

MAN AND MAN'S GOD :
A TIMELESS DIALOGUE

Man : My most respectful salutations !

God :

Man : You seem to be unresponsive. Does your silence mean you have not accepted my salutations ? Or, is it an indication to the contrary ?

God :

Man : Still unmoved ! Your silence is annoying, if you permit me to say so. I pray, say whether or not you accept my regards. I was absolutely sincere in offering them at your feet.

God :

Man : Your silence now becomes enigmatic. Perhaps nothing concerning you, including your very existence, is, as I have very often felt, unenigmatic. Since ages, rather since the day you gave to me my being, I have been trying my best, in so many ways, to make you respond to my seekings. Perhaps you never responded to them, perhaps you sometimes did. But, I must say, never in a manner decisive enough to leave me in no doubt that a certain response came from you, even if it did.

God :

Man : My inability to break your silence makes me feel very sad. Your responding to my salutations would have not only given to me a great emotional satisfaction, it would have also solved the most important of the enigmas concerning you, namely, the *enigma of your existence*. Only an existent being can speak to another existent being, and therefore your speaking to me of your existence. By not speaking, or speaking in a manner which does not clearly show that it is you who are speaking, or in a manner which does not make your meanings clear to me, you are giving to the devil not too weak a reason to claim that you do not exist.

He may feel emboldened even to whisper in my ears that I am exhibiting my foolishness in requesting you to speak to me. Won't you help me in resisting my temptation to be won over by the devil ?

God :

Man : Perhaps there is some point in your remaining silent. Perhaps there is not. But I want to be fair to you and also to the devil. Since you seem to be uninclined to speak to me, I am going to create you, a man's God, out of the elements provided by my thoughts and ideas, emotions and aspirations, needs and expectations, sorrows and joys experienced or experiencible, etc., with a view to ascertain how far my search for you, which has extended over several thousands of years and which perhaps would never come to an end, is a worthwhile one. I would feel comfortable with this, my, God. I can persuade him to speak to me since

God : Since you would be speaking through me then !

Man : How right I was ! You have now spoken to me because I have created you, because you are *my* God. Perhaps this is the truth, namely, that the God who speaks to man is the God which man has created and created him for the very reason that he wants God to speak to him. But I *do not want to assume* that this is the real truth, or even the truth statable as the conclusion of our dialogue because that would amount to prejudging the outcome of our conversation. But since we are now in a position to talk to each other, may I proceed further ?

God : Yes, you have my blessings.

Man : My most grateful thanks. To infuse into our conversation the spirit of a real one, I am going to forget from now onwards, that you are my creation, and shall converse with you as I would have conversed with one who really had an independent, objective, existence.

God : This is no concession to me, since I do have independent existence. In fact, only I, trully speaking, exist. Anything else either only appears to exist, or exists because of me, because it gets its existence from me.

You should know that I do not merely exist, but am existence itself or rather existence-consciousness-bliss.

Man : Let me concentrate on what you said in the beginning of this important *revelation*, namely that you exist independently of all other things, apparent or real. I am not at the moment accepting, or denying, that you are consciousness-bliss as well, or that your existence is really existence-consciousness-bliss.

God : No objection, go ahead.

Man : If you exist, is it not a true proposition that you, God exist (s) ?

God : Yes, it is rather a fundamental truth, a mahāvākya.

Man : Then, is it not *obligatory* for everyone of us to *know* that it is true, that you exist ?

God : No, from the fact that something is true, it does not follow that everyone ought to know that it is. There are innumerable truths, say, truths of mathematics, e.g., the truth that the area of a circle with r as its radius is equal to πr^2 , which are not known to many and by not knowing them they are not guilty of having failed to fulfil any obligation of theirs. You cannot say that everyone ought to know the formula for calculating the area of a circle, nor that one who does not know it, or does not try to know it, is guilty of non-performance of a duty of his.

Man : Well, I see you have started using my language or mode of thinking. However, when you speak my language

God : Does it surprise you ? You say you have created me; a creation of yours can, or must, speak your language, or argue as you do. Moreover, am I not omniscient ? Is there anything which I do not know ? My claim to know that a certain proposition is true, or that the truth of a proposition does not entail that everyone ought to know it, should cause you no wonder.

Man : Pardon me, if I *look* disrespectful. I donot want to be, or even to appear so to you. But I must say what seems to me to be true. You cannot seriously claim to be

using my language because then your language will have to satisfy all the logical conditions of intelligibility which my language has to. It is not difficult to find in theistic literature several things, (purportedly) said by you, which seem to be unintelligible if judged according to the criteria of intelligibility the meaningful employment of my language has to satisfy.

When you want, or, on your behalf, some member of my species wants, to use human logic to substantiate a claim concerning you, he justifies its use on the ground that he is speaking the human language which is the natural home of human logic. But when he fails to satisfy the demands of human logic he says that the logic of the human language is not applicable to *his language*, i.e., to the language used to talk about you, that that language has a logic of its own, very different from human logic. It cannot be unknown to you, since nothing is, that one of your chosen few has in fact declared that the logic of the infinite is the magic of the (finite) mind, i.e., the human mind. Therefore, such an use by you of my language, or its logic, may I beg your pardon, be characterised as exploitative. You use it when it suits your purpose and condemn it when it does not. What is this if not an exploitation of my language and logic ?

I hope I am not impudent if I bring to your kind notice, though nothing remains unnoticed by you, what seems to me historical truth. When your revelations, or some of the statements about you made by some of your loved ones, are profanely subjected by an unfaithful child of yours to tests of intelligibility and cogency applicable to the human language, and are claimed to have failed to satisfy all or some important ones of them, a very respected and commonly used method of justifying their meaningfulness and exalted status is to claim that they are not governed by the logic of the human language. That is, though they are expressed in the phraseology of the human language, they do not really belong to it. Some enthusiasts even

hold that they have a different semantics of their own. In brief, it is maintained that it is not fair to subject them to the tests of acceptability which are to be applied to, or are appropriate for, the human language. But if you admit, as you do now, that yours is also the same language as mine, you cannot claim for your language a different set of conditions of intelligibility or cogency, or even an entirely different set of canons of interpretation.

But this is not the only, or the chief, reason for my feeling dejected. I created you because otherwise it was not possible to converse with you. However, my real intention in the creations was *not to prove that you are my creation*, but rather to falsify it, to possibly demonstrate to myself that you cannot be a creation of mine. But your kind declaration that you were speaking my language virtually amounted to your making yourself a member of my species, since only members of the same species can speak the same language. It is not incorrect to say that all men belong to the same species very much because they speak the same, the human, language. One of the ways to extend the frontiers of human species would be to extend those of the human language. If we can converse with parrots (and not just train them to reproduce some of the linguistic sounds made by a human being), we shall have a very good reason to treat them as members of our species. If you speak my language and use my logic, you become a human being, or at least very much like one. But I do not *wish* you to be another human being. No human being can do all the things I wish a God to do, nor can he give me the solace and support for which I need a God.

Your condescending to speaking my language, therefore, Sir, produces in me very deep, rather paralysing, sense of frustration. You thereby make yourself comparable to a human being, which I never wished or expected you to be. You also then disposses yourself of a respectable method of protecting the

intelligibility of your revelations, or of some of the statements about you made by some of us, against the onslaughts of some of your disobedient, logic-intoxicated, children.

God : You have misunderstood the point of my speaking your language. I used your language to boost your morale. It does not mean that I have to abide by the rules of your language or logic. I do not have to use your language, or any language for that matter. I can speak without speaking, move without moving. . . .

Man : Pardon me, if I am too childish. I am not questioning your omnipotence (at the moment). I would request you most humbly to kindly appreciate my difficulty. If you speak my language, then you cannot escape from the responsibility of using it the way it ought to be used, i.e., in accordance with its logical and linguistic rules, and if you speak a different one then I cannot understand you. It is a truism that I can understand only things said or sayable in my language.

If I sometimes understand things expressed in a purportedly different language, say, the language of birds, the fact of the matter is that I do so by translating them into my own language. The possibility of my understanding a non-human language, if there be one, can be made intelligible only by assuming the translatability or convertibility of that language into mine. To admit this is only to reinforce the claim that I can understand only the things which have been, or can be said in my language. To concede, on the other hand, that yours is a language completely different from mine would rule out the above assumption and thereby the very possibility of my understanding your language.

God : Now, you seem to be not too far from the truth. When I said that I did not have to speak your language, or that my language was not, really speaking, the same as yours, I meant that you could interpret or translate mine in terms of yours, and thereby understand my messages as accurately as your competence permitted

you to do. Why can't you interpret or translate a language completely different from yours in terms of yours ?

Man : I am sorry what you have said just now does not make your position in any way more intelligible. I can translate your language into mine only if (a) it is a language in the same sense as mine, i.e., it is governed by rules, and (b) either there is a set of rules, linguistic and logical, common to both, or some of the basic rules of the one are equivalent, or nearly equivalent, to some of the rules of the other. This means that your language cannot be absolutely different from mine if your revelations are to make any sense to me, and if not absolutely different, then it cannot ignore *all* the conditions of intelligibility which my language has to abide by. Therefore, you decide either to speak my language (or one like mine, if you prefer this mode of speaking) and thereby to bind yourself by its logic, or to speak an absolutely different one and remain completely unknown, understood, to your most favourite creatures whom you have reportedly created in your own image.

God : Well, it is true that what I say cannot be fully expressed in your language, and in that sense my language untranslatable into yours. But your language can express approximately, roughly, or rather metaphorically at least, some of the truths my language can express exactly, accurately, or literally.

Man : I am sorry to say you are piling up your difficulties by trying to talk about a mundane, scientific, logical, topic in a divine idiom. A language which can express a truth approximately, roughly, or metaphorically, must have the *potentiality* to express it exactly, accurately, or literally as well. It cannot, in point of logic, be so constituted that it is doomed to remain eternally incompetent to do the latter. Every approximation presupposes a standard the realisation of which must not be logically impossible. You seem to be asserting, on the other hand, the contrary, since what you say amounts

to claiming that it is logically impossible for the human language to express divine truths, or at least the most fundamental ones of them, exactly, accurately, or literally.

To pursue the matter a little further, the word 'approximate', 'rough', or 'metaphorical', when predicated of a linguistic expression functions meaningfully only if the contrast or distinction between approximate and exact, rough and accurate, or metaphorical, and literal, is presupposed. But if it is logically impossible for my language to express divine truths, exactly, accurately, or literally, then these contrasts or distinctions become unavailable. Their unavailability would obviously make it pointless or vacuous to call any actual expression, if there is one, of a divine truth in my language approximate, rough, or metaphorical.

If you don't mind, I would like to discuss, as a separate issue and in some more detail, the claim that my language can express (some) divine truths only metaphorically and never literally,

God : I don't mind your discussing any thing whatsoever with me. But why to make a mountain of a molehill ?

Man : I assure you it is no intention of mine to make a mountain of a molehill. But the above claim is so important that letting it go undiscussed or only casually discussed would amount, it seems to me, to committing the reverse error of treating as a molehill what is really a mountain, an error which is in no way less grievous.

God : But haven't you already expressed your views on this topic?

Man : In a sense I have, but I still feel exercised because the claim, if valid, would cast a serious doubt on the correctness of my understanding of the logic of metaphorical language.

God : When you feel so concerned, go ahead.

Man : Thank you so much.

Even a not-too-minute observation of the role metaphors

play makes it abundantly clear that one can meaningfully use a word (or phrase) metaphorically, or understand its meaning when so used by someone else, only if he already knows how it is literally used. The devotee, who prays to you for being given some place near your lotus-feet, cannot meaningfully pray unless he knows, nor can another person understand what the latter is praying for unless he also knows the literal meaning of the word 'lotus'. It follows from this that 'lotus' has some literal meaning on which is somehow dependent the metaphorical meaning it has in the phrase 'lotus-feet'. Therefore, the latter is only its secondary meaning in relation to the former which may be called its primary meaning in relation to the former which may be called its primary meaning. I am not saying that one who knows its metaphorical meaning of 'lotus' will automatically know its metaphorical meaning as well, but that if he knows the latter, he also knows the former.

The metaphorical meaning of a term, therefore, cannot be independent of, or unrelated to, its literal meaning, and consequently no term can have only, exclusively, metaphorical meaning. The relevance of the literal meaning becomes clearly visible when one attempts an analysis of the metaphorical meaning, since to make the analysis complete, final, or ultimate, reference to the literal meaning becomes unavoidable. The link between the literal and metaphorical meanings (or uses) of a term need not be always direct, or simple to trace, though in the case of most of the current, living, metaphors, it is not invisible or too difficult to find out. It is the usage, linguistic practice, or convention, which offers the rules, or guidelines, for passing from a metaphorical to a relevant literal meaning. In principle, therefore, it must be possible to provide for every metaphorical expression a literal equivalent, every metaphorical expression must be ultimately analysable or explicable in terms of some literal expression or expressions. To state completely the

metaphorical meaning of an expression is to explicate it in terms of the literal meaning of some expression or expressions. The ultimate analyses of a metaphorical expression cannot all be metaphorical. It may, however, be true that the literal equivalent of a metaphorical expression is unnecessarily prolix, less elegant, or even less effective. But still it is always some literal meaning which sustains every metaphorical meaning.

To claim, on the other hand, that (some) divine truths can be stated in the human language *only* metaphorically is to claim that that sector of the human language which performs this job has only metaphorical meaning. That is, a string of words expressing a divine truth cannot be analysed or explicated in terms of the literal meaning of the same or any other string (or strings) of words. The metaphorical meaning of this unique string will thus be completely independent of all literal meaning and therefore it will be logically impossible to find out or state a literal equivalent to it. But then the string cannot communicate anything, it cannot play any role in the language game because it is the link between the metaphorical and literal uses of terms which enable them to perform their (metaphorical) role in the game.

In principle, every term can be used literally as well as metaphorically and therefore none can be used only metaphorically. When we use a metaphor (e. g. 'lotus-feet'), we encode in it a message, a set of ideas, feelings, etc. Our linguistic practice provides us with a set of rules or guidelines for encoding as well as for decoding the message encoded. These rules or guidelines are nothing but aids for explicating a metaphorical meaning in terms of some literal meaning. In the case of an expression having only metaphorical meaning such rules or guidelines are bound to be non-existent. In their absence, therefore, it would be impossible to encode a message in a metaphor and uncalled-for to decode one, leading to the linguistic misfortune of

making such metaphors speechless : they will cease to be communicative, i. e., usable pieces in the language-game. All this implies that whatever can be said metaphorically can also (though it need not, or not without some difficulty) be said literally. Therefore, whatever can be said, i. e., must be sayable, literally. Since then nothing can be only metaphorically said, no divine truth can be only metaphorically expressed. And if it can be expressed literally in some divine language, then, if the divine language is not made completely uninterpretable in terms of the human language, the divine language cannot be exempt from satisfying the conditions of meaningfulness the human language has to.

God : But is it not true that in your normal, secular, living, you come across or experience things which a metaphorical language can express much more effectively than a literal one can do?

Man : Yes, it is. How can I deny the utility of metaphorical language? The number of occasions on which we find it more successful, appropriate, or apt is legion. What I am questioning is its absolute independence from the literal language and therefore the validity of the claim that divine truths can be expressed in my language *only* metaphorically, which is very different from the claim that they can be expressed metaphorically. I also wish to assert, or rather reassert, that if they are expressed in my language, no matter metaphorically or literally, understanding, explaining, or interpreting the language expressing them will have to be governed by the logic of my language. Therefore, the logic of divine truths, or of the divine language, whatever that may mean, cannot be, if it is to make sense to me, completely different from that of my truths or of my language.

Perhaps it is my finitude which has made me incompetent to clearly see through the (divine) metaphors the divine truths the former reveal. But what I have said above, I must admit, seems fully sensible to me.

God : Yes, your finitude is the root cause of your blurred vision.

Man : This amounts to the indictment that, because I am a finite creature, I cannot really talk to you, or even about you. Perhaps this is what is meant by you when you say that (my) words cannot reach you. But you forget that if I cannot even talk about you, I cannot even think of you; I cannot even think negatively, i.e., think of what you are not. This means I cannot even say (of you) *neṭi, neṭi*. Have I not, then, no alternative but to remain only silent, completely silent ?

God : In a sense, yes. Those who know me know me in complete silence, in a state in which all of their thoughts, desires, aspirations, sensations, etc., become completely stilled.

Man : Stilled to nothingness ? Let me restrict myself to the silencing of thoughts. If I *know* you in a state of having completely silenced all thoughts, how is this *knowledge* different from ignorance ? My thoughts also get silenced when there is nothing to think of. I hope you are not nothing, a vacuum, or *Sūnya*. And, if you are, then you are not the God I need; the God to whom I can address my prayers, whom I can call in my adversities. In fact, then it would not matter to me whether or not there exists such a being, such a *Sūnya*.

God : You have the habit of stretching the rope to the point where it seems (to you) to break. But it does not really break, it slips out of your grasp because of your finitude. I am not nothing : I am the only real being. Did I not tell you that I am not an existent being but existence as such, or rather existence-consciousness-bliss ? Quite early in the conversation I revealed to you this fundamental truth, but you got misled by your reason into vain logical disputations.

Man : Thank you so much for bringing me back to the issue of your existence. I in fact wanted to request you to throw some further light on it. But I could not pursue

no one has the right to deny. This is what I mean by saying that if it is a fundamental truth, then everyone *ought* to know and therefore accept that it is.

God : Suppose I accept what you say. Is it not an obvious, or rather a trivial, claim that everyone *ought* to know or accept what is the (most) fundamental truth ?

Man : Yes, an obvious but not for that reason a trivial one. Definitely not so in your context. I am sure you know that the majority of those who affirm that you exist consists of persons who merely believe, without knowing, that you do. This is not, from the rational point of view, an ideal state of things. But even if we condone it on some pragmatic or utilitarian grounds, we cannot, and ought not to, ignore that the number of those who do not even believe that you exist is legion. It is the existence of such persons, whom we call atheists, or of atheism, which, according to my finite logic, tells on your existence, or on some of the characteristics which have been attributed to you.

God : Well, I am glad that you do not want to ignore the existence of atheists. But how can it tell on my existence, or any one of my powers which you call my attributes ? How can the fact that someone does not believe in the existence of an entity tell on the existence of that entity ? This should be obvious to your (finite) logic.

Man : Since you, once again, have used my logic, I can converse with you as an equal and in a comfortable manner. You are right in saying that anyone's belief or disbelief in the existence of a certain objective thing does not prove or disprove the existence of that thing. The state of belief or disbelief is a mental, psychological, i.e., subjective, state, whereas the existence of an (objective) entity is an objective matter. A subjective state cannot be used as a reason for or against the existence of an objective entity. My mental state of belief that A exists does prove the existence of my belief that A exists, or that a certain cognitive state exists in me, but it cannot prove or disprove that

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A exists. Therefore, that the atheists disbelieve that you exist may also be taken as irrelevant to proving that you do not exist. But, in this case

God : Your logic is really very fair.

Man : Yes, it is, and is always so. 'Unfair logic' is a contradiction in terms. I am really very grateful to you for your compliment to it. It is my only possession which other animals do not have. Therefore, it is naturally very dear to me, so much so that some members of my species are prepared to lose anything whatsoever if required by it but not to dishonour it at any cost. I most humbly and respectfully request you to see that it always gets the regard it deserves, and is never ridiculed.

God : I am never unfair. Proceed with confidence.

Man : When I claimed that the fact that there *are* atheists told on your existence, my claim might have seemed untenable because my argument for it had yet to be given. Atheism would not tell on your existence only if you were treated as similar to an ordinary, mundane, thing. But you are not like any ordinary, mundane, thing.

God : But this is unfair. Your logic should not make any discrimination between my existence and the existence of any other thing as far as the relevance of the belief or disbelief in a thing's existence to proving or disproving its existence is concerned. If the disbelief cannot disprove the existence of an ordinary thing, it cannot, by the same logic, disprove mine.

Man : No, there is nothing unfair in it. I do not want to make any discrimination but only to underline an important distinction between your existence and that of an ordinary thing. In fact, my logic would become unfair to you, or to the world of mundane things, if it ignores this distinction. If I disbelieve that there is any water in the *Gangā* when there is some, it is improper to do so, but the *Gangā*, by herself, does not have the power to correct me and the general effect of the disbelief on my life may be very insignificant, if

you exist, then it is obviously improper to disbelieve that you do. But in your case the impropriety acquires an extraordinary importance because of certain characteristics attributed to you. Since you are considered to be omnipotent you must have the power to make atheism impossible, i.e., to make it impossible that any one of your creatures does the impropriety of disbelieving that you exist and if per chance he does to cure him immediately of the evil. Since the existence of the atheist cannot be denied, it follows that either you do not exist or if you do, you either do not have the power to cure him of his atheism, or you are indifferent to his being an atheist. Lest you may accuse me of being uncharitable to you, I assume that you do exist. But then both of the consequent possibilities would tell on your existence. If you are devoid of the power to correct or cure the atheist, you cease to be omnipotent and therefore cease to be God. We do not need an un-omnipotent God. If you are indifferent to one's being an atheist, this indifference of yours cannot be treated as of no consequence to our conception of your existence.

You are not an ordinary being, but a being we need, a being we ought to adore and respect. Your peculiar relationship which we express sometimes by calling you the creator or ultimate father, generates for us a sacred duty, an unexceptionable obligation, to respect and worship you. To deny the very existence of the being to worship whom is an inviolable duty is, therefore, not simply wrong, but a crime, an evil, a sin. Further, devotion to you is not only a sacred duty but also a great source of genuine, ennobling, happiness. Is it not accepted as an uncontrovertible truth that only he is really happy and free from all worries who completely surrenders himself to you? Therefore, if you are indifferent to my being an atheist, you are indifferent to my being an evil and unhappy person; i.e., you do not care if I follow the path of evil or lead a miserable life. But then you cease to be my God, the God I need,

the kind of being I think God is or ought to be. Rather, a being who is indifferent to evil and unhappiness would not, even in our, the human, world be considered to be an adorable, reverable, being. Some of your children, who care for moral virtue, would not hesitate to call such a being an evil, immoral, being. I want you to exist, and to exist as the most perfect being. But one who is indifferent to the evil of atheism and the consequent unhappiness cannot be a God.

God : Well, if the atheist is unhappy, he is unhappy because he is an atheist, he deserves it.

Man : You say he is unhappy *because* he is an atheist?

God : Yes, if he is unhappy.

Man : Does it mean that the atheist need not be unhappy?

God : Certainly. Is it not a fact that all atheists are not unhappy?

Man : And, you are willing to admit that atheism is an evil?

God : Well, I can say, yes.

Man : All this makes me feel not only frustrated but also very greatly disturbed. It is true that some atheists are happy (and some theists unhappy). But this shows that doing something evil does not always lead to unhappiness. You may say that the atheist's happiness is the result of the (other) good things he does. But this cannot satisfy me because atheism is not an ordinary, trivial, evil. Therefore, the unhappiness which should naturally go with it must not be neutralizable by any set of goods the atheist does or has done.

To conclude, if you exist and are the kind of being we think you are, atheism must at least be one of the greatest evils, if not the greatest of all. Therefore, your inability to eradicate it, or your indifference to its existence, would definitely imply that you are not the all-powerful, all-good, God. That is, the God of our conception, the being we think God is, does not exist. I hope I have now made my point clear that the existence of atheism does tell on your existence.

- God* : Would you mind if I generalise the issue ?
- Man* : I do not know what you mean. But I do not want to be disobedient.
- God* : What I mean is that to ask why I permit the 'evil' of atheism is not very different from asking the general question why I permit any evil at all.
- Man* : I think this is not true. It is not always logically fair to convert a specific question pertaining to a certain issue into a general one pertaining to the class that issue belongs to. The Judge who asks me why did I break my neighbour's costly flower-vase is not asking me why anyone breaks anything, or why I break anything, or even any flower-vase. If I convert his question about my breaking the neighbour's flower-vase into a general one he would very rightly accuse me of side-tracking the issue. But I would still request you to proceed on as you intend to.
- God* : There is a very simple reply to the question why there is any evil at all. What seems to be evil to you may not be really evil.
- Man* : What you say amounts to denying that there is any evil at all, and to declaring that what we call evil is only apparently, not really, evil. This is not to explain, but to explain away, the problem of evil. If you say that our world, the world you have created, or the world in and through which you manifest yourself, contains no evil, if you say that poverty, immature death, disease, torturing the innocent, unhappiness of the virtuous, happiness of the vicious, ingratitude, betrayal in love, etc., are not evil, or do not exist, I would be forced to conclude that there cannot be a dialogue between you and me. This would also mean that you are not the God we need. Take atheism as an example. How can you say that denying the very existence of the being the deiner is obligated to adore and worship is not really evil ? And, if no evil exists but only my perverted perceptions make something which is not really evil seem to be evil, why do you let such things happen ? Why do you let my perceptions be so perverted ?

God : Even if I admit that there are evils, the admission would not necessarily mean that the problem is inexplicable. I can show that there is a point or purpose in the existence of what you call evil. Your awareness or experience of evil may lead you to realise the importance of the good, it may lead you to think of me,

Man : Well, what you say now controverts what you said earlier. You first denied the existence of real evils, and now you seem to be admitting it in admitting that there is a point in it. This amounts to justifying the existence of evils. Such moves in argumentation we call changing sides and do not consider their use a desirable logical practice. But even if I ignore all this, I find it extremely difficult to accept your explanation or justification. The *general* truth that there are evils may be justified on the ground that men think of what is good, or of God, when confronted with evils, but we cannot on this ground justify the existence of each and every evil taken *individually*. The general truth that we commit mistakes may be justified on the ground that mistakes provide opportunities for acquiring authentic knowledge, but we cannot in this way justify each and every individual error we commit. To use what justifies a general truth to justify a particular instance of it is not always a valid logical move. It is very much similar to what we call in our logic the fallacy of division.

I have some doubts about your facts as well. It does not seem to be empirically true that one *must* first suffer some evil in order to realise the value of the good, nor that experience of evil *always* leads him to think of the good, or of you. And, even if the experience of evil has these desirable potentialities, it does not seem to be a good or infallible method of turning one towards the good or even towards you.

When one is suffering from an incurable disease for no fault of his, he may think of you and may even claim of having obtained some knowledge of what you are. But such a state of mind is not the right

state of mind for acquiring an authentic knowledge of anything objective. The hungry man certainly thinks of tasty food, but we would not entrust to him the task of judging whether an edible is really tasty or tasteless, fresh or stale, etc. Moreover, subjecting one to an experience of something evil in order that he turns his attention towards you is definitely not the best way of doing it. You are all-powerful. Why don't you bring into existence a pleasant, a more likable, a less tortuous, avenue to reaching you? Why do you make us bleed in order that we may realise how loving and merciful you are? Do you enjoy our reaching you crying? Many of us do not survive the bleeding. Even if by an effort of will I close what may seem to you to be the vulture's eyes of the logician in me, I find it almost impossible to calm down the throbbings of my heart when I am told that the existence of evils is my good.

God : Well, you forget that there have to be evils because you deserve them, I mean, on account of your own actions. How can you get rid of the consequences of your actions? Does not your logic say, 'As you sow, so you reap'?

Man : I know what you mean: you are referring to *our theory* of Karma. It is a theory which some of us have formulated to explain a set of facts. It is not a statement of fact, nor impeccable even as a theory. But I do not want to discuss with you what the theory can or cannot achieve. It would be more appropriate if I play that game with some other members of my own species, since formulation and examination of theories is a typically human, rational, enterprise. Even a theory of God, a theory concerning you, is a human, and not a divine, affair. But since you have referred to the theory of Karma, I would like to mention that, if our actions alone are responsible for all that we are and all that we enjoy and suffer, then we may not need to believe that you exist. On the other hand, if they are not, the old question why there is evil in world remains still unanswered.

God : It seems your real worry is about the existence of suffering. But won't you admit that some amount of suffering in your world is unavoidable ? Those who have sinned ought to suffer ?

Man : Yes, I do. But this is a cent per cent *human* truth in the sense that its validity does not require any reference to you. We may even call it a moral truism.

God : Yes, you may, But certainly there must be an agency which combines sin with suffering (or virtue with happiness). Sinning does not always in your world automatically ensue in suffering, as one's putting his fingers into fire automatically ensues in burning the fingers. Therefore, there has to be an agency which manages the affairs of the world in such a manner that the sinner get the suffering appropriate to his sin.

Man : What you have said is again an ordinary, empirical, truth of the human world. The pocket which a pick-pocket picks does not then and there hurt his fingers. Therefore, we have instituted certain agencies to investigate crimes and punish criminals. Since people do commit crimes, and criminals ought to be punished, we have to have investigative and punitive agencies. We do not need to postulate a God to ensure the desired link between crime and punishment.

God : But don't you think that your agencies are imperfect with the result that quite often they fail to give to a sinner the punishment he deserves, or get outwitted by him ? Needless to say, no less often they fail to ensure to the virtuous the happiness he is entitled to.

Man : Yes, they are imperfect. But this is not a serious matter since nothing human is perfect even on human standards. Moreover, the *imperfection of human agencies* does not prove that there is a perfect, non-human, divine, agency. It is wrong to infer from the truth that there is no human agency which is perfect the purported truth that there is some divine agency which is.

It is obviously true that human agencies are fallible, but it is also true that they are improvable. One who, on some other considerations, does not find

it necessary to believe that you exist, may find in their improbability a good ground for hoping that with appropriate efforts, they may be made efficient enough to ensure that the sinner and virtuous always, or almost always, get what they deserve. If he is a tough-minded empiricist, he may consider such a state of affairs completely satisfying and may not consider the lack of absolute infallibility of human agencies a misfortune, or a reason for falling back on you. On the other hand, if one believes, on some other grounds, that you exist, then he would find no difficulty in believing further that those who do not get their due through human agencies will certainly get it through you, since by definition you are infallible or perfect. But in neither case the fallibility of human agencies could be a reason for believing in your existence. It may generate a wish to have such a belief, or a wish that you exist, but a *wish* is not a *reason*, nor can it be a valid *ground* for any belief.

Moreover, the purpose of making one undergo some suffering because he deserves it can be fulfilled only if he is made to realise, or at least told, that he deserves it, otherwise he may feel that in being punished he is being wronged. That is why we try to convince the criminal that he deserves to be punished and give him a chance to defend himself. But, even if we assume that you are an infallible judge, is it not true that you do not tell us clearly that we deserve the sufferings we are undergoing? What most often happens is that when a theist is not able to locate a cause of his sufferings, or cannot think of having deserved them, he consoles himself by thinking that you have given them to him for some faults of his unknown to him. There is nothing surprising here since he is already a theist. I admit, however, that even a tender-minded non-believer, in such circumstances, may think like a theist, and may ultimately become one. Perhaps most of us become theists in this manner : we suffer for no known fault

of ours, feel utterly weak and helpless, and then start thinking or wishing that there must be some God who is punishing us for some unknown faults of ours and will also help us out. But you must realise that this is not knowing but only wishing that you exist, or hoping that you would help us out.

God : But there is another aspect of suffering which must not be ignored. You yourself must have realised that it purifies the whole being of the sufferer. It washes off the dirt sticking to his heart and mind and soul, and makes him very intensely and sincerely long for me. He may cry for help, but a purified soul's cry is not like that of a criminal for being let off unpunished. It is like the moving cry of a hungry, innocent, baby for the lap of his loving mother. The mother cannot, as you know, resist her baby's cry.

Man : Suffering no doubt sometimes purifies the sufferer, but there is no guarantee that it would always do. It may even make him dirtier, and our experience shows that sometimes it does. The saying 'there is no sin which a starving soul may not commit, points to this truth of the human world. An experience of suffering, moreover, is very likely to produce in the sufferer a state of imbalance, mental or physical. To subject anyone to such a state does not seem to me a good means for effecting his purification. It even appears to be discordant with your boundless love and compassion for us, the unfortunate sufferers.

God : Your worry, I repeat, is the result of your finite, limited understanding. You can compensate for it only by having faith in my compassion, my love, for you.

Man : But I find it not very easy to have faith in your compassion though I very much wish to. It is very difficult for me to understand why a God, whose compassion and love for his children are boundless, has to use suffering to purify them. What sort of love has a mother got for her baby if she first lets him suffer the pangs of starvation so that he may get purified, and only then,

if he survives and crawls into her lap, she puts into his mouth the nipples of her breasts which, she says, are always overflowing with milk?

You also said that I suffer because I deserve to, and therefore my suffering is not without any reason. It seems thus that you first let me do something which earns for me some suffering, and then make that suffering a means to my purification and provide an opportunity for realising that your compassion for me is boundless. Whatever I do I do because you let me do it. Why do not you let me do only good things so that I may not deserve any suffering? Why do you not let my experience of joy and peace be the means to my purification, the stream which takes me direct into the ocean of bliss your boundless compassion is said to be? You first let Rāvaṇa have so many vices, let him even abduct the helpless Sitā, and then make him suffer death to get his soul purified!

God : But you know that in suffering death at my hands he reached me and get his final salvation.

Man : But is it the best way to give salvation? If this is your līlā, I must say it is something completely incomprehensible to me.

God : May be it is. 'Līlā' is your term, and you describe my workings as Līlā when you do not understand them.

Man :

God : Don't loose heart. I am with you.

Man : Thank you. I have been told your help is available to all who earn for it, even to the most fallen creature.

God : Yes, it is. Did I not give salvation to Ajāmila, the debauch Brāhmin? I am always waiting to offer my helping hand to those who *sincerely* seek it. You know I saved the drowning elephant from the clutches of the cruel crocodile, and incarnated myself in Draupadi's sārī to make the devil Dussāsana's attempts to derobe her all vain.

Man : Yes, I know these stories. They do make me feel encouraged to approach you for help, but they also

cause in me a logical tension. I hope you won't mind if I

God : Feel free and cheerful, speak fearlessly.

Man : You said a little while ago that our sufferings and happinesses were all due to our Karmas. I hope you recollect my submission to you that then we would not need to make any reference to you to explain any suffering or happiness, past or present, or an appeal to you either for escaping an anticipated suffering or for being ensured of a desired happiness. Secondly, since every suffering or happiness would be one we deserved to have, it would be unfair on your part to help anyone of us escape a deserved suffering or enjoy a desired (but undeserved) happiness. Take the case of the mythological elephant. The suffering he was undergoing when dragged into the river by the crocodile must have been the result of some Karma of his and therefore one he deserved. Then, why did you let your compassion interfere with course of nature, by helping him out, when nature was proceeding as it ought to have ? Why did you not let the elephant have what he deserved ? If you can grant to us what we do not deserve, or may not let us have what we do, we shall certainly need you. But will not all this be extremely unreasonable ?

God : Not at all. There is nothing unreasonable in rushing to help my devotees, the creatures who have surrendered themselves completely to my care.

Man : But why should you help your devotees ? You should let every creature have (or give to him, as a devotee may prefer to put it) what he deserves in virtue of his actions or abilities, and not what he wants to have simply because he is your devotee. Theists or atheists, devotees or non-devotees, should get what they deserve and nothing else. In the human world we do consider such a state of affairs better than that in which one, who is in a position to, offers some benefit to another person because the latter is devoted to him and denies it to someone else because he is not.

God : Yes, this may be true of your world. But don't you think that a world absolutely rigidly governed by what you call the law of justice, admitting of no exception, no flexibility, will be a very dull and dreary world ? This will be a world devoid of freedom, forgiveness and compassion. I love my children, and if I see anyone of them crying for help and wholly dependent upon me, anyone sincerely and unconditionally loving me, I do not calculate the relative weightage of his vices and virtues to determine the consequent punishment and reward he deserves. In fact, my love for my children is never in arithmetical proportion to theirs for me : I do not play a game of barter with them, I love them, and for no reason. Should not the father of the world be always watching how his children are and always be by their side to help them in moments of need ? Or, should he act like a bank cashier who, before making payment to a customer in lieu of his cheque, always consults his ledger to check whether or not he has the required balance to his credit ? Will he then be the father of the world, the creator, the God you worship ?

Man : If one gets *all* that he deserves and *only* that which he deserves, the world will become inflexible no doubt, but not on that account a bad world. On the other hand, if there is no inflexible link between what he deserves and what he actually gets, will not what he may get become uncertain and unpredictable ? A world in which both Ajāmila and Prahalāda can get salvation is not an easily intelligible world. Life in such a world is likely to be very precarious. One may hope and therefore try to get anything, irrespective of his deserving or not deserving it.

God : No, it will not be precarious at all. My compassion cannot lead to anything undesirable.

Man : But why may it not ?

God : Don't ask for a reason ; have faith in me.

Man : I do want to have faith in you. But my faith can be

an unfailing source of strength to me only if it is in consonance with my reason. I am sorry to say that our dialogue so far has not been able to remove, or even pacify, the doubts which I had before we agreed to converse with each other. Faith can survive only if it recognises the existence of doubts and their important role in human life, and either solves them or at least removes their discordance with itself. It cannot make them ineffective by simply ignoring their existence or importance. They have the tendency to re-create themselves and the tenacity to raise their unpleasant voice any time if they are not given a fair treatment.

God : Your doubts are the children of your reason. You want to base your faith in me on what your reason has to say about me. That is a wrong ladder to reach me. Reason will land you in self-contradictory situations. Silence your reason first, and then you will understand what I mean to you.

Man : But who has given to me my reason, my critical and argumentative ability ? Is it not you ? I have been told by a well-respected child of yours that it is man's rationality which distinguishes him from other animals. If reason stops me from reaching you, why did you create it ? Why did you make it my differentium ? Cannot you kill it even now ? My puzzle about your reality now becomes more puzzling : You have given to me a pair of glasses which, on your own admission, do not let me see you, or force me to see you wrongly. But most of us cannot see anything without using these glasses. You might have given to some favourite children of yours some different pairs of glasses. But why not to all the same type of glasses ? Is it not unfair to give to a child a wrong pair of glasses which he cannot dispense with and then to tell him that he himself is responsible for his not being able to see what he ought to see, what is present everywhere, in everything ? If I cannot silence my reason, why don't you do that, and open up a new window in me ?

God : Be patient. Don't you notice in yourself a vague feeling that I must be and be the being I am ? Nurture and strengthen that feeling.

Man : Perhaps I so. But I notice in me vague feelings about many things which do not exist. How to say that my feeling concerning you is different from other such feelings ? Moreover, this feeling may just be an unconscious expression of the wish that you exist. How can I take it, then, as an infallible pointer to your objective reality ?

God : Try to follow the feeling.

Man : Follow this vague, unclear, feeling ? You are advising me to follow a leader I do not clearly see where his foot-steps are leading me to.

God : But reason, whose foot-steps are clear, cannot lead you to me.

Man : That may be true. Perhaps reason cannot demonstrate that you exist, or that anything whatsoever, which exists, exists. But you are said to be self-revealing. Why don't you reveal your existence clearly and unambiguously so that I do not have to be led by my vague feeling and my reason gets no chance to block my vision ? This will be the greatest act of kindness you can do to your creatures.

God :

Man : Once again you have become silent. Are you angry ? Displeased ? You say you never are.

God : No. I am not. I do reveal myself to some.

Man : But why only to some ? Why not to all ?

God :

Man : I see that on this matter even the God of my creation does not want to speak to me.

God : I reveal myself to those who seek me.

Man : But why only to them ? The belief that you exist is a belief which, if you exist, ought to be held by every one. Then, why do you not help everyone to have it by revealing your existence ? If you do, all doubts and

disputation concerning you will come to an end, giving to the human soul the peace and tranquility it so badly needs. I pray, eradicate from our minds our scepticism, our agnosticism, our atheism, and eradicate even their possibilities. If you give us only one blessing, the blessing of having indubitable knowledge of your existence, we may not ask for anything else. This knowledge will solve all our problems and puzzles.

God : You must then seek, yearn for, me.

Man : How can I seek, yearn for, one whose very existence is in doubt. ?

God : Knowing that I exist, knowine what I am, is the consummation of your seeking, of your *sādhana*. You are treating it as a precondition of your seeking. That is wrong.

Man : But how can I seek you if I so not even believe that you exist? All I can do is to *assume* that you exist, and then seek you. But, I must say, to seek persistently what has been only assumed to exist is neither rational nor natural.

God : Don't feel pessimistic. You can if you try sincerely.

Man : Now I want to shake off my humility and assert that I have been yearning very sincerely and intensely, since ages, for being blessed with at least the justified belief that you exist and have all the possible excellences. But it seems I am still almost at the same point I started my journey from.

God : Your seeking is not as intense or sincere as it ought to be.

Man : But who decides that it is not? I do feel that it is, and if you find that it is not, why don't you change my thinking to the effect that I also find that it is not? If you did, I would have had no cause for complaint. You seem to allow me to think that my seeking is intense and sincere, and decide yourself that it is not, without revealing to me your decision and its grounds. Naturally all this is likely to make me an anguished atheist, or at least an unhappy agnostic.

God :

Man : Perhaps your silence should not annoy me any more. I created you and gave to you all the powers that my head and heart enabled me to. But still you could not satisfy me, my reason, my logic, my heart. Perhaps I should suppress or silence the voice of reason which my logic is. But I cannot do that unless you help me to. I am not even fully convinced that it ought to be silenced. And, being a rational animal, as I am condemned to be, I cannot create an illogical but perfect being.

God :

Man : I do still *want to believe* that you exist and have all the perfections, even though some of us would say that wanting to believe makes no sense.

God :

Man : Perhaps this is the time for closing our dialogue. Mayn't I hope that you would condescend to speak a little more clearly when we decide to converse again some time later ?

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