, or many manifestations, and each of these manifestations can be worshipped individually as God. The greatest and most popular of these manifestations of Brahman are as Shiva, the Destroyer of Evil, and as Vishnu, the Preserver of Good. Thus Brahman can be presented in threefold form, as Brahman, Vishnu and Shiva. But here we do not have a Holy Trinity, as it is seen in Christianity, but rather a three-faced symbol which can be further sub-divided into an infinite number of symbols, such as Ganesh, the god in laughter, and Indra, the god in thunder and storms. The central gods also have consorts, who symbolize the eternal female characteristics. Thus Shiva has two consorts, Parvarti, who symbolizes all that is loving and gentle in a woman, and Kahli, who is the shrieking black goddess of evil. To further complicate matters Hinduism believes in reincarnation, and so there are separate incarnations of the symbolic gods who have also come to be worshipped as individual gods. For example, the great mythological figures of Rama and Krishna, who appear as heroes in Indian classical literature, are both worshipped as incarnations of the god Vishnu.

There are, then, two ways of looking at Hinduism: as a confusing polytheism of conflicting gods, or as a complex monotheism which recognizes God in an infinite number of manifestations. In the great epic, the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says: ".....In all living beings I am the Light of Consciousness...." and also, "....Even those who in faith worship other gods, because of their love, they worship me...." Clearly this is saying that there is only one spiritual reality, regardless of the name, or names, by which it is known.

The second of our universal religious concepts is also clearly evident in Hinduism, and that is the idea that there is an eternal element in individual human beings. In Hinduism it is called the Atman, which has been translated as the Self or Consciousness, but which western readers might recognize under the more familiar terms of spirit or soul. However, in eastern thought the spiritual essence in man is not seen as suffering only one existence in physical life and then moving directly to heaven, or hell, but is regarded as being subject to reincarnation, which means a long cycle of many rebirths. The law of Karma, the balancing of all the good and bad deeds of a person's previous lives, will determine the place and status of that person's next incarnation. Salvation, in eastern thought, cannot be earned by faith in one life span alone, but is a process of purification through many lives until release is finally granted from the wheel of rebirth and suffering.

The whole concept of reincarnation may seem alien to western minds, and yet it seems to me that here Hinduism may have glimpsed another fundamental truth. As we have seen, the problem of evil does constitute a profound and painful difficulty for western theologians. Even after we have taken into account the free will defense, and all the other classical explanations of evil, it does seem that the whole combined weight of explanation is still not quite adequate or satisfactory. When we read of people being horribly tortured or murdered by their fellow human beings; when we see on our TV screens whole nations being ravaged by war, drought or famine; and when we hear of innocent children being abused and suffering, then we are entitled to ask, where is there any sense of divine justice in all of this? And Christian theology, which insists that the bloodiest murderer can still gain entrance to heaven provided he converts and confesses his sins, is hard pressed to explain why small babies sometimes have to die before they have had any chance to sin at all. The physical evidence of evil simply does not fit comfortably with our concepts of justice and the nature of God. However, if we can shift our thinking out of the closed context of one unique, single life span, to the idea of one soul passing through a whole succession of different lives, then it is possible to see how there could be invisible patterns of Justice in play.

When we move even further east to consider Buddhism which developed in India out of Hinduism, but is now the dominant faith of South East Asia, we find the concept of rebirth re-affirmed. In fact, is has been said, that virtually the whole world east of Karachi believes in this essential principle.

However, Buddhism differs from the other great mainstream religions in that it is arguable whether it should properly be defined as a religion at all. It is most of all a spiritual philosophy rather than a religion, which acknowledges the spiritual potential of human beings without any direct acknowledgement of God.

The name "Buddha," means The Enlightened One, and the faith of Buddhism is the belief that each individual soul has the ability, through the process of many re-births, to attain "Nirvana," which means Enlightenment. The Buddha who founded Buddhism as we know it today was Gautama, a prince of Nepal, who was born in 563 B.C. Gautama's early life was sheltered and pampered, but eventually he was shocked and dismayed by the suffering and hardship he discovered beyond his palace walls. He sought an understanding of the human condition by consulting other spiritual teachers, by meditation and austerity, and after six years he found that understanding. His quest led to his Enlightenment and he became Buddha.

He proclaimed his understanding in his teaching of the Four Noble Truths: That all life is suffering; that suffering is caused by selfish craving, or desire; that desire can be extinguished; and that the way to extinguish desire is to follow the Noble Eightfold Path. The path consisted of right belief, right aspiration, right speech, right conduct, right means of livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right meditation. At the end of the path is Enlightenment, the end of all desire for life, and without desire, an end to rebirth.

But what are we to make of this ultimate state of Enlightenment? Is it a state of some sort of spiritual existence, or is it extinction, a fading out into non-existence? Buddhism seems to acknowledge two aspects of the spiritual self, an individual aspect which sees itself as separate from others, and also an enduring, eternal aspect of the spiritual self which is part of the spiritual reality. It is the losing of the first aspect of the self, and the merging of the second aspect, which constitutes Enlightenment. So is Enlightenment a form of immortality? Buddhism denies this. But Buddhism also refuses to call it annihilation.

This merging of the second aspect of the self into one overall spiritual reality seems to be identifiable with what the deeper thinking of other religious traditions would describe as union with God. But there is no mention of God in Buddhism, and the question of His existence is one which the Buddha pronounced as undeterminable. In the final analysis, then, Buddhism is an agnostic faith, it recognizes the impossibility of showing whether or not God exists, and refuses to commit itself on either side of the scales of probability. And as it is agnostic as to the existence of the Supreme Being and Creator, so it is also agnostic to the exact meaning of enlightenment. Buddhism in its pure form concentrates its message on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. Beyond that all is undetermined.

There are many threads of religious thought which we have not followed, and many sub-threads of the great religions themselves, which need not detain us here. What we have seen is enough to show that all religions are founded on a belief in a spiritual reality beyond our immediate physical existence. All religions hold that man can become part of that spiritual reality, and four out of five of the great faiths see in the centre of that spiritual reality a Supreme Being or Creator God. These, then, would appear to be the lights of truth shining through the separate cultural jungles surrounding the world's great religions.

But I must take this argument further. Today, at the point of technological evolution where we stand trembling on the threshold of the universe, and where the possibility of life in other star systems and other galaxies has also to be taken into our considerations, it begins to seem clear that no single belief or event here on planet earth can have any exclusive cosmic significance. Any spiritual truth must, therefore, be universalizable on a galactic scale. With this reasoning it is only what we can admit to being probably true in all religions which we can hope to be true throughout the cosmos.

Just as we can see that there are elements of truth in all religions, so we can also see how each religion is flawed. Each religion trumpets its own particular interpretation of God as an exclusive truth which makes all other religions false. Thus we have seen the horrors of the Christian inquisition and the slaughter of the Inca and Aztec peoples, the futile ferocity of the Muslim Jihads, including the latest insane actions of Osama Bin Laden and the Taliban, and a multitude of other vast crimes, injustices and atrocities, all committed in the holy name of religion. The claim to hold an exclusive truth about God which can justify any extent of physical, mental or cultural butchery in His name is one which I totally reject in any religion.

I also refuse to belief that millions of sincere and gentle Buddhists will burn in a Christian hell because they do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as their Savior. Neither will I believe that millions of devoted and compassionate Christians will be destroyed by Shiva because they do not paint a vermilion stripe down their foreheads and bathe in the sacred Ganges. I will not believe that millions of faithful and prayerful Hindus will be shriveled by Allah because they recite the Vedas rather than the Koran, and because they pray not in a mosque but in a temple. And finally I will not believe that the faithful of Islam are doomed to an eternity of earthly suffering because they do not seek Nirvana in the teachings of Buddha. What I do believe is that all who are sincere in their faith, all who endeavor to live moral lives entailing a spirit of justice and compassion in their dealings with their fellows, will all stand equal in the sight of God, irrespective of the cultural shaping of their particular path of faith.

All faith, I will suggest, is like a series of paths up a mountain. Each path starts from a different base point, and ascends by a different route. Some paths are direct and steep, some are narrow and winding. Some paths climb through layers of lush and erotic cultural foliage, or through layers of mystic cloud. Some paths have to be walked humbly, in a simple robe and bare feet, while others are marched with proud pomp and ceremony. All have one thing in common; and that is that they are endeavoring to climb to the summit of the mountain. The outline of that summit will appear different from each approach or perhaps, as with the path of Buddhism, the summit will be so indistinct as to make it undeterminable. All that is really important is to find a path and make the ascent, and the most stupid and futile thing of all is to attempt to coerce people from other paths, or to vilify them, or to make war upon them.

In this analogy the summit of the mountain is God, for no matter how many and varied the paths of faith there is only one summit, just as there can only be one God.

We could also look at this in another way. I presently live in the town of Bury St. Edmunds in East Anglia, and if I wish to travel to London then the sensible way for me to go is south-west down the A14, and then along the M11. However, for someone who lives in Canterbury the only sensible way to get to London is to travel westward on the A2 and then along the M2. And anyone who lives in Wales will tell you that to get from Cardiff to London your best route is to go east via the M4. The destination may be the same, but the best way of getting there depends upon where you are coming from, whether you are making a journey to London, climbing a mountain, or seeking God.

At this point it is convenient do deal with an issue which must overshadow a book such as this, but which has not yet been directly confronted. This is the conflict between science and religion, and the question of whether scientific explanations can give us a more accurate conception of reality than the explanations given by religion. To answer that question I will now suggest that if the analogy of different paths up a mountain is a fair description of the relationship between religions, then the relationship of science and religion can be seen in the same analogy. For where religions are led by prophets with inspired visions of the half-seen summit, science is led by down to earth devotees who are busy measuring the grass blades, and scooping up their little rock and soil samples for laboratory analysis. Consequently the eye which is for ever peering down a microscope to study some magnified detail of localized flora or fauna, will only see that at which it is squinting. In this way science can build up a vast and challenging body of detail and theory, which may be virtually undeniable as far as it goes. But it is only an encyclopedia of bits of knowledge that can never go far enough to show us the overall picture. Science and religion do not offer us different explanations of reality, but merely different levels of explanation of the same reality. To go back to the analogy, science tries to explain the physical composition of the mountain, but because it lacks any spiritual drive it fails to ascend the mountain and discover its spiritual summit.

And, (Surprise, Surprise!), even in science there is an uncertainty principle, which was defined by the German physicist and Nobel-prize-winner Werner Heisenberg in 1927. Science has shown that all creation can be reduced to its sub-atomic particles, but here it finds its own enigma. For Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that it is impossible to observe any given sub-atomic particle and determine its direction and momentum before the act of observation, because the very act of a light particle striking the quantum particle we are attempting to observe will alter both its direction and momentum. So there cannot be any precise physics of single sub-atomic particles.

To confuse science even further the physical laws scientists use to govern the study of sub-atomic particles are not the same as the physical laws they use to govern the study of large objects, such as planets, stars and galaxies. These motions of the heavens are instead governed by Einstein's general theory of relativity. So, science has one set of imprecise laws to govern the study of small things, and a different set of laws to govern the study of big things. The goal of unified science is to find some way to combine the two sets of laws and give one overall explanation for everything that exists and everything that happens, but so far this is still only an unrealized vision.

Even in science, then, we find that ever re-occurring Consistency of Uncertainty which has been evident in all our investigations into the key fields of philosophy and religion. There is always a point where the human mind and its capacity for discovery can go so far and no further, and where belief in what lies beyond becomes a matter of faith.

As we have seen, there is no exclusive truth that can falsify all others, and just as faith is not incompatible with reason, neither is religion incompatible with science. Science studies the physical universe, while religion struggles for union with its spiritual essence. Science has proved false many of the absurdities of religious baggage, but it cannot achieve its own vision, and therefore cannot prove false the underlying heart of all religious belief. In fact, if science could achieve its own vision, it is probable that science would find its own path to God.

Let us return, then, to the question that is inherent in the title of this chapter: which religion? If I believe that all faith is relatively equal in the sight of God, and that it does not matter how we address God in our devotions as long as we come to Him in reverence and in faith -- then does that mean that I have to advocate some form of syncretism? The answer is no, I do not think that this must necessarily follow from what I have said so far, and neither do I see it as either possible or desirable.

There are two reasons for this.

First there have already been many attempts to syncretize different streams of religion. In the Far East the main schools of Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism have been woven together to form new schools and other efforts have blended them with the ethics of Confucianism and Taoism in China, and with the Shinto gods of ancient Japan. In India Sikhism arose from the fusion of what was seen as the best of Hinduism and Islam. Manichaeism, which was an eleventh-century rival to Christianity, was a mixture of Christian, Zoroastrian and Buddhist beliefs. And the list goes on and on. The entire history of religion is one of adoption and adaptation, of new ideas about God evolving from the old, and of new schools of thought attempting to move forward in understanding while still including older beliefs and practices in their embrace. The history of religion, across the mainstreams and within those streams, is almost a continuous history of syncretism. And yet there is never a final religion on which all faiths can agree. Instead syncretic ideas only seem to found new religions, adding to the confusion where there are already religions enough. It is tolerance between the faiths which the world so badly needs, and not more division and confusion.

And second, the idea of eradicating all the separately defined religions with all their rich variety of cultural traditions, to be replaced with one syncretized world religion, would be passionately rejected by all faiths. It would be as soul-less and as unaesthetic as blocking up all those fascinating, meandering paths on our analogous mountain in order to build a single sanitized motorway.

It is enlightening to stand back from the mountain for a moment, to take the distant aerial view that shows us the many paths all leading to the summit. And this distant view may be necessary to achieve the peace and harmony between peoples and nations, which our sense of morality, and of our common humanity, must surely indicate is part of God's will. But standing back is also a lonely business, intellectually satisfying, but not spiritually so. It is like merely observing life, when we need to live it, and be part of it. We need the understanding from that distant glimpse to show us the folly of inter-religious vilification, hate and war; but we also need the shared joy and fellowship of joining one of those paths, and following it to the summit in the whole-hearted company of our friends and neighbors.

The answer, then, to the question of "Which Religion?" is simply to worship in the way prescribed by your own traditions and culture. For most English speaking readers the obvious logical choice here is Christianity, and the Christian faith does make three unique claims that are well worth our most serious attention.

The first unique claim is that Jesus Christ was The Son Of God. Hinduism has claimed that God has appeared on earth in various forms and incarnations, but the claim to be the Son Of God is unique. Islam rejects such a concept because it limits the power and glory of God as they see it. While Buddhism has nothing to say about such a concept because in the final Buddhist analysis God is unknowable and the question of His existence is unanswerable.

However, if God does exist, as powerful and glorious as the Islamic version suggests, and ultimately as indefinable as Buddhism argues, then how will man's tiny intellect ever be able to grasp even a glimpse of what God is like? Assuming that God is loving and compassionate to all His creation, and that he wants the most highly-developed of His creatures to be aware of His Love for them, then it does seem logical that he would find ways to reduce the size and concept of Himself to a size and form that could be assimilated by the human mind. He would not want to compromise His gift of free will by making His existence certain knowledge, but He would want to open the doorways to faith, and to encourage men to live in the harmony with their fellows and with all creation that is His will. What better way could there be of achieving these aims than to create one unique human being who could live on earth and preach His message of Love and Forgiveness as His Son?

Thus the first unique claim of Christianity does not prove to be either illogical or irrational in the light of what we have come to understand about the probable existence of God. Instead there is something obvious and inevitable about such an event. So let us look at the second unique claim of Christianity, which is that Christ's death upon The Cross was an act of direct atonement for all our sins.

We have already touched briefly on this issue earlier in this chapter, where we concluded that if God has given mankind the freedom of will, then, He would in all fairness and justice accept some degree of responsibility for His own decision and its potential consequences. Just as we feel a moral responsibility for the consequences of our own decisions and actions, so we can expect that God, from whom our own sense of moral responsibility is derived, will also accept His moral responsibilities. God allows us to do wrong, even though he could have withheld the gift of free will and arranged things to prevent us from doing wrong, and so, as the fountain of all compassion and justice, it is logical that He would find a way to alleviate our guilt. Therefore it is logical to believe that the way He has provided is Christ's message from the Cross, that for those who will ultimately believe, there is forgiveness and salvation. God shares our responsibility when we do wrong, and providing a means of absolution from sin is the logical act of a Loving God who has given His creatures their freedom of will, but who still wants to protect them from the consequences of their possible mis-use of this wonderful gift.

So finally we come to the third unique claim of Christianity, which is that three days after He was crucified, Christ rose again from the dead.

We have already seen that together with the universal awareness of the existence of God, there is also a universal awareness of a spiritual dimension, of which something in us is part, and to which it can return. So what better demonstration could there be of the truth of this belief, than the practical demonstration of Christ leaving His tomb and appearing to His followers after he had been certified dead? Again such a demonstration would be an obvious and logical way for a Loving God to provide assurance of the spiritual dimension, and of man's destiny to return from whence he came.

We have seen that it is neither irrational nor illogical to believe in the probable existence of God. We have seen that in all probability all faith leads to God. And we have seen that in the unique claims of Christianity there is nothing that is either illogical or irrational once the probable existence of God is accepted. So I can see only one difficulty left in combining the arguments of this book with the Christian faith. Christ is reported to have said -- "I am The Way, The Truth, and The Light. No one goes to The Father except by me." If Christ was God on earth, and if He did by that implication say that there was no valid faith except that of Christianity, then those words damn all those of other faiths, no matter how moral or blameless they live their lives. I cannot accept that. I cannot believe that an all-loving, all-understanding God would be so vain and unjust. The quotation is from the gospel of John, but is not found in the gospels of Mathew, Luke or Mark, and so I can only chose to believe that here Christ was mis-quoted. Scholarly studies of the New Testament suggest that the gospels were based on the oral traditions handed down about Jesus, and were not actually written until between thirty and a hundred years after the Crucifixion. Time enough for the exact, original words of Christ to have become blurred or misinterpreted.

However, let us look again at those exact words: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Light. No one goes to The Father except by me.” What do they mean? What was The Way of Christ? What was His Truth and His Light? Surely it was in His Message – to Love God and to Love Thy Neighbor. Christ said nothing about worshipping only within the Christian Church, because the church had not yet been established. If other paths of faith follow the essence of Christ’s teaching, then surely this is The Way, even though the ritual trappings and the God-definitions may differ.

And, to go back to one of our original questions – now that Christ has again failed to return with the end of the second century after his birth in Bethlehem, will this be an unsurvivable crisis for Christianity? I very much doubt it. Perhaps the message here was also blurred, or misinterpreted. Or perhaps our concept of time and God's concept of time simply bear no relation. The Bible says that God made the world in seven days, and yet we know that our own little solar system took millions of years to evolve. This may simply mean that the authors of the Bible were a little bit hazy on how to accurately measure time. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that Christian faith as a whole will be any more than slightly ruffled.

There is, then, no need for most of us to chose between religions. That choice is made for us by the social world into which we are born. And there is no need to talk about syncretizing religions, for the only other thing we need to understand is the virtue of religious tolerance, which will lead us to acknowledge the validity of the different perspectives and approaches of other cultures, without compromising or abandoning our own.

This then, is the logical and rational way to move forward, and to survive in faith, into the Third Millennium.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER EIGHT:

SCRIPTURE, PRAISE AND PRAYER

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All religions have their scriptures and doctrines, handed down by saints, seers, and prophets, most of it claimed to be truth and wisdom revealed by God through dreams or visions, or even direct conversation with His chosen heralds. Christianity holds the Old and New Testaments of the Holy Bible as the only true Gospel, the true Word of God. For Muslims the Holy Koran is an exact copy of an original text written and held by God in Heaven, and revealed to Mohammed by the Angel Gabriel over thirteen hundred years ago. In Hinduism the divine revelations in the Vedas and the Upanishads pre-date the birth of Christ. While the Buddhist scriptures are truly enormous; the Pali Canon fills forty-five huge volumes, and these only relate to one single sect.

So what are we to make of this vast wealth and confusion of religious literature? Can it add or subtract to anything which we have already determined, or will it simply underline, yet again, that inexorable consistency of uncertainty. One thing does seem certain, most scripture has already endured for two millennium or more, and the undying faith of millions of believers will carry it forward into the third. Much of it strikes profound chords which we instinctively feel are right and illuminating, while the rest is often contradictory or obscure.

The contradictions, of course, are not only between the separate bodies of literature, but also within the individual Holy Books. God is all too frequently praised as being all benevolent and loving, and yet portrayed between the same covers as a vengeful and insatiably bloodthirsty demon. The God of Love and Creation is also the God of ruthless punishment, hellfire and damnation. If we are to believe that God is truly rational and compassionate, it becomes very difficult to reconcile this belief with any of the Holy Books as the revealed word of God.

The Bible is a classic example of this difficulty. We meet the problem in the story of Moses and the Pharaoh of Egypt. The Jewish people have been taken as slaves into Egypt, and eventually God sends Moses to plead with Pharaoh for their release. But, we are told, God makes Pharaoh stubborn. Pharaoh refuses to release the Jews, so God sends a series of plagues to punish the Egyptians, raining frogs upon the land, turning rivers to blood, and so forth. After each disaster Moses goes again to Pharaoh to plead for the release of the Jews, but each time God again makes Pharaoh stubborn, and he refuses. Finally God sends an angel of death to kill all the first-born sons of Egypt, and at last Pharaoh relents. The problem is that each time Moses speaks to Pharaoh, according to the account in the Bible, it is God who makes Pharaoh stubborn, and then it is God who cruelly punishes the whole Egyptian nation for the stubbornness He has created in their ruler. Surely this is not the behaviour of a compassionate and loving God?

Again, in the story of the conquest of Canaan, God is said to have commanded the Jews to slaughter all the men, women, children and animals who already lived in this Promised Land. Even more, God is said to have demanded the ultimate punishment of any Jewish soldier who left so much as an animal alive! And yet this is supposed to be the same God who gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the first of which, carved for eternity in the tablet of stone, was the words, "THOU SHALT NOT KILL."

How can we believe that both stories are true of the same God?

The whole of the Old Testament is full of such stories, which see God as terrible and tyrannical, imposing endless punishment on a wayward chosen few, and with no concern for the rest of human, or even animal life. The prophets are full of doom and horrors, and Jeremiah has visions of a sword-wielding God with his robes soaked red in the blood of his victims. God is presented throughout as the Creator and Controller of all things, but is then described as irrationally punishing those who have obeyed his will. The two images contradict.

The Old Testament is clearly the mythology and ancient history of the Jewish people, threaded through with claimed revelation to prove that these people have a special relationship with God and have been specially chosen by him. In contrast the New Testament is much more gentle in approach, almost as though God has realized that men have misunderstood Him and sent Jesus to put things right. Jesus preaches more about loving our neighbours and loving God than about fearing God and punishing sinners. But it is still difficult to believe that every word that Jesus spoke was the true Word of God. Jesus talks of "Things coming to pass before all who are now living have passed away," and of "All the stars falling from the sky." Neither prophecy has been fulfilled.

Later in the New Testament, in his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul talks of human nature as being full of sinful desires, and says that "Those who obey their human nature cannot please God." And yet it seems on logical reflection that it is human will only when it is directed to evil which is sinful, and not human nature, which is God's own creation. After all, we are told elsewhere in the Bible that God created man in his own image, and if we try to believe that and Saint Paul's statement, we end up with the implication that God's nature is full of sinful desires. And here we have another contradiction to the idea that God is All Good, which is probably not what was intended by the Bible's original authors.

The Koran is flawed in much the same way as the Old Testament. God is seen as All Compassionate and All Powerful, and yet there is an endless thunder of promised hellfire for the unbelievers, while the faithful, of course, will spend eternity in the gardens of paradise. The theme is repeated over and over again, and the Christians who believe that God created His Own Son in Jesus Christ, instead of merely decreeing that a prophet be born to the Virgin Mary, are threatened with the worst of the inferno. Islam preaches death to the unbelievers and bows to the God of vengeance rather than the God of Love. Again it is difficult to believe in the truth of a scripture which contradicts itself.

The sacred texts of Hinduism avoid this fundamental pitfall of self-contradiction, for the central concept of reincarnation means that they do not have to reconcile the idea of an all-loving God in control of everything that happens with the problem of evil. God is not responsible for evil; at least, not in the sense of making men sin, and then cruelly punishing them for what He has made them do. Men earn the evil they bring upon themselves by their past actions, and when evil out of proportion seems to fall upon some relatively blameless person, then it can be explained by the fact that he must have earned his misfortune in some previous existence.

Reincarnation seems a helpful concept toward believing in God, but again it seems to lead in flawed directions. There is a complete fatalism inherent in much Hindu thought, leading often to a mainly negative approach to life. If everything that happens to an individual is deserved and inescapable, then all that is left is to endure. Anyone who has ever seen the pitiable rows of beggars lining the approaches to the Ganges at Benares will have to ask if this is what God really intended.

On reading some of the Buddhist scriptures published in the west we find even more disappointment. What at first sight appears to be a warm and gentle faith proves on closer inspection to be hard and cold. The underlying message is that birth leads only to old age and death, and little mention is made of life and youth. All the suffering of life is stressed with its pain and lamentation and grief, but nothing is said of its joy, and love and laughter. Only one side of the coin is closely studied, and the whole is found worthless. Buddhist philosophy seems very much a rejection of life, and enlightenment, its only goal, may well be extinction rather than any closer union with God.

As with all the works of the great philosophers, all the great works of scripture hold profound truths which seem undeniable, and yet are bound up with other concepts which are contradictory or unacceptable to common sense. (And if I seem to have been more critical of the Bible than the other scriptures, it is only because the Bible is the work with which I am the most familiar.) However, there is much of infinite value in The Bible, as in all the sacred texts, but it is all packaged up with mythology and desperate attempts to nail truth to doctrine. Some of it may indeed be true revelation, but most would seem on critical reading to be human wisdom, or supposed wisdom, given the stamp of revelation to give it validity. Sadly, one of the obstacles to believing in God, for most modern, thinking people, would seem to be the argument that you have to believe in the literal God's truth of every word in the sacred book. You cannot chose which bits you want to believe, is a frequent cry from the pulpit, you have to believe the whole package to be a true believer and to be saved.

These claims to be literal truth, and exclusive truth, in the end only defend dogma and doctrine and prophesy. Ordinary people are not generally concerned with such things. Instead there is in most of us, I suspect, a simple spiritual yearning for God: a yearning that is not met in western culture where such a high percentage professes belief in God, but does not go to church.

Established religion, it seems, is failing most of us by refusing to recognize that if God exists then He can only be above doctrine and dogma, and that if God exists then all faith must lead back to Him. The root cause of many world conflicts lie in ethnic, racial or religious differences, and so much of these could be eliminated by this understanding of the nature of God. Widening this understanding is a goal that would be worth working for even if it were not the truth, although I believe that in all probability it is the truth.

Scripture is one foundation stone of almost every religion, and the others are universally praise and prayer. Scripture, we have seen, serves to divide the human spiritual experience, and again perpetuates that persistent uncertainty we have found elsewhere, but what of praise and prayer? Is there any hard evidence that those who praise and pray to God fare any better in this life than those who do not? Does going to church, or mosque, or temple, together with the singing of hymns and the performance of sacrifices and rituals really pay any dividend?

Unless we count the peace of mind and inner certainty that some religious people seem to have, and these again are immeasurable and indefinable in any scientific sense, then the answer will have to be no. Misfortunes seem to fall as often to those who pray as to those who do not. In any real crisis prayers seem to have no effect. As I wrote the first draft of this chapter an ethnic war was raging in what was Yugoslavia, as the Serb, Croat and Moslem populations all struggled to slaughter each other in the settlement of old debts and the forging of new power. Now, as I rewrite, the world is held in fear of Islamic terrorism and new wars rage in Iraq and Afghanistan. It seems that as soon as one conflict ends with the standard hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians maimed or killed, another one bursts open in another part of the globe. No doubt, as in all wars and in every human crisis, there is much praying taking place, by the desperately suffering victims in the war-torn area itself, and in well-meaning mosques and churches throughout the world, but there is no visible sign of any divine rein on these murderous proceedings. There is no evidence that prayer works, although many people sincerely believe that it does.

For even when some mercy is shown, when the killing briefly stops, when refugees are allowed a safe passage or the cruelly wounded are flown out to western hospitals, does this really show the Hand of God at work? Most people would claim that it is the work of human effort, of propaganda or expediency, and that it is mere coincidence that these things can seem like the answer to someone's prayer. And when some semblance of peace is restored, the cynical will argue that it is only because there is nothing further to be gained by fighting, the opposing sides will have run out of stamina or ammunition, and will have opted to consolidate their gains out of stalemate. The idea that all the praying that has been going on will have somehow influenced God to intervene will not hold good with many of us.

However, all this brings us back yet again to the basic argument of this book. For if God was seen to regularly answer prayers, if wars could be stopped when enough people prayed, and if every disaster could be averted by passionate prayer, then this would be the proof that has always been sought for God's existence. We would know that God does exist, but as we have seen, this knowledge would be inconsistent with the preservation of man's free will. If we are to retain our freedom of will we cannot really expect all our prayers to be answered, even if God is capable of shifting or reversing all the forces of creation which we believe He has set in motion. Having free will means that we can only have the choice to believe, we cannot know that God exists.

So is there any point at all in all the Christian praying, in bowing seven times daily to face Mecca, in chanting the Hindu sacred mantas or turning the prayer wheels in the Buddhist monasteries? Can there be any point at all in all the rituals of praise and worship that take place in the millions of churches, mosques and temples, and, perhaps the most sincere of all, in simple human hearts?

Well, it may be that some prayers are answered in various subtle ways, and many religious people do believe that this does happen. However, what does seem important is that all the rituals of worship, all the sacrifices and the sacraments, and the all important belief that we are communicating with God and doing His will, do help to keep religious beliefs alive. They underline belief in God, and preach the moral principles which we believe God must approve.

I suspect that God does not want all the adoration and worship that is offered to him out of sheer vanity, but that it pleases Him because it focuses the will of men toward loving each other and all of His creation. If the messages to Love God and Love Thy Neighbour can really take a deep enough root in enough human hearts, then that is a genuine way toward the ending of war and the alleviation of most human suffering. The great religions all preach high moral codes, and there is in all of them a variation of this true gospel.

Clearly praying heightens our awareness of God, and believing that we are communicating with God helps us to feel closer to Him. Loving God, and praying to God, makes us want to do His will; which is, in loving Him, to love each other and all of his creation. This will in turn lead to the kind of world He wants for us to live in, achieved by Him, through us and our own free will. None of this can be proved or shown to be true by any philosophical or scientific terms, but it does make sense of our need to believe and pray and thus gives meaning and value to all our religious beliefs, and all our prayers.

In all our investigations, through all the fields of philosophy, through all the religions, through all the scriptures, and through an examination of the results of praise and prayer, we find only uncertainty. There is nothing to prove that God exists, and yet in the face of all the universal human religious experience of faith and belief there is also nothing to prove that God does not exist.

In the final analysis there is no certainty, but there is infinite room for faith. We must all make our own choice, whether to believe in God, or not to believe in God. That is the ultimate test of our freedom of will. We cannot even know if there is any reward or penalty attached to either choice, but we can know that this is the only way we can have true freedom of will if God does exist.

GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER NINE:

THE NATURE OF GOD

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We have already determined, by recognizing the consistency of uncertainty in every philosophical field, that we cannot ever know the true nature of God. God's will is that we should come to Him in faith, through our own free will, which He has given us, and that should be enough. But having said this is it still possible that we can make some kind of an educated guess at His true nature -- or at His most probable nature?

Philosophers and theologians have, of course, been doing exactly this, ever since man first developed an infant sense of wonder at the fascinating world and the marvelous forces he discovered all around him. Primitive man saw the forces of nature themselves, the sun, the wind, the rain and the lightning, the turning of the seasons, the regeneration of the earth after winter, and all the processes of birth and growth and life, as sources of power to be worshipped with sacrifice and prayer. They saw God in the sun, the moon and the stars. And when they could not see a natural cause for any of the things that happened to them, or their world, then they sought for a supernatural cause in one of these sources.

They also sensed the spiritual dimension, and believed in the spirits of their ancestors, in the spirits of beasts and birds, and often in spirits which inhabited mountains, rivers and trees, and sometimes in every single animate and inanimate object.

The aborigines of Australia, the scattered tribes of Africa, the Indians and Eskimos of North America, and the great civilizations of the Maya, the Aztecs and the Incas, of Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome, of ancient India, Japan and China -- all became aware of a spirit world, physically unseen but palpably there, invisibly and permanently overlapping the impermanent world of their own reality. These two great streams of primitive belief -- Naturism, which saw power in the raw forces of nature, and Animism, which saw power in the souls and spirit of everything living and dead -- dominated the lives and thinking of all early peoples. Many of the spirits and forces became elevated to the rank of gods, and finally there developed the concept of the One God. In Africa He was the Supreme Being, the apex of a triangle with the lesser spirits and forces descending on either side, with at the human base level the fetishes and symbols of the witchdoctors. In North America He was Manitou, the Great Spirit of the native Indians, filling the great dome of the stars and the sky. In Palestine he was Jehovah, the One God of Israel, although ultimately Jehovah too had to embrace the concept of the Holy Spirit. Pantheism and Monotheism had developed, although the religions that favoured either one always had to make some sort of accommodation for the other.

Recorded philosophy, as we generally know it in the western world, began primarily in ancient Greece. Here there was still a belief in a family of gods, Zeus, Hera, Apollo, and the rest, an immortal pantheon ruling from the halcyon summit of Mount Olympus, but with all the usual mortal failings and appetites. The early Greek thinkers seem to have felt that this view was perhaps alright for the general populace, but that the truth might be somehow different. They started to look again at the notion of forces and purpose in the universe as they knew it, and Xenophanes, who lived around 570 BC, decided that God was unlike any sort of immortal person, with or without any celestial family, and that He was instead the fundamental principle of the universe, governing without beginning or end.

Plato speaks of God as the Creator and Master of the universe, and Aristotle, who believed that there were only two causes in the universe, those of form and matter, saw God as pure form without matter, and the ultimate cause of all motion. In Aristotle we come to God as the Prime Mover, the First Cause which began the process of causation leading to everything that is, that ever has been, and ever will be. We are now out of the primitive world of simple forces and spirits, and into the philosophical quest for the basic reality, the real God which lies behind them.

After the death of Alexander the Great, the mainstream of history by-passed the Greeks, and Greek philosophy lay dormant until it was translated by the Arabs and filtered back into Europe many centuries later. By then the great Hebrew religious tradition was well established, Christ and Mohammed had both been born and played their roles upon the world stage, and the concept of one all good and all powerful God was dominant in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. The medieval Christian philosophers studied Plato and Aristotle and decided that the reason and order which the Greek philosophers saw in the universe did point to a First Cause and Prime Mover which could only be their own eternal Christian God, and so they sought to unite what they saw as the best and most meaningful strands of Greek thought with Christian theology.

For Saint Augustine God became transcendent over the world, the eternal cause and creator of everything in the universe, all good, all wise and all powerful. For many this view still holds, but there were some who held that God was not in some sense separate and transcendent over the universe, but that God is part of the universe, and that, in fact, God and his creation are one and the same.

The philosophical and theological battle over the true nature of God struggled on. Islam and Judaism insisted there was only one God, Allah or Jehovah. Christianity wanted only One God but had to conceive of a Three in One God, The Holy Trinity; that is God the Father, a whole unity, which is also expressed in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit, which is the Divine Reason that permeates everything. Hinduism, of which western thought was becoming aware, was unashamedly pantheistic, with seemingly hordes of gods and godlings at its grass roots, and yet, as we have seen, claiming a sort of pyramid monotheism at its philosophical height. All this drove the mystics on all sides to claim that God cannot be known in any intellectual sense, but can only be experienced. They went off into the Himalayan forests to study their navels, or into the European monasteries to flagellate themselves into purity, and hoped that God would notice them.

Then came two of the greatest of the metaphysical philosophers of the Enlightenment who took up opposite positions in the great philosophical and theological divide. Rene Descartes sought to prove the existence of God in the Catholic tradition, as a God who is by nature the Prime Mover, independent from and overseeing his Creation from the outside. While Baruch de Spinoza set out to show that God and the universe are one and the same, that God is All and All is God.

Descartes we have met before, in the chapter on the Philosophy of Religion. Born in 1596 he is not only one of the greatest of the metaphysical systems builders, but is also considered as one of the founders of modern philosophy. He was one of the first to be seen as both a philosopher and a scientist in his approach and his methods.

His method, as we have seen, was the method of doubt, starting from a total scepticism where he would not accept that he could know anything until he could find some foundation he could build upon as a foundation of knowledge to which there could not possibly be any doubt. This was a scientific method of testing any candidate fact for consideration as true knowledge, but without the modern pre-requisites of a laboratory with means of controlled experiments and measuring and observing, Descartes could still only rely upon the old philosophical tools of deduction, induction, logic and reason.

He found his starting point in the famous - "I think, therefore I am." It was the one thing he decided he could not be skeptical about. The "I" that was thinking, the "I" that was having the doubts and asking the questions, the "I" that was the thinking part of Descartes himself, must necessarily exist. This, he reasoned, was one basic fact of true knowledge, and so a foundation stone on which he could build, and a springboard to escape from skepticism.

Again we have seen how this led him to believe he could show the necessary existence of God, because the idea of God in his mind was also an idea he could not doubt. In the previous chapter we saw how later philosophers challenged Descartes, but here we need only look at how Descartes himself saw God. Descartes was still a medieval philosopher in the tradition of the long line of Schoolmen, and he was struggling to use pure philosophical methods to prove the revealed truth about God as sanctified by the Catholic Church and laid down in the Bible.

God then, as Descartes saw Him, was a creator God, external and separate from the world and His creation. God, for Descartes, was a personal God, the God who planted the Garden of Eden and set Adam and Eve therein, eventually casting them out and leaving them to their own devices. Descartes believed that God has a Divine Purpose, but that it is futile to inquire into God's Purpose because the finite human mind could never hope to understand God's plans.

Descartes also believed that human beings do have freedom of will, which is a gift from God which can be misused, thus explaining the existence of evil. Once he believed that he had shown that there could be no doubt that God existed, then the God in which Descartes believed was very much the God of the Catholic Church.

Baruch de Spinoza came from a different tradition, a Portugeze Jew who found refuge in Holland, at that time an unusually tolerant little country which sheltered many liberal and unorthodox new thinkers. Spinoza was born some thirty-eight years later than Descartes, and most of his life and philosophy was in direct opposition and contrast to his great contemporary.

Spinoza was a modern philosopher who chose to break completely away from the traditional approach and viewpoint of the Christian and Jewish world, and for his pains he was excommunicated by his church and reviled by his community. And yet Spinoza believed passionately in God, and in the intellectual love of God, and he too built a magnificent ethical and metaphysical system to show how God exists.

Where Descartes saw God as external to and separate from the world, Spinoza saw God as within the world. God, for Spinoza, was Nature itself, Self-created and Self-Sustaining. God is not separate from anything, and there is nothing that is not God. All is God, and God is all. For Spinoza God was intrinsic within the world, and identifiable with the cosmic system as a whole.

Spinoza's argument was a one-substance doctrine. In Spinoza's terms God is identifiable with one substance, but this one substance has infinite attributes which make up the infinite, eternal reality. God is not just in all things, God is all things. This is a form of pantheism which has many striking similarities with the Hindu thought of the Upanishads. In fact, Spinoza can be seen as the main bridge between western and eastern philosophical thought.

Spinoza's ontology, or list of assumptions of what actually exists in the world, would be made up as follows:

Basically there is substance -- which is God, or Nature, self-caused and necessarily existing.

Substance, or God, has many Attributes, such as the worlds of thought and the worlds of physical extension. Spinoza states that God has an infinite number of attributes, but that as thought and physical extension are the only two attributes that are perceivable by the human intellect, then for all practical purposes these are the only two attributes which we need to consider, or indeed can consider.

Then there are Modes, which are individual things or objects. For example, in Spinoza's terms my body is a mode of extension which is one of the attributes of the one substance which is God. My mind is a mode of thought which is the other known attribute of the one substance which is God.

Finally there are properties, or qualities, of the modes. There are primary qualities, such as shape, size and location; and secondary qualities such as color, texture, taste, and so forth.

This may sound complicated, but all it means is that for Spinoza all mental and physical things can be reduced to substance, the one substance of his argument. And this one substance is something like the basic stuff of the universe which is logically irreducible to anything else. Substance is indivisible, a mass term for total reality. Thus it follows logically that in this sense there can only be one substance, there can only be one total reality and as that one substance/total reality is God, there can only be One God.

This is the main thesis of Spinoza's book The Ethics, and again it is only a brief summary. But it is enough to enable us to ask if this one substance doctrine could possibly be true? The argument that God exists as one sole existing substance, but possessing all possible attributes, is a form of ontological argument, which means that its central idea is that you can prove the existence of something from its definition. But we have already seen that ontological arguments fail, because their underlying assumption is simply wrong. Its critics insist that you cannot prove that something exists simply by defining it with existence or necessary existence as part of the definition.

However, all the previous ontological arguments, such as those of Anselm and Descartes, had all tried to prove the existence of a transcendent creator God, the supernatural Supreme Being of monotheism and Christianity. But Spinoza did not accept that there was any supernatural or external creator. His vision of God was that God existed within the world, and that God was identifiable with nature. Thus for Spinoza it would be absurd for anyone to argue that his vision of God did not exist, for his God is all reality, and if God in this sense does not exist, then nothing exists. For Spinoza, as long as the universe exists, then God necessarily exists, for in Spinoza's definition God is the universe.

At this point it begins to seem that the classification of Spinoza's one substance argument as an ontological argument, and the standard reasons for the rejection of ontological arguments, do not constitute anything meaningful here. The key question must be whether Spinoza could be right in his identification of God with the one substance that is all of nature?

Spinoza's definition of God is so different from the traditional definition in Christianity and Descartes that we have to ask whether Spinoza is in any way entitled to use the same descriptive label for his concept. It could be argued that Descartes talks about God, and Spinoza is talking about the universe, and for Spinoza to say that they are both talking about the same thing is ridiculous. And yet, when we look closer, is Spinoza really being so inconsistent here? The usual Judaeo-Christian descriptions of God as omniscient, omnipotent, infinite, eternal and necessarily existing, would seem to be only satisfied by something like the one-substance concept of God in nature. Spinoza would argue that it is the idea that all of these unlimited qualities can somehow be confined in some sort of supernatural person that is inconsistent and inadequate.

However, as we saw in the early part of this chapter, there have been many different concepts of God. Almost every culture has its own, from the most primitive of hunter-gatherers to the mightiest of civilizations. So, perhaps we can grant that Spinoza has as much right to use the term God for his concept as anyone else. However, what of the one-substance doctrine itself? Can we believe that there is just one substance?

Spinoza answers yes, it is his entire argument. But Descartes is a dualist who argues just as resolutely that there are two types of substance, physical and mental, and that both bodies and minds are all created by God, which seems to make a total of three substances, two created and one creating. These are very different concepts of reality, and how are we to chose between them? And do we, in fact, have to chose either? Since the days of Descartes and Spinoza all efforts at metaphysical system building seem to have fallen into disrepute, and most modern materialist philosophers will argue that there is no god, neither as intrinsic nature or as external creator, but that the world is purely physical. The concepts of both Descartes and Spinoza are neither proven nor uncontested.

However, they both live on, the ideas of Descartes are enshrined within Christianity and most of the monotheistic religions, while the ideas of Spinoza are at the heart of Hinduism and the pantheistic traditions.

Both accounts attempt to provide us with a complete, coherent ontological description and explanation of all reality, which can only be true if the account coheres in all areas of human understanding and experience. So the bottom line is whether we can accept either of these accounts as a complete coherent account.

Descartes's account does seem to have some mind-stretching difficulties in the light of what modern science now reveals about the vast nature of our expanding universe. An external creator does begin to seem too incomprehensibly remote, and thus the idea of an intrinsic God begins to look more in keeping with the attributes of omnipotence and omniscience which have always been accorded to God.

However, with Spinoza there does seem to be an element missing, for Spinoza gives no spiritual account. We have noted the two universal ideas that have made their appearance in virtually every culture of which we have any sort of record; first the idea that there is something answering to the general notion of God, and second that there is some sort of spiritual life. Spinoza ignores our spiritual life. He would obviously reject the idea that any sort of spiritual account is needed, for he rejects the idea that there can be anything supernatural. For Spinoza there is only nature and what is contained within it. But if the concept of God can be contained within nature, is there any logical reason why we cannot add to Spinoza's thought and conceive of a spiritual attribute within nature, or a spiritual mode to the attribute of thought. If God does not mean supernatural, then neither does spiritual have to mean supernatural. Spinoza might not accept this, but here Spinoza could be wrong.

It does seem to me that in all the philosophical accounts of reality we have a continuum of explanations from the purely physical to the purely mental. At one end of the continuum we have materialism, which claims that our supposed mental life is only a form of physical behaviorism, and that eventually there will be no difference between the abilities of the human brain and the ultimate computer. A little further along the line we come to Spinoza, with his idea that the world is all one substance, and that thought and physical extension are but attributes of that one substance. Next we encounter Descartes with the argument that there is a real distinction between the physical and mental worlds, and that there is a dualism of physical and mental substances, with God as a creative substance outside the two basic sets of created substances. And finally at the other end of the continuum we have mentalism, with Leibniz arguing that the spatial world is not real, and Bishop Berkely claiming that there is nothing in reality except ideas in the mind of God.

At one pole all is physical and there is no mental world at all, and at the other pole all is mental and there is no physical world. Both extremes seem equally absurd, and so where are we to look for reality in this eternal metaphysical puzzle? If the views at the extreme ends of the continuum insult our reason, then perhaps we should be looking somewhere in the centre of the continuum. That should focus our search somewhere between monotheism and pantheism -- to find God it would seem that we have to search for a meeting point somewhere between Descartes and Spinoza.

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With Descartes and Spinoza we have virtually come to the end of philosophical inquiry into the possibility and nature of God's existence. With the Enlightenment ushering in new waves of scientific inquiry the fields of philosophy withered away. There were to be more notable philosophers, for example Kant, whom we met in the chapter on morality, but generally there were no more attempts to build complex metaphysical ontologies to describe and explain the whole of reality. Metaphysics itself underwent a change of meaning to become the more limited study of defining belief and knowledge where philosophy seems marooned today. Where once the whole realm of human thinking was the business of the philosopher, the expanding bodies of new, specialized scientific discovery became fully known only to the experts within their chosen fields. The philosophers backed off, and the scientists led the way into brave new worlds of expanding knowledge.

The arrival of Charles Darwin and his epic voyage on The Beagle brought us the theory of evolution, and a completely new understanding of our own biology. As we have seen, evolution does not necessarily prove false all our old ideas about God and creation -- it could simply be that God creates through evolution -- but Darwin's theoretical work and its subsequent validation did give a bad shaking to the foundations of traditional belief.

Today Darwin's successors tell us that the root of all life is encoded in what is known as our DNA, the initials of deoxyribonucleic acid. These chemicals are long molecules coiled in a double strand of sugars and phosphates. The information carried within the DNA is the blueprint that allows each species to reproduce itself again and again. And it is the occasional mutations and the adaptations of the DNA life codes within a species that create the processes of biological evolution.

All of this happens on an almost infinitely microscopic scale. We are told that each human being is composed of something like a hundred trillion living cells, each one a complex chemical factory that is dividing, creating, controlling or re-producing. We are, each one of us, a fantastic universe of exploding cellular activity, which is all happening deep within the skin packaging, and the blood, bones and other organs which is all that we can ever be really familiar with. The deeper levels are only perceivable, or theorizable, in the fully equipped laboratory of the chemical biologist where there are powerful microscopes, and specially programmed computers and techniques.

There is no place here for the old-fashioned philosopher who could only do simple experiments with simple tools, and who had to rely mainly on logic and reason. Philosophers, like most of us ordinary mortals, are mainly left far behind by the trained scientists and specialists. And, of course, the experts are generally only expert in a very narrowly defined field.

We do have to take most of what the experts say on trust. Most of us have only a hazy idea of how electricity works, even though it plays a constant role in our everyday life. We only know that when we flick a switch, a light comes on, or the TV flickers into life, or the washing machine starts to work. How that electrical power is actually generated, and transmitted, and put to work in all its various uses, is something we just accept. It is the same with our bodily chemistry and DNA, the experts tell us how it works, and we accept what they say, but most of us can never actually see these processes happening for ourselves.

It is also likely that the average biologist just accepts that the electrician does know what he is talking about, just as the average electrician probably accepts that the biologist knows what he is talking about, without either of them really knowing the others specialist field in any real depth.

Modern physics has also gone far beyond the range of human vision, and indeed, far beyond the range of what is perceivable by any of the unaided human senses. Four hundred and thirty years before Christ the Greek philosopher Democritus first suggested that the world was made up of atoms, which were, he believed, indivisible. They were too small to ever be seen, and too small to ever be divided further. Now we know that modern science has smashed the atom, and found that it can be divided into a nucleus of positively charged protons and electrically neutral neutrons, surrounded by a cloud of what are called electrons. Furthermore protons and neutrons of the nucleus can be broken down into even smaller particles called quarks, which no one has ever seen. The terrible forces that can be unleashed by splitting the atom have given us nuclear power and hydrogen bombs. It is all a long, long way from ancient Greece and the untested speculations of Democritus.

Not only does modern physics explore into ever smaller and smaller worlds of the atom, and particles of atoms, and particles of the particles of the atom, but it also explores ever upwards into the stars, and the galaxies, and the universe above. Primitive man believed that the earth was the centre of all things, that God resided in the sun, and that the stars were hung above our heads in recognizable patterns for our guidance. Modern astronomy has turned all of that upon its head, and we now believe that our earth is a minor planet in a solar system orbiting a rather dull single star in a galaxy of billions of stars, which in turn is only one of billions of galaxies in an expanding universe.

Modern physics has studied the stars through powerful telescopes, on earth and in space, by measuring light waves and radio waves and radioactive gamma rays. Millions of photographs have been taken and millions of hours have been spent in observing the heavens, until scientists can tell us all about the life cycle of the stars, and the galaxies, and even the universe itself. We are told how stars are born, and how they die, how they burn up in fantastic furnaces, become red giants, burn out or explode, become white dwarves, or black holes. They tell us about pulsars, and quasars, and binary stars, and how solar systems and planets evolve, and how life itself has evolved. The original constituents of our DNA were all cooked up in exploding starbursts billions of years ago. Everything we are and everything we know has come from the stars.

It all began, so they tell us, with The Big Bang, when all the star-stuff was compressed into an incomprehensibly small, tight ball, a kind of cosmic egg. The egg exploded, and all the matter in the universe rushed out to become the expanding universe which has been expanding ever since. The galaxies have all been racing away from each other for billions of years, and perhaps one day, billions of years into the future it will have expanded as far as it can possibly go. Then the whole process may reverse, and the universe will collapse with all the galaxies rushing back to the centre again to collide in a fantastic implosion which they have called The Big Crunch.

As with the deep fields of human chromosomes and sub-atomic physics, all this far-flung picture of the boundless cosmos is something which we ordinary mortals have to take on trust. I have to hand a Pictorial Atlas of the Universe which contains some of the fantastic photographs that astronomers have taken through their telescopes and from space stations and space probes to the moon and the planets. There are vividly beautiful pictures of Venus, wreathed in golden but lethal clouds, the Earth gorgeous in marbled blue and white, the gas giant Jupiter blazing orange and gold, and Saturn with its brilliant light-reflecting dust rings and moons. There are photographs of more distant nebulae, of vast swirling clouds of mauve and scarlet gas, creating exotic images with names like the Crab, the dumbbell and the horses head, all of them shot through with brilliant white masses of stars. There are pictures of great pinwheel galaxies, spinning like flaming catherine wheels far out in space, and of the great galaxy of Andromeda looking like a gigantic disc of white hot star-stuff within billions of individual stars and star systems scattered over the silky blackness all around. Andromeda is our nearest neighbouring galaxy, and perhaps a mirror image of what our own Milky Way galaxy must look like from afar.

However, we do not have direct access to the telescopes and space probe cameras which have taken these wonderful photographs and we simply accept that they are genuine photographic images of what is really out there. In the same way we do not have direct access to the gigantic particle accelerators the scientists have constructed to smash atoms and the particles of atoms, and so we simply accept that the sub-atomic world is as they describe it. Plus the complicated, mind-boggling, computer-driven mathematics they use to demonstrate their theories are far beyond the ordinary brain power of the rest of us.

In fact, the demonstration of proof in some of their theories is even beyond the means of the scientists themselves. Their latest hypothesis is something called superstring theory: the idea here is that after you have split the atom and after you have split the particles of the atom to reach the quarks beneath, you can still, theoretically, split the quarks even further to reach something which they call heterotic strings. At this rock bottom, infinitely small level, these strings are the very foundation of space-time, forever vibrating and moving to create the fundamental forces. This is the scientific dream, the theory of everything, but it can never be observed and seems to owe its origin to some form of abstract mathematics. The scientists seem to have reached a point where there can be no super-computer big enough and fast enough and no particle accelerators big enough and fast enough, to ever test their ultimate theories. Not only are ordinary mortals and philosophers out of their depth, the scientists are beginning to flounder as well. We have arrived once again, so it seems, at yet another variation on the familiar consistency of uncertainty.

So, is there still room for God in this modern cosmic worldview with its billions of exotic spiral and elliptical galaxies all hurtling away from the initial Big Bang? Is there any way in which the universe as we believe we know it now can be reconciled, for example, with the visions of either Descartes or Spinoza?

Well, every culture since time immemorial has had some sort of creation myth, in which God has created the world out of chaos, or darkness, or nothing, and all of these could perhaps be seen as somehow allegorical to something like the Big Bang. And today, even the Catholic Church has accepted The Big Bang model and pronounced it to be in accordance with Genesis and The Bible. God could have created the universe and all that is within it through the Big Bang, and so the Big Bang theory in itself is not incompatible with belief in God.

In his best-selling book, A Brief History of Time, his account of the evolution of the cosmos from the big bang to black holes, Professor Stephen Hawking makes even more concessions toward the possible existence of God. He points out that the laws of science contain many fundamental numbers which seem to have been very finely adjusted to make possible the development of life. He gives as an example the size of the electric charge of the electron, and the ratio of the masses of the proton and the electron. These, and other numbers vital to the way the cosmos works and creation has developed, are in relatively few ranges for the values that would allow the development of intelligent life as we know it. The choice of these numbers, these laws of science -- if there was a choice -- could, he says, be taken as evidence of a divine purpose in creation. The universe is, it seems, created in just the way it would have to have been created as the act of a God who intended to create beings like ourselves.

Could God, external to the world as Descartes believed Him to be, have created the universe of our current understanding? It is possible, but it is hard to see how God could be outside our solar system, outside our Milky Way galaxy, and outside the billions and billions of light years that separate all the galaxies of the universe. For God to be working in our world, and in our lives, He has to be somehow within the universe. Perhaps God dispersed Himself with the Big Bang, and perhaps His essence, His Holy Spirit, is spread throughout all His creation. With the concept of the Holy Spirit we are still with Descartes and the Christian God, but we are moving much closer to Spinoza and pantheism.

In Hinduism there is not only the belief in a spiritual world and the reincarnation of souls, but also the idea that the cosmos itself goes through similar cycles of birth and re-birth. The idea of a Big Bang, a universe expanding to its limit, and then the contraction of the universe in the Big Crunch, followed by the next Big Bang, and so ad infinitum, seems to fit loosely with both Hinduism and modern science.

One image that scientists have used to describe the atom is that it is like a miniature solar system with its electrons whizzing in endless orbits around the nucleus. We are made up of atoms, and so it follows that in a sense our bodies are galaxies of tiny atomic solar systems. If this so, then can we follow Spinoza's line of thought and think of all the galaxies in the universe as making up the body of God. Perhaps the Big Bangs are somehow allegorical to the heartbeat of God. Here we are beyond philosophy, and even science, and into the realm of pure speculation, but as we have seen, we cannot know, we can only believe, and wonder.

But if the universe is the body of God, it seems that there must still be something more, just as we believe that we ourselves are something more than just the sum of our physical parts. There has to be the spiritual dimension, the soul of God, and perhaps that is the real essence of God. If God is the spiritual dimension of the physical world, then He is the Holy Spirit of Christianity, and the God in all things of Hinduism and Spinoza. We cannot know, but it seems that in all probability, this is something like the nature of God.

The Christian Faith speaks of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. God is our heavenly father, because this is the way in which the majority of us can most easily understand Him and relate to Him. He is the Son, because in all probability God was manifest in Jesus Christ, far more profoundly and explicitly than in all other beings. And he is the Holy Spirit because he is the spiritual dimension of the universe.

And if there is to be a big crunch, the reversal of the Big Bang when the universe stops expanding and starts to contract, then that contraction might yet prove true the seemingly impossible words of Jesus when he spoke of His Second Coming. In chapter thirteen of the Gospel of St Mark, Jesus said, "-- the sun will grow dark, the moon will no longer shine, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers in space will be driven from their courses." Modern science seems to be telling us now that it could happen, but before modern science only God could have known.

Perhaps this new Millennium will see science expand the frontiers of knowledge even further, but I suspect that the consistency of uncertainty will still be there. I suspect it will always be there, because it seems most probable that this is the way God has arranged things.

GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER TEN:

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

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It might seem that the appropriate place to end this book would have been with the previous chapter. I have set out to show that it is rational to believe in the probable existence of God, and that if my reasoning by what I have called the consistency of uncertainty is correct, then it also follows logically that all faith will lead to God. However, as we move into the twenty-first century, I think that it may be possible to draw further implications from these two arguments: implications about how we should attempt to live socially with each other, and about how societies should endeavour to relate on the international scale. Consequently there are two further chapters to this book which will attempt to follow these implications through. They are two more signposts to a safer world of peace and justice in the third millennium.

In one sense politics is about government, about the machinery of government and how it works. In another sense politics is about power, about who should rule, and why the rest of us should be under an obligation to obey. But politics is also about political ethics, about what is the right way for people to live, and what are the proper goals for society, and here it overlaps with ethics generally, which is the field of moral philosophy. Much of what is argued about in moral philosophy is also the subject matter for argument in political philosophy. In my chapter on moral philosophy I concluded that there were, in all probability, two levels of morality, the subjective level aspiring to the objective or transcendent level, and that if this reasoning was correct then the most likely explanation of the nature of this transcendent level of morality is that it is our imperfect awareness of the will of God. Therefore, it now seems to me, that if we believe in God, who has arranged things so that we may exercise our own freedom of will, who allows for our differences, and yet wants us to chose to do what is right, then all of this should be reflected in, or should help to shape and guide, our political philosophy.

Let us continue, then, with the method we have adopted throughout this book, which is first to survey the current state of affairs in this particular field of philosophy, and then to see whether any conclusions can be drawn by applying the approach of logic and reasoning as it has been developed so far.

Two of the early areas of contention now seem to be generally settled by the majority of modern philosophers, and the first of these is the question of which group is best fitted to rule over the rest of us. Much of classical political philosophy argued over the relative merits of monarchy, dictatorship, aristocracy, oligarchy, and so forth, but no more. Now the Divine Right of Kings is just a historical oddity, and dictatorships and oligarchies, where they exist, are usually held to be in some way immoral. Instead the concept of democracy is now paramount.

There is an awesome problem of definition here, for both western governments and communist governments, which on one level claim to be thesis and antithesis of each other, all claim to be democracies; while many other governments which claim to be neither pro-western nor pro-communist also claim to be democracies of one sort or another. With so many differences in practice democracy can only be a kind of banner word that symbolizes an ideal, and that ideal is that people should be able to chose their representatives or their rulers, and that the rulers should rule for the general well-being and advancement of all the ruled.

This is a shift in meaning from the original Greek idea of direct rule by the people, which is no longer possible with the huge populations of today, but what the concept of democracy now acknowledges is that in essence all men and women share a basic common humanity. We all have hopes and fears, dreams, ideals and emotions. We are all capable of compassion, love and reason. There are also flaws and imperfections in us all, for we are all capable of hate, greed, cruelty and envy. The variations in the mixture provide our individuality, while the universality of the components gives us all our common humanity. Because of our shared humanity we are all, on one level, equal as human beings. Therefore people are more important than dynasties, or institutions, or accumulations of wealth and power. Democracy embodies the idea that government should be for the people, and somehow accountable to the people. Human beings are held to have certain rights, to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, simply by virtue of being human beings, and to this list democracy adds the right to take part, or be represented, in the decisions which affect the course of their lives.

Democracy, then, although it has many forms and failings in practice, and no absolute definition, does represent an ideal which we can comprehend. It is the dominant ideal in modern political philosophy. Most governments in the world today claim to be trying to realize that ideal, and even those who cannot make such a direct claim usually insist that they are only acting as a "caretaker" government until social and economic conditions make a real attempt at democracy possible.

The other area of contention which seems to have reached a reasonable level of agreement, except for a few dissenting anarchists, is the question of what constitutes the individual's obligation to obey the rules of the state, the state being the term for the combination of government and society. Here it seems that in acknowledging and understanding the basic similarities which are the common foundation beneath our differences, we also implicitly acknowledge and understand that we do have basic moral obligations to each other. Most of us do feel that it would be morally wrong to take another's life, to cause him or her pain or distress, or to restrict his or her liberty. The opposite to wrong is right, and once we accept that it is morally wrong to kill, hurt, or enslave our fellow human beings, then it logically follows that all human beings must have a natural moral right to their lives and liberty, and to being able to live as far as possible without suffering pain or distress, which means being free to pursue as far as possible their own self development and self fulfillment. From this it further follows that when the state can be seen as a means to the fulfillment of the same moral obligations which we sense in ourselves toward each other, then we also have a similar obligation to support the state. Therefore one major root of our sense of political obligation is that it is part of our moral obligation. We can be coerced into keeping within the law, by means of penalties and punishments for breaking it, but that is another matter. Most people, most of the time, obey the rules of the state because they see them overall as a moral framework of which they generally approve. Good government asks of us what we would generally ask of ourselves and of each other, which is the promotion of justice and the common good. If it did not we would vote against it, or more forcefully rebel.

Philosophers have also argued for a second root of political obligation which is grounded in the idea of individuals making a voluntary undertaking to participate in society and obey its rules. This is the basis of the Social Contract idea proposed by Hobbes and Rousseau. In this theory it is the fear of anarchy and lawlessness, combined with the realization that people in organized communities can achieve so much more than people in unrestricted conflict, which causes people to come together and accept the need for a body of rules and some sort of governing body to enforce them. Here it is prudence and practical necessity which form the origins of society and man's political obligation to obey its rules.

Some materialists will claim that prudence and practical necessity are the only root of political obligation and that to talk of a sense of moral obligation is an abstract, metaphysical nonsense, but that need not detain us here. We have already seen that truth is rarely of a totally exclusive nature, and that there can be elements of truth in a whole variety of what are put forward as conflicting arguments. Prudence and practical necessity form part of the account, but the full account of what constitutes our sense of political obligation can only be filled out by reference to that other root of moral obligation.

Do I have any justification for placing the major emphasis of explanation on to this notion of moral obligation? I think that perhaps I do, for with democracy the dominant ideal the central area of debate in political philosophy today is the question of how this ideal can best realized. One answer to this question was put forward in the philosophy of Utilitarianism, which, although subject to much criticism, gave birth to the British Welfare State and National Health Service, which are still the envy of much of the world today. Alternative answers are proposed by left and right wing political ideologies, but they all have one thing in common, and that is that they are offering answers to the same question. The question being, what is the best way to promote justice and the common good of all the people? The question and the answers are all about defining the state's moral obligation, and how it should respond to it.

Let us look briefly at these different answers, starting with John Stuart Mill and his philosophy of Utilitarianism. Based upon what has been called The Greater Happiness Principle, Mill's argument maintains that all actions which tend to lead toward the maximum possible degree of happiness for the greatest number of persons must be for the general good, while actions which cause misery or pain must be bad. As a general rule for social living this seems pretty straight-forward, and yet most academics have found serious faults with it.

These faults can be broken down into three broad and general areas of objection. The first is in the purely practical area in problems of calculation. Exactly how do we evaluate and add up different people's different definitions of what constitutes their happiness? Do we aim for the greatest happiness in terms of total happiness, or the highest possible average happiness? And there are other calculative and comparative problems of this sort.

The second major area of objection lies in the fact that Utilitarianism is a consequentialist doctrine, and that therefore it ignores motives and implies that anything and anyone can be legitimately used as a means to the desired ends. For example, if it makes a thousand decadent Romans happy to see one Christian torn to pieces by lions, then on the utilitarian account it is right to feed Christians to the lions.

Thus the third area of objection is that due to its consequentialist nature, Utilitarianism is actually unjust and immoral. The Greater Happiness Principle would seem to be useable to justify actions which most people who consider themselves as having moral values would not find acceptable. By applying the principle in a situation where a large majority intensely desires the extinction or domination of a small minority the Utilitarian calculation can be seen as endorsing genocide or slavery.

Because of these objections the critics of Utilitarianism have deplored it as a worthless and even dangerous doctrine, raising the specter of "ruthless Utilitarians" committing all sorts of monstrous crimes to raise the total happiness of the perpetrators regardless of the cost to the victims. But surely this is an unreasonable reaction, with logical possibility being taken to the extremes of hostile imagination. To the best of my knowledge no great immoral crimes have ever been committed in the name of Utilitarianism, perhaps because immoral people who are criminally inclined do not care a damn either way for philosophical justification. Instead the monuments to Utilitarianism are all in the great strides to social progress which were made during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

The objections, then, are mostly academic, although they do have their point. Human nature is extremely complex, and the mistake Mill made was to believe that this complexity could be reduced in terms of morality to his one, simple, "Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number," principle. Used flexibly Utilitarianism can provide a useful general guide to moral behavior in the majority of situations that ordinary people are likely to encounter, and to political decision-making on the majority of questions that governments will have to decide, but when Utilitarianism claims its principle as the sole foundation of all political morality it claims too much. Utilitarianism can provide a plank in the moral platform, but there are other moral considerations, such as the personal moral integrity of the decision-makers, and the rights of the individuals affected, which go beyond the purely mathematical calculations of The Greater Happiness Principle.

A moral person, or a moral government, will let their sense of morality guide their use of the utilitarian principle, for the ways in which it can be shown to logically sanction unacceptable acts against minorities and individuals shows that it cannot function perfectly, as Mill believed, unless the decision-makers already have the disposition to act morally.

The Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number Principle is, therefore, not a complete answer to determining how best to promote justice and the common good for all the people. So what other theories does the field of political philosophy have to offer? The complete choice ranges from the extreme loony left to the extreme fascist far right in a confusion of over-lapping ideologies, but this can be broken down more generally into the politics of left, right and centre. Left wing views generally advocate some form of socialism or egalitarianism, which call for principles of distributive justice based on need or an ideal of equality. Right wing views generally take the opposite view and reject the notions of distributive justice and all men being treated exactly the same, and instead encourages the gifted, ruthless, or harder-working individual to achieve all that is possible in the spirit of free enterprise.

The current debate in this area of political philosophy hinges on the contesting theories set out by two modern American philosophers, Robert Nozick and John Rawls. Both authors accept the security of basic human rights to life and liberty as an essential starting point to any form of social order, but from here they diverge sharply. Rawls champions the egalitarian or everybody-being-equal view; while Nozick champions the ideas of laisser-faire neo-liberalism. It will pay us to make a brief survey of their arguments in order to understand both sides of the issue.

Let us deal with Rawls first. In his book, A Theory of Justice, he defines his system as, "Justice as Fairness," and gives us two basic principles of justice. The first principle states that: "Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all." The second principle states that: "All social and economic equalities are to be so arranged that they are to the greatest benefit of the most disadvantaged." The general, overall concept being summed up in the statement that: "All social primary goods -- liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self respect -- are to be distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution of all or any of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored."

Rawls goes on to argue that any inequalities of birth or natural endowment, such as personal skills, intelligence or abilities, are all undeserved, and that it is the function of the just state to compensate for these inequalities by what he calls the redress principle. The meaning of redress is to make things right by some kind of repayment, and the idea here is that to create genuine equality society must pay back more to those with fewer natural assets, and to those born into less favorable social positions.

Thus from those who have ability, drive and enterprise, we must take away the excess fruits of their labors in order to give more to those who do not have these qualities. The employment of any of these qualities in the individual is only permissible where this can be shown to benefit the worst-off members of society. At first sight this may seem just, but it has the problem of all egalitarian theories: it is basically a leveling process, and it is always very difficult to achieve any worthwhile leveling up, instead there is only a general leveling down.

All egalitarian-type concepts which aim for as-near-as-possible absolute equality are no more than unrealizable ideals. And they are unrealizable because they do not take into account the realities and complexities of human nature. The problem is that for absolute equality to exist we would all have to be exactly equal, we would have to be identical clones, or at best something like the unwilled, impotent rabbits we first looked at in our discussion on the problem of evil.

These theories also assume that we would all work as hard and as long and with the same dedication for the altruistic ideal as we would for personal achievement or advancement. They assume that we all want equality. The egalitarian ideal ignores the competitive and gambling instincts in man, or it regards the drive to create, to achieve, and to succeed, as purposes somehow immoral. Or it must naively assume that all these impulses can still be harnessed to the egalitarian ideal without their being any personal rewards or acknowledgement for their effort and deployment. All of these assumptions, I would suggest, are unrealistic, and therefore somewhat irrational.

The idea of all people being exactly equal tries to tackle the eternal problem of how to eradicate undeserved poverty, and undeserved wealth. It also tries to remove the conditions for envy and spite. Unfortunately not all wealth is undeserved, some people do work harder than others, or take entrepreneur type risks. The egalitarian ideal would penalize hard-workers and risk-takers, or at least make their efforts meaningless in terms of personal advancement. It would kill competition. A society that does not allow any winners would make us all losers. A society purged of its jealousies would also be purged of its inspirations. There would be no entrepreneurs in an egalitarian society, most talents would lie dormant or unstimulated, and society would eventually stagnate.

It seems that there is a direct conflict between the requirements of justice for those who make the extra effort and those who are in need through no fault of their own, and there is a further conflict between the requirements of justice and efficiency. To compensate all those less favored by nature to the point where all are equal in goods and status must mean frustrating and handicapping those who have been gifted by nature. The egalitarian state would, therefore, seem doomed to become an incentive-lacking state of nil drive toward achievement and efficiency.

At the other extreme, and in direct contrast to egalitarianism and distributive justice theories, Robert Nozick has written a book entitled, Anarchy, State and Utopia. He argues for what he calls "Historical Entitlement" as the sole basis for justice. This is the extreme, laisser-faire, right-wing end of the continuum. In Nozick's view the only state which can be justified at all is what he terms the minimal "nightwatchman state," which has only one purpose, and that is to protect wealth and property holdings as they are "naturally" evolved. Nozick disapproves of force and fraud, but otherwise he seems to be advocating a free-for-all anarchy with legal protection for the winners.

Nozick opposes all redistribution schemes and welfare state ideas, and even argues that taxation to benefit others, although legal, is in fact immoral. Taxes, in his view, should only be levied to protect property and lives and maintain law and order. His arguments are based on the undeniable fact that the gross domestic product of any society is not some kind of miraculous cake which simply appears to be divided with no prior claims. Instead, whatever is produced is produced by a whole series of efforts, and it is the people who make those efforts, through hard work or the application of their skills and talents, who have the only moral claim on the end results.

Thus Nozick objects to all forms of end-patterned states because they require constant interference with individual rights, and with the natural workings of the market. Instead, he argues that whatever a man can secure by his own legitimate efforts and fair transfers is his entitlement by that right. Present patterns of wealth and power distribution, no matter how unequal, can, he says, be justified by these principles. Also it follows that past efforts have created present entitlements and present efforts will create future entitlements, hence his idea of "Historical Entitlement." The history of how wealth patterns have occurred is held to be a vital and valid factor for consideration which cannot be ignored.

These arguments clearly have some valid points. First the individual does have a just claim to what he creates or transforms by his own efforts. Second those claims do logically extend into the future and by the same logic past efforts do project just claims to the present. Third, too much interference by government does infringe individual rights, and can be damaging to the economy as a whole.

However, in trying to establish the notion of "Historical Entitlement" as the sole basis of justice the theory becomes overloaded and collapses. For a start, if we took these ideas literally and attempted to trace the legitimacy and fairness of all dealings back through time we would eventually find enough injustices to decide that nobody could possibly have any just title to anything.

Another and equally important point is the impossibility in the complexity of modern society of determining and disentangling the values of all the individual contributions. It is partly because we cannot set comparative values that we do need a system of redistributive justice which acknowledges that every contribution is of value in its own right. Society needs the effort of those in the majority as well as it needs the more specialized skills of its high flyers.

Third, Historical Entitlement allows the huge build-ups of wealth and power which puts those at the top in a strong bargaining position, with the majority of wage-earners held down at an unfair disadvantage. In fact, when a large reservoir of the unemployed can be maintained, the average wage-earner has no bargaining power at all.

Finally, the most repugnant feature of the theory is that it seems to be totally without compassion. It says that the world and its resources belong rightfully to the gifted and the strong, and that the rest of us must struggle along as best we can. And worse, those of us who are unable to contribute have no claim at all, beyond that of pity from private charity. This is a callous rejection of our common humanity, which is morally unacceptable.

Our survey has again been no more than a surface sketch, but it outlines the major theories that are debated in political philosophy today. Because Mill's Utilitarianism can be said to entail the moral fallacy of being able to justify injustices, Rawls has attempted to provide a moral and political framework for society in which this fallacy cannot occur. The left-wing, Rawlsian, or egalitarian-type, state would base justice for all on concepts of need and equality. Nozick's theory is a direct reply to Rawls, and his right-wing, neo-liberal state would base justice entirely on concepts of Historical Entitlement and reward for effort. These final two theories are polar opposites: the former is irrational and naive in its expectations, and the latter is cold-blooded and without compassion for the sick and the weak.

What remains to be considered is the centre view, which for want of a better working title I shall call a rational morality. To me it seems that there is no single claim to justice, but that both needs and desert are valid claims which have to be balanced. We need a theory that is both rational and moral, and not one that flies off to either an unworkable or an unacceptable extreme. The answer to the question -- what are the best policies, or what is the best kind of government, for the good of all the people? -- must be that we require the kind of policies and government that will shape a fair, moral and compassionate society. We must provide for those in need, and provide scope and incentives for the maximum development and self-fulfillment of both individuals and society as a whole.

I said at the beginning of this chapter that it might be possible to draw some implications for political theory from what has already been discussed, so now let us recap briefly. In the first seven chapters of this book I set out the justification for four rational beliefs, which are as follows:

1. That as human beings we do have freedom of will, not in any absolute sense, but in varying degrees of freedom to make our own choices.

2. That it is rational to believe in the probable existence of God.

3. That the best explanation of our awareness of what seems to be a transcendent morality is that it is our spiritual awareness of the Will of God.

4. That if God exists then all faith must lead to God.

So what might these beliefs imply for political theory?

First, it does seem that 1, 2 and 4, taken together, do make it difficult to accept any form of egalitarianism as an exclusive base for social justice. If God exists and He has given us freedom of will, then He clearly wants us to express and fulfill ourselves to our full human potential, and if this is acceptable in a diversity of cultural forms then it seems logical to suppose that it is also acceptable in a diversity of individual forms. If God wanted us to be leveled in terms of equality, then He could have created us all exactly the same. So it does not seem likely that He will want our thoughts and behavior patterns to be forced into any exclusive mould. God's creation is one of wonderful diversity, and although we share a common humanity we also share in that wonderful diversity as individual human beings.

However, when we turn to look at the ideas of Historical Entitlement and free enterprise as an exclusive base for social justice we find them even more difficult to accept. Our third belief, that God does want us to behave compassionately, with care and understanding for our fellow men and women, is in direct conflict with a theory that can selfishly neglect all the claims of need and misfortune.

Neither the left-wing theory, not the right-wing theory, can be wholly correct, but at the same time neither of them is wholly wrong. Both theories have their valid points, for as I have been at pains to stress throughout this book, there is no theory or doctrine which can add up to an exclusive truth. Even much-maligned Utilitarianism has its valid points, despite the fact that we cannot abandon all moral and political decision-making to purely mathematical calculations.

Consequently, if we believe in God's will, and if we seek it in political theory, then we must look to the centre ground of politics where the balancing efforts are made. We do need to advocate something like a rational morality where basic human needs and individual aspirations are all taken into account. This would seem to follow logically from the fact that God has given us a moral awareness of our common humanity, together with the gift of free will and our individuality. We are not meant to ignore either gift or the human responsibilities they carry with them.

The British Welfare State, despite its imperfections, was right in principle. Its health and social services did aim to provide for all basic needs, while the free education system did provide a basic starting point for equal opportunity. At the same time there was room for advancement for the industrious and the gifted which provided scope and incentives for individual achievement to the benefit of all. The aims of the Welfare State may not have always hit their target, but we have to bear in mind that nothing in this world is continuously perfect.

Sadly the British Welfare State as we knew it through the nineteen-fifties, sixties and seventies, came under attack in the nineteen-eighties, and the dismantling process has continued remorselessly through to the present century. The total collapse of excessive communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has undermined socialism generally, and given a triumphant free rein to unbridled capitalism. Nozickian ideas are in the ascendant and in Britain government efforts are directed at rolling up the welfare state and winding down the National Health Service. However, the aims of the welfare state did approximate to a rational morality, which must be to stimulate a healthy, growing society and economy which gives just rewards for efforts, but also ensures that any excess is creamed off to provide for those in need.

Obviously it is difficult to give a clear-cut direction to the centre view of political philosophy when it must necessarily be a balance and a compromise, which in turn leaves it open to critical attack from both extremes of the political spectrum. It is all too easy for extremists, who always have the loudest and most aggressive voices, to condemn the balanced view as a cop-out that will give victory to the other side. The middle ground in British politics so far has always failed due to this difficulty in every general election.

Also there are huge problems; such as how to curb the unjust bargaining power of big money and big business; how to define individual and social needs, and who is capable of impartially defining them, and many more. Rational morality can give no simple, definitive answers to any of these issues, but, as we have seen, simple answers are usually the answer from only one viewpoint. God's creation, of which humanity is one of the more fascinating and paradoxical aspects, is far too magnificent and diversified to admit simple one-doctrine blueprints for political decision-making. Instead our search for the just basis for political decisions, and how the good society and good government should behave in the best interests of all, can only be guided by common sense and moral instinct.

Hopefully, as we enter the third millennium, the over excess of Nozickian capitalism will lead to its own collapse, just as communism collapsed when taken to unworkable extremes. Perhaps then we can return to the saner, middle ground paths of political and economic theory.

We are, to a certain degree, free-willed individuals, but we are also aware of our common humanity and morality, which implies that we should relate to each other with compassion and respect. Thus it is from this awareness that we can derive God's guidance for human living, not in the form of doctrinal answers or exclusive theories of truth, but in the spirit in which life should be lived.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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CHAPTER ELEVEN:

THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS.

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We can now define the principle of rational morality as a guiding principle which denies neither our individuality nor our common humanity. It clearly suggests that we should ignore the extreme right and left wings of political theory and seek for good government and the most beneficial overall forms of political decision-making in the rational centre-ground of political thinking. It is only here that we can hope to find a closer approximation to a just balance of the different claims upon society's resources.

This means that we should not disregard nor be complacent about the needs of the poor and disadvantaged, but neither should we be so short-sighted as to give no incentives at all to those who are carrying us through the new technological revolutions of the third millennium. The principle of rational morality argues for a just balance to be found between the rewards due to those who run modern society and modern industry, and a fair deal for the rest of us.

However, if this development of the argument is correct, and it is preferable and more in keeping with God's will for the principle of rational morality to guide our decision-making in domestic politics, then surely the same principle can be extended and applied to international relations. Here the major issue is not in striking a reasonable balance between the rewards and needs of the high flyers and the low flyers within society, but between the needs of the developed and under-developed nations on an international scale. Here left-wing egalitarian ideas would reduce the rich western nations to virtually the same level as the poverty-stricken third world nations, while right-wing notions of historical entitlement would simply ignore the problems of third world poverty. But the principle of rational morality recognizes that an advanced western society with a healthy economy is in all probability the best available mechanism for helping to raise world living standards overall, and would also recognize the moral responsibility of giving that help wherever possible.

Unfortunately the global problems of today do not end with the issue of how resources and aid should be shared between the desperate poor of Africa, Asia and Latin America, and the relatively affluent rich of the northern hemisphere. Our modern world also faces monumental problems of political, racial and religious prejudice; of technological pollution and destruction of the earth's resources, and possibly irreparable damage to the earth's environment and climate. The insanity of the East-West arms race and the accompanying threat of nuclear holocaust have temporarily abated with the collapse of the old Soviet Union, but new powers are running new arms races and developing new nuclear threats in new spheres, so the madness shifts location but goes on. Can our conclusions so far offer us any further guidelines into any of these minefields of extremely difficult tensions and arguments?

Before answering this question let us first look into one of the major areas of dispute in the study of international relations. The dispute is about what motivates the statesmen who have to make policy decisions in international affairs, and there are two contending theories. These have been labeled as Idealism and Realism.

Idealism was the major theory about what motivated the workings of international politics between the two world wars. It emerged in the aftermath of the First World War and was the child of two beliefs. One was the belief that the First World War had occurred almost by accident; that it was the result of a misunderstanding between nations, and that it was a war that no one had wanted except for a few sinister interests such as the international arms manufacturers. Hand in hand with this general pattern of belief about the causes of the First World War there also developed a belief in an international morality and the common humanity of all men everywhere. This view held that no one could possibly want to inflict the horrors of war except for a few sinister profit-seekers, and therefore war could be banished by a combination of international co-operation, better communications and mediation facilities between governments, and more democracy within nations to ensure that ordinary people could make their rejection of war more strongly felt. Underlying this idealism was the view that there was a common sense of morality which could triumph in the cause of peace if societies, and international society, were so structured as to give it a chance.

Clearly there is much in the idealist view which is in close agreement with our own conclusions on the nature of morality, but history did not end there and the assumptions of idealism were brutally shattered by the advent of World War Two. This second cataclysmic devastation of Europe was not a pattern of events that had been drifted into by mistake. Instead it had been willed and wanted by the losing powers of the First World War who would no longer accept the conditions imposed by the victors in their earlier defeat. The League of Nations, which had been set up as the mediating body to defuse any possibility of war, had failed in its purpose and the beliefs of idealism were frustrated and discredited. A new theory of political realism seemed to offer better explanations of why the Second World War had begun.

Political realism argues that national interest can always be defined in terms of power: therefore, whatever statesmen may do, or say, or even believe, all their actions and all of their foreign-policy making decisions will always be aimed at the one underlying goal of maximizing their power. This cynical and depressing claim is made on the assumption that there is some fixed law in human nature which makes human beings strive always and only for survival and dominance. Realism is thus the antithesis of idealism. It argues that any notions that we may have of any other motivations, or ideals, or any sense of international morality, are nothing more than self-delusions. All events and decisions in international politics can be explained by the brute fact that human beings are, and always will be, fixed, power-seeking animals.

The strength and attraction of this claim is that in many cases it is nakedly true, and in many others it shows up as a clear element of truth. Political realism does explain the behaviour of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and expansionist Japan during the Second World War. It also offers a credible explanation to the East-West Cold War and the power struggle that developed between the Soviet Union and the United States after the Second World War, and it explains the horrors of disintegrated Yugoslavia and all the other brutal power struggles and tribal and racial slaughters that have taken place since. It would be foolish to ignore or deny the value of this realistic approach, and in our present world of international anarchy with no overall power of international government, it may be the biggest single factor in the compound of political motivation and national interest. Yet, on the other hand, it seems equally absurd to insist that this is the only factor at play.

To assume national interest acting in terms of power may be the best general predictor of international behavior at our present stage of development, but to hold the drive for power-maximization as a fixed and infallible law of human nature is surely mistaken. For a start, if human nature were fixed it would be static, incapable of development. We would still be at the level of our ape fore-fathers. It hardly seems necessary to point out that we have developed beyond that first stage, and as our powers of reason and understanding, and our awareness of God and what God wants us to be, all continue to evolve, there seems to be no reason to suppose that we are not capable of over-coming and controlling those basic animal instincts of fear and distrust that remain.

When we look at history and the present state of the human race, we do see almost as many instances of compassion and heroism as there are of folly and wickedness. History offers us the examples of Jesus, Gautama and Florence Nightingale, as well as the likes of Hitler and Genghis Khan. There are endless accounts of men and women who have worked, suffered and died for their fellows or their ideals, or who have been martyred for their faith in their understanding of God; and as there can be no sense of maximizing power in suffering and death, the power theory of realism cannot be a true account of their motivation.

Clearly, then, the Idealism versus Realism debate is basically a fruitless one, for once again we can see that neither thesis expresses an exclusive truth. I have explained why I believe there is a transcendent morality, the Will of God, which we all strive to interpret within the personal and cultural limits of our understanding, and it is this level of morality which idealism has attempted to define with its belief in an international human morality. But I have also argued that God has given us free will, and to be meaningful that includes the freedom of will to seek power and to act in evil ways. It is this aspect of our freedom of will that has generated the thesis of political realism. When Neville Chamberlain came home from Munich in the September of 1938 and bravely proclaimed that he had won "Peace in our time," his behavior and motivations are best explained by the idealism view. But the behavior and motivations of Adolf Hitler, who eleven months later discarded the agreement he had signed with the British Prime Minister and marched his army into Poland to launch the Second World War, are best explained from the viewpoint of political realism. Neither thesis can explain both events.

There is, then, a dual quality about our freedom of will, in that our choices and actions can be used for both good and evil. It is like a two-edged sword, or a coin that has both bright and dark sides. It would also seem to be parallel to, or perhaps another definition for, what a psychologist would label as the human instinct for aggression. Free will, in its aggressive form, is the drive which creates, builds, explores and advances. It is the vehicle which carries the human spirit ever upward and forward in its quest for understanding and achievement. It is the gift of God which has enabled mankind to survive and evolve above the level of the other animals and creatures with which we share this beautiful planet.

But the other edge of the sword, the dark side of the coin, is that an aggressive free will that has failed to understand the shared nature of our common humanity can also be totally destructive. Almost every great empire that has ever been raised by man has also been destroyed by man. Almost every golden age in history has ended in fire and slaughter as its cities fell to the forces of conquest and war. This understanding of the basic paradox in the aggressive nature of free will, as the roots of both violence and self-preservation, and as the dynamic force of both construction and destruction, has not escaped western psychologists. In religious thought it is a paradox that is perhaps best expressed in Hinduism, where the interpretation of the nature of God incorporates the ideas of Brahmin as Creator, Shiva as Destroyer, and Vishnu as Preserver.

Here we can return to our main question, which was how can our principle of rational morality guide us in this sea of paradox and confusion. I argued that in domestic politics the positive side of free will, our drive to create and achieve which is the constructive side of the paradox, should not be frustrated or contained any more than is necessary. This is the rational part of the principle. However, it has to be balanced with the moral requirement, which is our responsibility, derived from a shared common humanity and the Will of God, to ensure that the needs of our fellow human beings are not disregarded where they can be alleviated. In international politics, I will now suggest, it is the negative side of the coin, the destructive side of the paradox that has to be balanced against our sense of moral responsibility. Many states and statesmen will be primarily motivated by the goal of maximizing their power, not necessarily in the interests of greed and ambition, but in what they see as the interests of defense and security for their country. It would be irrational to ignore this fact, and to ignore the lesson of Chamberlain's mistake at Munich. But at the same time we cannot ignore our moral responsibility. We must maintain a forward-looking balance. We cannot give up the goals of idealism because our expectations were not achieved the first time round. We cannot afford to abandon the ideal of world peace as a lost and hopeless cause.

Is the answer, then, to work for peace, and yet be prepared for war? This is the claim that most international politicians make when announcing their foreign policy decisions, and it is the ironic rationale behind every arms race. The problem here is what the political analysts have defined as the "Security dilemma." All nations see a necessity to build up their armed forces and to form their alliances with other nations, in order to ensure their own defense; but rival nations and groups of nations inevitably see these moves as potentially aggressive and seek to make similar moves of their own. Escalating chain reactions of hostile confrontation are established, and in an unstable world of fast-spreading nuclear weapons the inherent dangers in such situations are terrifying. A mad leader gaining control of nuclear weapons, a tiny miscalculation in over-stepping the limits in the nuclear saber rattling of war games, a misinterpretation of the other side's intentions, or perhaps a simple computer malfunction in a piece of monitoring or targeting technology; any of these could plunge part of the globe, or all of it, into a final holocaust.

The crucial factors which give rise to the security dilemma are mutual feelings of fear and mistrust. Partially these are caused by our knowledge that there always are ambitious leaders who hunger for ever more power, for conquest and for regional or even world domination. But fear and mistrust are also caused by ignorance and misunderstanding, we to tend to think that because other peoples have different cultures, different world-views, different interpretations of the nature of God, or alternative political systems, then somehow they are necessarily evil and dangerous. These fears and feelings are, of course, deliberately exploited and manipulated by those who do want war, for the expansion of their power, for its profits and spoils, or for some insane notion of its supposed glory. These surface differences are usually only slight, and the alternative political systems vary more in theory than in actual practice, but these are the points that are always highlighted by the doctrinal fanatics and demagogues who attempt for their own ends to deny the underlying common humanity of all men and women.

When we look for an explanation of the Nazi death camps of World War Two, or when we try to reach some understanding of any genocidal atrocity, or any of the many bloody examples of man's blind inhumanity to man, then it seems that there is always a similar kind of total moral blindness at play. We can concede that there are some warped psychopaths and sadists who can enjoy the humiliation, torture, rape and even murder of other men and women, but most men can only abuse others, or ignore or laugh at the abuse of others, when they can first be persuaded that these others do not really count as human beings like themselves. The camp guards at Dachau and Buchenwald did not, in their own view, herd other human beings into the gas chambers. Instead they herded Jews, and in their own minds they had accepted, or been taught to accept, that Jews were not really human beings in the same sense as themselves. If they had not been persuaded to make this morally blind distinction, if instead they had been able to maintain a full understanding of their common bond of humanity with the people they so callously sent to their deaths, then it seems reasonable to suppose that the horrors of Dachau and Buchenwald could never have so easily happened.

It is only when people of different races, color, culture or religion, can be seen as non-human, as inferior, or as a pollution to the supposed pure race, color or religion, that atrocities of this kind can happen. Apartheid could only exist in South Africa because the majority of white South Africans could be persuaded that black South Africans were inferior. In South East Asia American servicemen could only use their awesome firepower and technological superiority to massacre the native Vietnamese because they saw them only as "Viet Cong", a term they were taught to hold as synonymous with inhuman. In Yugoslavia Serbs can only slaughter Muslims and Bosnians because they did not count them as fellow human beings, and vice versa.

International terrorists can only single out American citizens as legitimate murder targets because they see them as agents of the evil power of "The Great Satan." The fanatics who murdered the crews and passengers of four airliners and thousands of innocent office workers in the horrific attack that destroyed the World Trade Centre Towers in New York, could only commit such an act because they had been deceived into believing that all those who died were just some sort of abomination in God’s sight. In short, the majority of atrocities can only occur where the perpetrators can be morally blinded to the simple fact that their victims are also human beings like themselves.

Many factors can contribute to this fatal moral blindness, the seeds can be in genuine grievances and adversity, and are then nourished by false or grossly exaggerated propaganda; but once it is established then the full potential of man's inhumanity to man can be unleashed. The key to understanding the majority of atrocities is that in situations like these, man the perpetrator does not see himself as being inhuman to man the victim. Instead he sees himself as cleansing the world of an evil, as saving or defending the true essence of humanity from the threat of creatures that are base and vile.

The conclusion here is simple to reach: to prevent, or more realistically to scale down, the level of future animosity and atrocities, man everywhere must learn to understand the common humanity he shares with all other men. What we must all learn is that we were all created by God, not just a chosen few of one particular race or religion, but all of us, all men and women and all religions. And God does not want us to exterminate those of our fellows who worship Him in a different way or call Him by a different name. His command was that we should Love One Another, and that must surely be irrespective of our individual and cultural differences.

Think back for a moment to the moral dilemmas inherent in the problem of evil. The moral dilemma of the explorer Jim was that in his particular situation he had only two choices: to commit one murder himself, or to allow twenty murders to take place. Other actual moral dilemmas have been on a much greater scale. In World War Two the night bombing of German cities by the allies, and the consequent killing and maiming of thousands of innocent German civilians, appeared as the only way of stopping Hitler, the war itself, and the continuing horror of the Nazi death camps. While in the Far East the dropping of the two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Nagasaki and Hiroshima was seen as the only alternative to a prolonged war and the invasion of the Japanese mainland which would have cost many more millions of lives. In each case a situation had developed where one crime against God and humanity had to be weighed against another. There was no easy way out.

Surely the lesson to be learned here is obvious. Once these dead-end situations are allowed to develop, then all the moral agonizing in the world becomes futile. We have gone beyond the point of turning back and our choices have narrowed until there is nothing left but to combat evil with evil, or perish. The only way then, to prevent such monstrous crimes, is to prevent such narrowed-choice situations from developing. Once they are allowed to develop it is too late.

The way to combat the security dilemma, and the evils of war and the moral dilemmas that war can generate, is now becoming clear: it lies in the positive promotion of international understanding of our common humanity, and of the transcendent morality which unites us all. Then, as we begin to realize that all faith leads to God, and that all cultures and peoples have an equal value in God's sight, so it will become less easy for our fears and uncertainties about each other to be exploited by those who want to wage war. We have to work against religious intolerance and the kind of dogmatic blindness which can insist that, "God is on our side," in order to justify atrocities that are crimes against man and God. We have to work against racial intolerance and the bizarre notion that any one particular culture, or creed, or shape of nose, or color of skin, is somehow superior to all others. We have to work against the political intolerance that insists that only one system of social organization and economic management is acceptable, and that all alternative systems should be destroyed. We have to learn that just as we all have our own individuality and yet share in our common humanity and common morality within society, so in international society all cultures also have their own individuality and a shared humanity and morality. When this understanding becomes universal the overall level of fear and distrust will be reduced, and perhaps then we can hope to see a decline in international hostilities, and more peaceful co-operation between nations. It may then be possible to wind down the arms races and divert resources to the raising of living standards throughout the world. It is true we must always guard against those who would use their freedom of will to promote war, and the profit motives of the arms manufacturers and the defense industry, but we do not have to be ignorant prey to their manipulations of our fears and differences.

However, today there is more than one Sword of Damocles hanging over the human race, and the need for improved understanding and co-operation between cultures and nations goes beyond the needs of peace and the horrors of war. Modern technology and modern communications have brought with them a vast range of international opportunities, and international dangers. Our wanton rape of the earth's resources, together with our continuous fouling of the land, oceans and atmosphere with our waste and the excretions of our industrial processes, all threaten us with potential disaster. Man's space age activities and his scientific capabilities to manipulate the laws of chemistry, biology and physics, can all be detrimental to the interplay of natural forces which make our planet habitable to life as we know it. Modern technology is ruining the Earth's ecology and environment. It is poisoning the atmosphere and the oceans. It is causing damage to the ozone layer and threatening an increase in the global heat balance which may cause catastrophic climate changes.

To ensure a safe world, a tolerable future for our children, and perhaps the very survival of the human race, it would seem that higher levels of international understanding and co-operation are vital. But the possibilities of nuclear holocaust or technological doomsday are not the only potential dangers that we face. There is a third danger in the escalating desperation of unresolved grievances. It is evident in the issues of the exploiters and the exploited, the conflict between rich and poor, between individuals and between nations who are economically entrenched and those who are economically dispossessed, and between those who are riding comfortably on the modern wave of the technological revolution and those who have been left behind. These problems manifest themselves in social anarchy at home, and in international terrorism on the global scale. Human frustration and bitterness is a powerful explosive force which can erupt on its own account, or be willfully exploited by others. In England, on the streets of Bristol, Brixton, Toxteth, Hounslow and Tottenham, we have seen flames, blood, hate and violence. And beyond our island borders we see guerrilla and terrorist forces waging new kinds of hit and run warfare with an unprecedented ferocity that has no regard for either their own lives or those of the innocent.

All of these issues came to the forefront of debate in the early 1970s, and the need for more international co-operation to ensure safeguards and eliminate grievances was advocated by many political analysts at the time. The international political climate of the time was then that of detente, which involved a scaling down of the of the old east-west cold war, a lessening of the fundamental east-west tensions, and the slowing of the first nuclear arms race. There were more healthy signs of co-operation rather than confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. It was also a time when more and more multinational business corporations and interests were being established and expanded, making the idea of international unity seem even more necessary and feasible.

Unfortunately two major factors frustrated this essential move in the right direction. One was the collapse of detente and the renewal of the cold war and the nuclear arms race, which again focused the attention of most analysts on this area of international relations as the most predominant and vital issue. The other factor was that most of the globalists advocating international co-operation were Americans, who expected to see western cultural, political and economic values adopted by any, (In their view), "rational" global system.

A basic assumption underlying the globalist view was that with increasing world interdependence, and more and more multi-national or international bodies, the role of the separate nation states in world affairs would be diminished. This decline of the nation state as the dominant actor in world affairs was comfortably acceptable to western analysts because of their belief that it would be the western world-view, and the western political system and way of life that would eventually be universalized. However, the problem with this ideal was that it was not so readily acceptable to other cultures and political systems. Much of the world was, and is, hostile to western assumptions and intrusions, and prefers to maintain the indigenous traditions and institutions of their own cultures.

Clearly then, the real need is to co-exist peacefully, co-operatively and tolerantly, with other cultures and values, and not to make the doomed attempt to superimpose any one set of cultural values on a global scale. Any further attempts to pursue international agreements and safeguards must bear this in mind, and these efforts must be made, for the multiple dangers of mankind ultimately destroying itself throw darker shadows than ever before.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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# EPILOGUE

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This book has argued throughout that it is rational to believe in the probable existence of God, and this probability is based upon what I have called the consistency of uncertainty. The structure of this argument could be criticized as absurd, because at first reading it may seem that what I am saying is that the more uncertainty there is about God's existence the more evidence there is that He does in fact exist. That would be an indefensible argument, but that is not what I have been saying. It is not just the uncertainty of God's existence that is significant, but the fact that a similar degree of uncertainty exists in every related field of the whole metaphysical jig-saw. And as long as some degree of uncertainty remains in all of these additional fields of philosophy of mind, morality and knowledge, then it is this consistency of uncertainty which seems to require some explanation. And the probability of God existing, but arranging things so that human beings can have free will, with human belief in Him left to a matter of individual faith, does provide a reasonable and logical explanation.

This book further argues that if God does exist, then all faith must logically lead to God, and that just as God has created a universe of infinite variety, so he has also created an exotic diversity of human cultures, and possibly other cultures on other habitable planets throughout the galaxies, which are all as pleasing in His sight as the multi-colored flowers of the fields.

It is also argued that if God exists then it is reasonable to believe that He has given us the freedom of will which can enable us to destroy both ourselves and our planet home if we so chose, but that to balance and hopefully overcome this he has also given us a spiritual awareness of a transcendent moral reality which is His desire that we should chose to live in mutual peace and harmony.

From all of this it follows that it is not God's intention that all of human thought and behaviour should be forced into any single mould, and that, therefore, the paths of sanity, unity, co-operation, respect and tolerance, between individuals and between different value-systems and world-views, are more in keeping with what He wants us to achieve.

If this analysis is correct then it may well be that the Biblical idea of Satan, and the devils and demons of other religions, are all the personifications of the selfish and immoral aspects of man's will. Christ, then, was of the essence of God, in that there was no trace of selfishness or immorality in His will, there was only the wisdom and understanding, the love and compassion, of pure spirituality.

Christ's command was to, "Love Thy Neighbor," but this can no longer be taken as extending simply from Jew to Gentile. Today the frontiers of the known world stretch much further than the shores of the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. So Christ's command must logically extend to the Moslem, the Buddhist and the Hindu, and to all men and women of faith, who are in their own way, and through their own understanding, attempting to find and follow the moral will of God.

This means that as we enter the third millennium we should make our continuing journey one of faith and hope, and our goals should be religious tolerance, peace and social justice. This is surely what God desires of us, no matter how we perceive Him.

# GOD, FAITH AND REASON

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# BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Throughout this book I have stressed that my descriptions of the various fields of philosophy have only been survey sketches, sufficient only to set the background for my own arguments. Other authors in other books examine these areas in much greater detail, and for the reader who wishes to enquire further the books listed below will give a much better introduction to their fields.

# BELIEF AND KNOWLEDGE

An excellent starting point here is The Problems of Philosophy, by Bertrand Russell.

# THE PROBLEMS OF THE MIND

The Mind And The Soul, by Jenny Teichman, and Matter And Consciousness, by Paul M. Churchland, are both recommended as introductory texts into this field.

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

The Existence of God, by Richard Swinburne, and An Introduction To The Philosophy of Religion, by Brian Davies. These books also cover the free will argument against the problem of evil, and discussions on the arguments to and from religious experience, and the religious arguments to and from morality.

# MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The Moral Law, by H. J. Paton, is a translation and analysis of Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals.

# THE NATURE OF GOD

Read Descartes, The Discourse On Method. And Spinoza, The Ethics.

For the background to the Cosmos and Big Bang theory, A Brief History Of Time, by Stephen Hawking. And Cosmos, by Carl Sagan. Plus The Pictorial Atlas of the Universe, by Kevin Krisciunas and Bill Yenne.

# POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Utilitarianism, by J.S. Mill, A Theory of Justice, by John Rawls, and Anarchy, State And Utopia, by Robert Nozick, cover the major areas of debate.

And finally, The Religious Experience of Mankind, by Ninian Smart, gives a comprehensive account of the heritage and beliefs of all the major world religions.