***Introduction to Philosophy: Classical and Contemporary Readings* (9th Edition)**

**Part II Summary: God and Evil**

**Saint Anselm, “The Ontological Argument”**

This brief selection contains the classic statement of the ontological argument for the existence of God. Anselm understands God to be “something than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Because of this particular way of understanding God, Anselm thinks he can derive that God does in fact exist.

The argument runs roughly as follows: We can understand the phrase “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” And because anything that we can understand exists in the understanding, God must exist in the understanding. But God can’t exist only in the understanding, because otherwise we could conceive of something greater—a God who existed in reality as well. And because God is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, God must exist in reality as well.

Anselm also goes on to argue that God can’t be conceived not to exist for similar reasons.

**Saint Thomas Aquinas, “The Existence of God”**

Aquinas’s main tasks in this selection are (1) to present and reply to two objections against the existence of God, and (2) to articulate five ways to prove that God exists. The two objections are as follows: First, it might be argued that if there were something infinitely good, there wouldn’t be anything bad. And because there are obviously bad things, there must not be anything infinitely good. Second, it might be argued that everything in the world can be accounted for on the basis of natural phenomena even if we accept that God doesn’t exist. Aquinas gives us reason to think that these two objections are mistaken, but to understand his reasons, we need to see his articulation of five ways to argue for the existence of God.

The first way is by appealing to the fact that things in the world change. Because everything that changes is made to change by something else, and this process cannot go on to infinity, there must be a first cause of change. This is God.

The second way is by noticing that there are efficient causes in the world. Because nothing can be its own efficient cause, and there cannot be a change of efficient causes that goes on to infinity, there must be a first efficient cause.

The third way appeals to modal considerations. Aquinas points out that if a thing exists contingently, there must have been a time at which it did not exist. But then if everything were contingent, there would have been a time at which nothing at all existed. If that were true, though, there would be nothing in the world now, because nothing can begin to exist without being brought into existence by something else. Because there clearly are things that exist in the world now, there must be some being that is not contingent—some necessary being.

The fourth way appeals to the fact that some things in the world are more or less noble or true or good. For there to be degrees of some quality, there must be something that is the noblest or the truest or the best. That thing is God.

Finally, the fifth way appeals to the fact that even things that lack consciousness appear to act for a purpose. But because they lack consciousness, we need some conscious being that provides their purpose and directs them. This being is God.

We can now see how Aquinas responds to the two objections mentioned earlier. Against the first objection, Aquinas points out that God might allow bad things to happen if he could bring good out of them. And against the second objection, he again points out that because we must trace everything that changes back to something that doesn’t change, we can’t, after all, explain everything in the world without appealing to God.

**William Paley, “Natural Theology”**

Paley begins by supposing that he finds a rock on the ground as he is out hiking. If this happened, he wouldn’t give any thought to how the rock got to that particular place. On the other hand, if he found a watch on the ground as he was out hiking, he would indeed wonder how the watch got there and, in particular, he would suppose that someone, somewhere, designed and created the watch. This is the beginning of his design argument for the existence of God.

Even if we had never seen a watch be made or had never known anyone capable of making one, Paley thinks we would still conclude that the watch was created by some kind of agency, just based on the way the parts fit and work together for a particular purpose. Even if the watch didn’t work perfectly or had a few missing parts or had a few apparently superfluous parts, we would never be able to conclude that the watch did not have a designer of some kind.

To continue the argument, Paley has us suppose that the watch contains in itself the ability to produce another watch just like itself. What effect would such a discovery have on the previous conclusions? First, Paley notes that this discovery would cause us to admire the designer even more than we did before. Second, he notes that the existence of the second watch is not adequately explained by the existence of the first. Everything that puzzles us about the first watch also should puzzle us about the second.

It is important to keep in mind, Paley notes, that what is under consideration here is not how the first watch came into existence. This question could be adequately answered by supposing that there is an infinite series of watches, each producing the next. Rather, the question is about the design of the watch. What explains the design?

What is true of the case of the watch appears to also be true of nature itself. Indeed, Paley thinks that the evidence of design in nature is far greater than the evidence of design in the watch. By analogy, then, we must conclude that someone designed nature. This is the essence of Paley’s argument for the existence of God, the ultimate designer.

**David Hume, “Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion”**

For introductory information concerning this article, see p. 59 of the textbook. You can also find a bit of explanation on p. 90 of this manual.

**Gottfried Leibniz, “God, Evil, and the Best of All Possible Worlds”**

In this selection, Leibniz attempts to dismantle two objections to theism from considerations of evil. The first runs as follows: “God did not choose the best in creating this world,” as he could have created a world without any evil at all, and because anyone who “does not choose the best must be lacking in power or knowledge or goodness,” God must be lacking in one of these three attributes. And the second objection runs as follows: “There is more evil than good in intelligent creatures,” and because that fact implies that “there is more evil than good in the whole work of God,” there is therefore more evil than good in the whole work of God.

Leibniz’s response to the first objection is to deny that God did not choose the best in creating this world. He points out that the evil that exists in the world might be accompanied by a greater good. Indeed, he says that a world with evil in it might well be better than a world with no evil at all.

In response to the second objection, Leibniz denies both premises. First, he says that one cannot generalize from the predominance of evil in intelligent creatures to the predominance of evil in the whole work of God, for it may be that nonintelligent creatures more than make up for the evil that is in intelligent creatures. But, second, it’s not clear that there really is a predominance of evil in intelligent creatures, as there may well be other intelligent creatures besides humans.

**William Rowe, “The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”**

In this paper, William L. Rowe develops a version of the argument from evil. This argument supports an atheist conclusion. Nevertheless, Rowe also considers a number of possible responses to this argument. Ultimately, drawing on G.E. Moore, Rowe locates an argument that he thinks provides an adequate rational defense for theism, although it doesn’t settle the dispute between theists and atheists. Finally, Rowe considers different varieties of atheism—unfriendly atheism, indifferent atheism, and friendly atheism. He defends adopting the friendly atheist position.

Rowe begins by distinguishing broad and narrow versions of theism and atheism. Broad theism holds that there exists some god, whereas narrow theism holds that there exists an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good God. Correspondingly, broad atheism denies the existence of any god, whereas narrow atheism denies the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and wholly good God. Rowe is concerned with narrow theism and atheism.

Rowe presents the argument from evil as follows:

1. There exist instances of intense suffering that an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.

3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient, wholly good being.

After offering some explication of the second premise, Rowe concludes that it isn’t controversial. Premise 1, then, is where the action is. Rowe argues that we aren’t in a position to establish 1 with certainty; however, he insists that there is reason to believe 1 is true. Given all of the instances of seemingly pointless suffering, it seems reasonable to believe that 1 is true.

How can a theist respond? Rowe argues that a theist can adopt the “G.E. Moore shift.” If the theist adopts this strategy, then she can reasonably conclude that the first premise is false by combining the negation of 3 with premise 2. This, of course, doesn’t knock down the atheist’s argument, Rowe explains, but it allows the theist to reasonably hold that the first premise is false.

The G.E. Moore shift doesn’t settle the debate, then, but it allows the theist to reasonably continue holding her position in light of the argument from evil. After considering this dialectic, Rowe goes on to consider different varieties of atheism: unfriendly atheism, indifferent atheism, and friendly atheism. The unfriendly atheist believes that no one is rationally justified in believing that a theistic God exists; the indifferent atheist holds no belief concerning whether any theist is or isn’t rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists; and the friendly atheist holds that some theists are rationally justified in believing that the theistic God exists. Rowe endorses friendly atheism.

**Marilyn Adams and Stewart Sutherland, “Horrendous Evils and the Problem of Evil”**

“Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God” represents two companion pieces. The first is an original article by Marilyn McCord Adams, and the second is a response to Adams’ piece by Steward Sutherland. Therefore, it is best to consider each article in turn (even if you are only discussing one of these articles for your class). Adams offers a novel position about the problem of evil, and Sutherland offers a discussion of Adams position, raising some worries and questions about it.

Adams focuses on what she calls “horrendous evils,” which are “evils the participation in (the doing or suffering of) which gives one reason *prima facie* to doubt whether one’s life could (given their inclusion in it) be a great good to one on the whole.” Horrendous evil raises a significant problem for traditional solutions to the problem of evil, because they tend to focus on why God might permit evil, generally, to exist in the world. Horrendous evils, though, occur at an individual level. Adams doesn’t think there is a good reason *why* such evils exist. She does think, however, that a solution can be offered. She focuses instead on the question of *how* God permits horrendous evils. She argues that because God is a transcendent good, a good incommensurate with both created and temporal goods, face-to-face intimacy with God can “balance off”—outweigh—the badness of horrendous evil. Moreover, she argues that God can *defeat* horrendous evil—can integrate it into a life such that the life can be a good one—by “integrating participation in horrendous evils into a person’s relationship with God.” In this way, Adams holds she has solved the problem posed by horrendous evils.

Sutherland’s contribution looks at an experience Tolstoy had with an execution. The execution was by guillotine, and it horrified Tolstoy. Sutherland uses Tolstoy’s experience to reflect on Adams’ position, and he raises many questions and concerns about it. Nevertheless, the central worry is that Adams’ position might make it such that horrendous evils aren’t in fact evil. If God integrates horrendous evils into one’s relationship with him, it seems as though the horrendous evil has been redeemed such that it isn’t evil. And this doesn’t seem satisfying. Worse, it seems to undermine third-personal judgments about horrendous evil, which Adams is unclear about in the first place, yet seem an important (and very real) part of moral life.

Central to Sutherland’s critique is the primacy of morals. He holds that Adams implicitly puts this issue aside; however, it is integral for understanding Tolstoy’s experience at the execution. This is because the horrendous evil that Tolstoy witnessed was an instance of injustice and cold-bloodedness (at least in Tolstoy’s view). And it doesn’t seem that Adams’ account of horrendous evil is wide enough to capture such horrendous evils. She is too focused on the suffering individuals might endure.

**Eleonore Stump, “The Mirror of Evil”**

In “The Mirror of Evil,” Eleonore Stump considers the problem of evil; however, she does this in a unique way. Rather than focusing on the compatibility of God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness with the presence of evil in the world, she focuses on the different ways we can react to evil. She holds that engaging with evil is actually a way one can come to recognize God’s true goodness.

She begins by outlining a number of ways one can react to all of the evil in the world. One might ignore that evil and focus on their immediate lives; one might labor at obliviousness to that evil by focusing on various projects; and one might focus on the evil in the world, staring it in the face. Stump also discusses the Good Samaritan’s reaction to evil—trying to alleviate suffering—and compares it with that of what she calls a “global reformer,” who tries to remove the human defects that lead to evil. She holds that the latter approach is futile.

Stump suggests that all human beings have a moral faculty, which cannot be accounted for by reason, sense perception, or memory, and which allows us to discern good and evil. Through this faculty, Stump holds, we can come to “taste and see” God. Sometimes, Stump notes, we cry when we are confronted with true goodness. She postulates that we cry in these cases when we are startled by true goodness, and we are startled because we have become used to a certain amount of evil in our lives. Such “heartbreaking” true goodness, Stump suggests, is God’s goodness. And she holds that by loathingly focusing on all of the evil in the world, we will be prepared to come into contact with that goodness. Thus, for Stump, focusing on evil is a way to come to “taste and see” God.

**Louise Antony, “For the Love of Reason”**

In “For the Love of Reason,” Louise Antony reflects upon her experiences with religion as a child, and the various questions it raised for her, as a way of engaging with the value of reason. She notes that when she was young, many of her questions, particularly those questions that challenged religious doctrine, were met with dogmatic denial. These responses to her questioning led her to think of questioning as bad; they made her feel as though she was doing something wrong.

Later, in college, Antony started to study philosophy. Here, she encountered the questions she raised as a child; however, the context was different. In this philosophical context, it was okay to ask these questions. Ultimately, Antony became an atheist. She found the argument from evil particularly convincing. How could an omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly benevolent God allow suffering? And how could He allow unbaptized people to go to Limbo when they had no chance to be any different?

Antony uses her experiences to reflect on the importance of rationality. She distinguishes between two kinds: (i) the human capacity to logically reflect and (ii) the cold, calculating self-interest that eschews values and affection, a construct of economics. Antony worries there is a celebration of irrationality in our culture, and that proponents of irrationality often confuse (i) and (ii). Antony only means to defend the importance of (i).

For Antony, our rational capacity is of the utmost importance. It amounts to a way of relating to each other. And indeed, she argues that failing to provide reasons for your positions is disrespectful to your interlocutor.

Antony considers herself a humanist, and central to her positive picture is the importance of rationality and the dignity it bestows upon us. In this vein, she writes, “Human dignity is not, and should not be thought to be, hostage to any myth.” She ends her essay with an interpretation of Genesis. On this interpretation “Adam and Even did not ‘fall from grace,’ they ascended into moral responsibility.”