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SIMPLICIUS ON THE NATURE OF EVIL*

Just as a mark is not set up to be missed; so there is no nature of evil in the world.—EPICTETUS ENCHIRIDION XXVII.

The failure to settle definitely the question of the nature of evil leads to impiety towards God, confuses the principles of right moral discipline, and involves in many inextricable difficulties those who do not rightly account for it. If anyone asserts that evil is a principle, making two principles of things, the good and the evil, many great absurdities follow: for if the rank of principle is one and belongs to both the opposites in common, how does it come to them, if not from one cause which pertains to both? And how can they be absolutely opposite, if they cannot be classed under one common head? White cannot be said to be the opposite of hot or of cold; it is rather those things which differ from each other most in the same class which are opposites: white and black, for instance, coming under the class of colour, for both alike are colours; or hot and cold, whose class is the quality of being perceptible in the same manner.

It is not possible, therefore, for opposites to be principles, since there must be prior to them some common class, and because, moreover, there must be the One before the many, if each of the many is necessarily either one, by participation in the First One, or else nothing at all. Further, if there must be before every particular property a monadic principle from which every property distributed among many things subsists (as from the Divine Principle of Beauty all beautiful things proceed, and from the First Divine Truth all truth), then also the many principles must point upward to the One Principle Which is not, like each of the others, a particular principle, but the Principle of all principles, exempt, bringing them all together into Itself,

* Translated from the Greek by the Editors of *The Shrine of Wisdom*.

and from Itself giving them all alike the rank of principle with the subordination proper to each. So it is absurd to say that there are two first principles, or any more in any way than the One.

Those who say that there are two principles of all things, the good and the evil, are forced to deny that He Whom they call the Good God is the Cause of all, nor can they celebrate Him as Lord of all, nor ascribe to Him complete and supreme power; but only half complete power, if even so much as that; nor can they believe that He Who is called the Fount of Light and Goodness enlightens all things and makes them good. What dreadful blasphemies must of necessity follow from what they say! For they present Him as a coward Who fears the evil which is so near His borders, even if it does not actually enter them; and through this cowardice He abandons to evil the souls which are, so they say, His own parts and limbs, though they have done no wrong before, in order to save the rest of the good; just as a general, when enemies come against him, gives up a part of his army to save the rest. This is what they say, even though they may not use these actual words. And He Who abandons the souls, according to them, or orders them to be abandoned, either forgets, or does not think, what the souls given up to evil are likely to suffer—fire, and frying, and torture of all kinds, though they have done no wrong before, and are parts of God. Finally, they add that those that become impious (and by this they do not mean those who commit murder or adultery or any of those accursed things that come from a corrupt life, but those that deny that there are two principles, the good and the evil), these, they say, do not return to the good, but remain stuck fast in the evil; so that He remains imperfect, having lost parts of Himself!

God is also a fool, according to them (far be it from me to say this), neither able to reckon out what is to His own advantage, nor to understand the nature of evil. For how could evil enter into the province of good, their allotted limits having been set apart from all eternity, as they say, and separated in accordance with their own natures? What do they say is the cause of this? Doubtless either chance—and so they make chance altogether a principle; or else something superior to both good and evil; and in this case it would have to be prior to the Cosmos, according to them.

The wonderful thing is that they make up all this in supposed godly reverence; for not wishing to call God the Cause of evil, they assume a special principle of evil, equal in rank and power with the good, or even more powerful, for up to now, in all its undertakings, so they believe, the evil is clearly superior. This evil, according to them, everywhere holds on to the good and makes every effort not to lose it; while the good voluntarily mingles itself with evil, and up to now has behaved in a cowardly, unjust, and foolish manner: so that in refusing to make God the Cause of evil, they describe Him as altogether evil. In the words of the proverb, "avoiding the smoke, they fell into the fire."

So impious, then, is this argument. It destroys, as far as is possible to it, the principles of natural discipline, since it really denies our freedom of will: for it presents the principle of evil as without birth or death, and powerful, driving souls forcibly into evil; so that it is no longer in our own power to sin or not to sin, the compelling power being so strong that, according to them, even God cannot overcome it. Yet, on the other hand, this must be considered, that if souls commit murder or adultery or any of those things that are called evils, through the constraint of something stronger than themselves—not willingly, but by compulsion, then they would be sinless: for what is done unwillingly and perforce, not being sinful, is pardoned by God and by the laws: it is not sin at all; for it is not evil—if one supposes that we are forced by stronger causes to do such things. So if they seek the cause of these things, as being evil, and assume a principle of evil, which when assumed uses force, then no evil remains; the argument most pleasantly overthrows itself. For the inference is that if there is a principle of evil, there is no evil at all; and if there is no evil, there would not be a principle of evil either. Consequently, if there is, as they say, a principle of evil, there is neither evil nor a principle of evil.

This assumption being so clearly disproved, if anyone, to avoid this refutation, ventures to say that God Himself is the Cause of evil, as evil, he too is even more concisely proved impious and a liar: for how could an argument be true which is impious towards God Who is the Producer of Truth? In the first place, how could God, Who is good in supreme and immutable goodness, produce evil from Himself? If evil is the opposite of good,

how shall the opposite be produced by the opposite? Moreover, he who produces something from himself and is the author of its being, produces it as having its cause and standing in that relation to it, being himself, causally, what the thing produced is essentially. So this argument is fallacious because, in addition to being itself manifestly impious towards God, it also, like the other, introduces a principle of evil and a first evil.

If, then, evil has no principle, and God is not the cause of it, whence does evil come? For it is impossible for anything to come into being without a cause. Or must we first settle what that is which is called evil, and then inquire whence it comes? For he who does not know what a thing is cannot find its cause either.

We must say, then, that this evil—which those who assert a principle of evil, and most of those who doubt concerning it, think has some prior subsistence, as good has, and a power equal to the good, and opposed to it on equal terms, and has a being of its own, unmixed through its very nature with the good opposed to it, as is black in relation to white, and hot to cold—we must say that this sort of evil simply does not exist in the nature of things: for if it had some prior essence, as man has, for example, or a horse, it would certainly have by its own nature some perfection and type according to which it is what it is; and every type, having its natural perfection, is good, and not evil. That is the reason why they say that this “evil” longs for the good, and participates in it and profits by it, and desires this participation and does all it can not to lose it. Is it possible to regard such a thing as absolutely evil? That which is evil, according to which we are called evil, and sinners, and are accountable for as evil-doers, is contingent, and has no real being, since it comes and goes without loss of substance, and has no subsistence in itself: for what can evil be which is not the evil of someone? Similarly the good opposed to it is contingent too. But the good is that which belongs to each thing by its nature, and according to which it has its perfection, while evil is the condition contrary to the nature of that which has it, according to which it is deprived of what it has by nature, and of good. If evil were the natural condition and perfection of the form in which it is, it too would be good, and would no longer be called evil.

There is, therefore, no natural principle and subsistence of

evil as there is of good, but it exists in dependence on the good, a falling off and deprivation of it. Disease has this relation to health, and sinfulness to virtue. And just as to walk upright is an active principle of the creature who makes it its aim and strives towards it, while to halt and limp in walking is a contingent thing resulting from a failure of this active principle, being a movement contrary to nature; so is every evil in relation to the good opposed to it; and one cannot say that these are alike principles or on an equal footing: for privation is a derangement and failure of the form, as lameness in walking: one being according to nature, the other is contrary to it; and the unnatural is secondary to the natural; the evil, clearly, to the good. It cannot be that good is secondary to evil; just as no one could say that hitting the mark is secondary to missing it, or health to disease; but missing is secondary to hitting, and disease to health. The primary aim of the marksman is to hit the mark—it is for this reason that he shoots; and the primary aim of nature is health, which is for the preservation of the creature, and is the end for which it operates. One can rightly say that what is contingent and involuntary is secondary to the primary aim, but not that the primary aim is secondary to the contingent and involuntary.

If, then, all things desire the good, and everything that operates, operates for the attainment of the good, whether real or apparent good; clearly the primary aim of all energy is the attainment of the good. Evil is sometimes contingent to this energy, when the desire is for what is not truly good, but apparently, and accompanied by good. It is in desire for pleasure that one commits adultery, in desire of riches that one steals or plunders: desiring what seems good, and working to obtain it, one is forced to take with it the evil that accompanies it; since no one longs for any evil as being evil. But if it were a principle and the cause of those things which arise from it, it would be their aim, and desirable to them, like good. So again it would be good, not evil: for the desirable is good, and the good is desirable.

Everything longs for what is to its own advantage, either real or apparent, but the apparent as being real: for no one is willingly deceived so as to choose the false rather than the true, the semblance rather than the idea; but in enthusiasm about what seems to be good, sometimes we do not even see the evil that accompanies it; sometimes even if we see it, we mislead ourselves,

reckoning the good greater than the accompanying evil. We often choose the greater good with the lesser evil; for example, we endure surgery and cauterization, thinking the good which results to the health from them greater than the evil in them.

Since everything desires the good, evil itself, if there were such a thing and if it acted, would act for the sake of its own advantage, which is the same as saying for its own good. Therefore, those who assume that evil acts, say that it acts in order to participate in good and keep it for itself and not lose it. If, then, nothing desires evil, there is no subsisting principle of it. But since it exists and comes into being in the way I have said, it is reasonable to say that it is secondary and does not subsist in itself.

"Very well," someone might say, "evil is contingent, a missing of the good, and secondary to it: being such, our argument requires to know what is the cause of it; for everything that comes into being comes from some cause. If not, whence does any evil gain an approach to existing things, since God, which is the same as saying the Principle of all things, is Good?"

It has, however, been stated before concerning this question, in the discussion on our freedom of will, and in explanation of the saying of Epictetus, "Seek not that things which are should be as *thou* wilt"—still, let it be said again more concisely—that God, the Fount and Principle of all Goodness, did not produce only the first good things which are absolute goodnesses, nor after these only the middle goodnesses which abide eternally in the Good, but the lowest goods also, which can turn aside from that which is according to their nature towards that which we call evil. For after the eternal substances which keep ever their own nature and are ever established in the Good, come things which are born and decay; and after the souls which are ever established in the Good come the souls which can turn aside; so that not only may the wealth of the Creator create everything as good as it possibly can be; but also that the Cosmos may be perfect and complete, having not only the first and the middle, but the last also, as is proper to perfection; and also that the first or the middle, being entirely good, might not be found to be last and almost without value, and powerless, if there were nothing left that grows and decays; for such of necessity must the last be. At the same time, the first and the middle being such as

they are, some immutable both in essence and activity, others immutable in essence but admitting change of place in their parts, it is impossible that there should not be also beneath the moon the things furthest from the revolution of the heavenly bodies, mutable in essence and disposed contrary to nature.

According to these calculations, and others doubtless far more weighty, sublunary things exist, and this mortal place, where there is room for the turning aside from good; for there must be the lowest good, and the lowest must be such as can turn aside. Therefore above this place there is nothing evil; because the nature of evil being a turning aside of the lowest good, which can naturally turn aside, is there, where the lowest good is. Therefore the soul, having a nobler and immutable essence, when it subsists in itself, has no part in evil; but as it is its nature and condition to be in this place, and to be involved in bodies here (by the Providence of the Father and Creator of all, Who has produced souls of this kind, so that the last things may be bound to the first through the indissoluble chains of the continuity of life), it seems to participate in the evil which assails bodies in disease and corruption, according to their unnatural condition; but this is not really evil, I think, but good, in that out of mutual conflict and distress in alien places the soul wins release from its troubles on the dissolution of the body, and is freed from conflict to rest in ever greater purity, restored to its own place and its own integrality for its renewal.

And if one thing changes into another there is no evil in that either; for each becomes what it was before. Water changes into vapour, and from vapour becomes water again. And the most important thing is that the dissolution of composite things and the changing of simple things into one another, is good for the whole, since the decay of one thing is the birth of another; and this is the reason why the circle of generation abides without cessation.

We see also that often nature, and art, too, sacrifices the parts for the good of the whole: nature in pushing forth humours and discharges from the more important parts to the surface: art in cutting and burning and often excising the part for the preservation of the whole. Thus the things that happen to the body must be called good rather than evil, and the cause of them is the cause of good, not of evil. For the simple sublunary bodies

have no evil, being perpetual in themselves; while what seems to be evil in the parts has more good than evil even in those parts, as has been said; and when it is referred to the good of the whole, it becomes entirely good. Therefore the unnatural condition of bodies cannot be evil, since it is altogether turned to good.

If anyone contends (and this has been said before) that this must not be called good as it is a turning aside from what is according to nature, it must not be at once called evil, through the confused notion we have of evil, as absolutely opposed to good; but rather necessary, not being in itself desirable, but contributing a great part to what is in itself desirable; for if it were entirely evil, it would not contribute to the good. The necessary, however, even if not in itself desirable, still in the upliftment to good is itself turned to good; and it *is* good in itself, inasmuch as it is in some way desirable. For example, we accept surgery and cauterization and pay money for them, and thank the doctors; which we should not, if we thought these things evil: but it is a lesser good and belongs to the second rank of the good, since it is not primarily good, but in a kind of secondary way. Thus the doer of it would not be in the least the cause of evil, but either of good or of the necessary, which is itself a secondary kind of good and presumably also flows from the Fount of Good in a lesser degree. Concerning the evil in bodies and the cause of it, let this suffice for the present.

Now since the stumblings of the human soul seem to be evil and sin, though this, too, has been said before, nothing prevents us now also tracing out their nature and cause. And it must be said that the souls of those superior to us, being ever above, established eternally in the Good, never have any evil; but the human soul, being midway between the souls which ever abide above, because of the excellence in the essence of soul and its participation in Intellect, and that which is below, because of its bodily kinship with irrational life; and being a living link between the above and the below, becomes through its freedom of will now like the one, now like the other. When it abides above, it is altogether free from evil, established in Good; but relaxing sometimes in respect of that blessed life and those arcane and pure contemplations, because by its nature it has a tendency sometimes to descend lower when it wishes—that is the begin-

ning of whatever evil there is, the voluntary descent into this mortal place.

Although its nature is twofold, it is not through compulsion that it moves downwards and upwards: it is so constituted that it moves according to its own choice. What is there remarkable about this in a soul which has essential self-motivity? Irrational amphibious creatures whose nature it is to live both in water and on land can change from the one to the other according to their own impulse, not compelled by anything.

The soul, descending in condition to this mortal place, and intending to involve itself in a mortal body, and to join with it to form one mortal creature, puts forth irrational powers, some gnostic, such as the senses and phantasy, some appetitive, such as passion and desire, through which the mortal creature will have cognition in correspondence with itself, as the irrational creatures also have, and renew by nourishment what it loses, and preserve the permanence of its kind by generation with like creatures, and resist what is harmful. These things would not be possible for the mortal creature if it were not filled with these irrational powers. For which, especially of the purer natures, could eat and excrete for so long, like an irrational creature, if it were not actuated by irrational appetites? And who could bear the burden of pregnancy for so long a time, unless inflamed with this frantic desire, the propagation of the race? These things are enough to show that the irrational appetites were given for good and for the constitution of the creature; and no evil appears as yet.

But when the rational soul, being superior in essence to the body and the irrational life, and having natural authority over them, keeps its own rank in respect of them, and is exempt from them, using them as an instrument and referring the good of their ministry to its own good—then all things are good and there is nowhere any evil springing up. But if the soul forgets its likeness to the higher, and casts away its sceptre and authority, neglecting its power to rule, it sinks down completely towards the body and the irrational life (this happens chiefly when it prefers the excessive gratification of the irrational appetites to the purity and calm of the rational, and identifies itself with irrationality); then, when reason operates irrationally, against its nature and its rank as ruler and lord, choosing to be ruled

and enslaved, then arises evil; for evil, as such, has no place in the higher, nor in the lower, if this remains in its place; but arises when the higher is involved in the lower and takes on a disproportionate likeness to the lower instead of the higher. This happens because it suffers no compulsion, owing to our power of freewill; for the choice is with us, our movement being from within.

Pay careful attention, now, to this, lest being led astray in my own reasoning, I deceive you also who read.* It has been clearly stated and proved already that choice and intention is a movement proper to the soul and comes from within, not compelled by anything from without: and that it is according to choice and intention that the soul chooses now the higher, now the lower, is shown clearly by the fact that God and good laws and men who are wise judge the good and evil actions of men not by results, but by intentions; for they honour, punish, praise, and blame only in regard to the intention which is in our own power and freewill. Therefore they are ready to pardon what is done under constraint, even if it be very serious, considering the sin to be not that of the doer, but of him who causes it to be done; because the latter compels the intention, the former acts contrary to his own will. If, then, intention is the cause of evil, being a voluntary operation of the soul, and not impelled by force, what could we call responsible for the evil except the soul? and that not of evil as such (for nothing chooses evil as being evil), but of what appears to be good, concealing the evil that is in it, which must be taken along with the apparent good.

Having therefore found the cause of evil, let us cry out with a loud voice, "God is not responsible for evil"; because it is the soul that works evil of its own free will, and not God.

If the soul did evil from compulsion, one might perhaps accuse God of allowing it to be forced guiltlessly; and yet what is done perforce is not evil: but the soul, in choosing of intention, would rightly itself be held responsible.

If anyone should say that God ought not to allow it to choose the evil, he is saying one of two things: either that though it is natural to the soul to choose now good, now evil, it ought to be

* This warns against hasty and superficial judgment regarding the difficult matter propounded, which cannot be correctly understood except through man's higher faculties.

compelled never to choose the evil; or else that it ought to have been so constituted that it would never be disposed to choose the evil. The first is manifestly absurd: for the power to choose either course would be vain if it were never possible to choose one of the two; nor would there be any choice left if there were compulsion, for choice and compulsion are contradictory.

As regards the second argument, one must first bear in mind that there never is any choosing of evil; secondly that it seems to recommend that this essential freedom of will in the soul, which voluntarily and without force chooses at one time the truly good, at another the apparent, should be taken from the world, as being either not good, or a great evil; nor does it consider how many things are held to be good in the world, of which none is so great and precious a good as freedom of will; for this excels all things on earth; and no one would choose to be an irrational plant or beast rather than a man. How, then, when the lesser goods have been provided by God, should that which is greater not be provided?

Then, as has been said before,* if the inclination of souls in either direction be taken away, the most valued human virtues must of necessity be also taken away, and the whole idea of man: for there is no longer any human temperance and justice, if it is not in his nature to turn aside; and if he could not turn aside he would be an angel or divine, not human at all.

This argument proves that the power of turning aside is necessary, and that what is said to be evil must necessarily result from it; since without this the human virtues could not have come into being, nor the very idea of man.

Thus, even if one says that this power of turning aside came from God, in so far as it is necessary for the existence of so many good natures which can turn aside, it would not be thought right to call God the cause of evil: for no one even calls the doctor who foment abscesses and cuts into the body and cauterizes and amputates limbs, the producer of disease, but of health; since without these things it is impossible for the man to be cured. And Divine Justice also carries the punitive form of its administration which irritates and increases the sufferings of the soul to such an extent, because it cannot be healed if it does

* Simplicius on "Freedom of Choice," *Shrine of Wisdom*, No. 49, p. 16.

not first, and sometimes often, operate in accordance with its own insane appetite. That is why good trainers of the young do not oppose the boys' appetites entirely and in everything, but often give way to them, and sometimes assist them; for the soul could not vomit forth these passions completely if it did not sometimes follow them and become satiated with them. And we do not call either the trainer or Divine Justice the cause of evil, but of good; because it is done for the sake of the good.

We call the practices that tend towards temperance, temperate, and those that tend towards health, healthy. Every action is moulded by the end for which it is done. So God, if He were in some way the cause of the necessary power of turning aside from good, could not justly be called the cause of evil.

It is worth while to consider in what way He is the cause of this necessary power of turning aside: He does not Himself effect the turning aside (Heaven forbid!) but has granted this to the soul's freewill, that such a thing may have its place in the universe and make possible so many good things which could not be without this power of turning aside. God is the efficient cause of this essential freewill which is good, and more precious than many good things in the world. The turning aside is a passionate activity of this—voluntary, not compelled: and that this essential freewill is good, though it sometimes tends to turn aside, is clear, I think.

Let this suffice for the present concerning the nature of evil. It remains to consider the words of Epictetus, and to see how he has gathered together in a few words what we have said in so many about evil. For moral discipline being concerned with the choice of good and the avoidance of evil, it was necessary to show the nature of evil to be something extraneous. In a way it both exists and does not exist; being a secondary, not a primary nature. Therefore it is not a thing that anyone chooses, nor an aim for anyone's action. For to the builder of a house, the house is the aim and end for which he builds; and to the carpenter the door on which he is working; and nothing is done for the sake of evil. Epictetus' syllogism in brief is this: "Evil is a missing of the mark." What is purposely done according to nature in the world is the aim of action, and the end of it is the hitting of the mark by the doer. If, then, what is done primarily according to nature is a hitting, and evil is the missing of the mark, it is clear

that evil is not done primarily in the world. And that evil is a missing of the mark is clear; for anyone who sets up pleasure, as being good, for a mark, aims at it, as at a good, or he runs to it more swiftly than an arrow, in imagination; and if he does not hit the good, going past it, or turning aside from it, clearly he is missing the mark in falling into evil. Everything that is done is the mark for the doer, to which he looks and directs his energies like missiles, and his end is the hitting of the mark. When Epictetus says "There is no nature of evil in the world," by the word "nature" he means that which exists according to nature, and primarily.

And if anyone has accepted Epictetus' syllogism thus, and considers the lesser premiss—"Just as a mark is not set up to be missed" (for that means that evil is the missing of the mark), leaving the greater, which says that what is done purposely in the world is not a missing of the mark (for it is a hitting), the conclusion is reached that evil is not done purposely, and according to nature, in the world. And the syllogism can also be taken in this way: if a mark is not set up to be missed, there is no nature of evil in the world; for if there were, it would be a mark for the doer, to which he would look as he acted; but the aim is to avoid evil; so that it would not be set up to be hit, but to be missed. If, therefore, the mark is not set up to be missed, there is no nature of evil in the world.

BUDDHA'S DECISION TO PREACH THE DOCTRINE*

Then the Blessed One arose from the state of meditation, and went to the banyan tree. And when he had reached it, he stayed at its foot.

Then in the mind of the Blessed One, who had retired into solitude, the following thought arose: "I have penetrated this Doctrine which is profound, difficult to perceive and to understand, which brings quietude of heart, which is exalted, which is unattainable by mere reasoning, abstruse, intelligible only to the

* From the Mahavagga.

wise. Mankind, on the other hand, is given to desire, intent upon desire, delighting in desire; to mankind, therefore, given to desire, delighting in desire, the law of causality and the chain of causation will be a matter difficult to understand; most difficult for them to understand, also, will be the extinction of all samkharas, the getting rid of the substrata of existence, the destruction of desire, the absence of passion, quietude of heart, Nirvana. Now if I proclaim the Doctrine and other men are not able to understand my preaching, there would result but weariness and annoyance to me."

Then the following stanzas, unheard before, occurred to the Blessed One:

With great pains have I acquired the Doctrine:
Why should I proclaim it?
This Doctrine will be hard to understand
For beings lost in lust and hatred.

When the Blessed One pondered over the matter, his mind became inclined to remain in quiet and not to preach the doctrine.

Then Brahma Sahampati, understanding by the power of his mind what had arisen in the mind of the Blessed One thought: "Alas! the world perishes: alas! the world is destroyed, if the mind of the Tathagata, of the Holy, of the Supreme Buddha inclines to remain in quiet and not to preach the Doctrine."

Then Brahma Sahampati appeared before the Blessed One as quickly as a strong man might stretch out his bent arm, or might draw in his outstretched arm.

Then Brahma Sahampati threw his upper robe over his shoulder, and with his right knee on the ground, raised his joined hands towards the Blessed One, and said to him: "Lord, let the Blessed One preach the Doctrine! Let the Perfect One preach the Doctrine! There are some beings whose mental eyes are darkened by scarcely any dust; but if they do not hear the Doctrine they cannot attain Salvation. These will understand the Doctrine."

Thus spake Brahma Sahampati; and having spoken, he further said: "The Dhamma hitherto manifested in the country of Magadha has been impure, thought out by contaminated men. But do thou now open the door to Immortality; let them hear the Doctrine discovered by the Spotless One.

"As a man standing on a rock, on mountain's top, might overlook the people all around, thus, O Wise One, ascending to the highest palace of truth, look down, O All-seeing One, upon mankind lost in suffering, overcome by birth and decay; thou who hast freed thyself from suffering! Arise, O Hero, O Victorious One, wander through the world, O Leader of the pilgrim band, who thyself art free. Let the Blessed One preach the Doctrine: there will be those who will understand it."

When Brahma Sahampati had spoken thus, the Blessed One replied to him: "The following thought, Brahma, has occurred to me: 'I have penetrated this Doctrine which is profound, difficult to perceive and understand, which brings quietude of heart, which is exalted, which is unattainable by mere reasoning, abstruse, intelligible only to the wise. Mankind, on the other hand, is given to desire, intent upon desire, delighting in desire; to mankind, therefore, given to desire, delighting in desire, the law of causality and the chain of causation will be a matter difficult to understand; most difficult for them to understand, also, will be the extinction of all samkharas, the getting rid of the substrata of existence, the destruction of desire, the absence of passion, quietude of heart, Nirvana. Now if I proclaim the Doctrine and other men are not able to understand my preaching, there would result but weariness and annoyance to me.'

"And also, Brahma, the following stanzas presented themselves to my mind, which have not been heard by me before:

With great pains have I acquired the Doctrine:
Why should I proclaim it?
This Doctrine will be hard to understand
For beings lost in lust and hatred.

"When I pondered over the matter, Brahma, my mind became inclined to remain in quiet, and not to preach the Doctrine."

And a second time Brahma Sahampati spake to the Blessed One, as before; and for the second time the Blessed One answered Brahma Sahampati in the same words.

And yet a third time Brahma Sahampati spake to the Blessed One in the same manner.

Then the Blessed One, when he had heard Brahma's solicitation, full of compassion to sentient beings, looked over the world with his all-perceiving eye of a Buddha. And the Blessed One,

looking over the world with his eye of a Buddha, saw beings whose mental eyes were darkened by scarcely any dust, and beings whose eyes were covered by much dust, beings sharp of faculty and blunt of faculty, of good disposition and of bad disposition, easy to instruct and difficult to instruct, some of them seeing the dangers of future life and of sin.

As in a pond of blue lotuses, or water-roses, or white lotuses, some born in the water grow up in the water and reach only to the surface of the water, while other blue lotuses, or water-roses, or white lotuses, born in the water grow up in the water, stand emerging out of the water, and the water does not touch them—thus the Blessed One looking over the world with his eye of a Buddha, saw beings whose mental eyes were darkened by scarcely any dust, and beings whose eyes were covered by much dust, beings sharp of faculty and blunt of faculty, of good disposition and of bad disposition, easy to instruct and difficult to instruct, some of them seeing the dangers of future life and of sin.

And when he had thus seen them he addressed Brahma Sahampati in the following stanzas :

Wide open is the door of Immortality
 To all who have ears to hear :
 Let them send forth faith to meet it.
 The Dhamma sweet and good
 To men I spake not, Brahma,
 Despairing of the weary task.

Then Brahma Sahampati understood: "The Blessed One grants my request that he should preach the Doctrine." And he bowed down before the Blessed One and passed round him with his right side towards him, and then straightway he disappeared.

JEWEL

Without knowledge there is no meditation, without meditation there is no knowledge: he who has knowledge and meditation is near unto Nirvana.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL IN THE PLATONIC DIALOGUES *

III. THE REPUBLIC

This dialogue opens with a discussion upon the nature of justice and injustice. Thrasymachus, a teacher of rhetoric, the chief speaker among those present, digresses from the original subject, and maintains that injustice is of greater advantage to men than justice. Socrates refutes this opinion, but Glaucon, one of his friends, is still unsatisfied; whereupon Socrates suggests a fuller investigation of the original subject by an inquiry into the nature of justice and injustice as it appears first in a state, and then in an individual soul. A description of the ideal state and its citizens is thus gradually built up.

In the tenth and last book of the Republic the subject of the immortality of the soul is introduced. The value or danger to the soul of the imitative arts such as imitative poetry and painting and the drama is being discussed, for, says Socrates, "Great is the issue at stake whether a man is good or bad: and what will anyone profit if, under the influence of money or power, or under the excitement of poetry, he neglect justice and the other virtues?" He adds that as yet the greatest rewards of virtue have not been touched upon in the discussion: to which Glaucon replies that if there are still greater rewards than have already been enumerated they must be immeasurably great. Socrates agrees, adding that the rewards received in time are not to be compared with those of eternity, and that an immortal soul should set the highest value upon eternal blessings.

Glaucon, astonished at this statement, and unwilling to admit that the human soul is immortal, asks for proof. Then Socrates, approaching the subject from the standpoint of good and evil, shows that everything in the material world possesses some natural and characteristic quality of goodness, and that it may also be attacked and corrupted by some characteristic disease or evil, such as rot in timber; and that when it is infected in this

* For Sections I and II, see *Shrine of Wisdom*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 61 and 62.

manner it becomes decayed and is at last destroyed: but if some disease or evil to which it is subject does not destroy it, nothing else will do so; for good does not destroy anything, neither does that which is neither good nor bad.

Glaucon assents to this, and Socrates continues: "If, then, we find any being which, although subject to some evil by which it may be rendered base, is yet not dissolved nor destroyed by this evil, it is certain that such a being cannot by any means be destroyed." He then asks which are those evils which debase the soul, and points out that those named by Glaucon, unrighteousness, intemperance, cowardice, ignorance (the opposites of the four cardinal virtues), do not destroy the soul; for the unjust do not perish when their wrongdoing is detected, through the injustice which is the baseness of their souls. Then, taking the argument a stage farther, he shows that if the soul cannot be destroyed by internal corruption, neither can it be disrupted by external corruption. In illustration he uses the analogy of the body which cannot be infected with disease from food that is decayed unless some infection from the food enters the body and communicates corruption internally; for the body, being a distinct unity, cannot be destroyed by any such kind of evil external to itself and belonging entirely to another thing. Similarly, the soul, being a definite unity, cannot be destroyed by any external evil. It follows that neither physical disease, nor even the dissolution of the body, can destroy the soul, unless it can be proved that the soul becomes less holy or righteous in consequence of physical disease, mutilation, or death.

Glaucon agrees, and adds that even supposing that injustice were fatal to the unjust, this would not be a cause of terror to them, for they would in this case be freed from evil; but a more likely result would be that the injustice which slays others would keep the slayer alive, so far removed is its dwelling place from the house of death. The conclusion is therefore reached that the soul, since it cannot be destroyed by internal or external evil, must always be, and if it always is, must be immortal.

A further inference is drawn by Socrates, namely, that if the soul is immortal, the number of souls will not diminish, neither will it increase; for any increase in number of immortal natures, if it comes about, must be from that which is mortal; and in this case all things would in the end become immortal. To this

Glaucón agrees, and Socrates directs his attention to another inference, namely, that the soul, in its true nature, cannot be a mixture of many different elements which conflict with one another, but being immortal, must be a unity exceedingly beautiful in character. In order to perceive this real beauty the soul must be viewed not as we ordinarily see it, veiled and distorted by bodily distractions and miseries, but as it is seen by the eye of reason, in its essential purity and brightness, when we look to the soul's love of wisdom, examine its relationship with that which is immortal, eternal, and divine, and consider the goal of its essential nature: for thus its beauty will be discovered, and justice and the other virtues will be more clearly seen within it. Glaucón assents to this, and agrees that justice is clearly of the greatest value to the soul.

Socrates then enumerates the blessings which come to the soul through justice and the other virtues. In the first place, since justice is dear to the Gods, the just soul will be a friend of the Gods, and will therefore receive from Them that which is good; the only evils it experiences being the consequences of its former sins. Such being the case, even when the just man is in poverty or sickness, or any other apparent misfortune, all things must work together for good for him in life and death: for the Gods love and cherish those who long to become just and, as far as possible, God-like.

Not only, however, does the just soul receive continual blessings from the Gods, but men also honour and speak well of those who endure to the end of every action and occasion of their entire life: for although the clever but unjust man may, for some part of his life, prosper and receive the rewards of men, yet in the end they will see and despise his injustice. Besides this, it must be remembered that justice itself brings to the soul the beauty and enduring unity and harmony of all the virtues. Yet all this is nothing, either in number or greatness, in comparison with that which the soul receives in recompense after the death of the body.

Socrates then relates the myth of Er* which tells of the journeys, the recompense, and the destiny of souls in the after-life, and the dialogue ends with the exhortation: "This is my counsel to us:

* See "The Human Soul in the Myths of Plato," *Shrine of Wisdom*, Vol. IX, No. 33.

let us believe that the soul is immortal and is able to bear all evil and all good, and we shall always hold fast to the upward path, and in every way practise justice with wisdom; that we may be dear to each other and to the Gods, both while we remain here and when we receive the rewards of this pilgrimage like Olympic victors going about to gather their crowns, and both here and in that journey of a thousand years which we have described we shall fare well."

SEED THOUGHTS

In ascending to Spirit, the soul loses itself in order to find itself again. We present ourselves a living sacrifice, not to death, but to life, and this is possible because our highest life-principle is super-personal. The ideal unity is truer than the concrete individuality. Love joins the discontinuity of living beings to the continuity of life, and mirrors in the subjective sphere, the objective unity of the individuals. Love is the psychical expression of the natural Unity of living creatures, and of their union with God. This doctrine is common to Neoplatonism and Christianity.

Dean Inge in *The Philosophy of Plotinus*.

They that love beyond the world cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies. Nor can souls ever be divided that love and live in the same Divine Principle, the root and record of their friendship. Death is but crossing the world, as friends do the seas; they live in one another still. For they must needs be present that love and live in that which is omnipresent. In this Divine Glass they see face to face, and their converse is free as well as pure. This is the comfort of friends, that though they may be said to die, yet their friendship and society are in the best sense ever present, because immortal.

William Penn.

We are in God eternally, like a work of Art in the mind of a Master.

Eckhart.

THE CELESTIAL HIERARCHIES

BY DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE*

CHAPTER XV

What is the meaning of the formal semblances of the Angelic Powers? What of the fiery and the anthropomorphic? What is meant by their eyes, nostrils, ears, mouths, touch, eyelids, eyebrows, their manhood, teeth, shoulders, arms, hands, heart, breasts, backs, feet, and wings? What are the nakedness and the vesture, the shining raiment, the priestly insignia, the girdles? What are the rods, spears, battle-axes, and measuring-lines? What are the winds and clouds? What is meant by their brass and electron? What are the choirs and the clapping of hands? What are the colours of the various jewels? What is the form of the lion, the ox, the eagle? What are the horses, and their various colours? What are the rivers, the chariots, the wheels? What is the so-called joy of the Angels?

Let us, if you are so disposed, now relax our mental vision from the effort of the contemplation of the sublimity of the Angels, and descend to the particularized, all-various expanse of the manifold diversity of forms in Angelic images; and then return analytically from them, as from symbols, ascending again to the simplicity of the Celestial Intelligences. But first let me point out clearly to you that the explanations of the sacred likenesses represent the same Orders of Celestial Beings sometimes as leading, and again being led, and the last leading and the first being led, and the same ones, as has been said, having first, middle, and last powers. But there is nothing unreasonable in the account, according to the following method of unfoldment.

If, indeed, we said that some are first governed by those above them, and afterwards govern those Orders, and that the highest, whilst leading the lowest ranks, are at the same time being led by those whom they are leading, the statement would be obviously

* For Chapters I-XIV see *Shrine of Wisdom*, Vol. XV, Nos. 58, 59, and 60, and Vol. XVI, Nos. 61 and 62.

absurd and wholly confused. But if we say that these holy Orders both lead and are led, but not the same ones, nor by the same ones, but that each is led by those above itself, and in turn leads those below it, we may reasonably say that the Scripture in its sacred symbolic presentation sometimes rightly and truly assigns the same powers to the first, middle, and last ranks.

Wherefore the eager upward tending to those above them, and the constancy of their revolution around them, being guardians of their own powers, and their participation in the Providential power of proceeding forth to those below them through their own inter-relations, will truly befit all the Celestial Beings, although some pre-eminently and universally, others in a partial and lower degree.

But we must begin to deal with the remaining part of our discourse, and must ask, in first explanation of the forms, why the Word of God prefers the sacred symbol of fire almost above all others. For you will find that it is used not only under the figure of fiery wheels, but also of living creatures of fire, and of men flashing like lightning who heap live coals of fire about the Heavenly Beings, and of irresistibly rushing rivers of flame. Also it says that the Thrones are of fire, and it shows from their name that the most exalted Seraphim themselves are burning with fire, assigning to them the qualities and forces of fire; and throughout, above and below, it gives the highest preference to the symbol of fire.

Therefore I think that this image of fire signifies the perfect conformity to God of the Celestial Intelligences. For the holy prophets frequently liken that which is super-essential and formless to fire which (if it may lawfully be said) possesses many resemblances as in visible things to the Divine Reality. For the sensible fire is in some manner in everything, and pervades all things without mingling with them, and is exempt from all things and, although wholly bright, yet lies essentially hidden and unknown when not in contact with any substance on which it can exert its own energy. It is irresistible and invisible, having absolute rule over all things, bringing under its own power all things in which it subsists. It has transforming power, and imparts itself in some measure to everything near it. It revives all things by its revivifying heat, and illuminates them all with its resplendent brightness. It is insuperable and pure, possessing separative power, but

itself changeless, uplifting, penetrative, high, not held back by any servile baseness, ever-moving, self-moved, moving other things. It comprehends, but is incomprehensible, unindigent, mysteriously increasing itself and showing forth its majesty according to the nature of the substance receiving it, powerful, mighty, invisibly present to all things. When not thought of, it seems not to exist, but suddenly enkindles its light in the way proper to its nature by friction, as though seeking to do so, uncontrollably flying upwards without diminishing its all-blessed self-giving.

Thus many properties of fire may be found which symbolize through sensible images the Divine activities. Knowing this, those wise in the things of God have portrayed the Celestial Beings under the figure of fire, thus proclaiming their likeness to the Divine, and their imitation of Him in the measure of their power.

But they also invest them with the likeness of men because of the human powers of intellect and aspiration, the straight and erect form, the inherent power of guiding and governing; and because man, although least in sense-perception, in comparison with the powers of irrational creatures, yet rules over them all through the pre-eminence of his intellect, the lordship of his rational knowledge, and the intrinsic freedom of his unconquerable soul.

Thus it is possible, I think, to find in the various parts of our bodies fitting symbols of the Celestial Powers by taking, for example, the power of sight as an image of their most transparent upliftment to the Divine Light, their single, free, unresisting reception of that Light, their responsiveness, and pure receptivity without passion to the Divine Illuminations.

The human power of distinguishing odours signifies the power to receive the inconceivable and most fragrant Divine influences, as far as is attainable, and the definite recognition and utter rejection of others not of this kind.

The power of the ears denotes participation in and conscious gnostic receptivity to Divine inspiration. The power of taste represents an abundance of spiritual food, and the reception of Divine streams of nourishment.

The power of touch symbolizes the power of distinguishing that which is of advantage from that which is harmful. The

eyelids and eyebrows represent the guarding of intellectual conceptions in Divine contemplations. The images of youth and vigour denote their perpetual bloom and vigour of life. The teeth symbolize the distribution of the sustaining perfection supplied to them; for each Intellectual Order, receiving a unitive conception from the Divine, with providential power divides and multiplies it for the proportionate upliftment of the one below.

The shoulders, arms, and hands signify the powers of activity and accomplishment. The heart is a symbol of that Divine Life which imparts its own life-giving power beneficently to those within its care. We may add that the chest, being placed over the heart, represents the indomitable power which guards its own life-giving dispensations. The back denotes that strength which holds together all the life-giving powers. The feet signify the power of motion, swiftness, and skilfulness in the ever-moving advance towards Divine things. Wherefore the prophet described the feet of the Celestial Intelligences as being covered by their wings which symbolize a swift soaring to the heights, and the heavenly progression up the steep, and the exemption from everything earthly through the upward ascent. The lightness of the wings shows that they are altogether heavenly and unsullied and untrammelled in their upliftment on high. The naked and unshod feet symbolize their free, easy, and unrestrained power, pure from all externality, and assimilated, as far as is attainable, to the Divine Simplicity.

But since that single and manifold Wisdom both clothes the naked and assigns to them implements to carry, let us unfold, as far as we can, these sacred garments and instruments of the Celestial Intelligences.

Their shining and fiery vesture symbolizes, I think, the Divine Likeness under the image of fire, and their own enlightening power, because they abide in Heaven, where Light is: and also it shows that they impart wholly intelligible Light, and are enlightened intellectually.

Their priestly garment symbolizes their authority as leaders to the mystical and Divine contemplations, and the consecration of their whole life. The girdles denote their guardianship of their own generative power, and their state of unification, for they are wholly drawn together towards their essential unity, surrounding it in a perfect circle with changeless sameness.

The rods are tokens of the authority of sovereignty and leadership and the true directing of all things. The spears and battle-axes represent the power of dividing incongruous things, and the keen, vigorous, and effectual power of discrimination. The measuring-lines and carpenters' tools are figures of the power of foundation and erection and perfection, and whatever else belongs to the Providential guidance and upliftment of the lower orders. Sometimes, however, the implements assigned to the holy Angels symbolize the Divine judgment upon ourselves; for some are figures of His corrective discipline or avenging justice, others of freedom from difficulties, or the perfection of disciplinary instruction, or the restoration to our first happiness, while others signify the addition of other gifts, great or small, sensible or intelligible; and no acute mind would have any difficulty at all in finding the correspondence between the visible symbols and the invisible realities.

The name winds given to the Angels denotes their swift operations, and their almost immediate impenetration of everything, and a transmitting power in all realms, reaching from the above to the below, and from the depths to the heights, and the power which uplifts the second natures to the height above them, and moves the first to a participative and Providential upliftment of the lower.

But perhaps it may be said that the name winds, applied to the aerial spirit, signifies the Divine Likeness in the Celestial Beings. For the figure is a true image and type of Divine Energy (as is shown more fully in the *Symbolical Theology* in our fourfold explanation) corresponding to the moving and generative forces of Nature, and a swift and irresistible advance, and the mystery, unknown and unseen by us, of the motive principles and ends. For He says: "Thou knowest not whence it cometh nor whither it goeth." The Scriptures also depict them as a cloud, showing by this that these holy Intelligences are filled in a supermundane manner with the hidden Light, receiving that first revelation without undue glorying, and transmitting it with abundant brightness to the lower Orders as a secondary, proportionate illumination; and further, that they possess generating, life-giving, increasing, and perfecting powers by reason of their intelligible outpourings, as of showers quickening the receptive womb of earth by fertilizing rains for life-giving travail.

The Scriptures also liken the Celestial Beings to brass and electron, and many coloured jewels. Now electron,* resembling both gold and silver, is like gold in its resistance to corruption, unspent and undiminished, and its undimmed brightness; and is like silver in its shining and heavenly lustre. But the symbolism of brass (in line with the explanations already given) must resemble that of fire or gold. Again, of the many coloured varieties of stones, the white represents that which is luminous, and the red corresponds to fire, yellow to gold, and green to youth and vigour. Thus corresponding to each figure you will find a mystical interpretation which relates these symbolical images to the things above.

But now, since this has been sufficiently explained, I think, according to our ability, let us pass on to the sacred unfoldment of the symbolism which depicts the Celestial Intelligences in the likeness of beasts.

The form of a lion must be regarded as typifying their power of sovereignty, strength, and indomitableness, and the ardent striving upward with all their powers to that most hidden, ineffable, mysterious Divine Unity, and the covering of the intellectual foot-prints,† and the mystically modest concealment of the way leading to Divine Union through the Divine Illumination.

The figure of the ox signifies strength and vigour and the opening of the intellectual furrows to the reception of fertilizing showers; and the horns signify the guarding and unconquerable power. The form of the eagle signifies royalty and high soaring and swiftness of flight and the eager seizing of that food which renews their strength, discretion, and ease of movement, and skill, with strong intensity of vision which has the power to gaze unhindered, directly, and unflinchingly upon the full and brilliant splendour of the brightness of the Divine Sun.

The symbolism of horses represents obedience and tractability. The shining white horses denote clear truth and that which is perfectly assimilated to the Divine Light; the dark, that which is hidden and secret; the red, fiery might and energy; the dappled black and white, that power which traverses all and connects

* An alloy of gold and silver.

† The lion was said by the ancients to erase his footprints with his tail.

the extremes, providentially and with perfecting power uniting the highest to the lowest and the lowest to the highest.

If we had not to bear in mind the length of our discourse, we might well describe the symbolic relations of the particular characteristics of animals already given, and all their bodily forms, with the powers of the Celestial Intelligences according to dissimilar similitudes: for example, their fury of anger represents an intellectual power of resistance of which anger is the last and faintest echo; their desire symbolizes the Divine Love; and, in short, we might find in all the irrational tendencies and many parts of irrational creatures, figures of the immaterial conceptions and single powers of the Celestial Beings. This, however, is enough for the prudent, for one mystical interpretation will sufficiently serve as an example for the explanation of others of a similar kind.

We must now consider the representations of the Celestial Beings in connection with rivers and wheels and chariots. The rivers of flame denote those Divine Channels which fill them with super-abundant and eternally out-pouring streams, and nourish their life-giving prolificness.

The chariots symbolize the conjoined fellowship of those of the same Order; the winged wheels, ever moving onward, never turning back or going aside, denote the power of their progressive energy on a straight and direct path in which all their intellectual revolutions are supermundanely guided upon that straight and unswerving course.

The figure of the spiritual wheels can also have another mystical meaning, for the prophet says that the name *Gel, Gel* is given to them, which in the Hebrew tongue means revolutions and revelations. For the Divine fiery wheels truly revolve, by reason of their ceaseless movement, around the highest Good Itself, and they are granted revelations because to them the holy hidden Mysteries are made clear, and the earthly are lifted up, and the high illuminations are brought down and imparted to the lowest orders.

The last thing for us to explain is the joy attributed to the Celestial Orders. For they are utterly above and beyond our passionate pleasures. But they are said to rejoice with God over the finding of that which was lost, as well befits the Godlike mildness of their nature, and as befits their beneficent and

boundless joy at the providential salvation of those who are turned to God, and that ineffable bliss in which holy men have often participated when the illuminations of God have divinely visited them.

Let this be a sufficient account of those sacred symbols which, although it falls far short of their full interpretation, will yet, I think, contribute to prevent us from lingering basely in the figures and forms themselves.

If you should point out that we have not mentioned in order all the Angelic powers, activities, and images described in the scriptures, we should answer truly that we do not possess the supermundane knowledge of some, or rather that we have need of another to guide us to the light and instruct us; but others have been passed over for the sake of proportion, as being parallel to what has been given; and the hidden Mysteries which lie beyond our view we have honoured by silence.

PRAYER

O Allah, truly I seek from Thee of grace the most perfect, and of protection the most abiding, and of mercy the most encompassing, and of forgiveness its attainment, and of living the most comforting, and of life the happiest, and of beneficence the most perfect, and of blessing the most general, and of favour the sweetest, and of kindliness the most beneficial.

O Allah, seal with our happiness our appointed time and confirm in excess our hopes, and unite in forgiveness our mornings and evenings, and bring to Thy mercy our final state and what is for us, and pour out the gift of Thy pardon upon our transgressions, and bestow upon us the correction of our blemishes, and make piety our provision for the journey; in Thy religion is our endeavour, and upon Thee is our trust and our confidence.

Al-Ghazzālī.