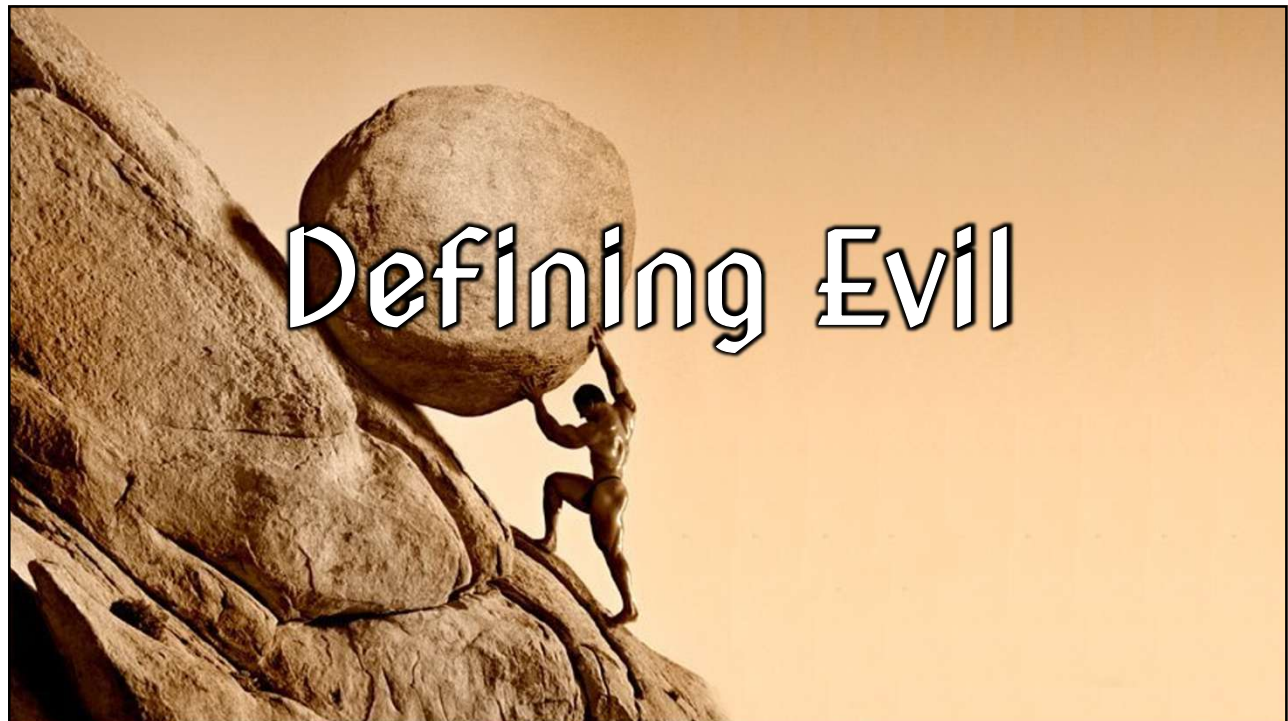


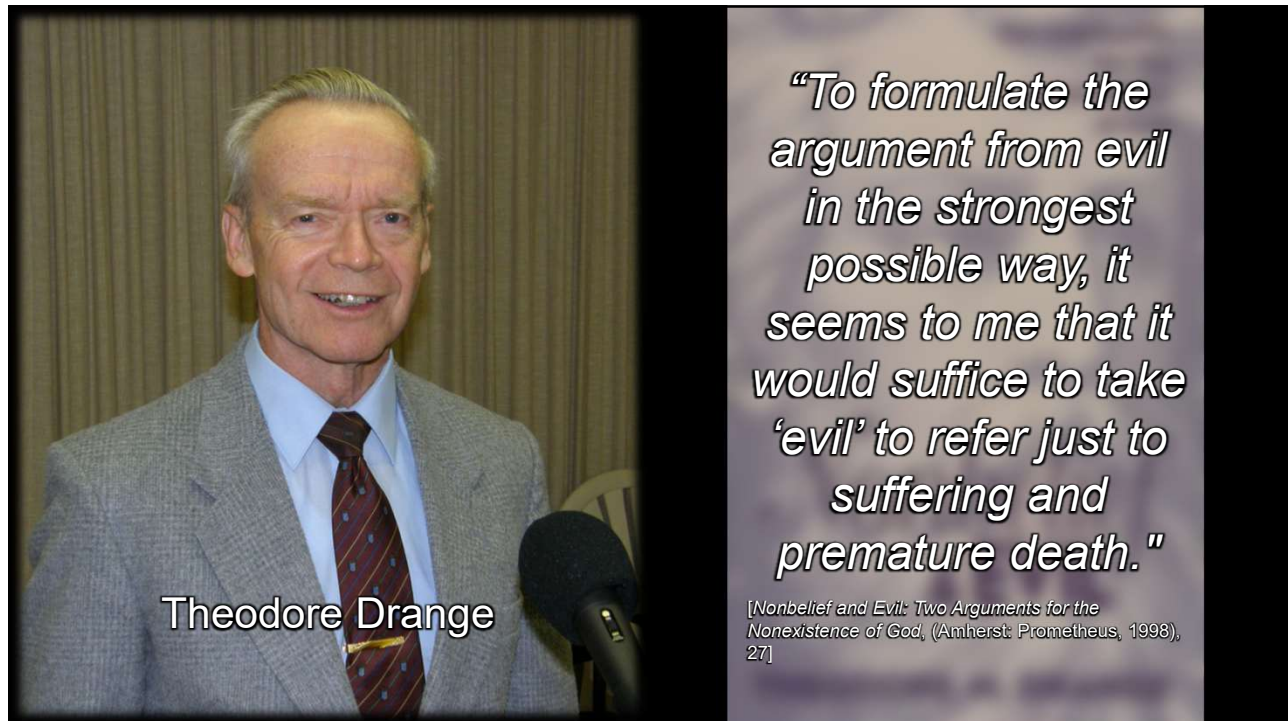
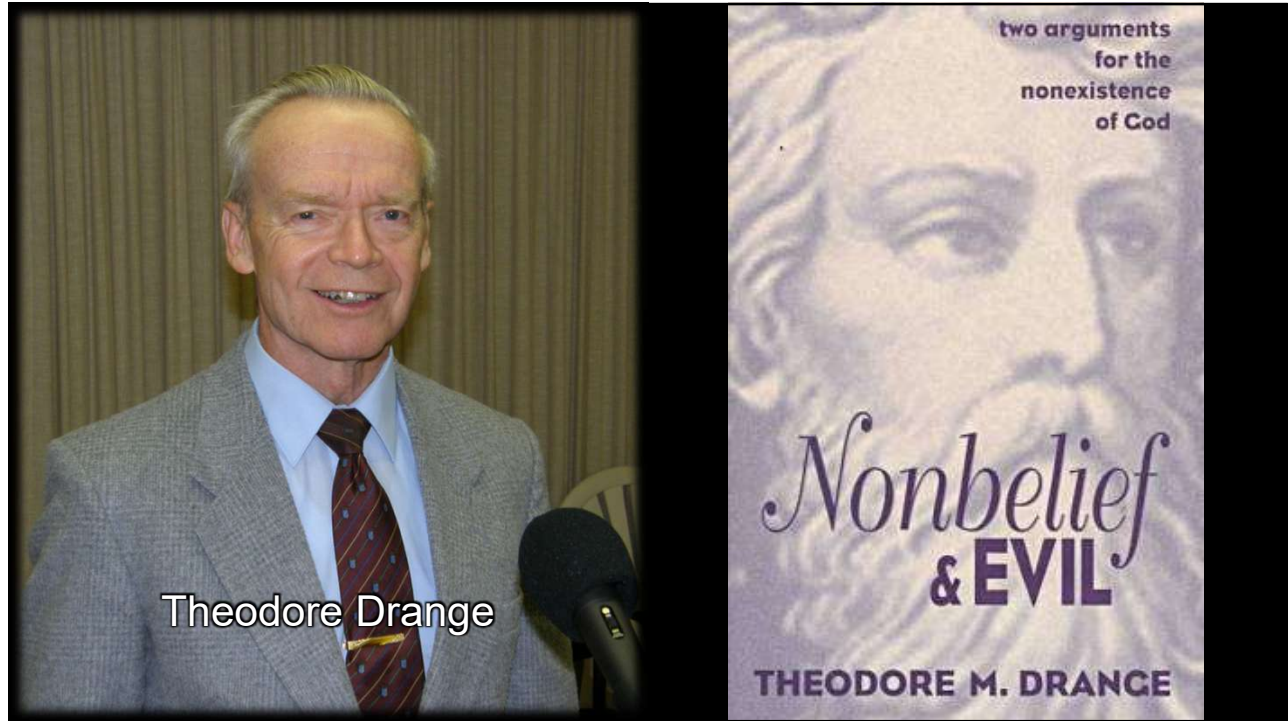
Andrea M. Weisberger
Chap. 10: "The
Argument from Evil"



Defining Evil

In contemporary philosophy, evil usually has to do with suffering, and death.

This definition of evil in contemporary philosophy differs from the definition of evil in the Classical / Scholastic (i.e., Aristotelian / Augustinian / Thomistic) tradition.



Note that Drange (similar to other contemporary philosophers) does not distinguish 'evil' and 'moral evil'.

"To formulate the argument from evil in the strongest possible way, it seems to me that it would suffice to take 'evil' to refer just to suffering and premature death."

[Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God, (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), 27]

As such, while wanting to make an argument that leads to a conclusion about the nature of reality, i.e., whether God does or does not exist, he never connects his definition of evil to either the nature of human beings or to the nature of reality as such but only to the experience humans have of reality.

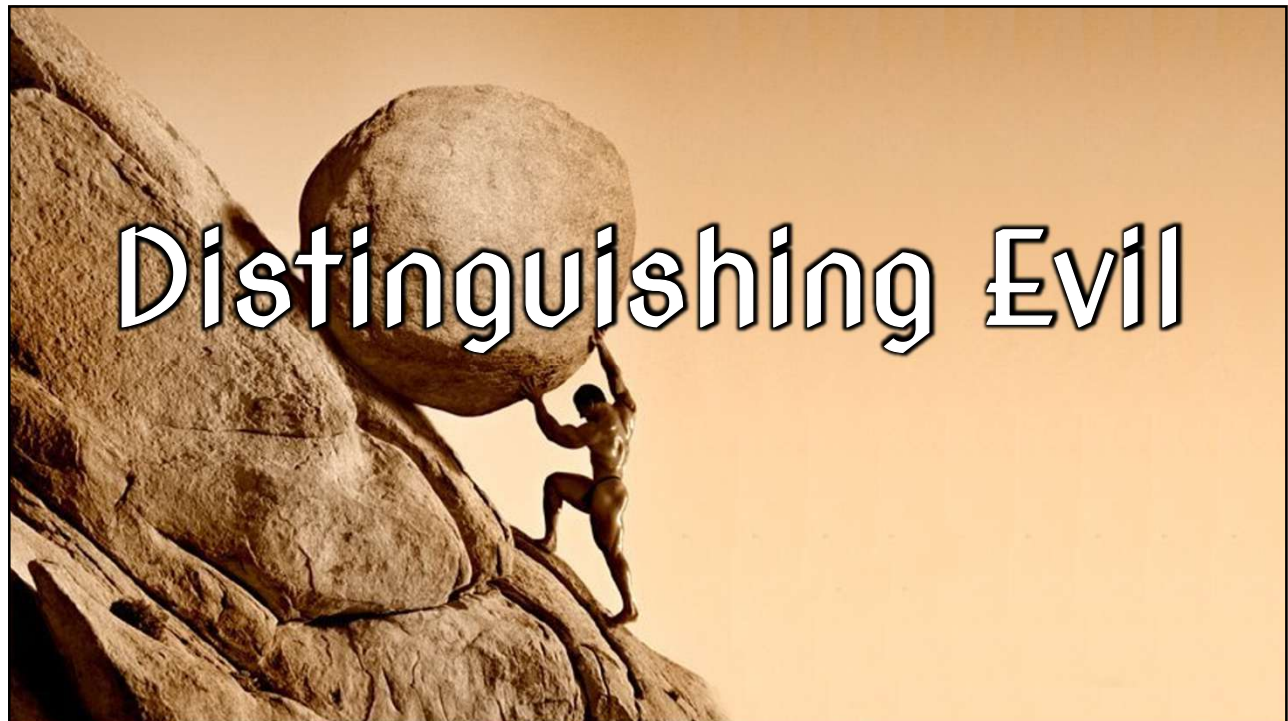
"To formulate the argument from evil in the strongest possible way, it seems to me that it would suffice to take 'evil' to refer just to suffering and premature death."

[Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God, (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), 27]

To claim that certain philosophers fail to distinguish between 'evil' and 'moral evil' is not to say that such philosophers fail to make other distinctions in their definition of evil.

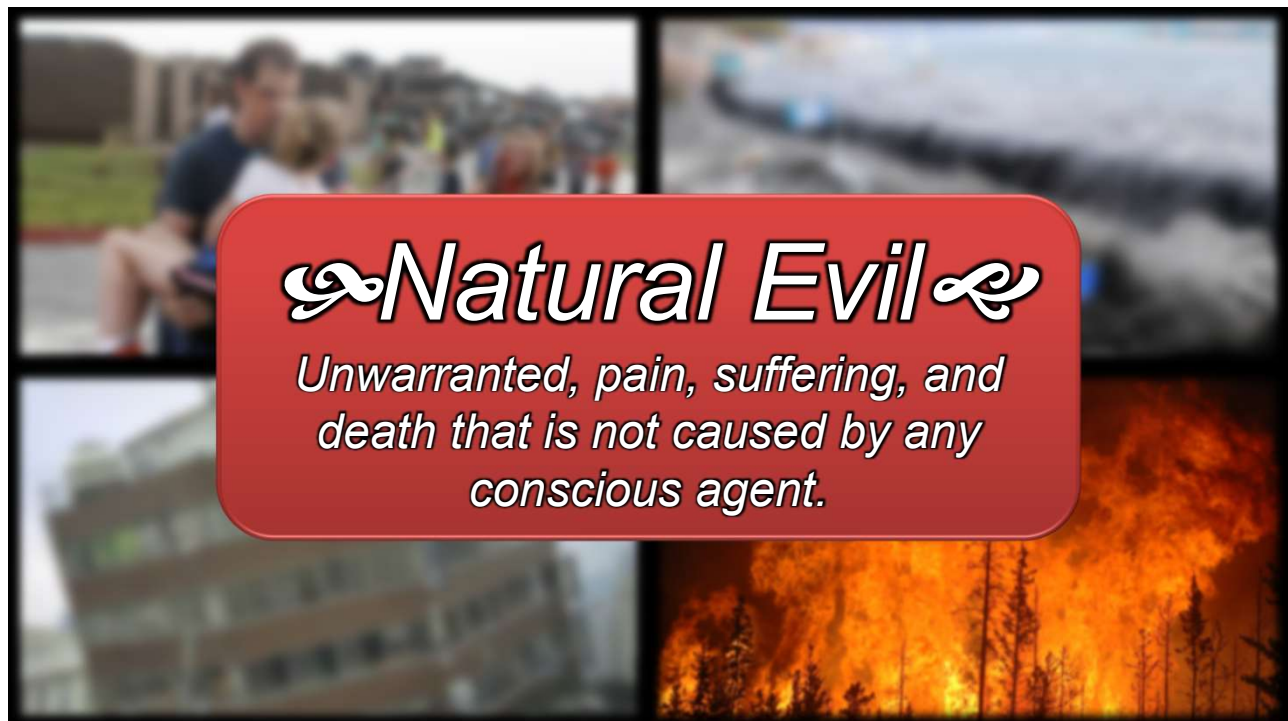
"To formulate the argument from evil in the strongest possible way, it seems to me that it would suffice to take 'evil' to refer just to suffering and premature death."

[Nonbelief and Evil: Two Arguments for the Nonexistence of God, (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), 27]



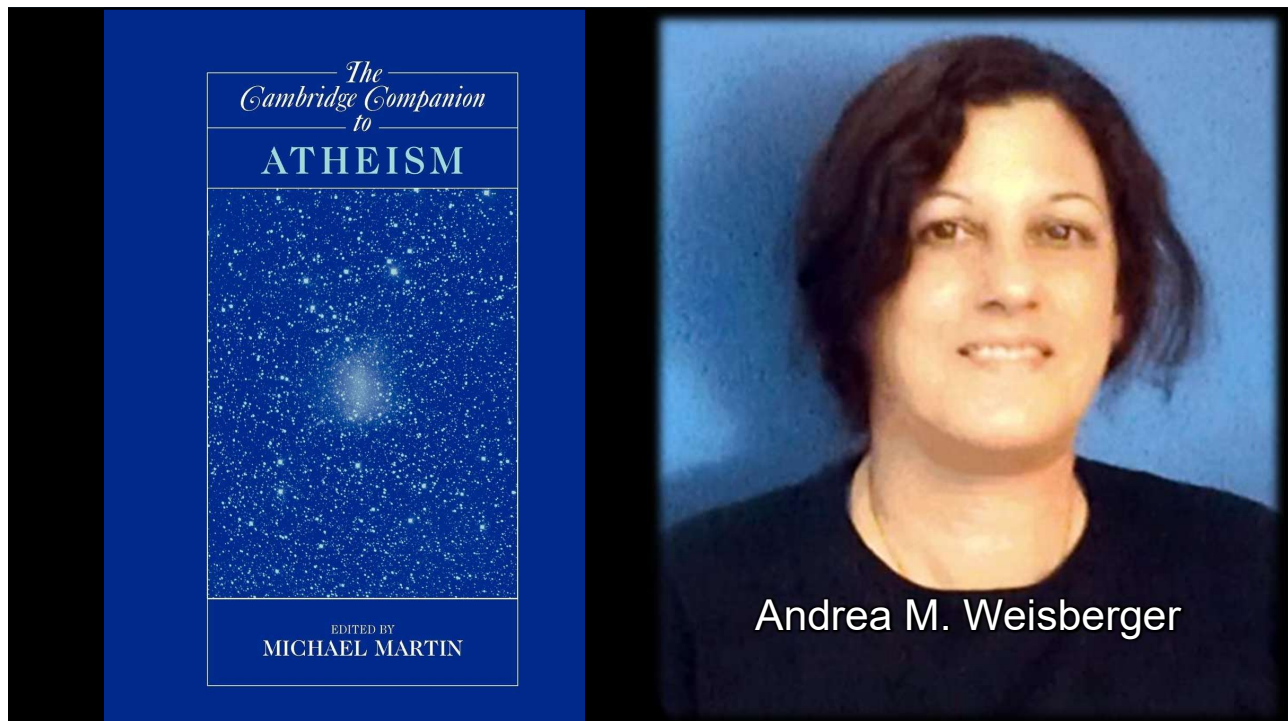
*One of the most common distinctions contemporary philosophers make regarding evil is between **natural evil** and **moral evil**.*

∞ Natural Evil ∞



Moral Evil





*"The existence of evil is the most fundamental threat to **the traditional Western concept** of an all-good, all-powerful God.*



Andrea M. Weisberger

*"Both natural evil, the suffering that occurs as a result of physical phenomena, and moral evil, the suffering resulting from human actions, comprise the **problem of evil.***



Andrea M. Weisberger

*"If evil cannot be accounted for, then belief in **the traditional Western concept** of God is absurd."*


[Andrea M. Weisberger, "The Argument from Evil," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 166, emphasis in original]



Andrea M. Weisberger


*"If evil cannot be accounted for, then belief in **the traditional Western concept** of God is absurd."*

[Andrea M. Weisberger, "The Argument from Evil," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 166, emphasis in original]



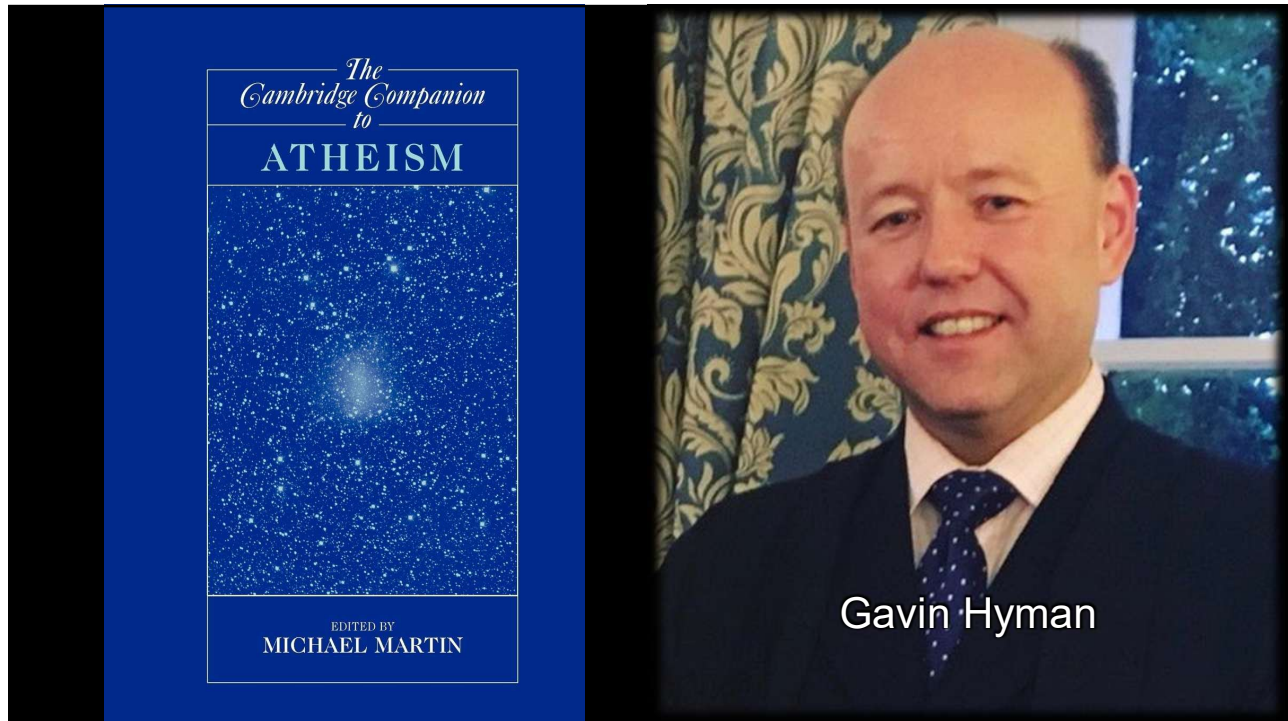
Andrea M. Weisberger

*"The existence of evil is **the most fundamental threat to the traditional Western concept** of an all-good, all-powerful God."*



Andrea M. Weisberger

In Weisberger's article, there seems to be nothing that would make one think that her "traditional Western concept" of God has anything to do with the classical concept of God, i.e., the God of Classical Theism in the tradition of Aquinas. In this regard, one would do well to heed the observation of Gavin Hyman.



Gavin Hyman



Gavin Hyman

"Many have claimed that this was indeed the case, to such an extent that the modern God was a 'thing' quite different from the premodern God. Indeed, to say that the modern God was a 'thing' in many ways captures the distinction; for premodern theology, God was not a 'thing' at all.

Gavin Hyman

"The transition can perhaps best be understood in terms of a corresponding transition in the use of language. ... Although Aquinas' teaching on analogical language is well known, its centrality and ubiquity with respect to all his other teachings has not been appreciated."

Gavin Hyman

"For Aquinas, the fundamental problem with language is that it has been developed by creatures to refer to creaturely things. It is therefore inadequate—and potentially misleading—when applied to God.



Gavin Hyman

If we are to avoid the conclusion that nothing whatsoever can be said about God, then we must at least recognize that our language can be applied to God only in a highly qualified and provisional way.



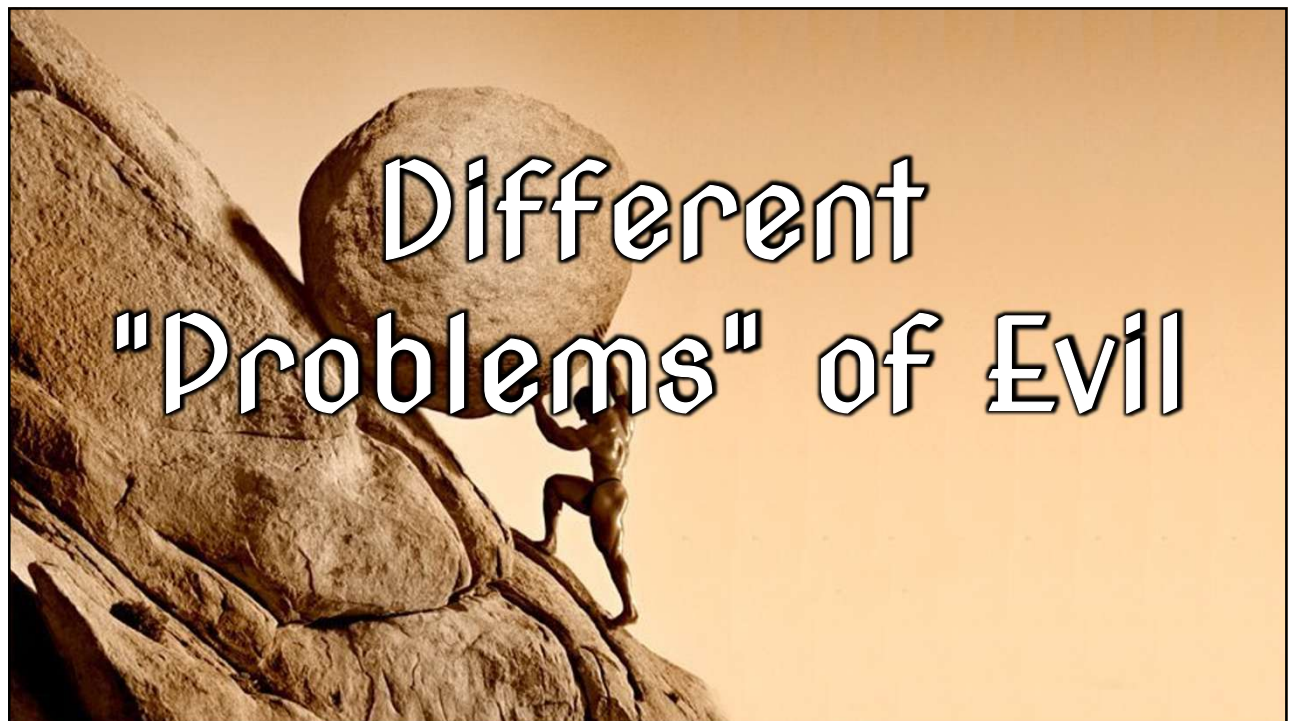
Gavin Hyman

We cannot imagine that our language refers to God in the same way that it refers to things in the world. This conviction lies at the heart of Aquinas' teachings on analogy."

[Gavin Hyman, "Atheism in Modern History," in *Cambridge Companion*, 37, emphasis added]



Gavin Hyman



Different
"Problems" of Evil

The Logical Problem of Evil

*The logical problem of evil is
notion that the propositions
“God exists”
and
“Evil exists”
are **logically** incompatible.*

The Cambridge Companion
ATHEISM
"The deductive argument from evil claims that there is a contradiction inherent in affirming both the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and wholly good God and the existence of evil."

[Weisberger, "Argument," *Cambridge Companion*, 167]

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MICHAEL MARTIN



Andrea M. Weisberger

The Cambridge Companion
ATHEISM
The basic intuition of the inconsistency involved in the problem of evil is captured by the following formulation, from Michael Martin:

1. God is all-powerful.
2. God is all good.
3. Evil exists in great abundance.

[Weisberger, "Argument," *Cambridge Companion*, 166]

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Andrea M. Weisberger

The Cambridge Companion
ATHEISM

Most philosophers today agree that ... surely no direct contradiction is generated by the three premises, without the addition of qualifying statements."

[Weisberger, "Argument," *Cambridge Companion*, 167]

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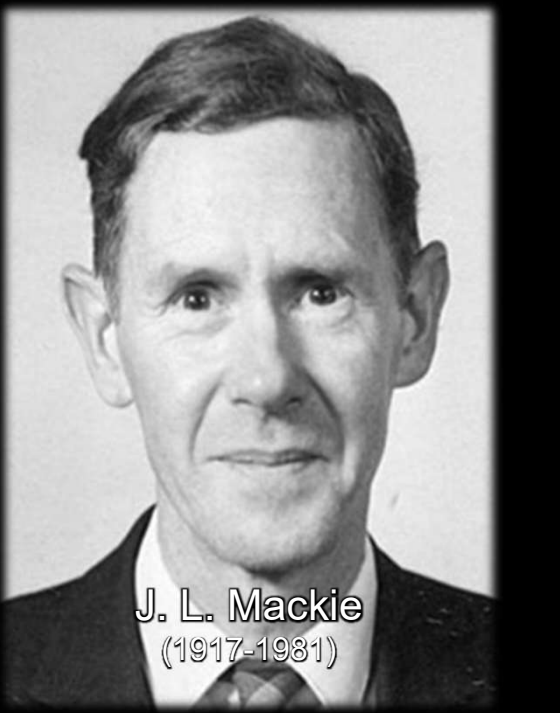


Andrea M. Weisberger

J.L. Mackie

**THE
MIRACLE
OF
THEISM**

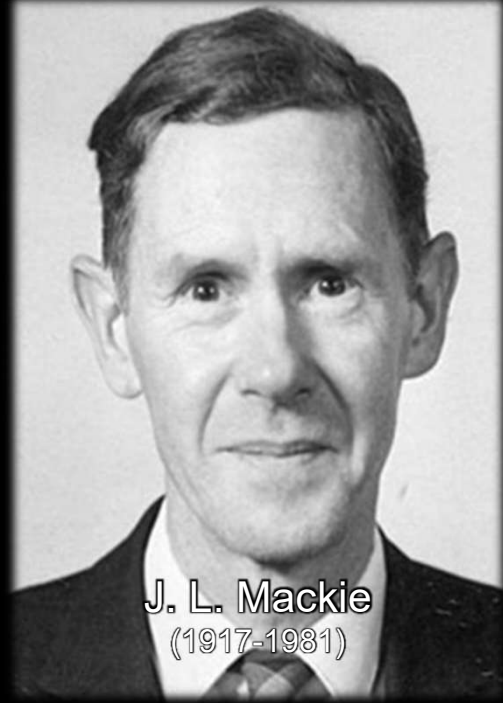
Arguments for
and against the
Existence of
God



J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

**"We can concede
that the problem of
evil does not, after
all, show that the
central doctrines
of theism are
logically
inconsistent with
one another."**

[*The Miracle of Theism*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1982), 154]



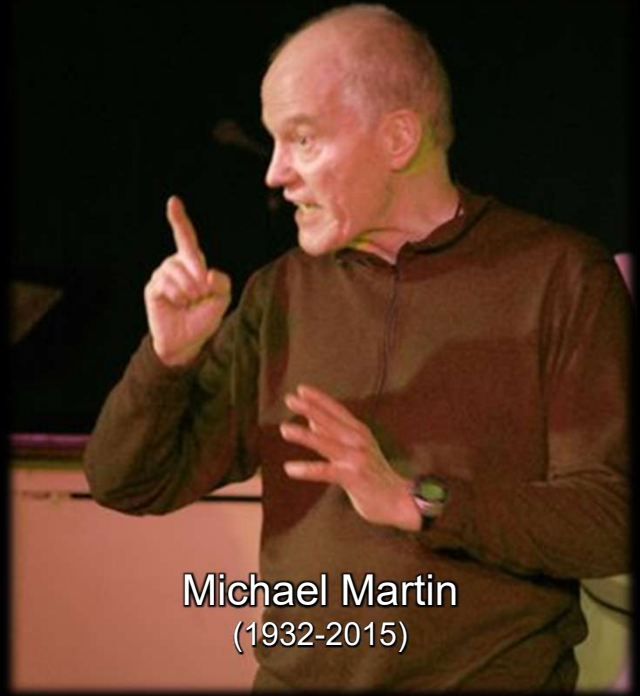
J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

A·T·H·E·I·S·M

A Philosophical Justification



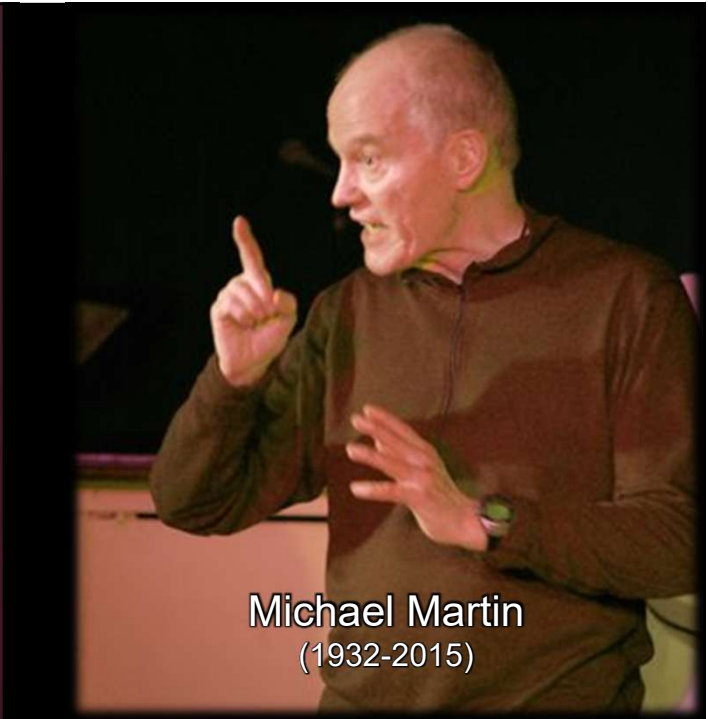
MICHAEL MARTIN



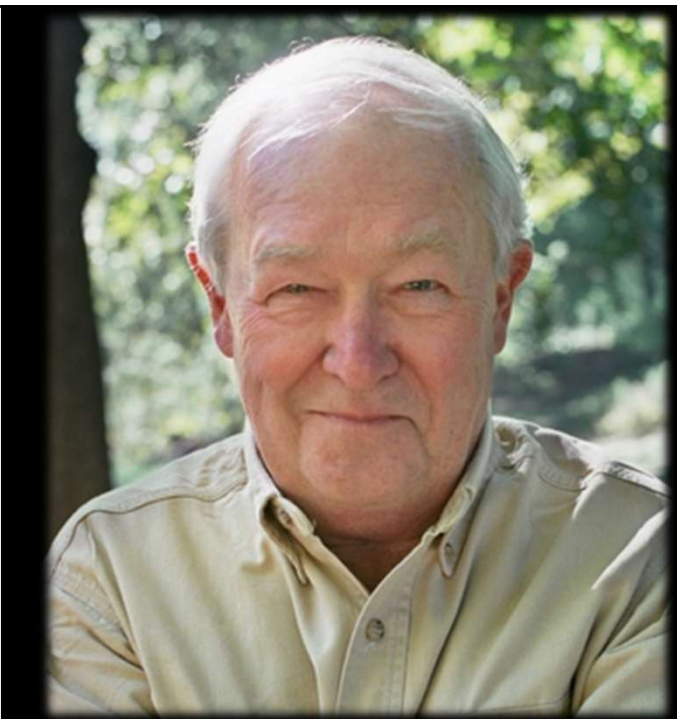
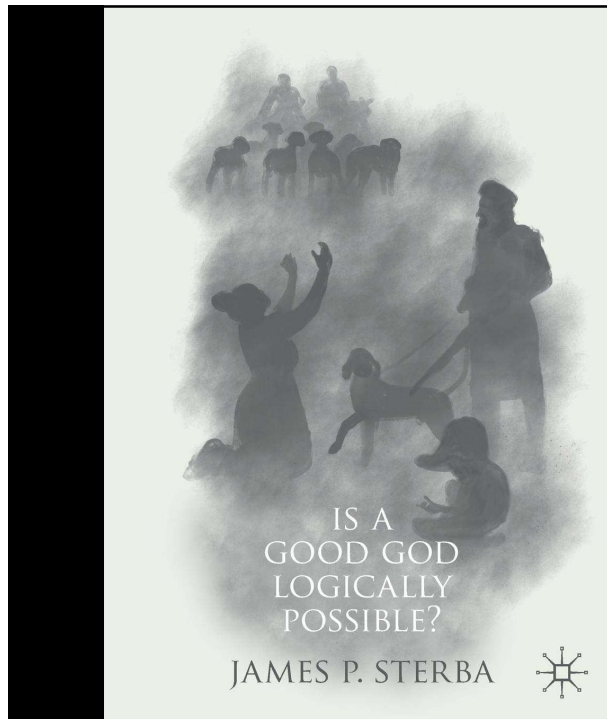
Michael Martin
(1932-2015)

"Because of the failure of deductive arguments from evil, atheologists have developed inductive or probabilistic arguments from evil for the nonexistence of God."

[Atheism: A Philosophical Justification, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 335]



Michael Martin
(1932-2015)



THE
PHILOSOPHICAL
QUARTERLY

Vol. 10 No. 39 APRIL 1960

GOD AND EVIL

A. THE PROBLEM STATED :

Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand, and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other. God cannot be both all-powerful and perfectly good if evil is real. This contradiction is well set out in its detail by Mackie in his discussion of the problem.¹ In his discussion Mackie seeks to show that this contradiction cannot be resolved in terms of man's free will. In arguing in this way Mackie neglects a large number of important points, and concedes far too much to the theist. He implicitly allows that whilst physical evil creates a problem, this problem is reducible to the problem of moral evil and that therefore the satisfactoriness of solutions of the problem of evil turns on the compatibility of free will and absolute goodness. In fact physical evils create a number of distinct problems which are not reducible to the problem of moral evil. Further, the proposed solution of the problem of moral evil in terms of free will renders the attempt to account for physical evil in terms of moral good, and the attempt thereby to reduce the problem of evil to the problem of moral evil, completely untenable. Moreover, the account of moral evil in terms of free will breaks down on more obvious and less disputable grounds than those indicated by Mackie. Moral evil can be shown to remain a problem whether or not free will is compatible with absolute goodness. I therefore propose in this paper to reopen the discussion of "the problem of evil", by approaching it from a more general standpoint, examining a wider variety of solutions than those considered by Mackie and his critics.

¹ "Evil and Omnipotence", *Mind*, 1955.

"Evil is a problem for the theist in that a contradiction is involved in the fact of evil on the one hand and the belief in the omnipotence and perfection of God on the other."

[H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 10, no. 39 (April 1960): 97-114]

WRITINGS
VIDEOS
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RECOMMENDATIONS

Richard Carrier

→ Blogs

ABOUT
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Is a Good God Logically Impossible?

BY RICHARD CARRIER / ON AUGUST 27, 2019 / 6 COMMENTS

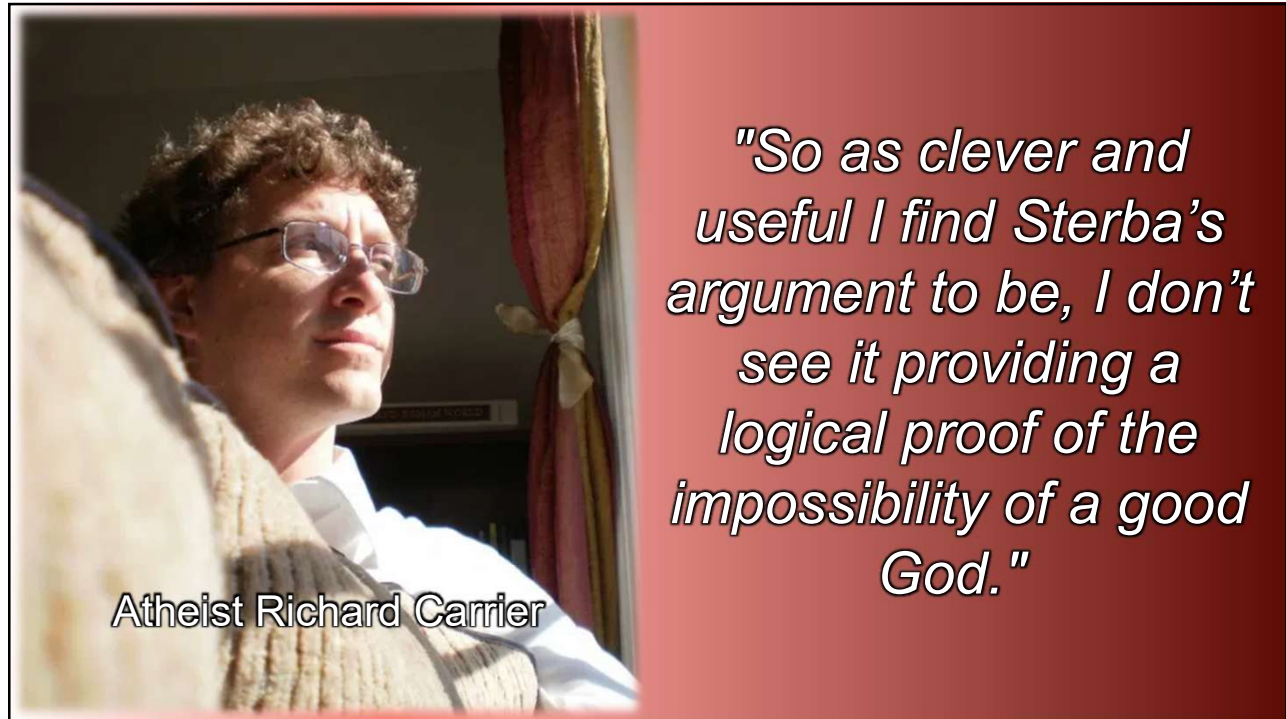
Philosopher James Sterba just came out with [a book of that title](#), arguing for the conclusion that a good God is logically impossible, given present observations. At the same time, Michael Shermer and Brian Huffling published in *Skeptic Magazine* a closing exchange in reaction to their debate on the same question.

Both are very interesting reads; Sterba's even quite useful, if you want to hone your ability to explain why the Argument from Evil cannot be dismissed with any of the tactics delusional

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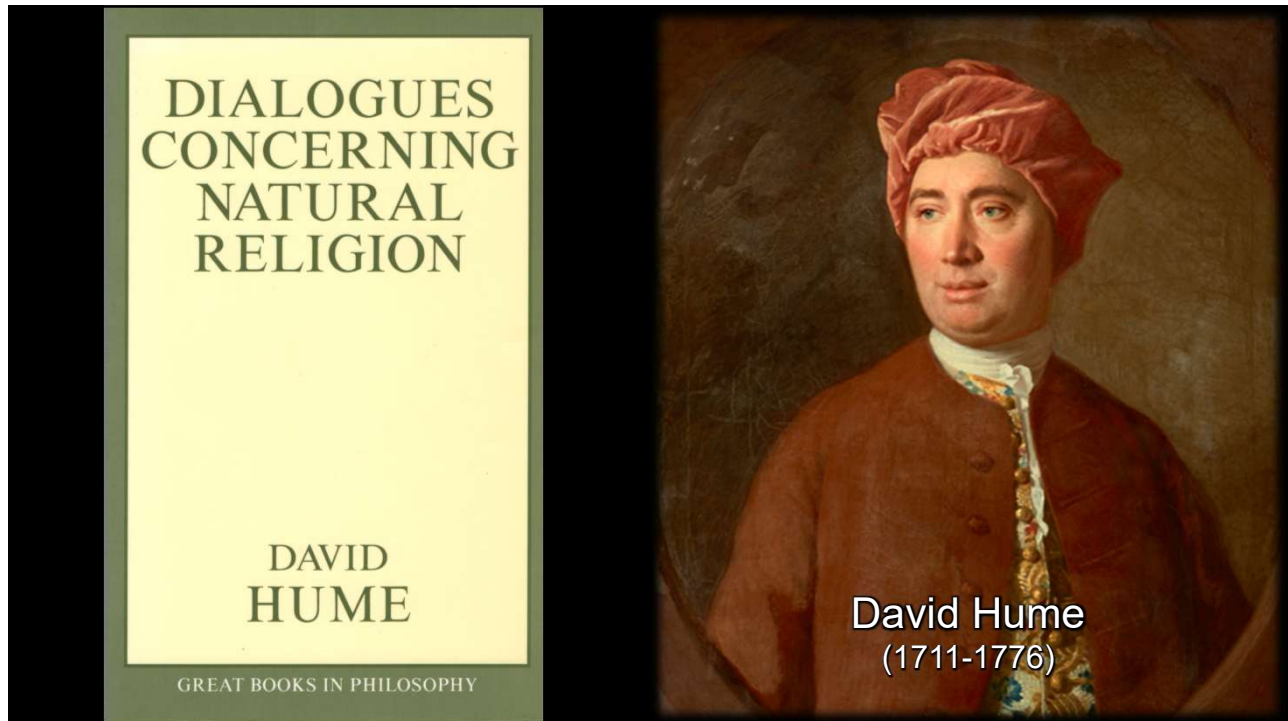
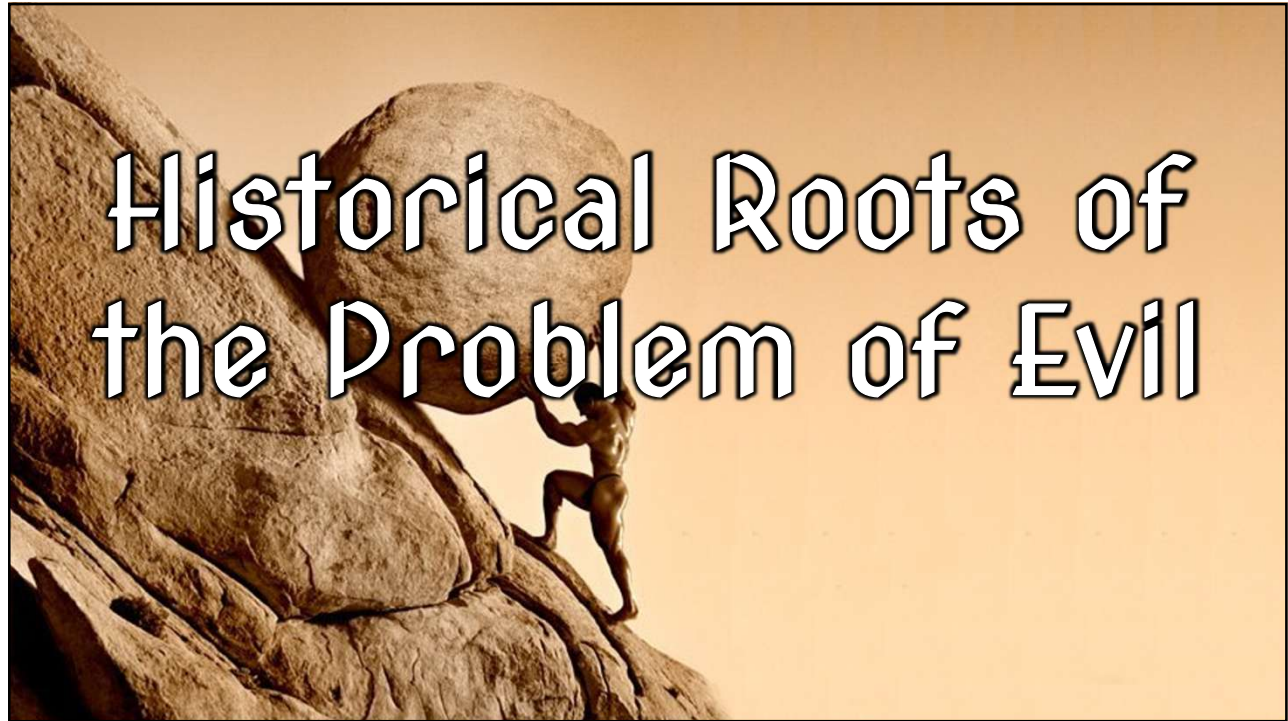
*The Pastoral
(Existential)
Problem of Evil*



*The Philosophical
Problem of Evil*

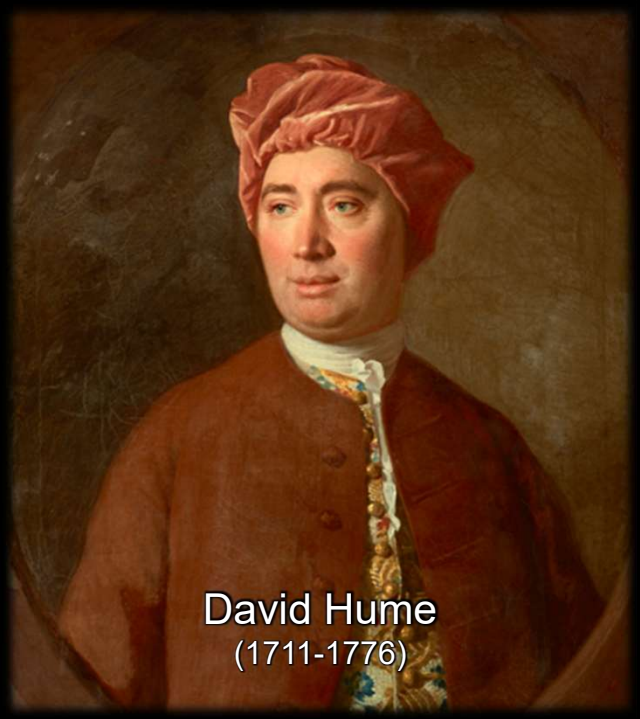


*The a.k.a. Inductive or
Evidential or Moral
Problem of Evil*

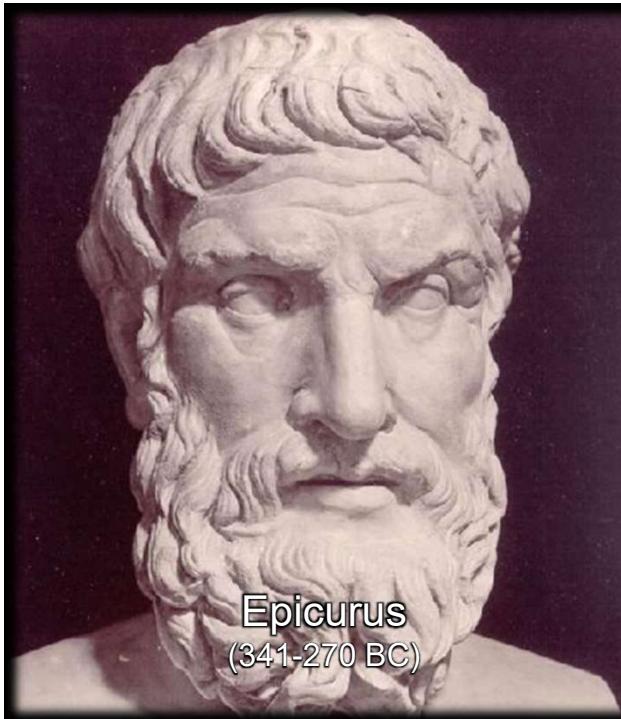


Philo: "Epicurus' old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"

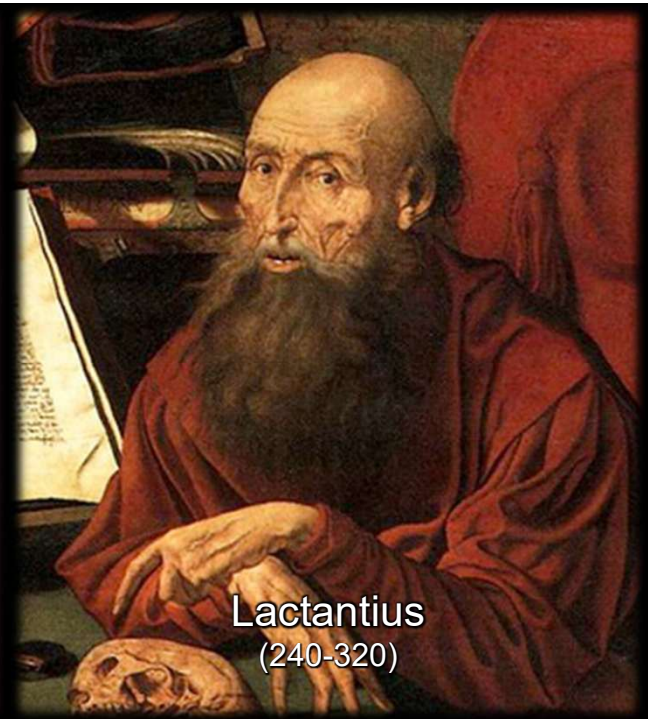
[*Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*
(Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1989), 84]



David Hume
(1711-1776)

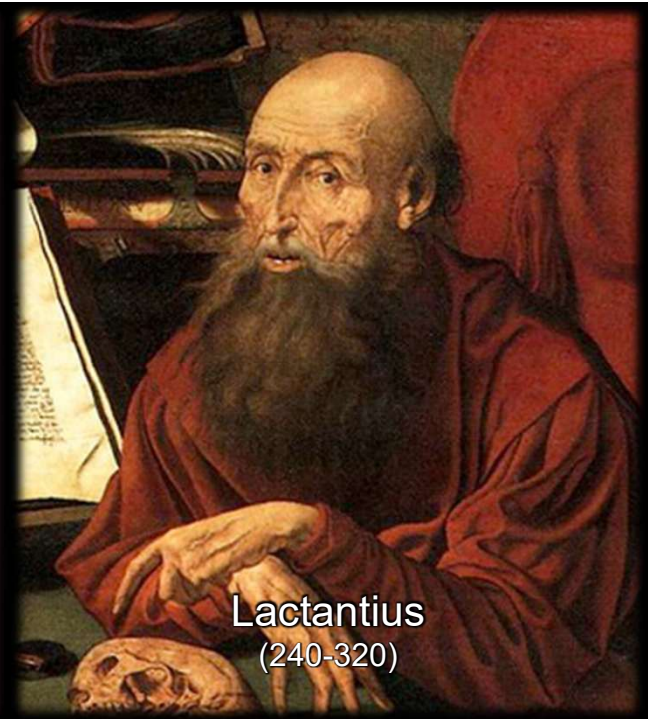


Epicurus
(341-270 BC)



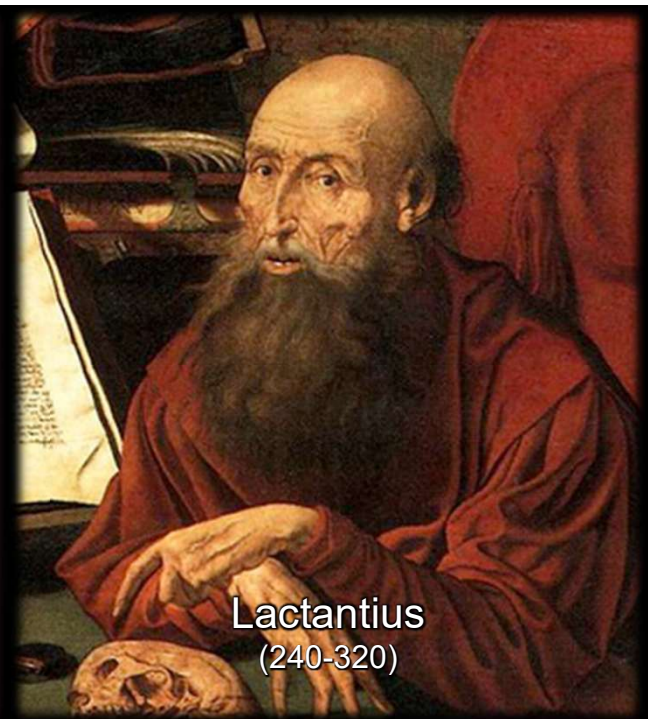
Lactantius
(240-320)

“God, [Epicurus] says, either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able.



Lactantius
(240-320)

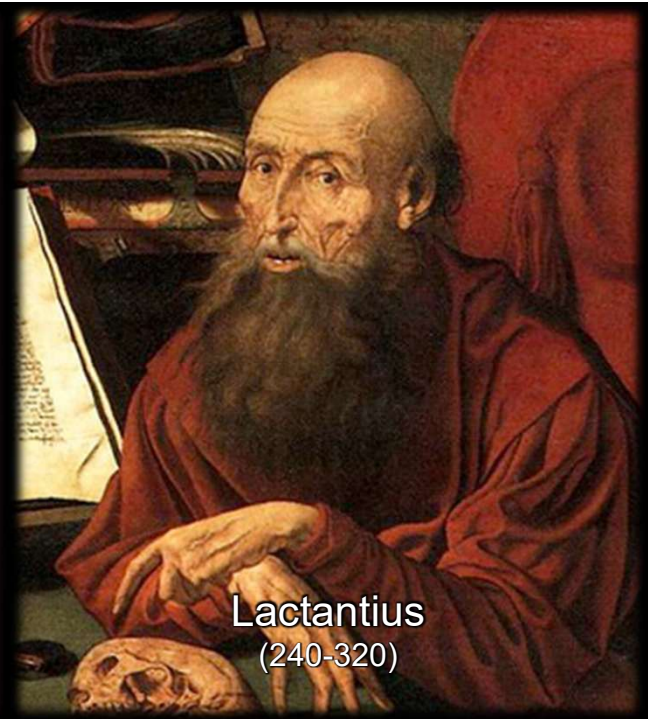
“If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God;



Lactantius
(240-320)

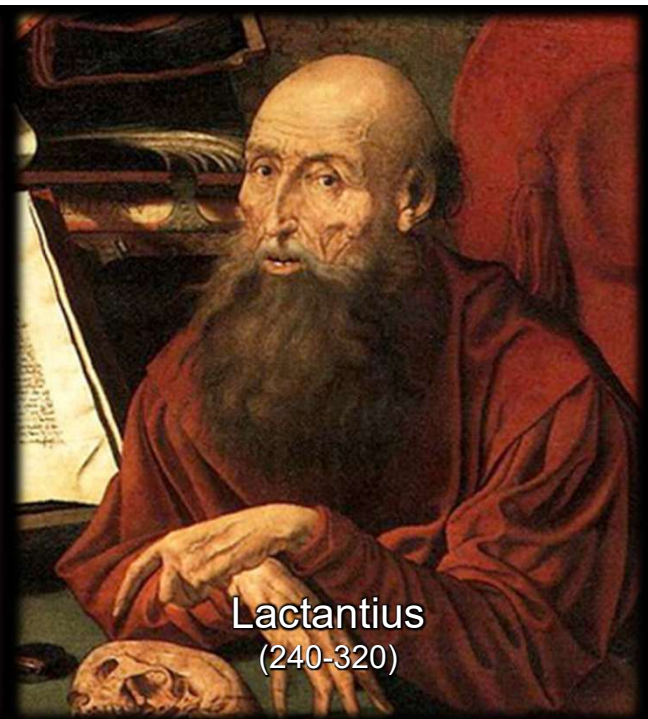
“If He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? or why does He not remove them?”

[Lactantius, *On the Anger of God*, XIV,
<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0703.htm>, accessed 04/23/24]

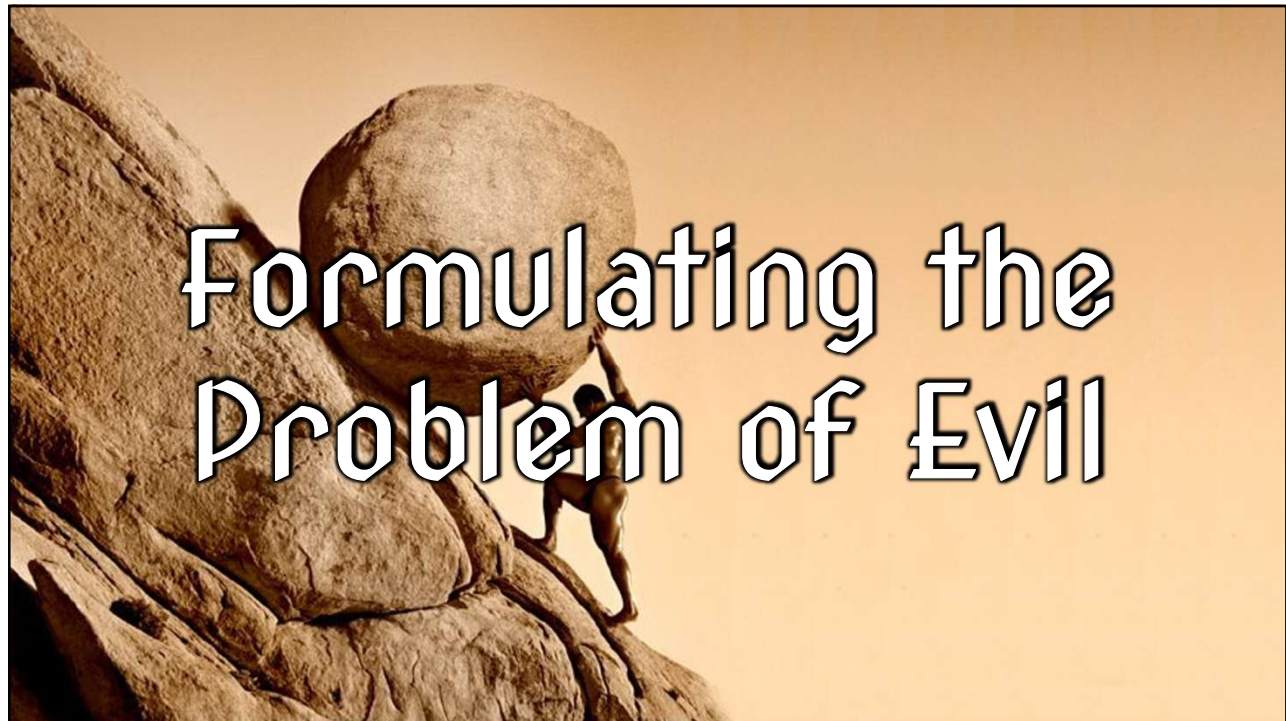


Lactantius
(240-320)

It would seem that Lactantius was mistaken in attributing this quote or sentiment to Epicurus.



Lactantius
(240-320)



∞ Premise 1 ∞

*If God is all good (omnibenevolent),
He would prevent evil.*

∞ Premise 2 ∞

*If God is all powerful (omnipotent),
He could prevent evil.*

∞ Premise 3 ∞

*If God knew in advance that creation
would fall into sin He would have
either:*

left well enough alone and not created in the first place

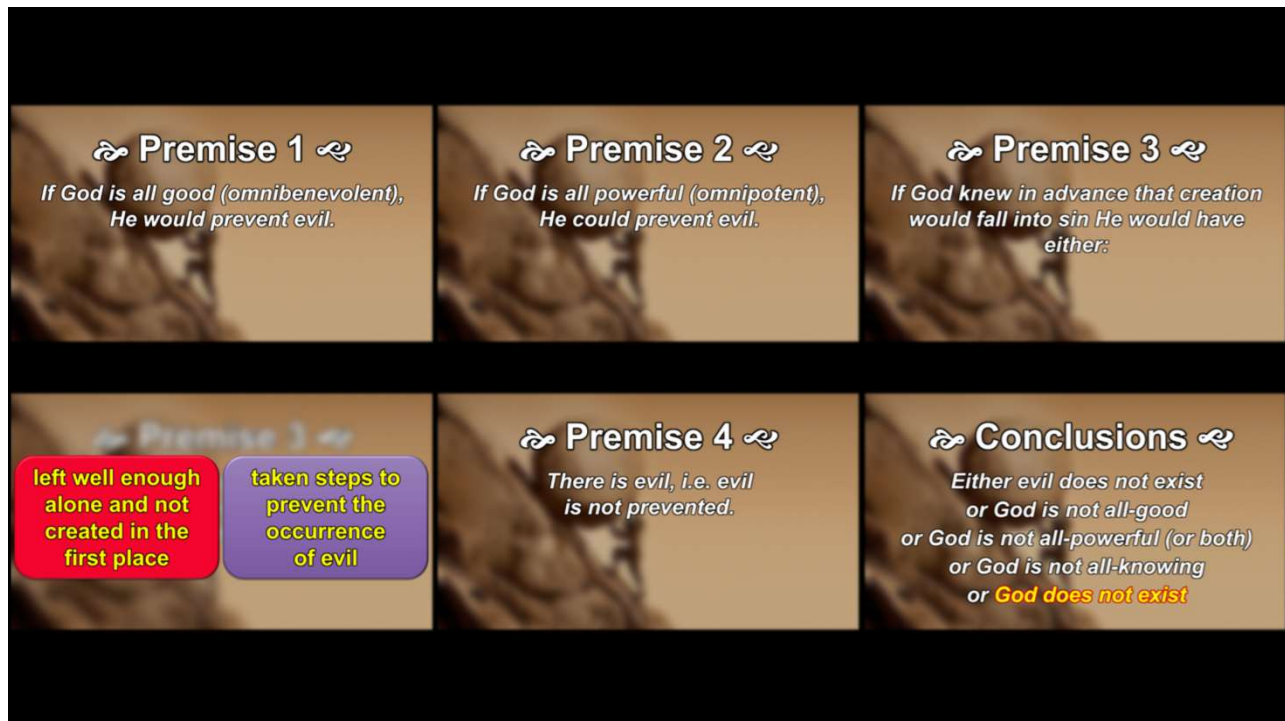
taken steps to prevent the occurrence of evil

∞ Premise 4 ∞

There is evil, i.e. evil is not prevented.

☞ Conclusions ☞

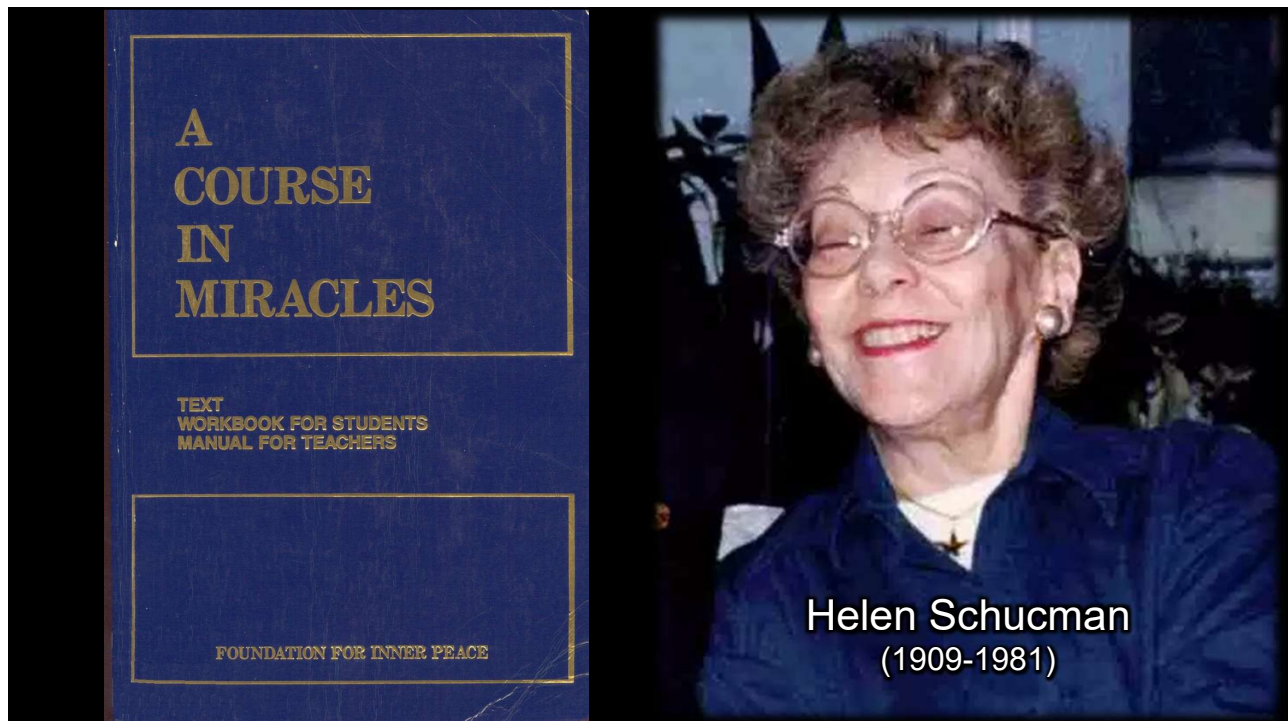
*Either evil does not exist
 or God is not all-good
 or God is not all-powerful (or both)
 or God is not all-knowing
 or **God does not exist***

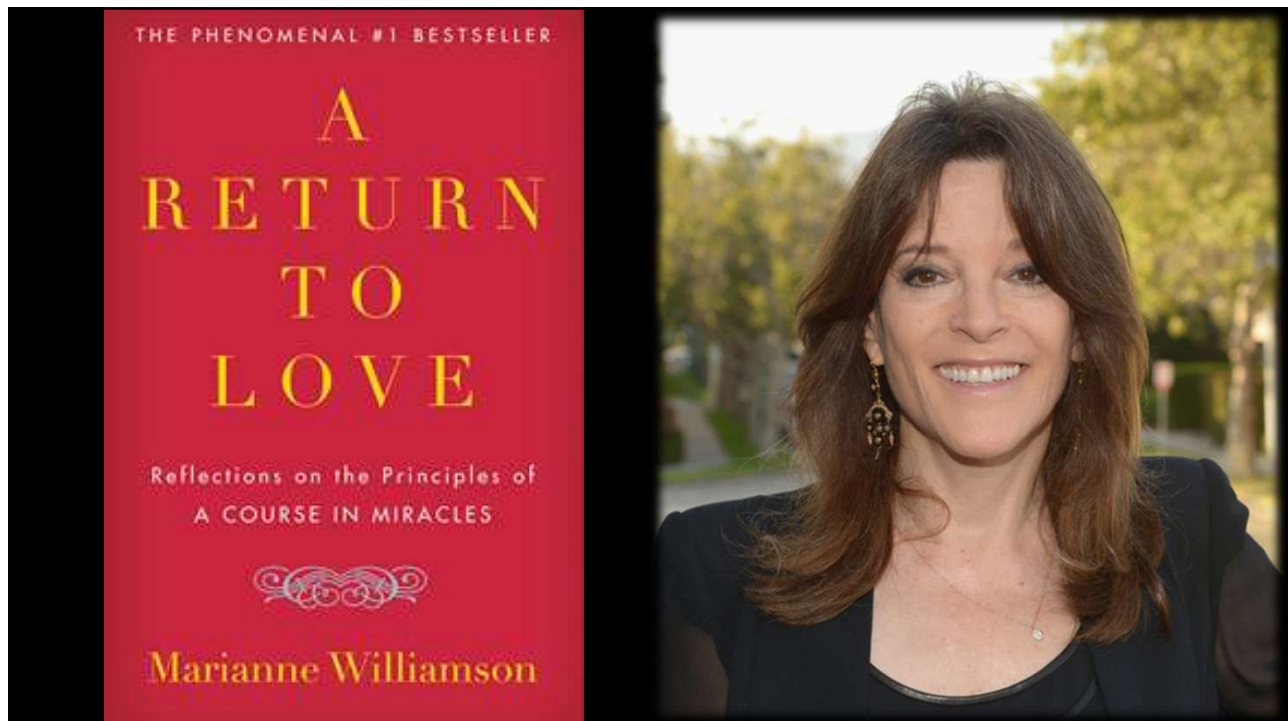
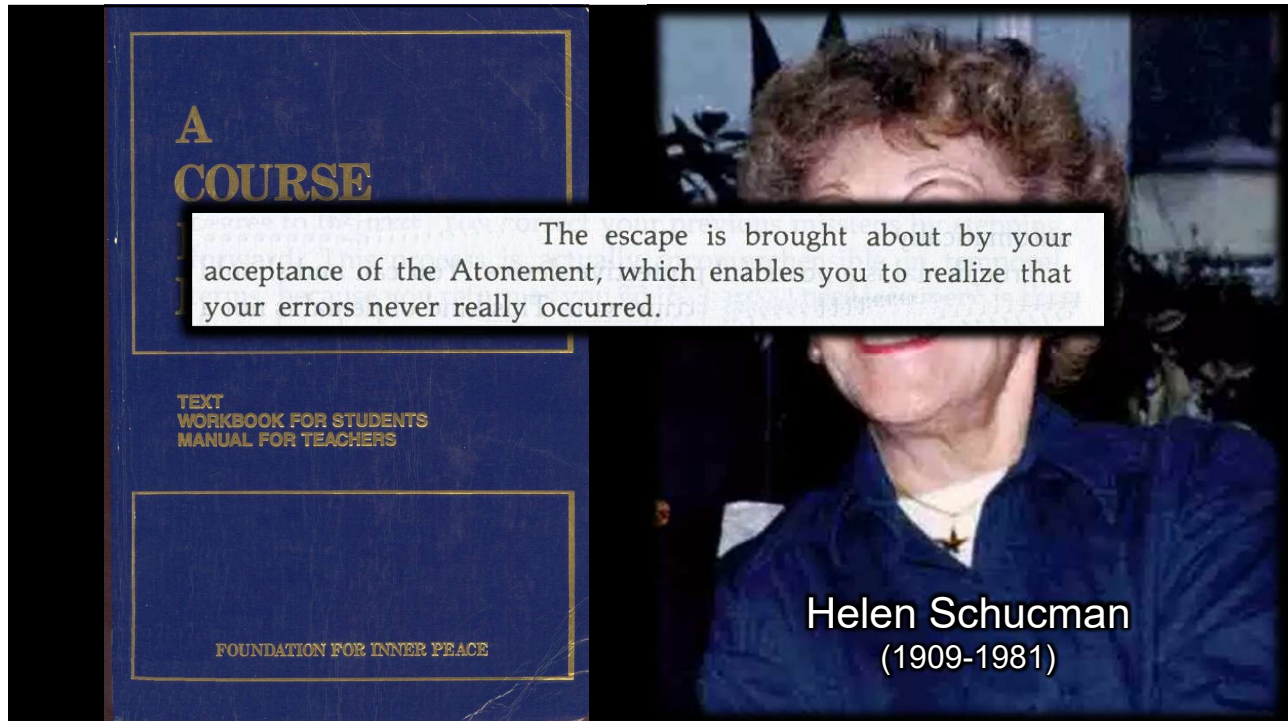


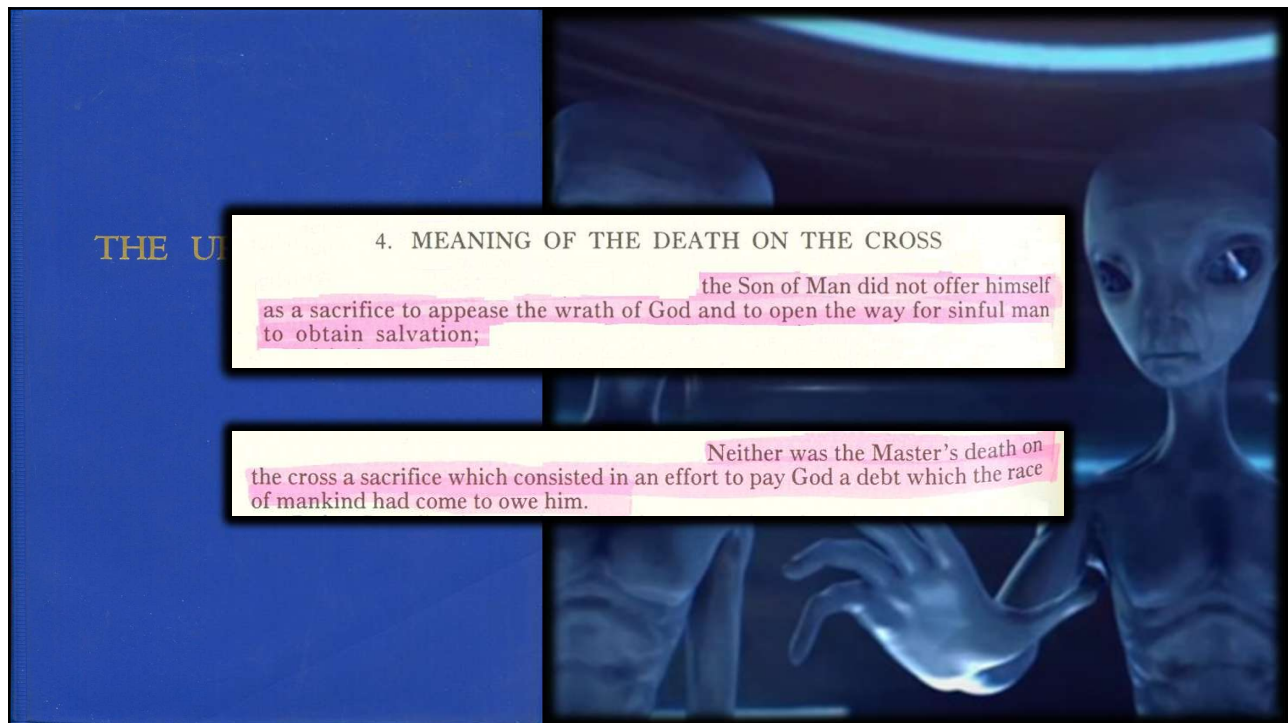
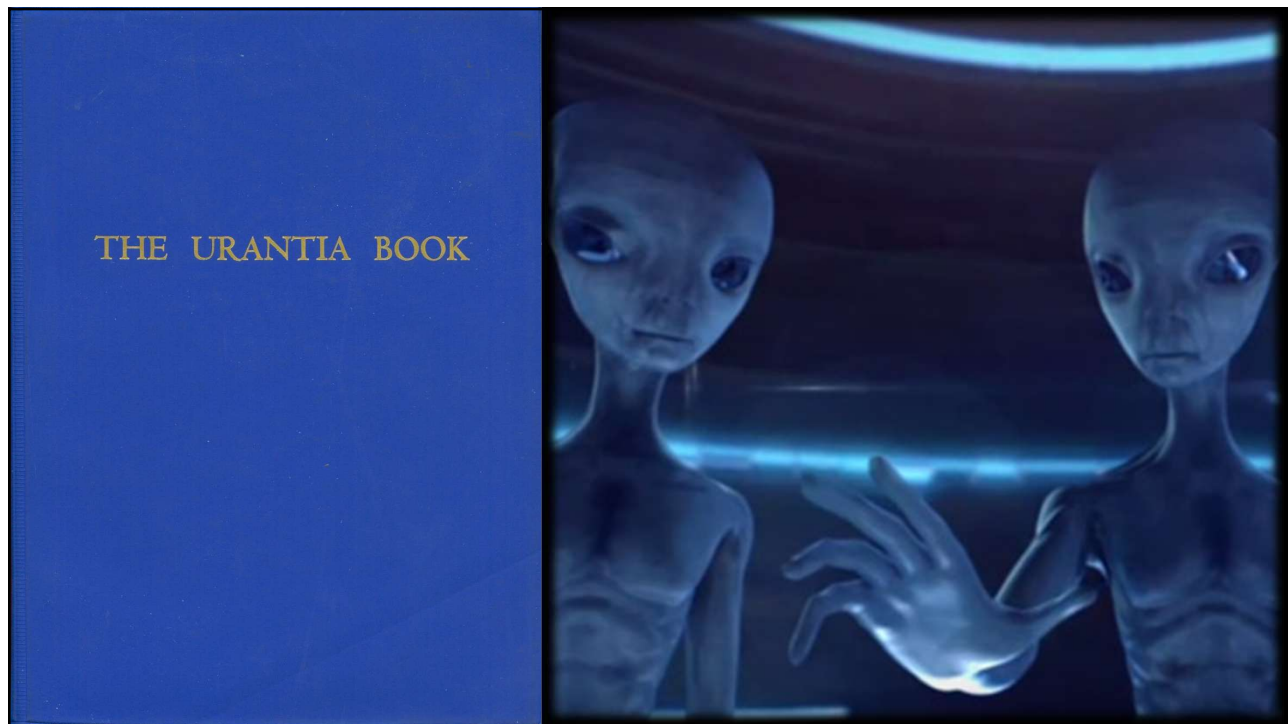


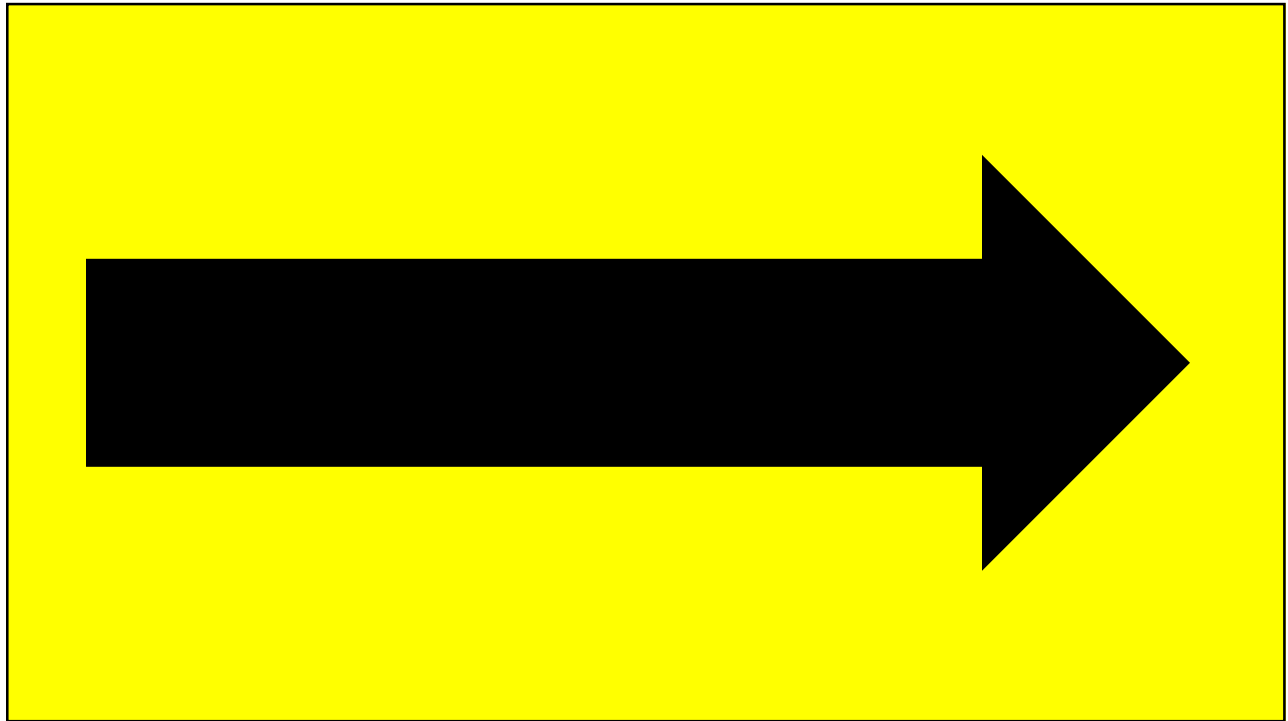
Evil does not exist.
God is not all-good.
God is not all-powerful.
God is not all-knowing.
God does not exist.

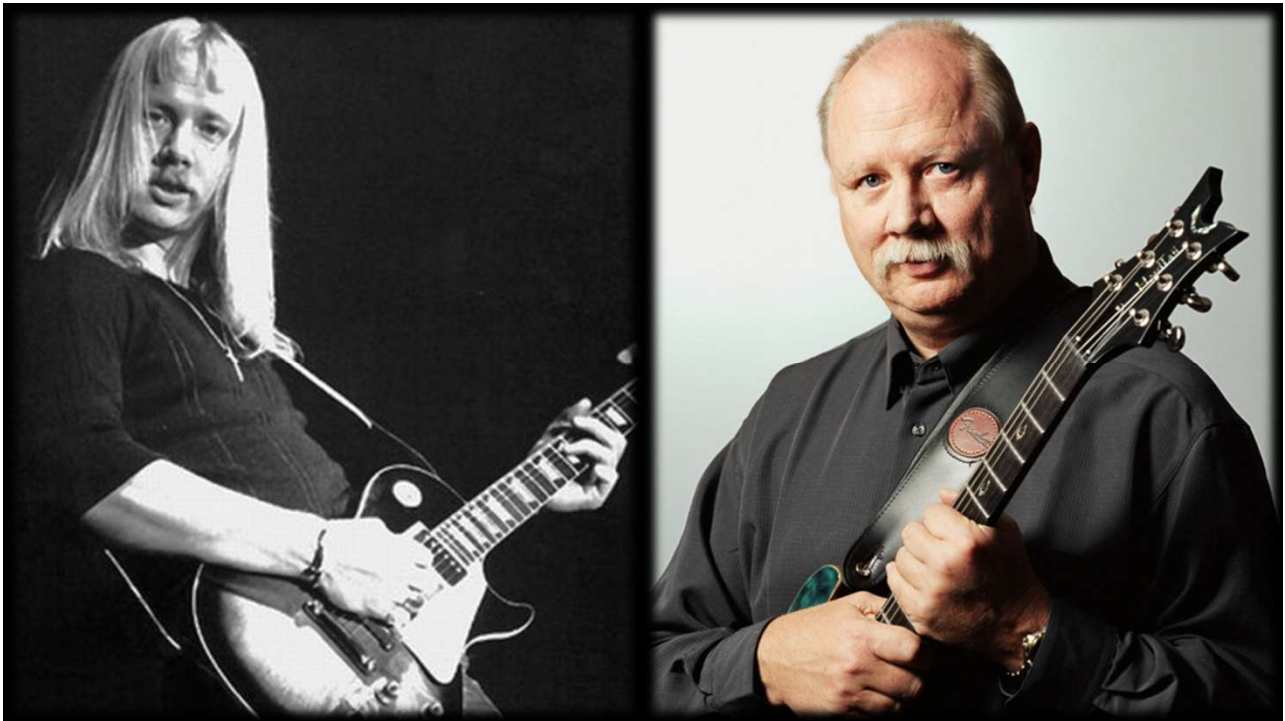
*Evil does
not exist.*

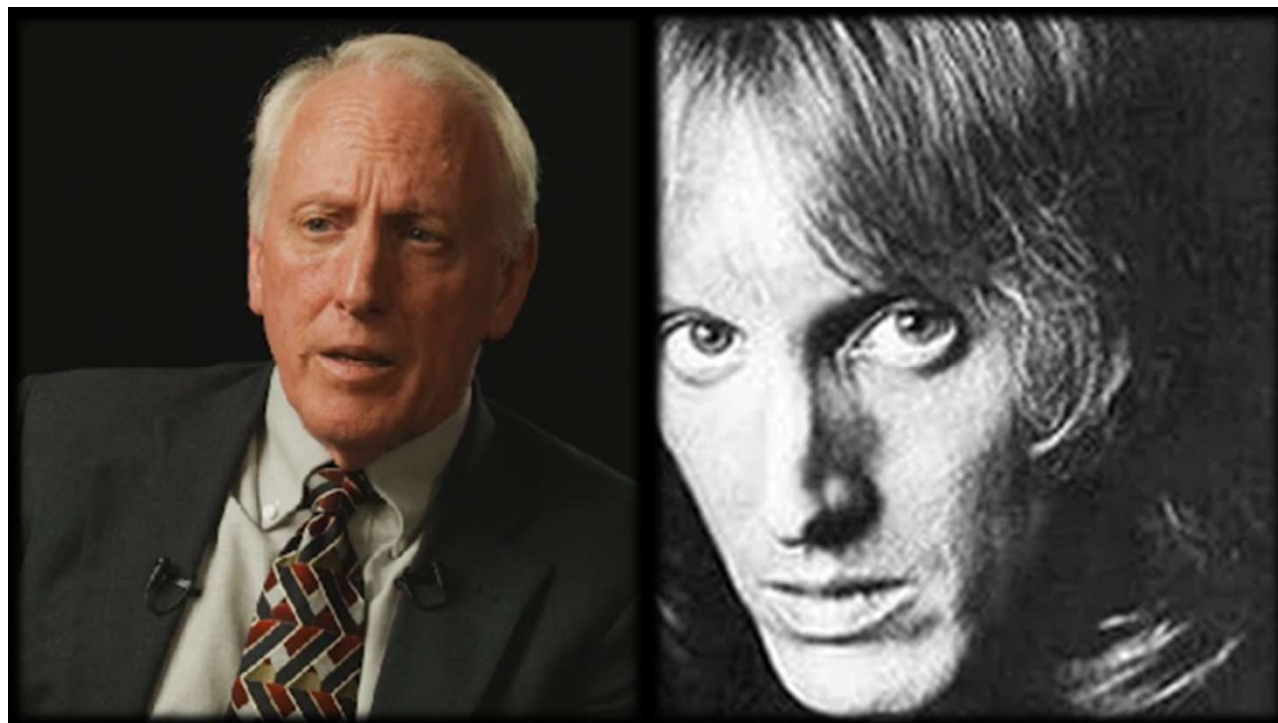


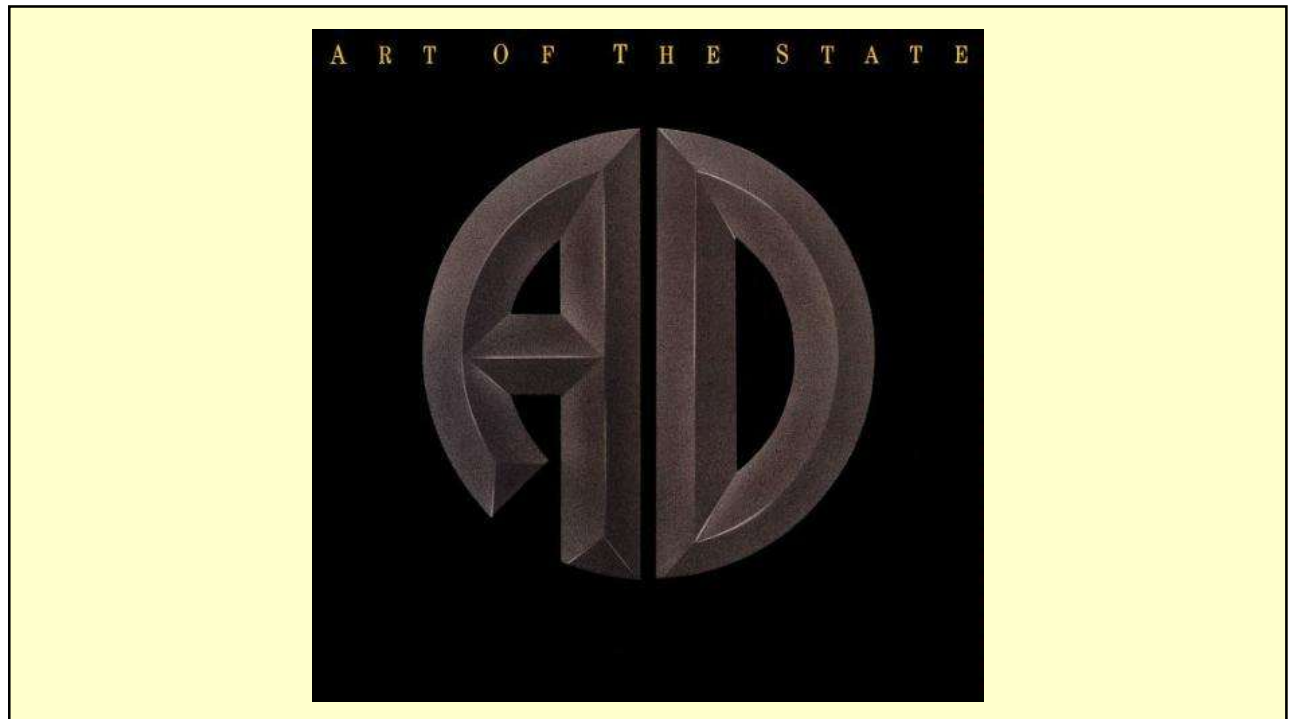
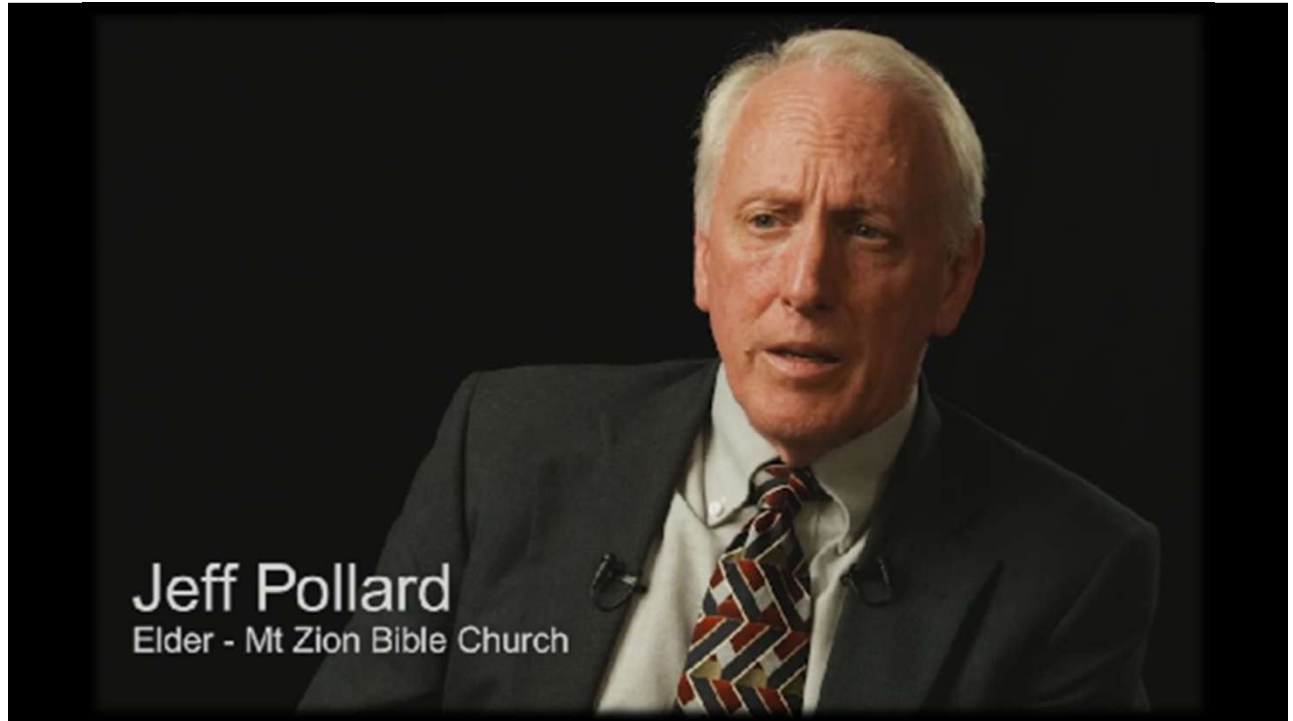


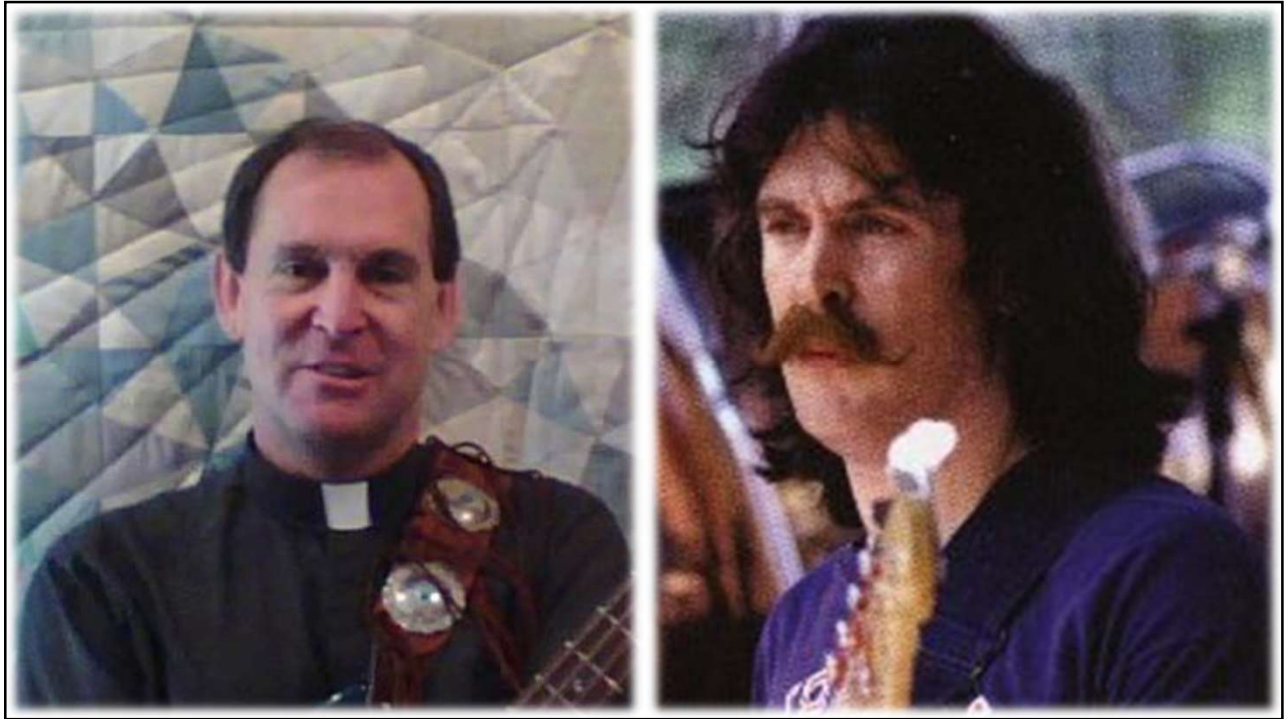




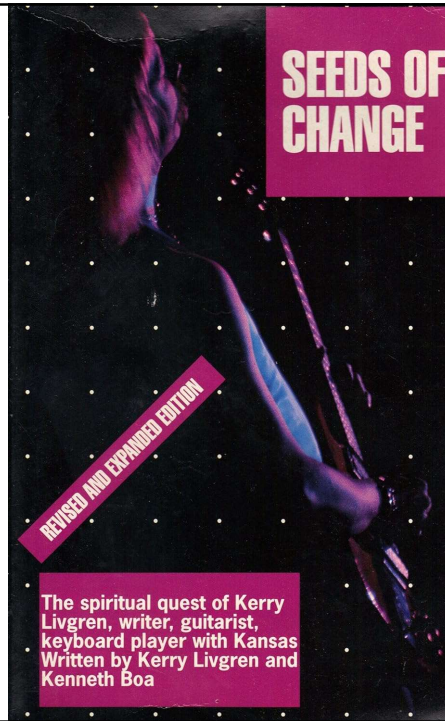








Ken Boa



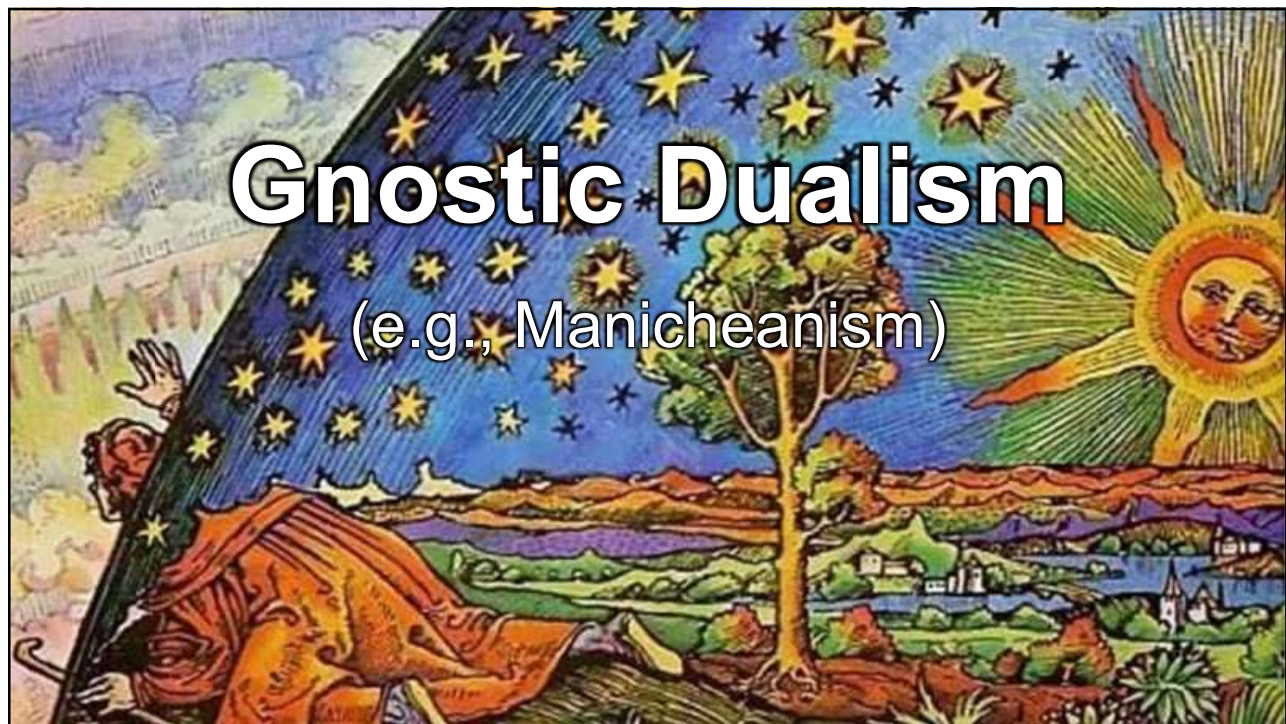
Kerry Livgren

***God is not
all-good.***

Greek Polytheism

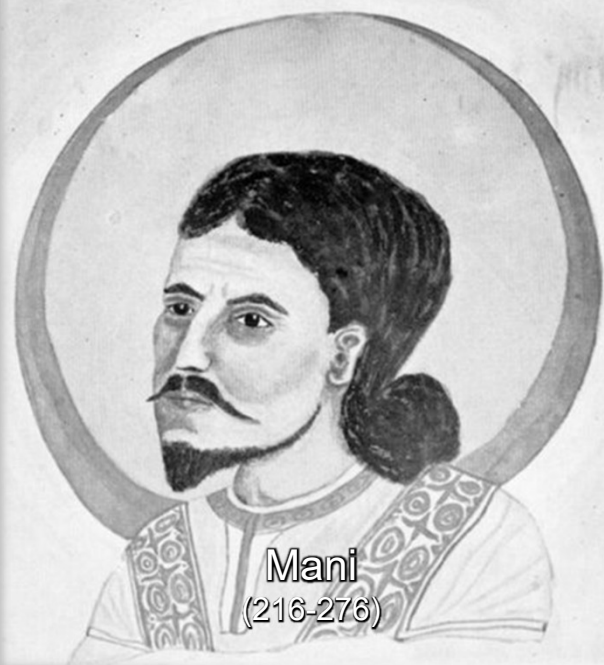
*held that there were both good and
evil gods*

*explained evil in the world by the evil
among the gods*



Manicheanism

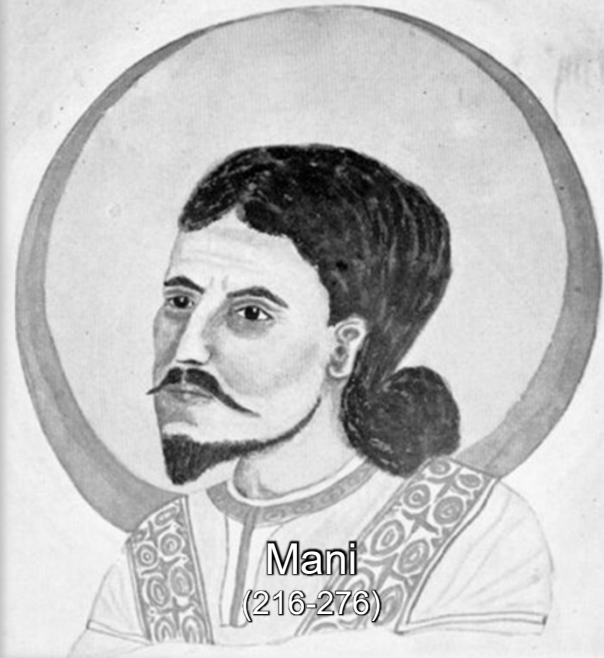
"The chief characteristic ... is a consistent dualism which rejects any possibility of tracing the origin of good and evil to one and the same source.



Mani
(216-276)

Manicheanism

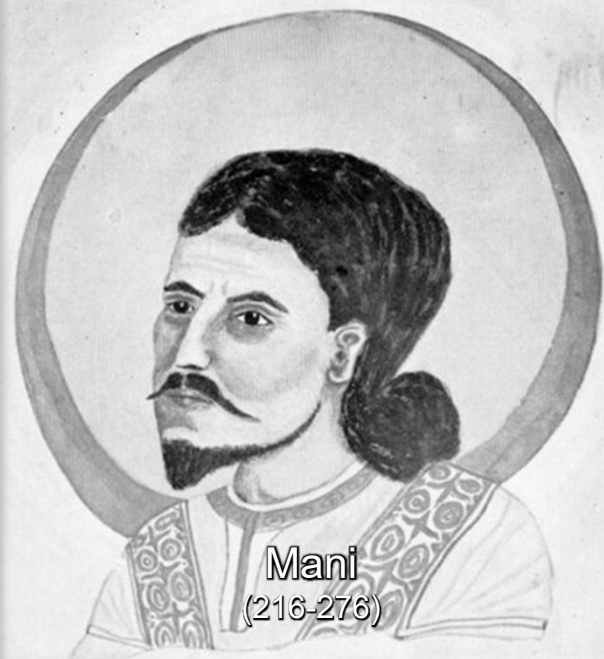
"Evil stands as a completely independent principle against Good, and redemption from the power of Evil is to be achieved by recognizing this dualism and following the appropriate rules of life.



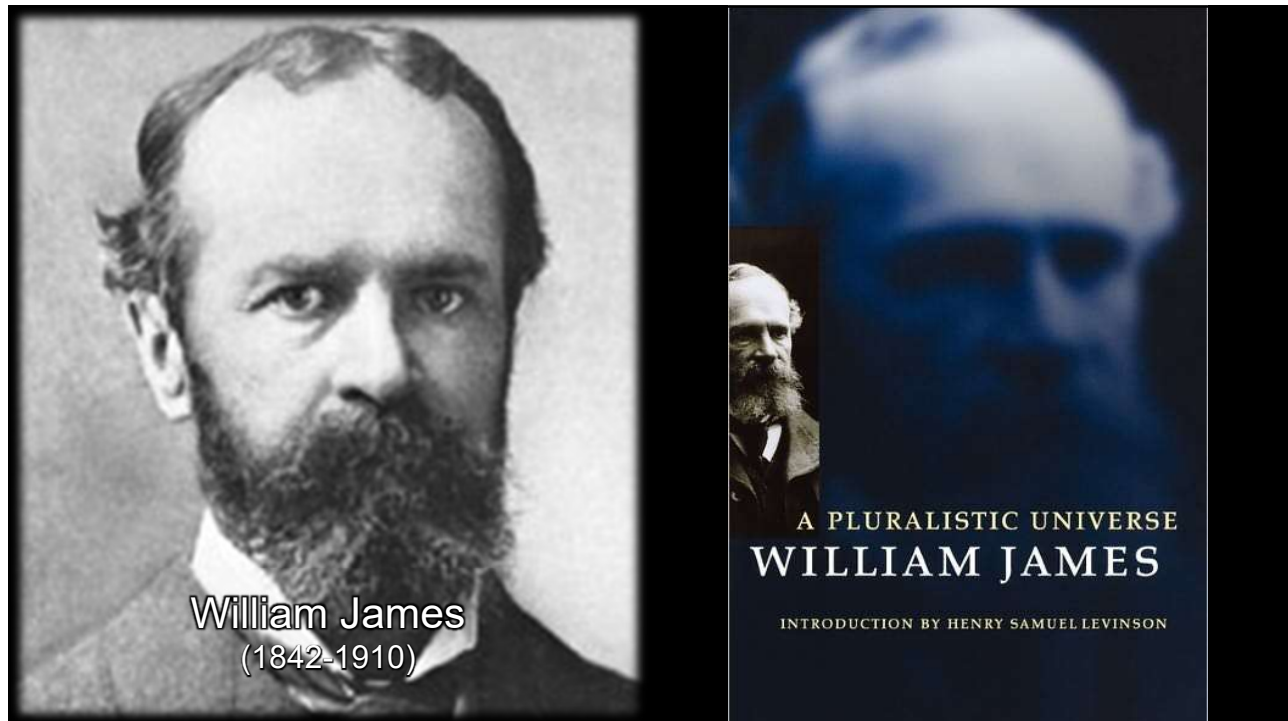
Manicheanism

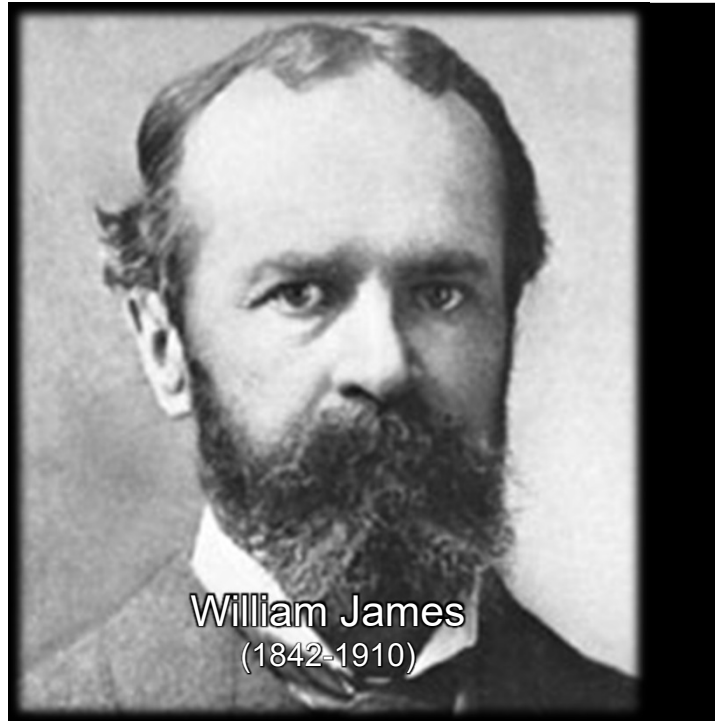
"The opposition of God and Matter is seen in the realm of nature as the conflict of Light and Darkness, Truth and Error."

[R. McL. Wilson, "Mani and Manichaeism" in Paul Edwards, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing & The Free Press; London: Collier Macmillan, 1967), 5:149]



*God is not
all-powerful.*

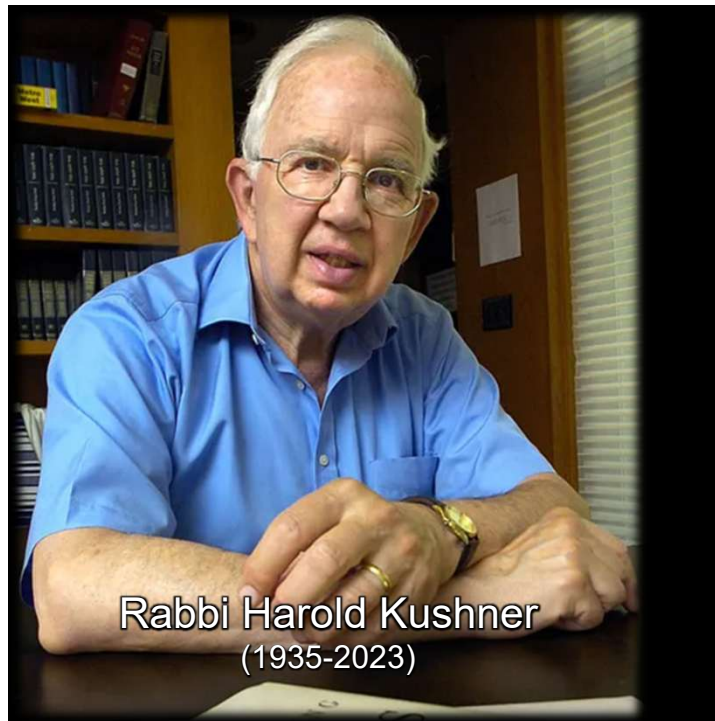




William James
(1842-1910)

"The line of least resistance, then, as it seems to me, both in theology and in philosophy, is to accept, along with the superhuman consciousness, the notion that it is not all-embracing, the notion, in other words, that there is a God, but that he is finite, either in power or in knowledge, or in both at once."

[A Pluralistic Universe, Lecture VIII, Conclusions]



Rabbi Harold Kushner
(1935-2023)

When
Bad Things
Happen to
Good People

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HAROLD S.
KUSHNER

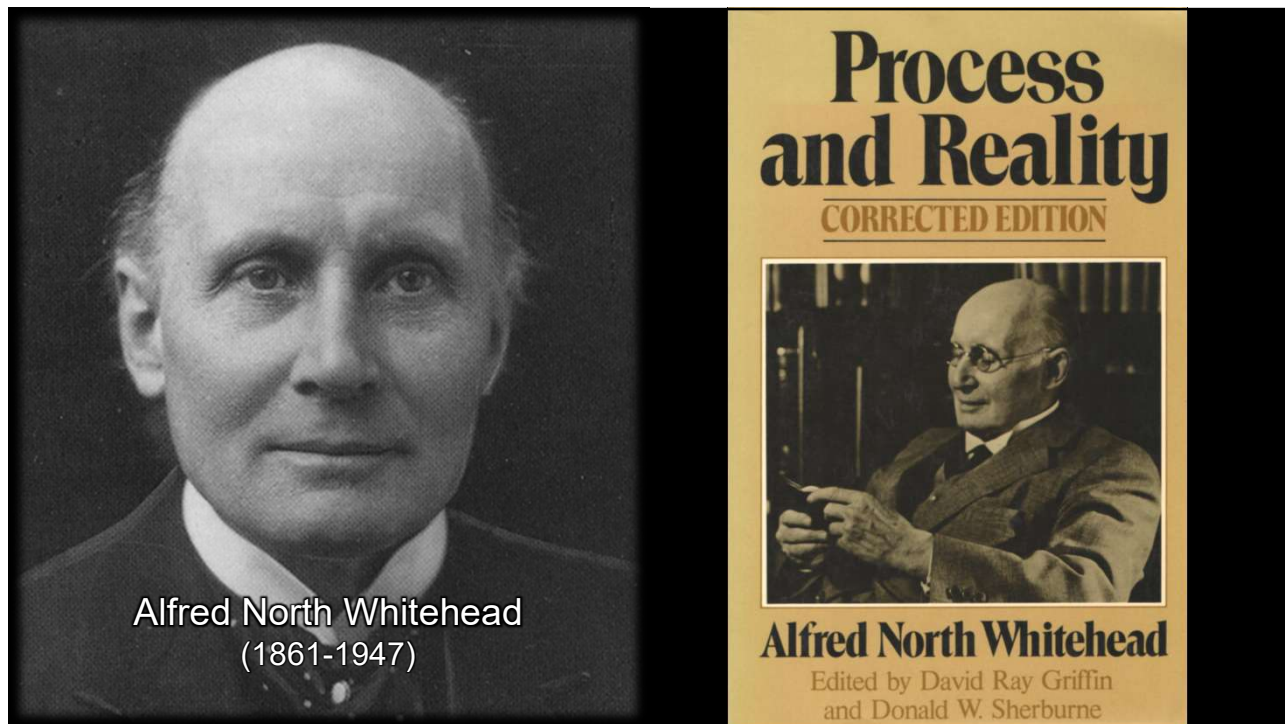


Rabbi Harold Kushner
(1935-2023)

"I recognize His limitations. He is limited in what He can do by the laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom. ... Even God has a hard time keeping chaos in check and limiting the damage that evil can do"


[Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, pp. 134, 43, cited in Norman L. Geisler and William D. Watkins, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views*, 2nd ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 203]

***God is not
all-knowing.***

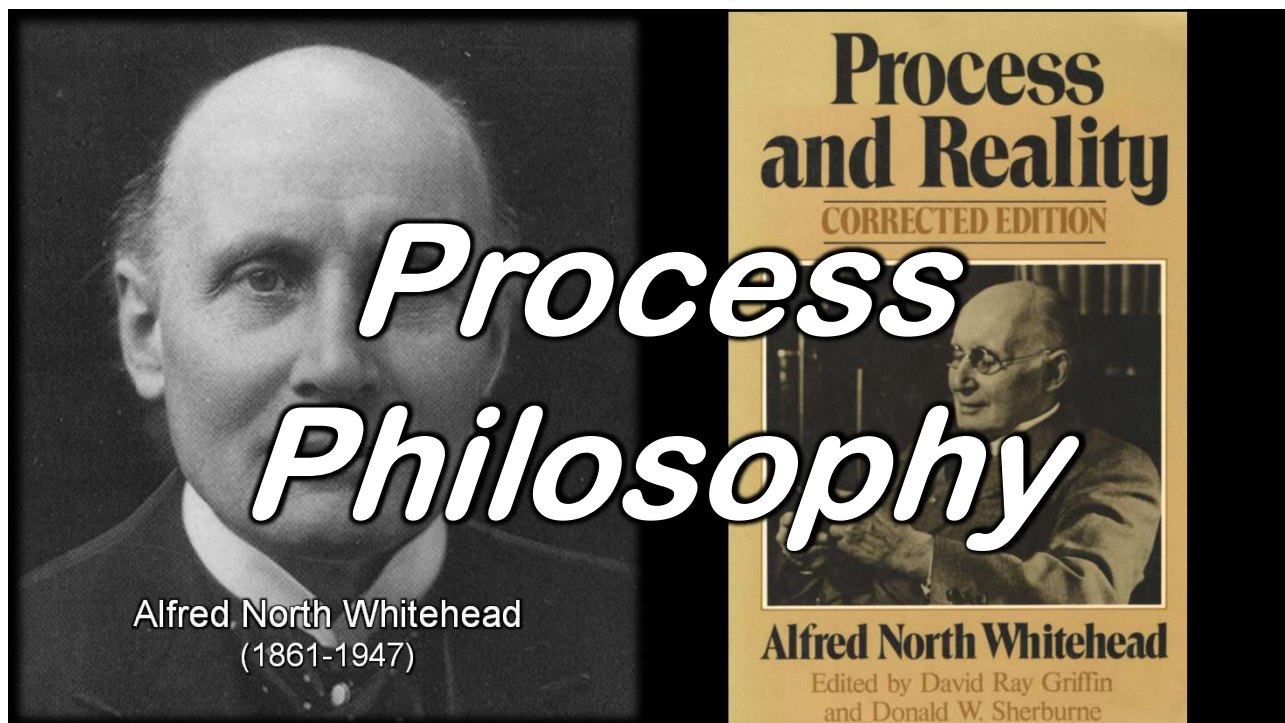


Alfred North Whitehead
(1861-1947)

**Process
and Reality**
CORRECTED EDITION



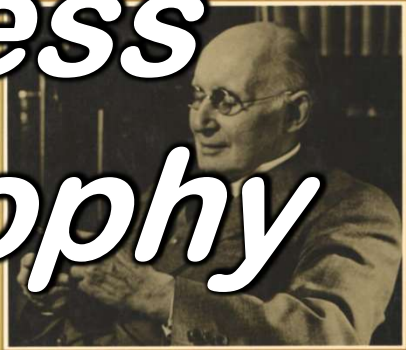
Alfred North Whitehead
Edited by David Ray Griffin
and Donald W. Sherburne



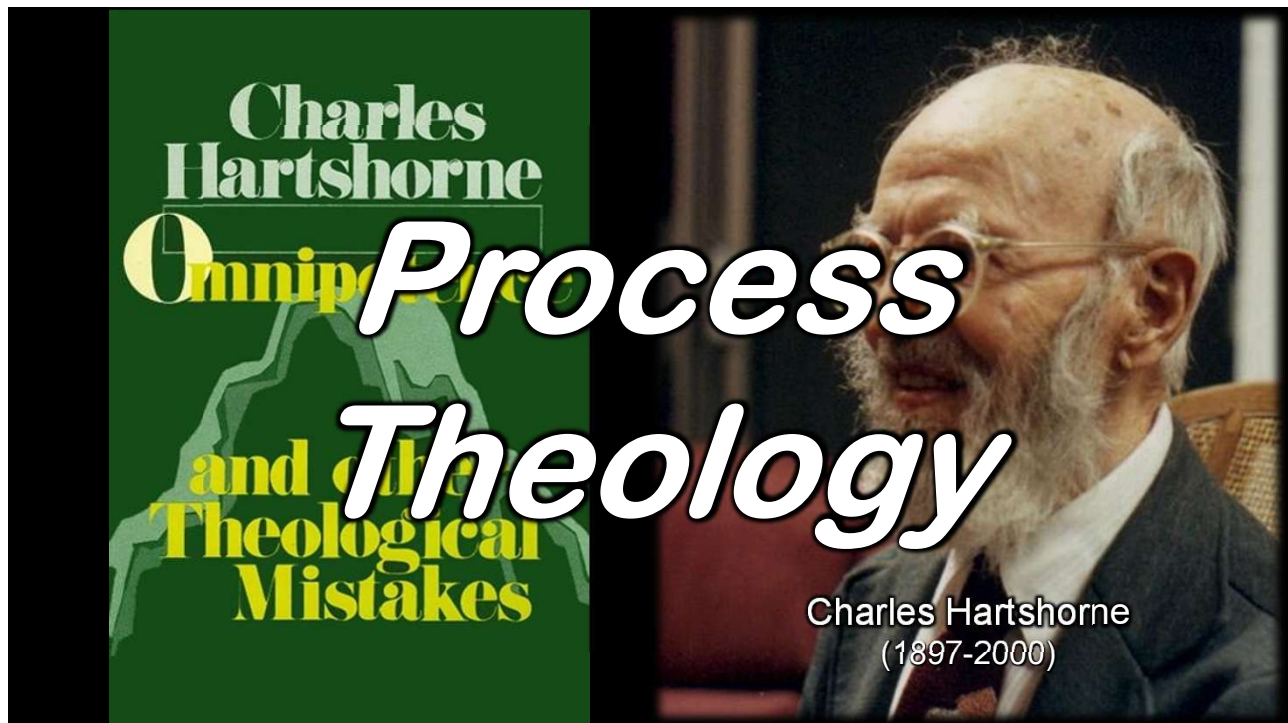
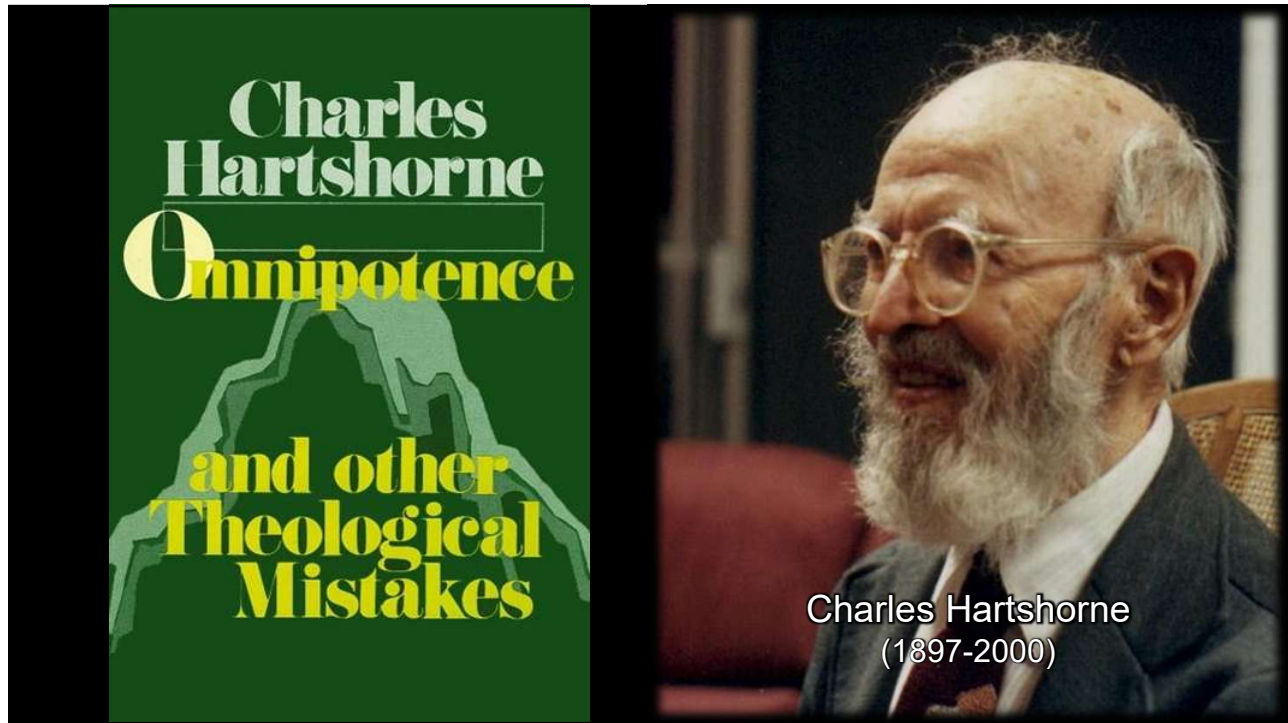
*Process
Philosophy*

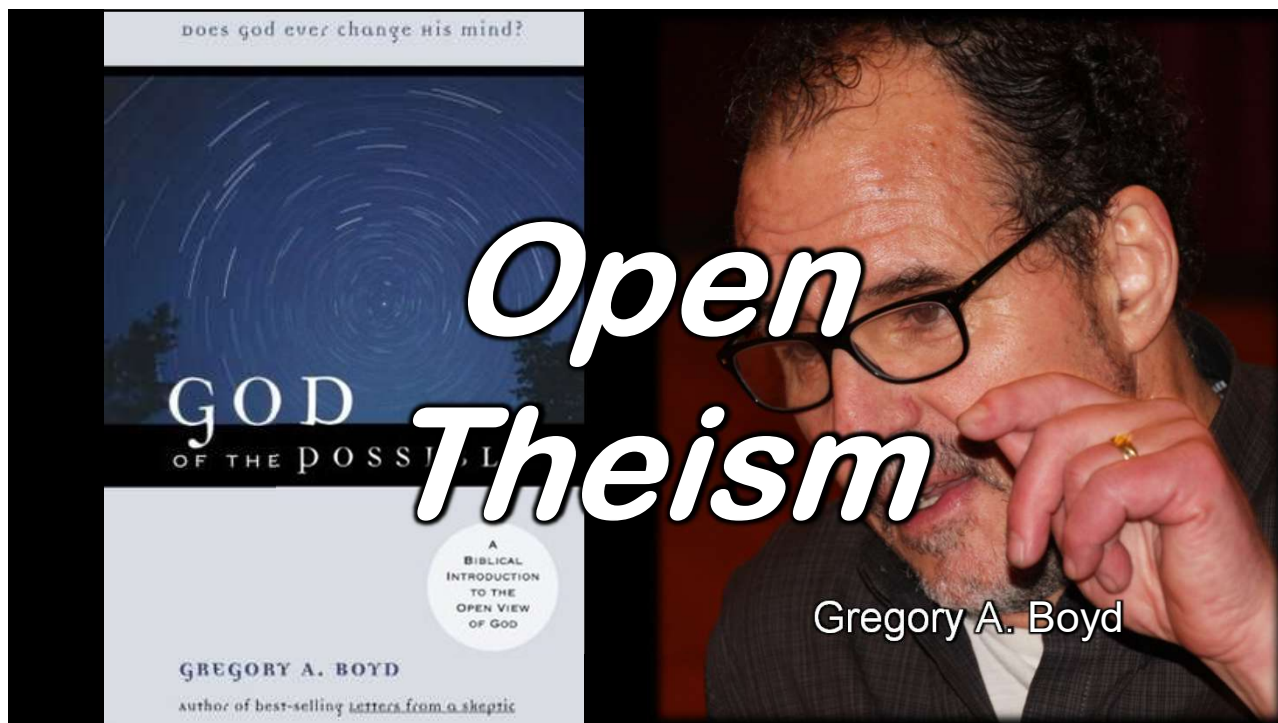
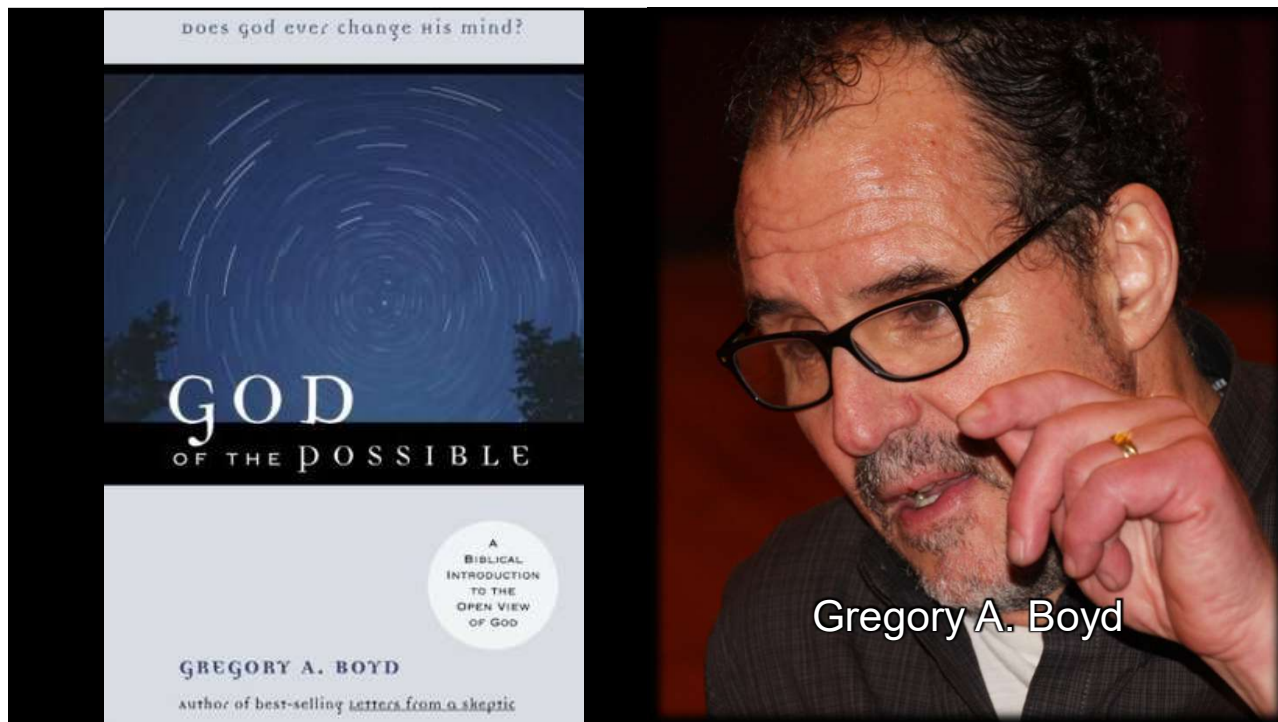
Alfred North Whitehead
(1861-1947)

**Process
and Reality**
CORRECTED EDITION



Alfred North Whitehead
Edited by David Ray Griffin
and Donald W. Sherburne





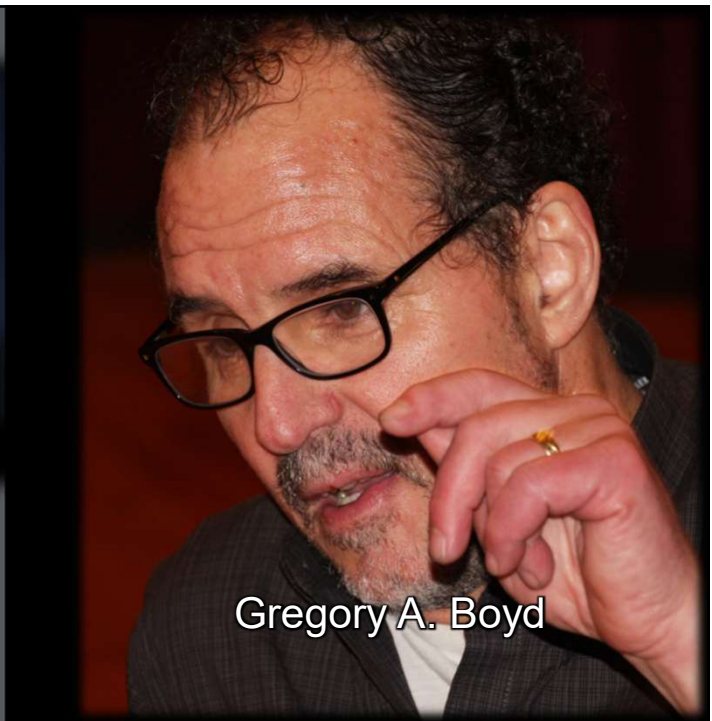
"The fifth practical difference that the open view makes concerns our understanding and response to the problem of evil. ...

[*God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 98]



Gregory A. Boyd

"My agnostic father ... asked me why God would allow Adolf Hitler to be born if he foreknew that this man would massacre millions of Jews. ...



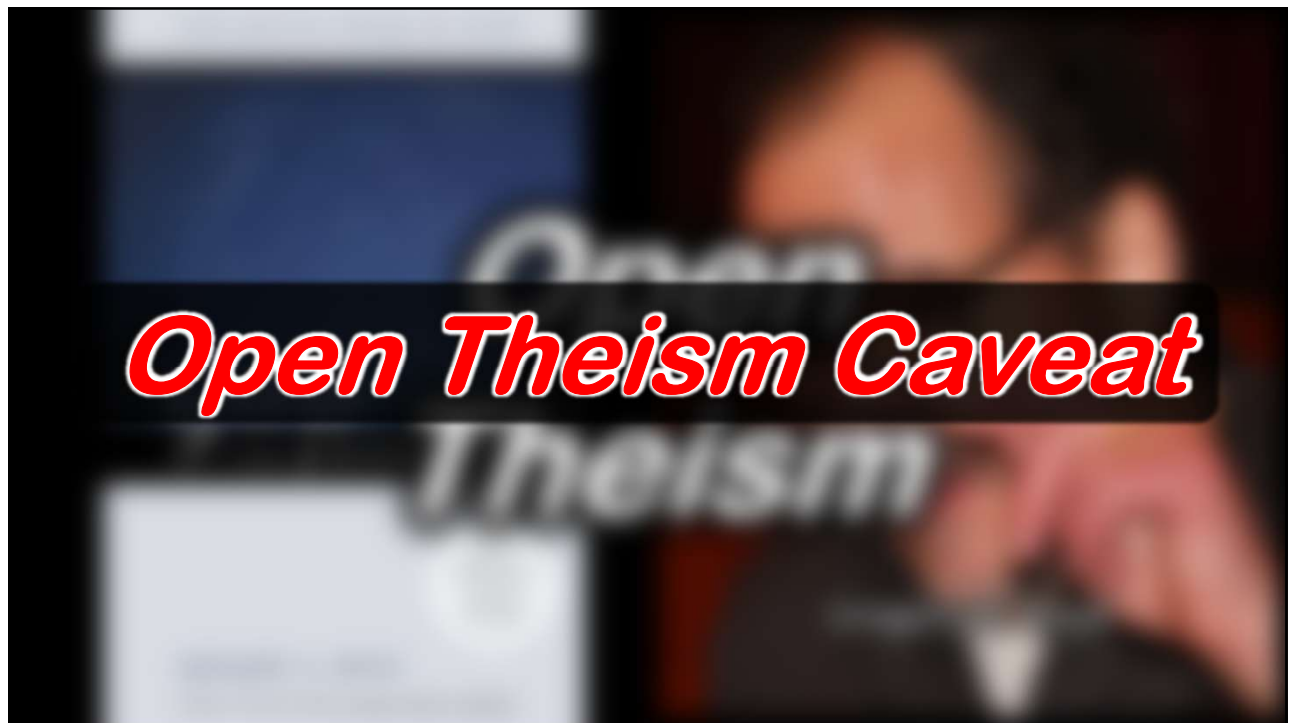
Gregory A. Boyd

"The only response I could offer then, and the only response I continue to offer now is that this was not foreknown as a certainty at the time God created Hitler."

[God of the Possible, 98]



Gregory A. Boyd



In Fairness to Boyd:

- *They claim to hold to the doctrine of God's omniscience.*
- *But they would maintain a different definition of 'omniscience' than the Classical Theist.*
- *They would claim that propositions about the future are **unknowable**.*

In Fairness to Boyd:

- *Thus, in their estimation, God is "omniscient" because God knows everything that can be known but God does not know the future because (in their view) the future is not knowable.*

*God does
not exist.*

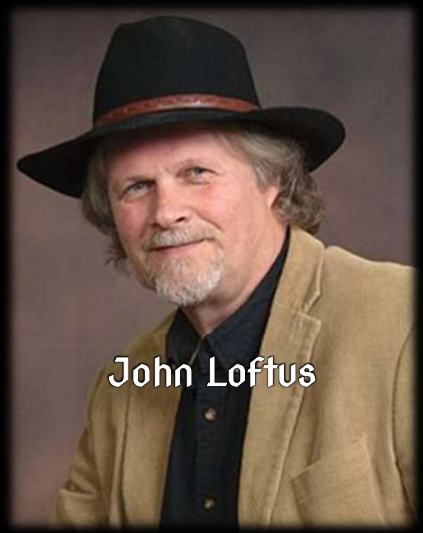
Popular Atheism



Dan Barker

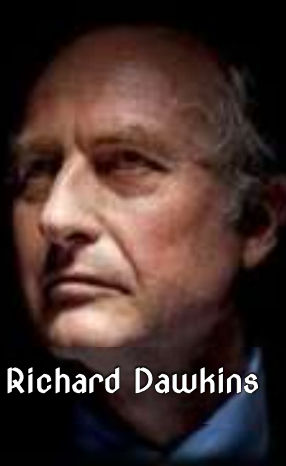


George Smith




John Loftus


The New Atheism



Richard Dawkins



Sam Harris



Christopher Hitchens
(1949-2011)



Daniel Dennett

Academic Atheism



J. L. Mackie
(1917-1981)

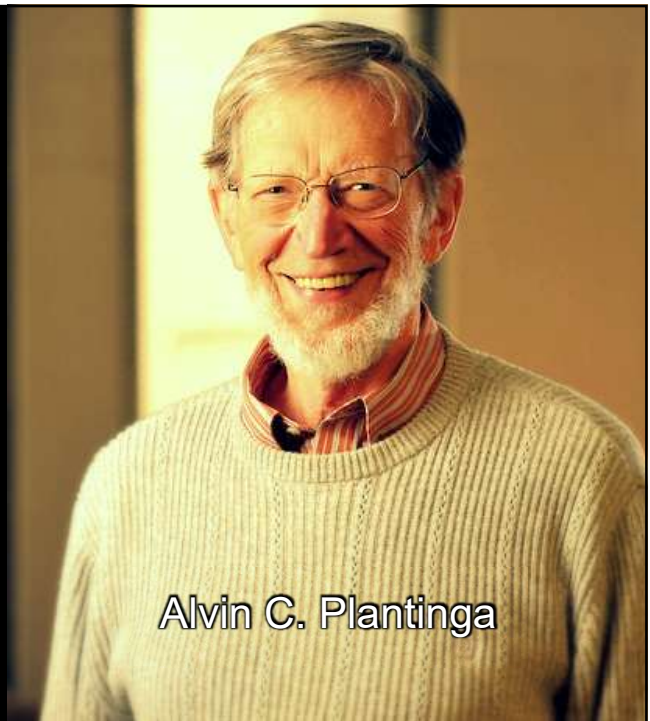
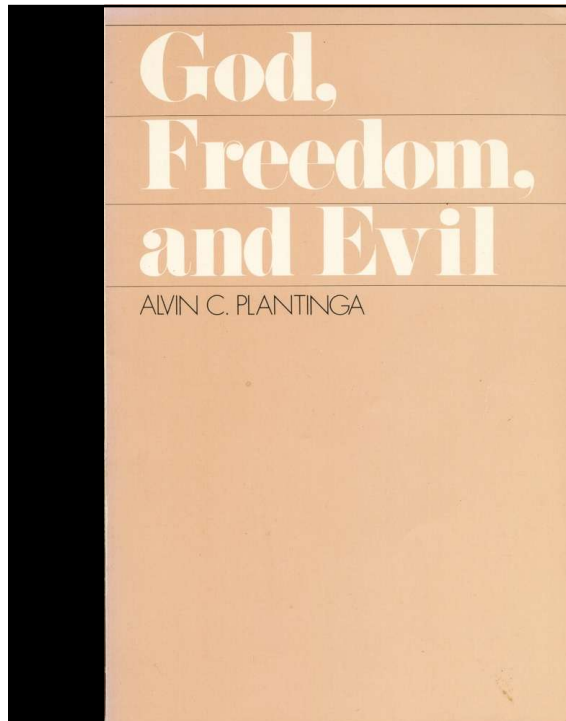


Theodore Drange

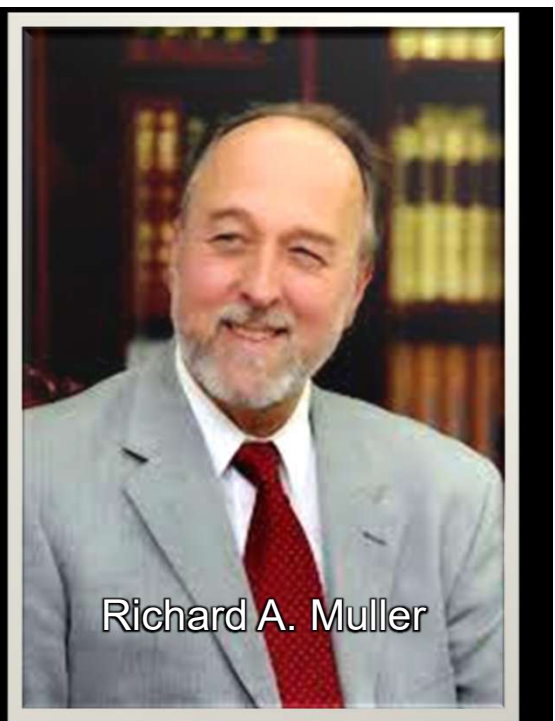
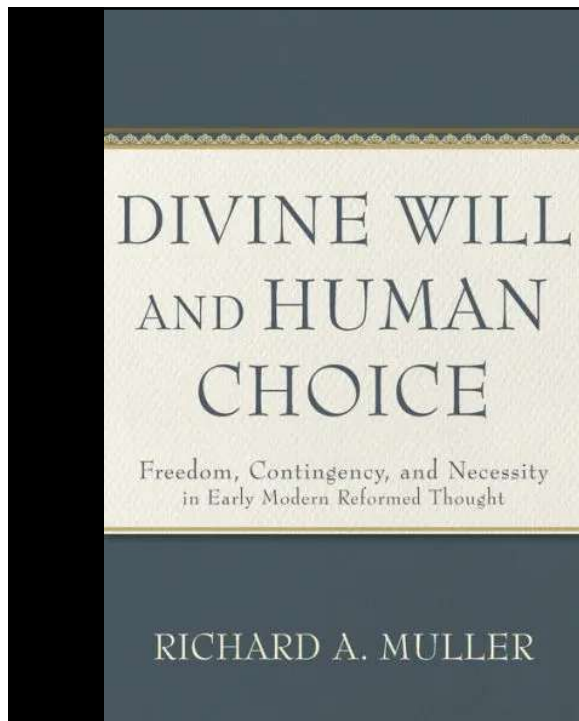


Michael Martin
(1932-2015)



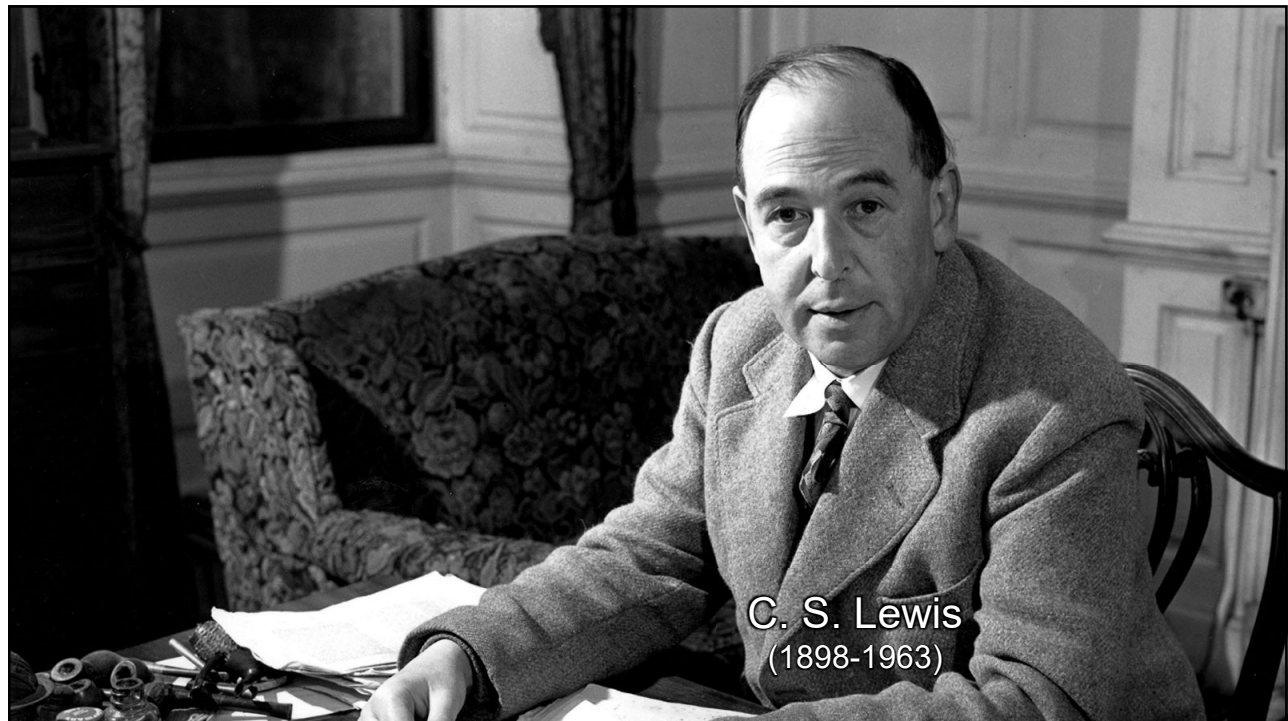


Alvin C. Plantinga

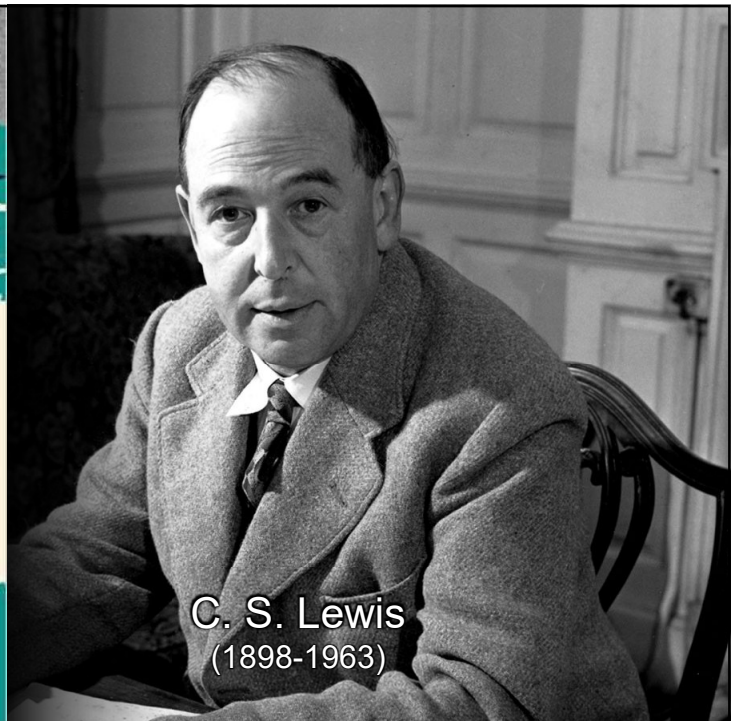
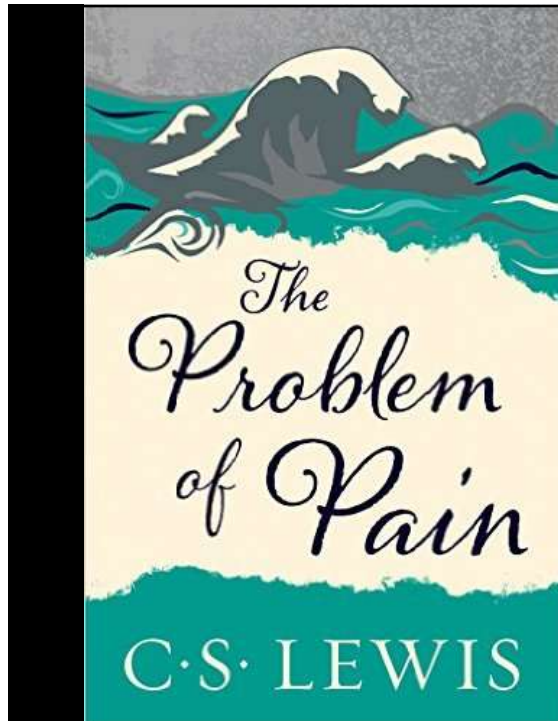


Richard A. Muller

The Natural Order Defense of C. S. Lewis



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

"Fixed laws, consequences unfolding by causal necessity, the whole natural order, are at once the limits within which their common life is confined and also the sole condition under which any such life is possible."



C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)

"Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free-wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."

[The Problem of Pain (London: The Centenary Press, 1940), 22]

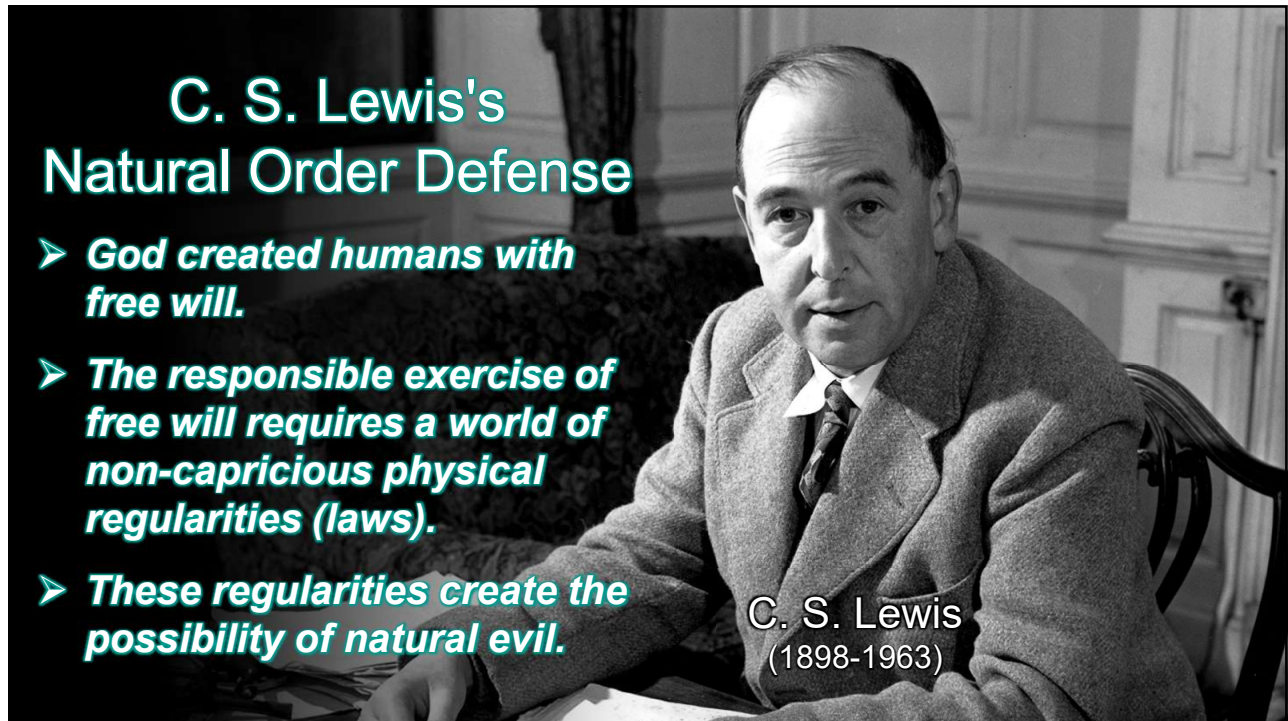
C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)



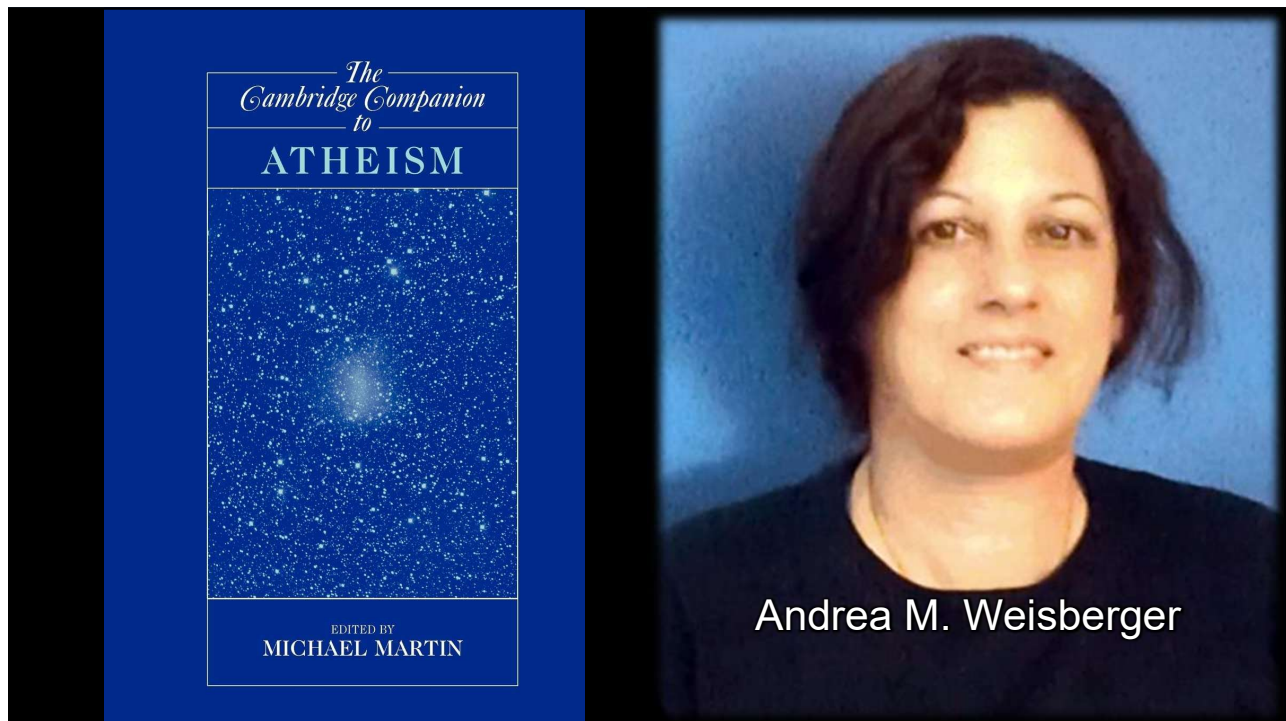
C. S. Lewis's Natural Order Defense

- ***God created humans with free will.***
- ***The responsible exercise of free will requires a world of non-capricious physical regularities (laws).***
- ***These regularities create the possibility of natural evil.***

C. S. Lewis
(1898-1963)



Would It Have Been Better if God Had Never Created the World?



Interacting with Alvin Plantinga's treatment of the problem of evil and culling from the work of Richard R. La Croix, Weisberger formulates the following argument:



Andrea M. Weisberger

- "(i) There is a God who created everything that exists.***
- (ii) Before God created there was nothing but God.***
- (iii) After God created, everything is causally dependent on God.***
- (iv) God had the choice of whether or not to create this world.***
- (v) In one possible scenario, God could have chosen not to create anything at all.***
- (vi) If this choice were actualized, God would not have created a world in which evil existed.***
- (vii) Since God is perfectly good, if God had not created anything, all that would exist would be perfect goodness."***

[Weisberger, "Argument," *Cambridge Companion*, 168]

- (i) *There is a God who created everything that exists.*
- (ii) *Before God created there was nothing but God.*
- (iii) *After God created, everything is causally dependent on God.*
- (iv) **God had the choice of whether nor not to create this world.**
- (v) **In one possible scenario, God could have chosen not to create anything at all.**
- (vi) *If this choice were actualized, God would not have created a world in which evil existed.*
- (vii) *Since God is perfectly good, if God had not created anything, all that would exist would be perfect goodness.*

Thomists would certainly agree that creation was due to God's free choice.

He could have decided not to create at all.

But what could it possibly mean to talk about a "choice" being "actualized" when the meaning of 'choice' here excludes anything being created?

- (i) *There is a God who created everything that exists.*
- (ii) *Before God created there was nothing but God.*
- (iii) *After God created, everything is causally dependent on God.*
- (iv) **God had the choice of whether nor not to create this world.**
- (v) **In one possible scenario, God could have chosen not to create anything at all.**
- (vi) *If this choice were actualized, God would not have created a world in which evil existed.*
- (vii) *Since God is perfectly good, if God had not created anything, all that would exist would be perfect goodness.*

The problem is that to actualize X is to give X existence.

If the 'X' here is the "choice," then to actualize the "choice" is to give the "choice" existence.

But to give something existence is to create.

- (i) *There is a God who created everything that exists.*
- (ii) *Before God created there was nothing but God.*
- (iii) *After God created, everything is causally dependent on God.*
- (iv) **God had the choice of whether or not to create this world.**
- (v) **In one possible scenario, God could have chosen not to create anything at all.**
- (vi) *If this choice were actualized, God would not have created a world in which evil existed.*
- (vii) *Since God is perfectly good, if God had not created anything, all that would exist would be perfect goodness.*

Thus, actualizing the "choice" would be creating the "choice."

But the "choice" here means that nothing is created.

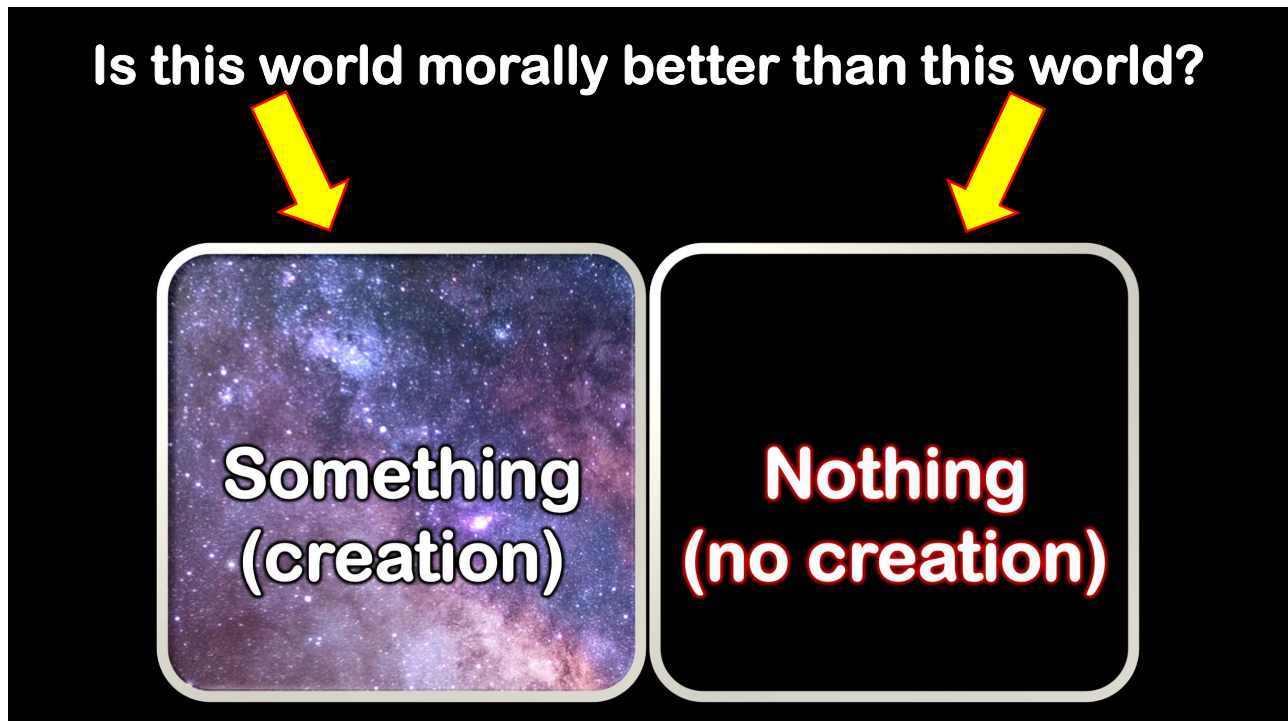
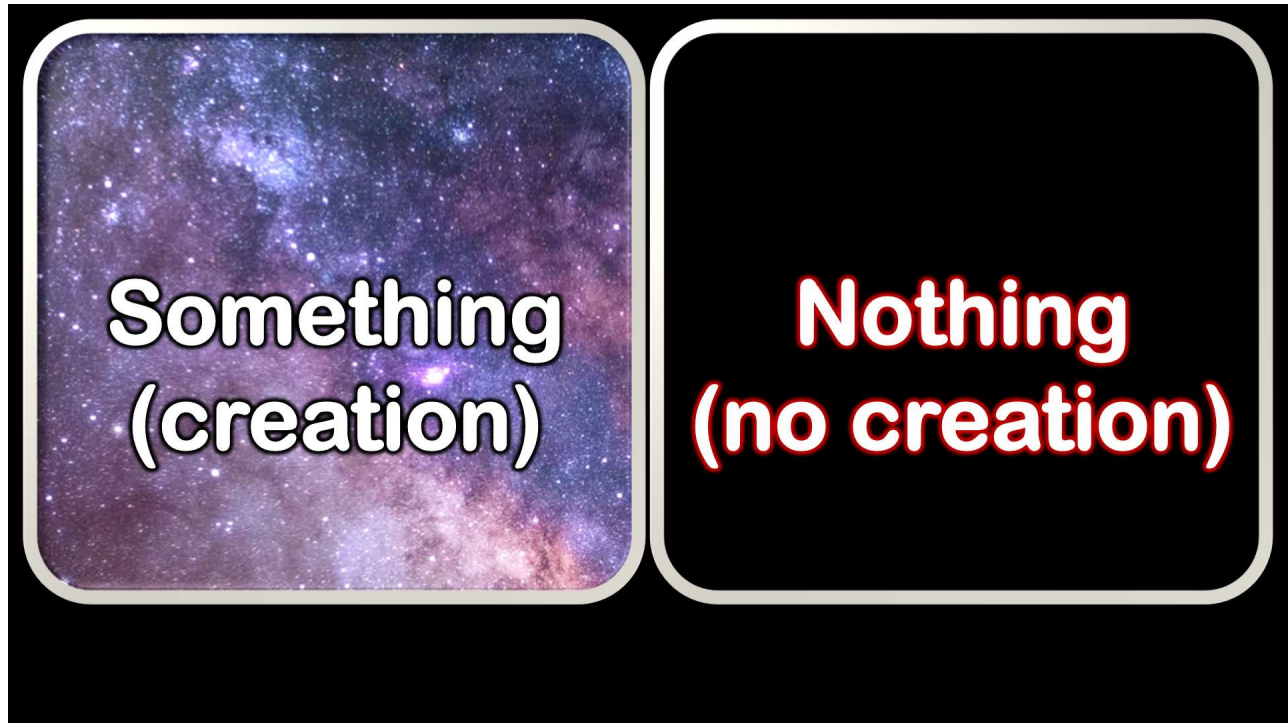
But now we have a contradiction, to wit, that something was created that was not created.

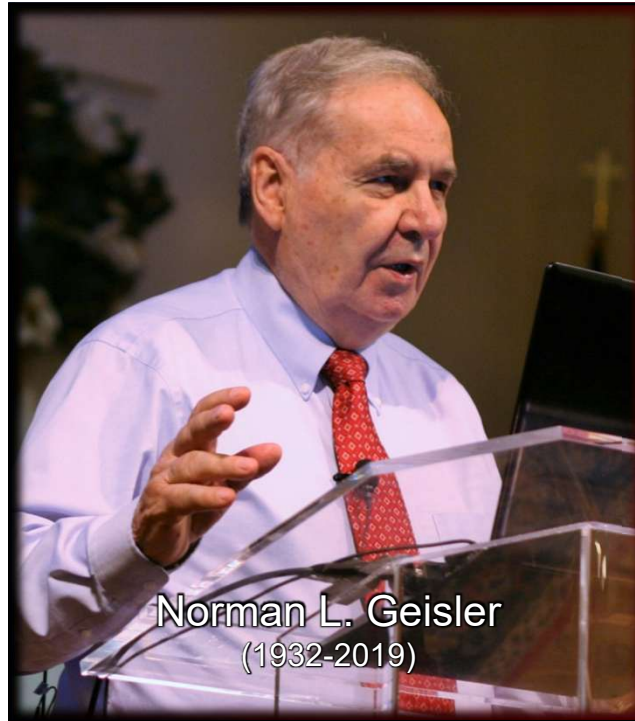


**Something
(creation)**



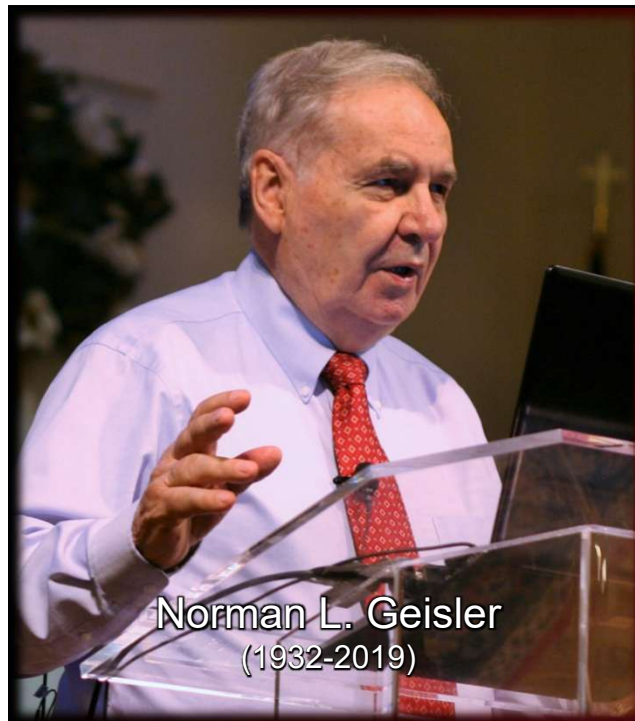
**Nothing
(no creation)**





Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

"It is true that God had a choice to create or not to create. But is it true that not to create is morally better than to create?"



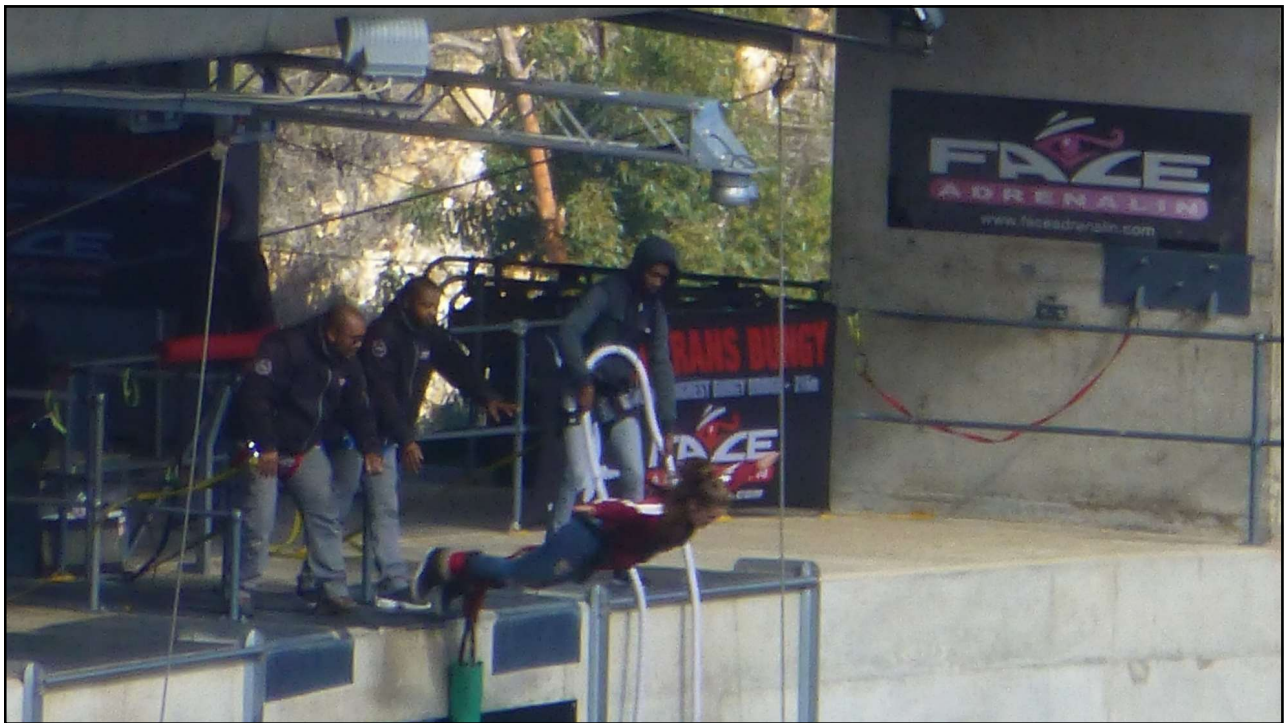
Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

"It assumes that nothing is better than something. This is a gigantic category mistake, because being and nonbeing are not in the same category."



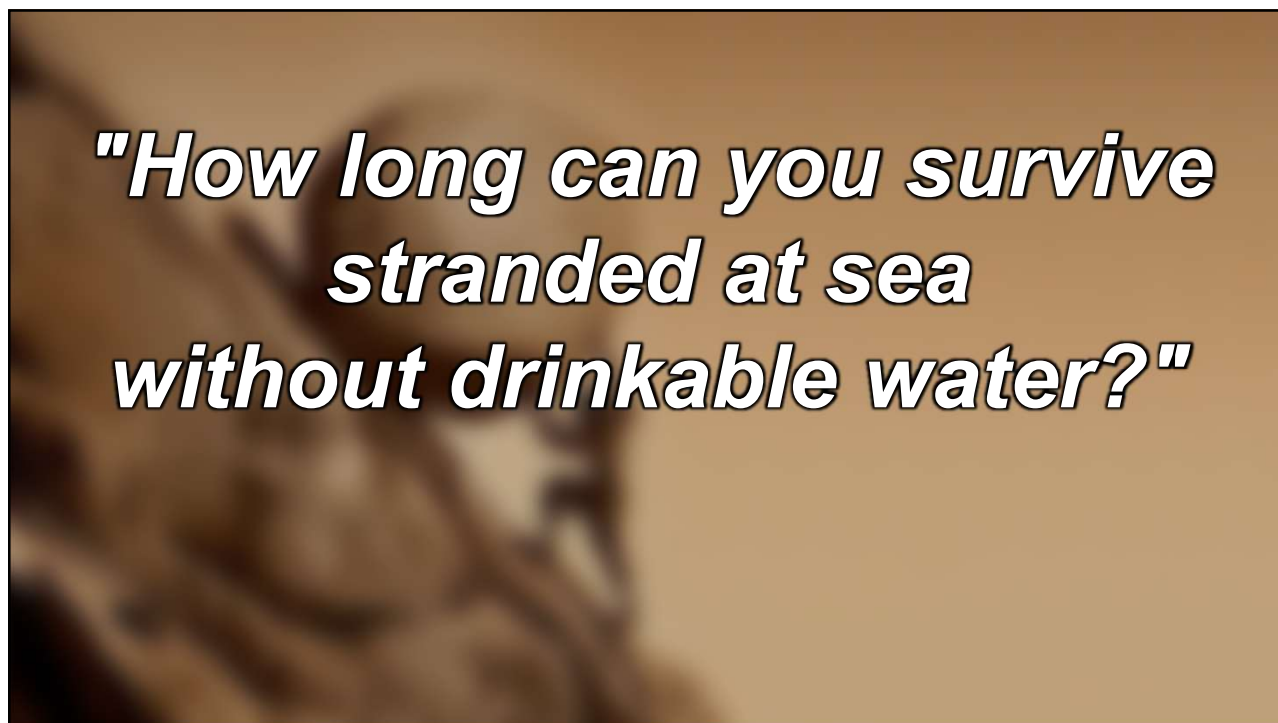
↻ Category Mistake ↻

You commit this fallacy when you illicitly mix or cross categories or ascribe an attribute or property to a thing or concept which could not possibly have that attribute or property.





*"What time is it
on the Sun?"*

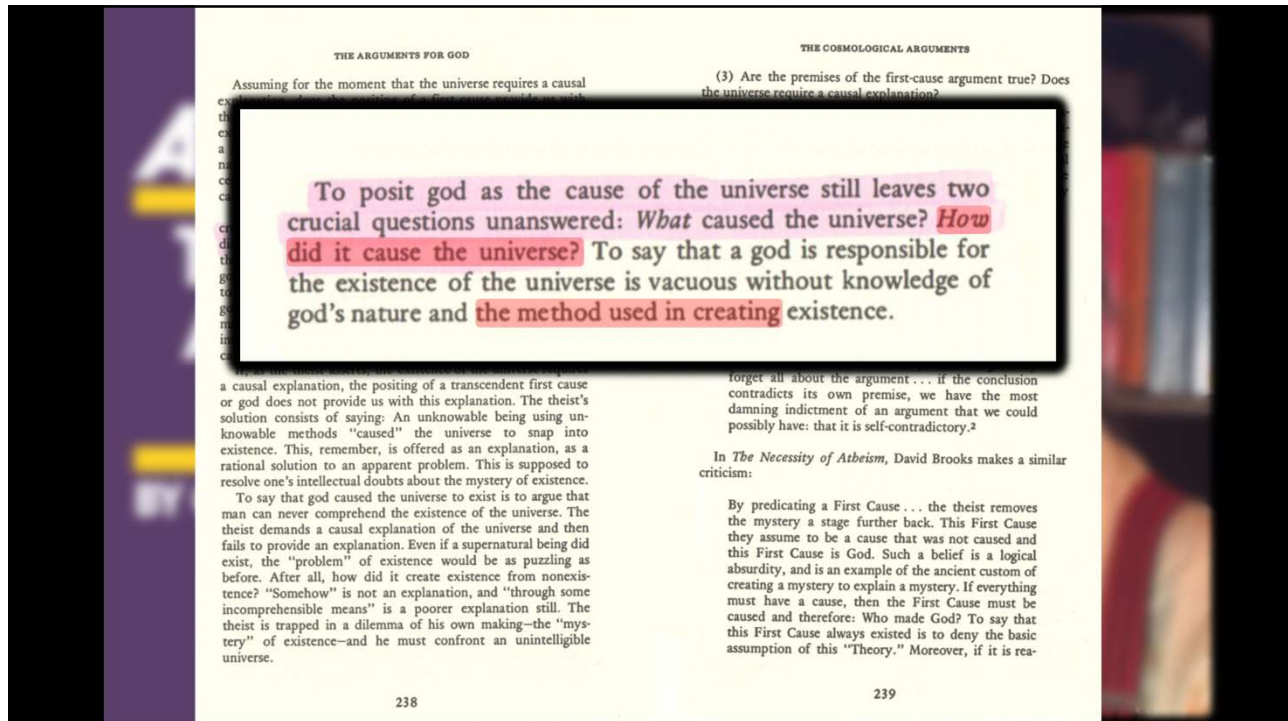
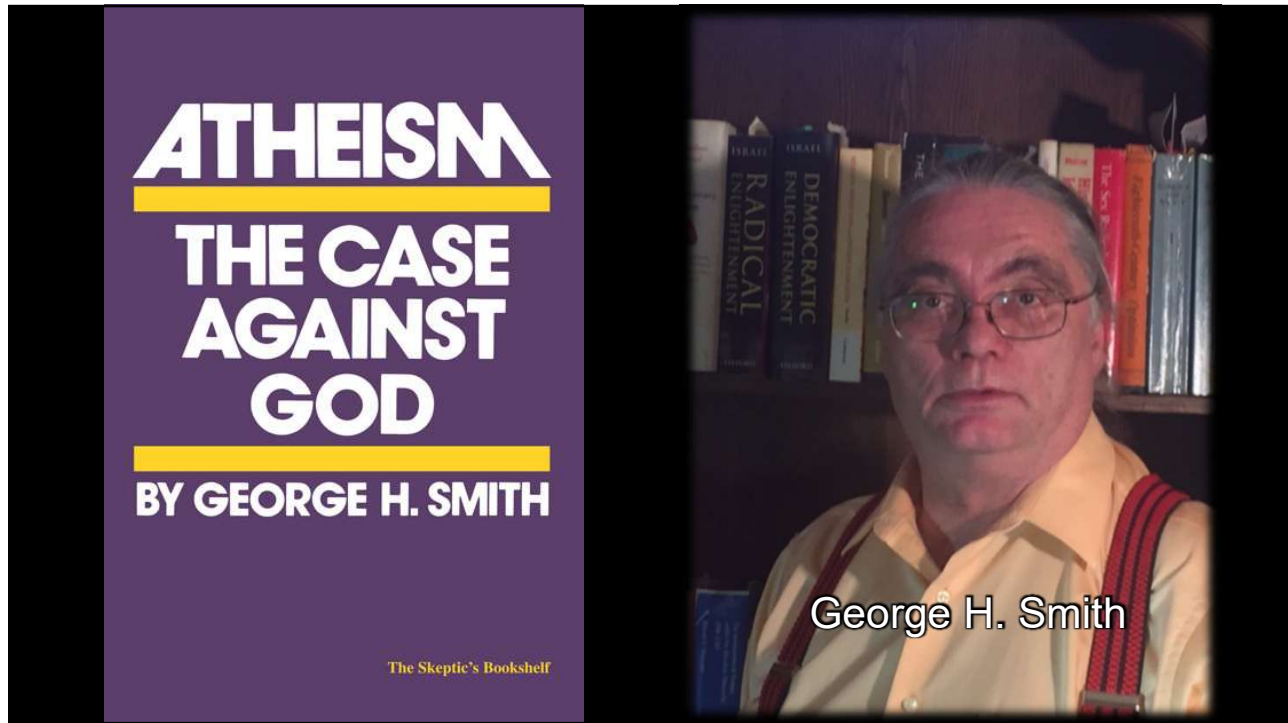


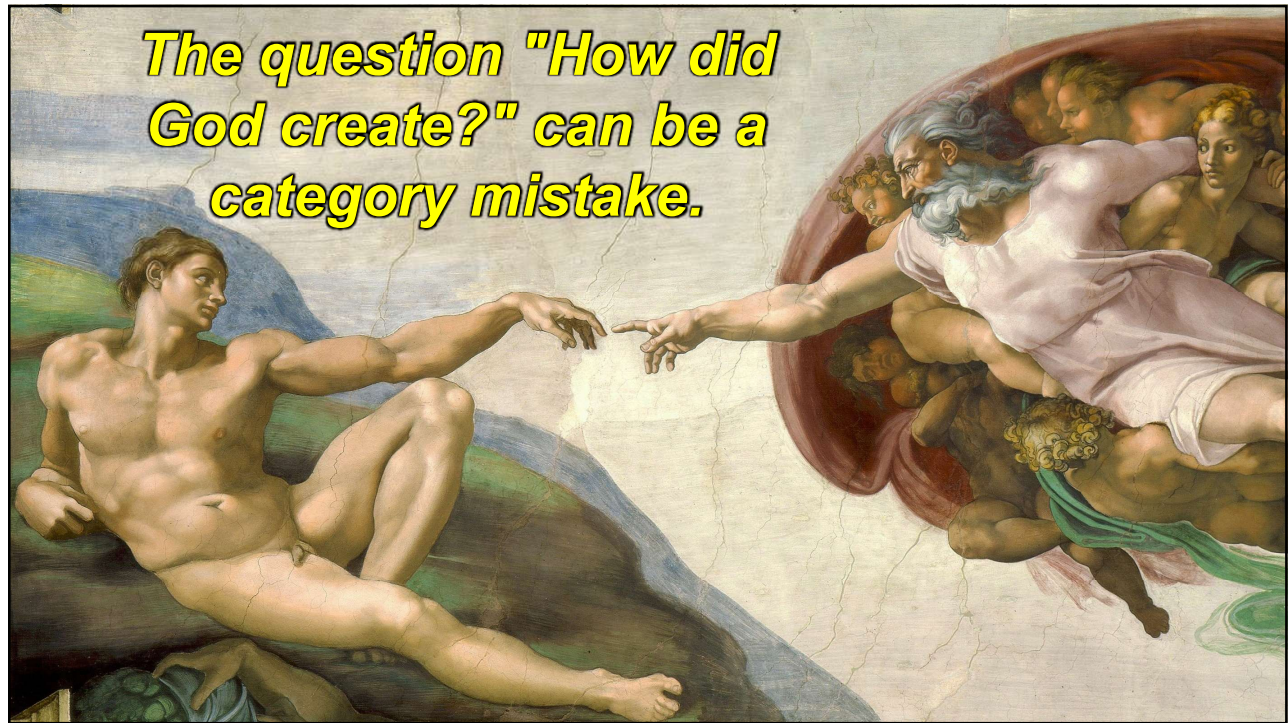
***"How long can you survive
stranded at sea
without drinkable water?"***

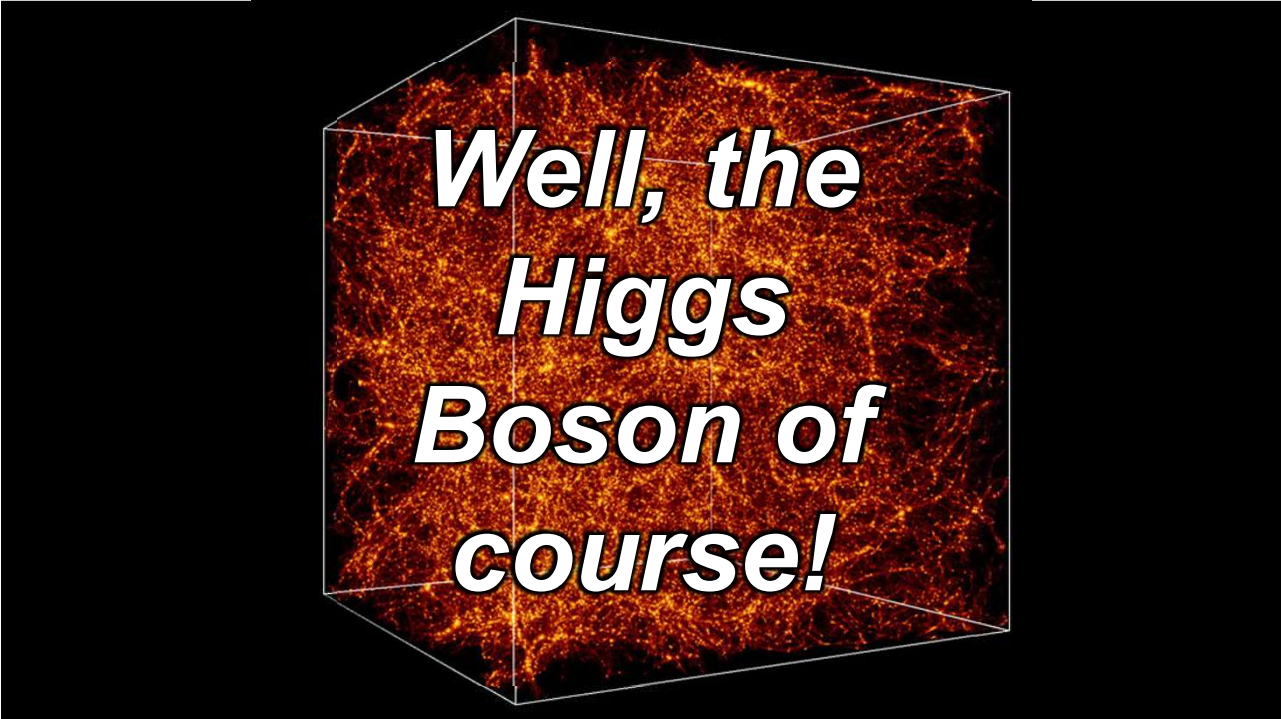
*"How long can you survive
stranded at sea
for about two weeks?"*

Beware of certain
"how" questions.

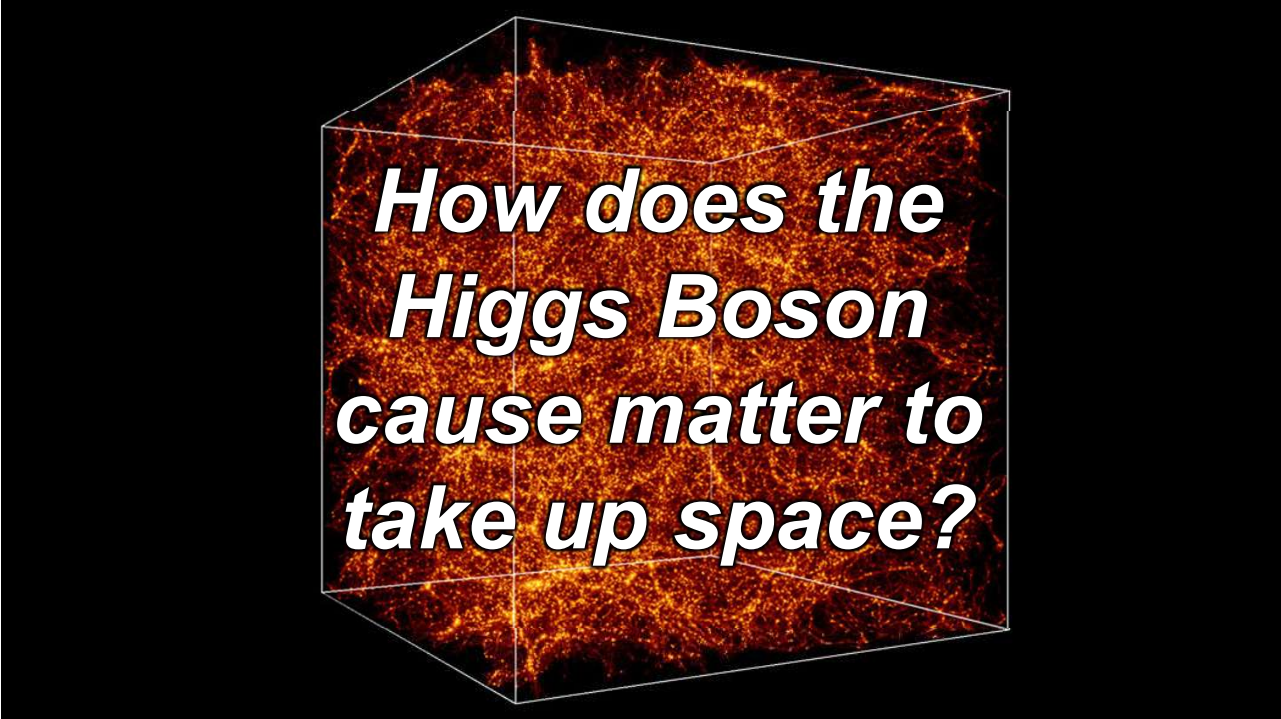




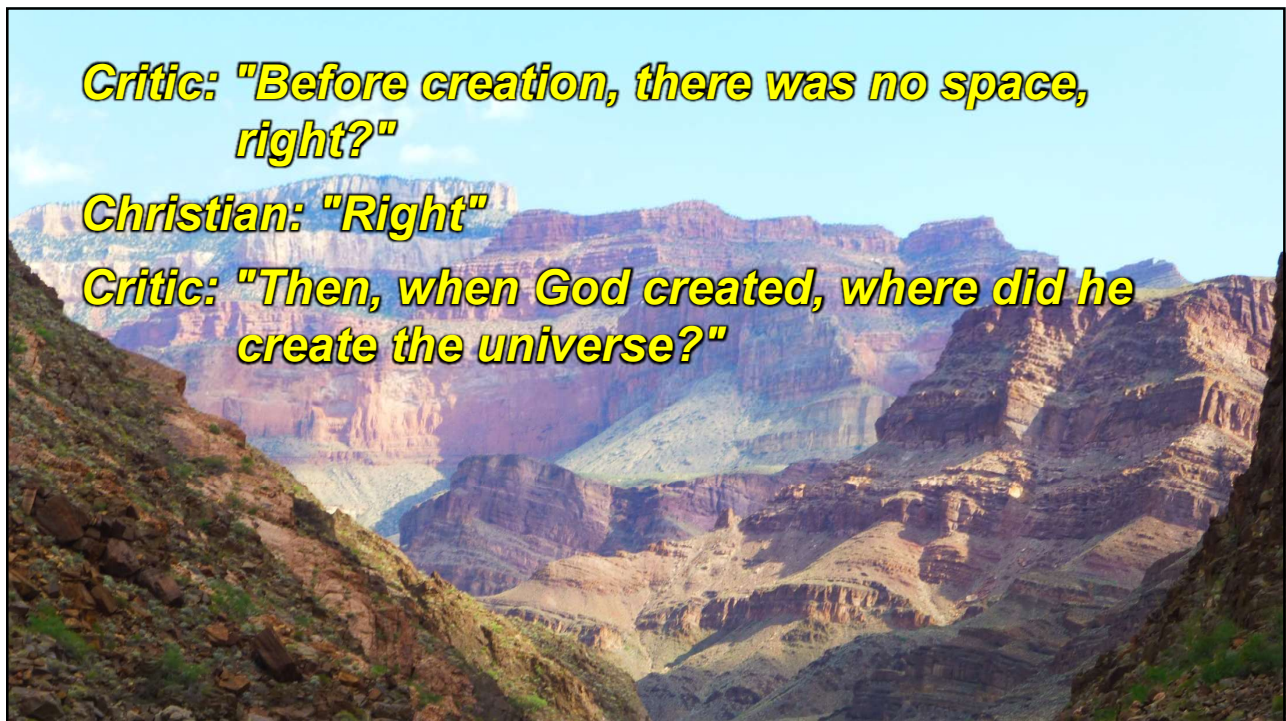




***Well, the
Higgs
Boson of
course!***

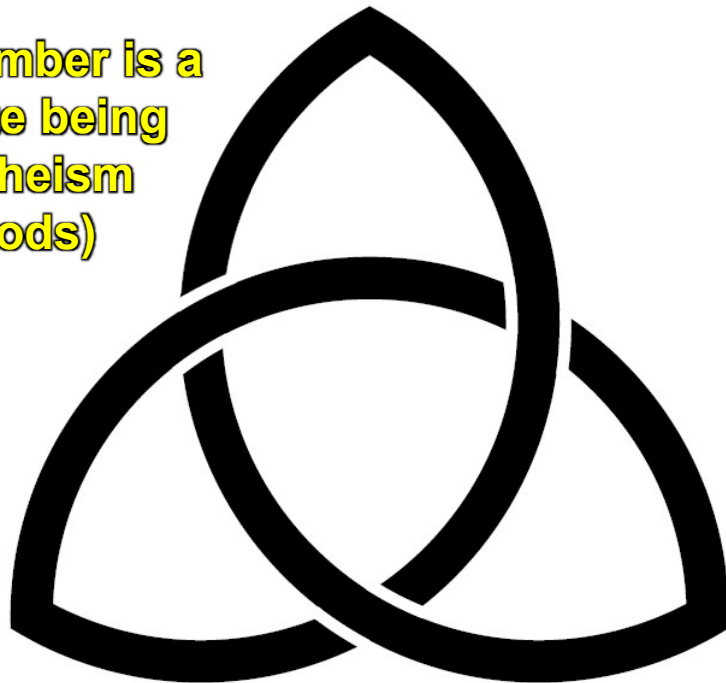


***How does the
Higgs Boson
cause matter to
take up space?***

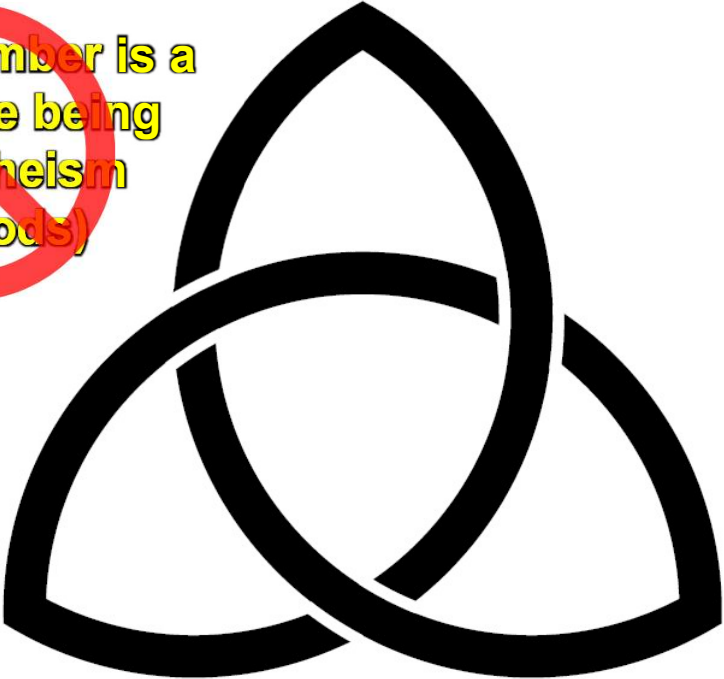




**Each member is a
separate being
= Tri-theism
(3 Gods)**



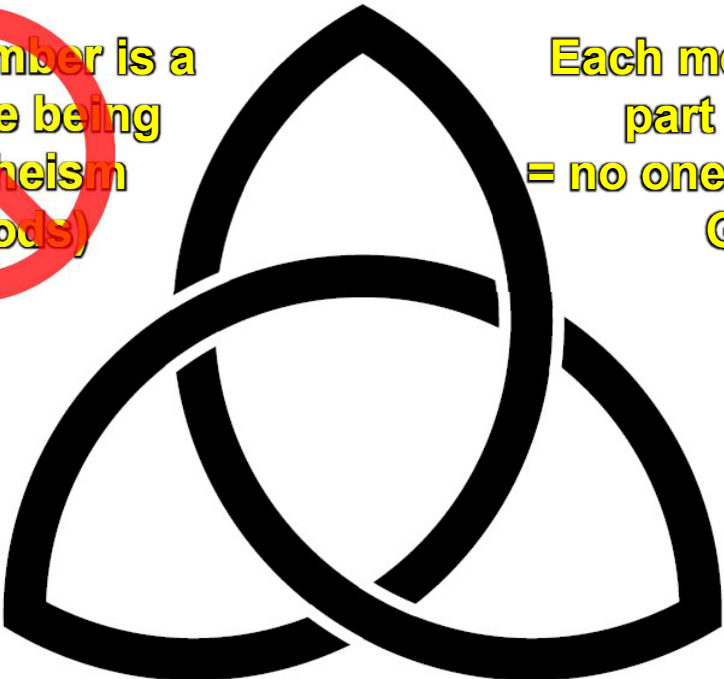
~~Each member is a separate being = Tri-theism (3 Gods)~~



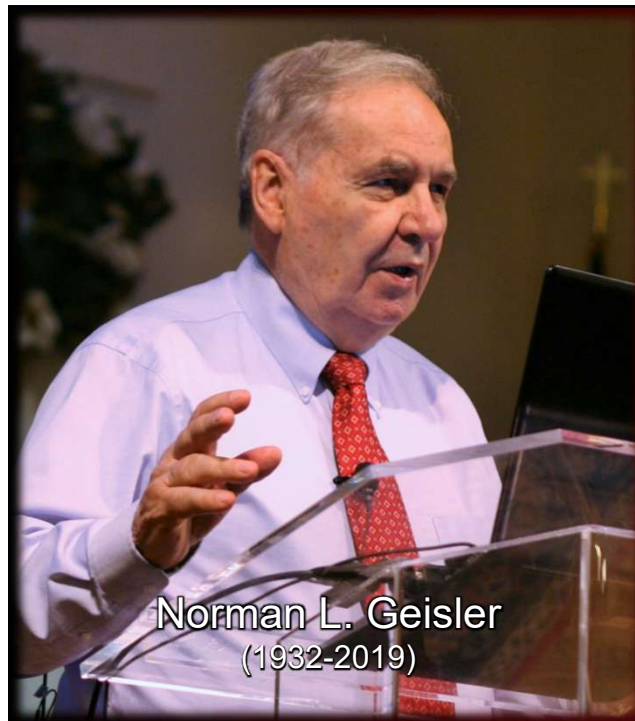
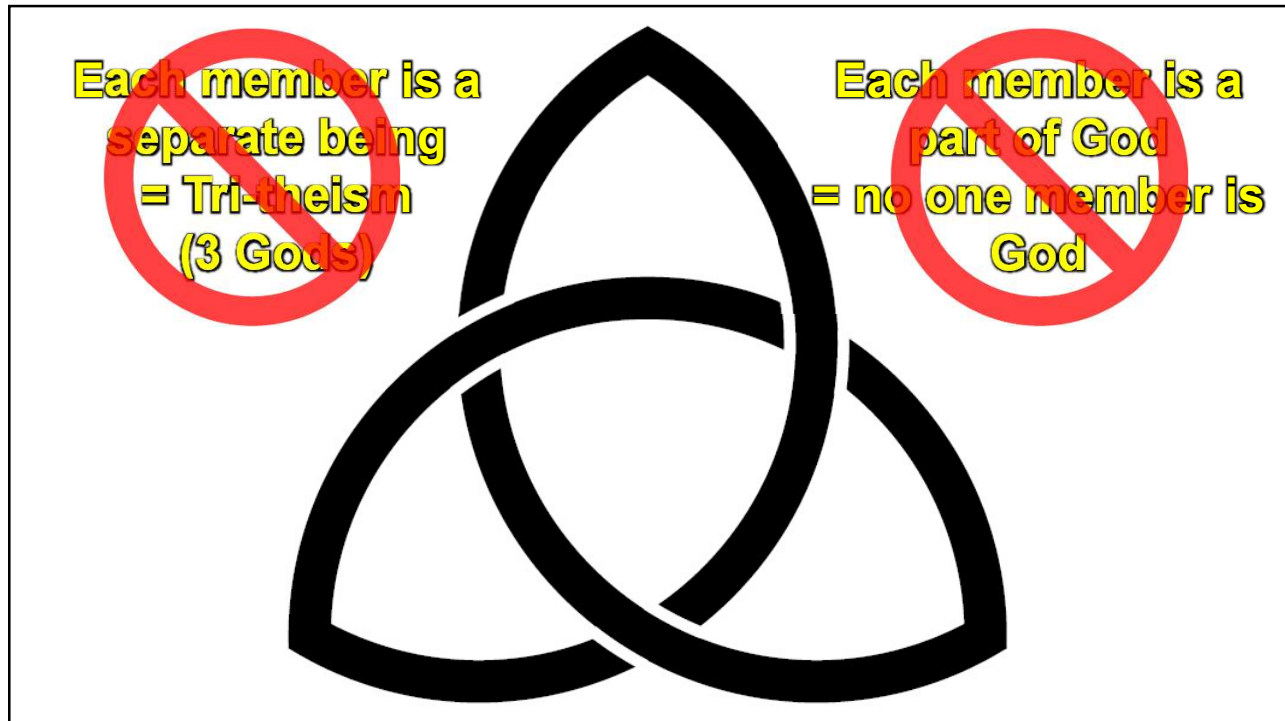
The diagram consists of three thick black teardrop-shaped outlines that overlap in a central triangular region. Each teardrop is oriented with its point towards the top-right, bottom-left, and top-left respectively, creating a symmetrical arrangement.

~~Each member is a separate being = Tri-theism (3 Gods)~~

Each member is a part of God = no one member is God

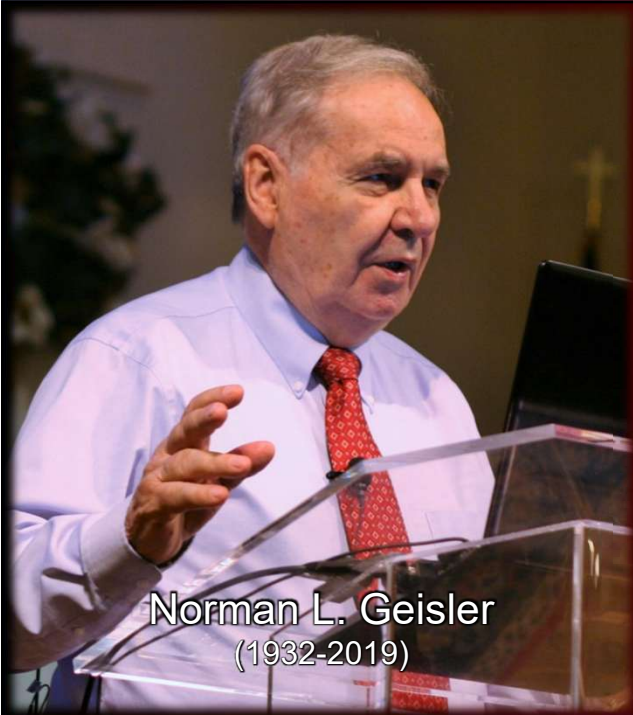


The diagram is identical to the one above, showing three overlapping teardrop shapes. The text on the left is crossed out with a red circle and slash, while the text on the right is not.



Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

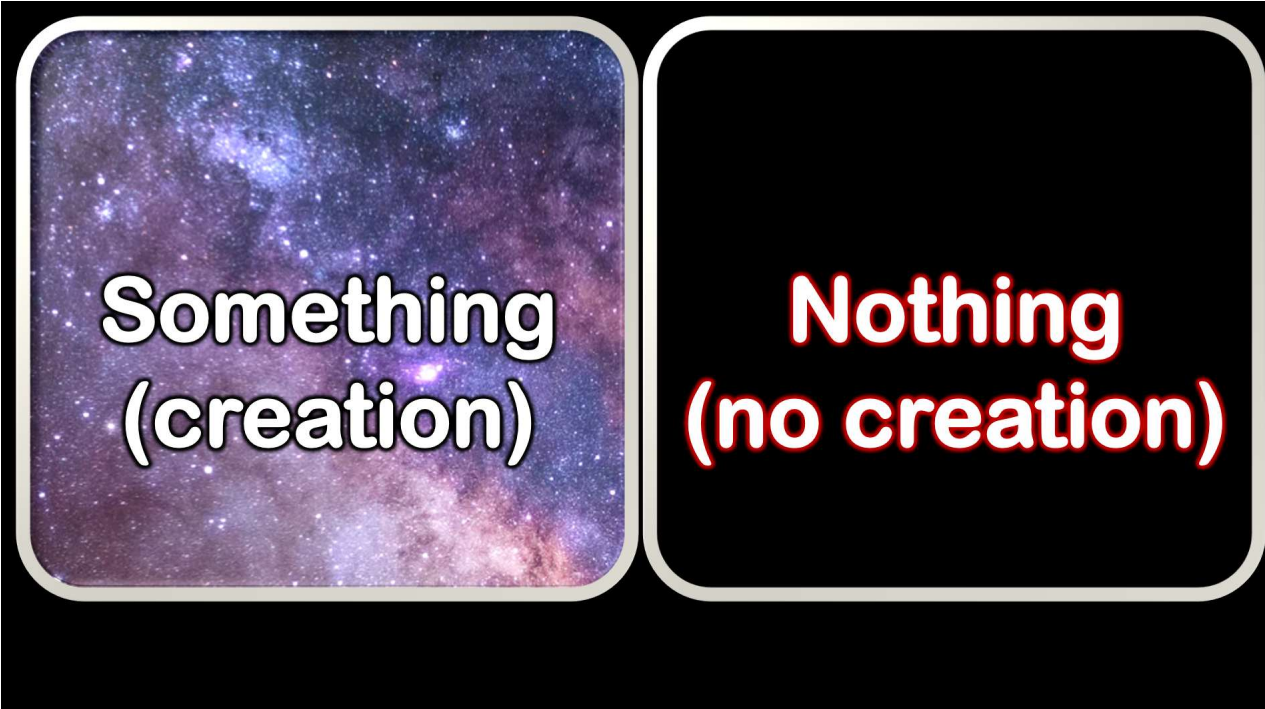
"It simply is not possible that nothing is better than something, since nothing is nothing, and something and nothing don't have anything in common."



Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

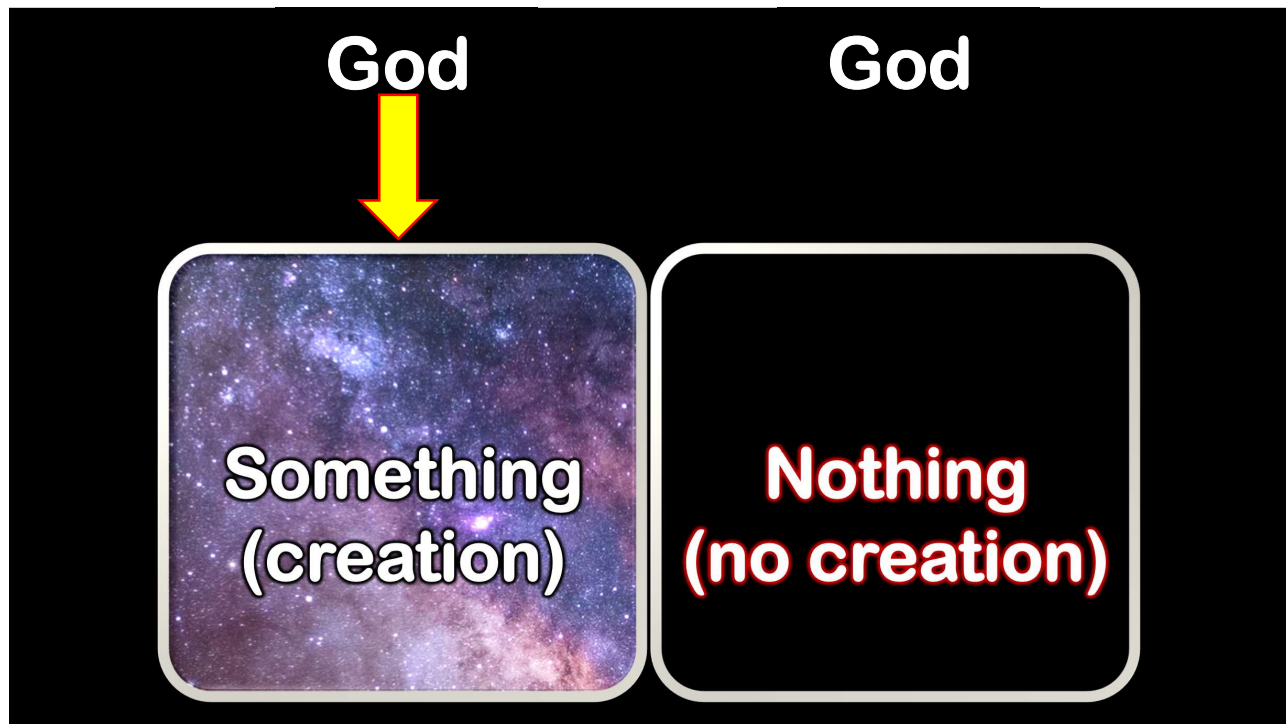
"Comparisons like better than can only be made where both things have something in common to compare."

[Norman L. Geisler, *If God, Why Evil? A New Way to Think about the Question* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2001), 59, emphasis in original]



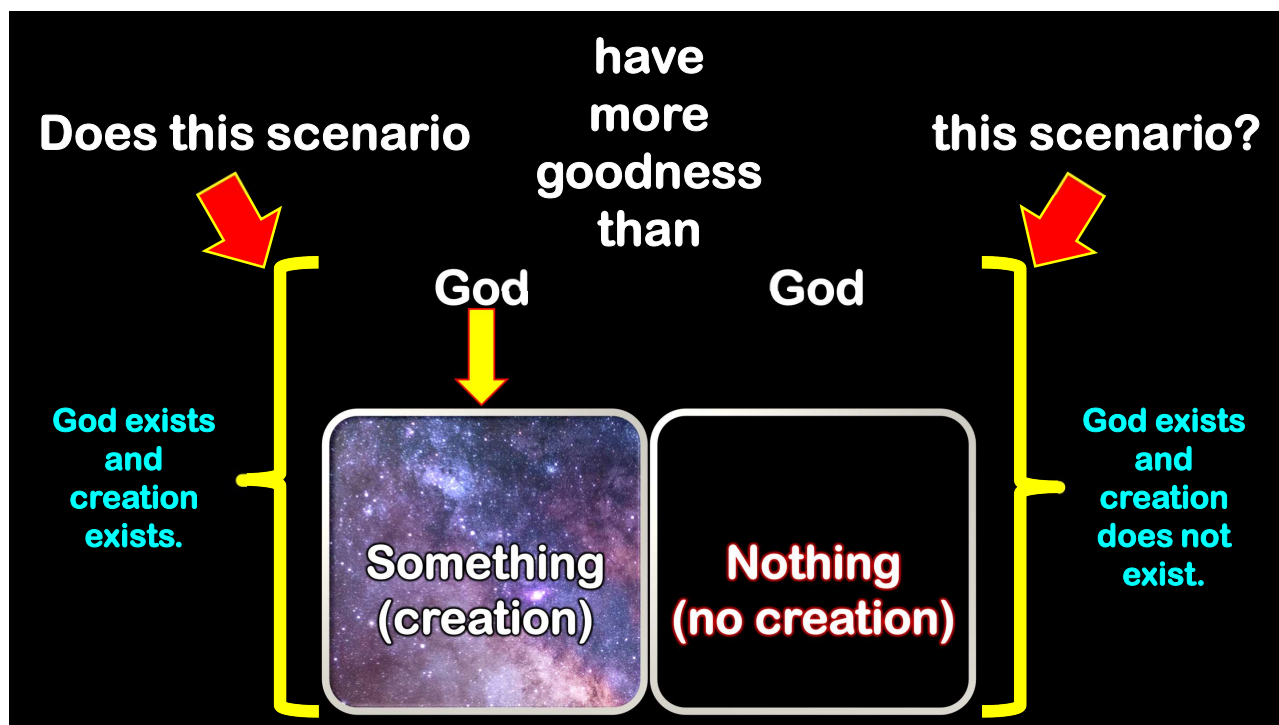
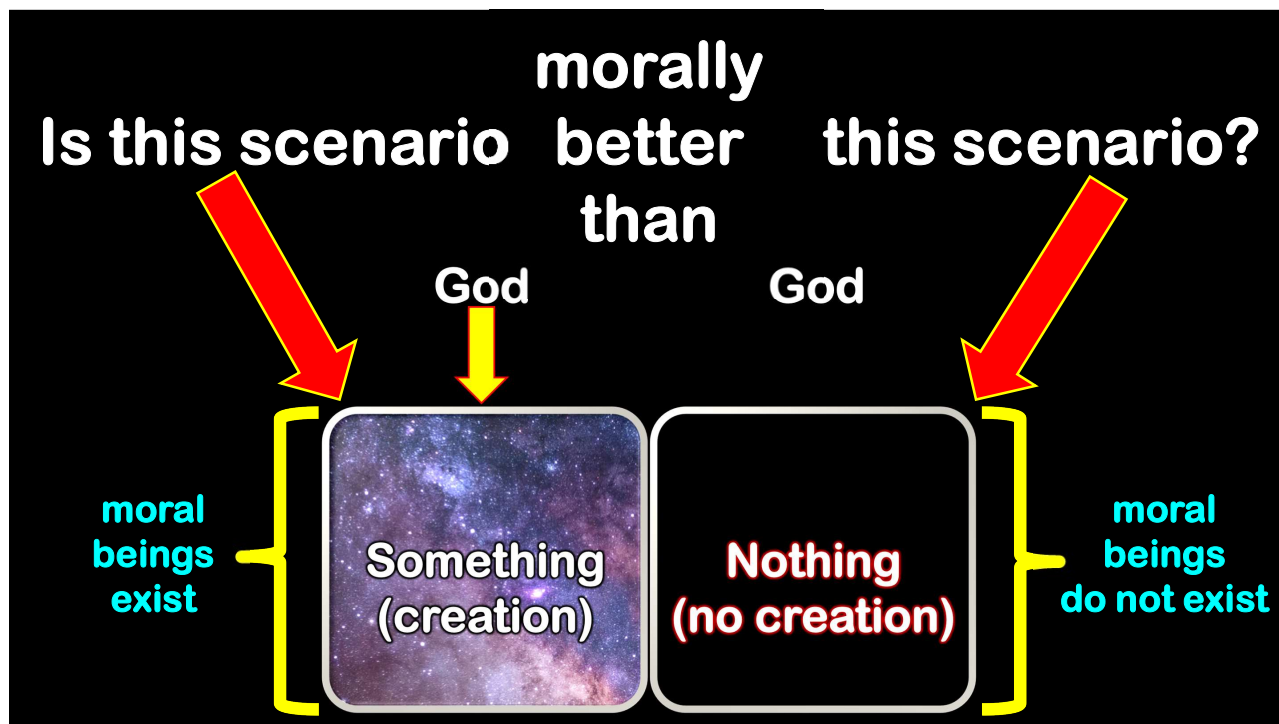
**Something
(creation)**

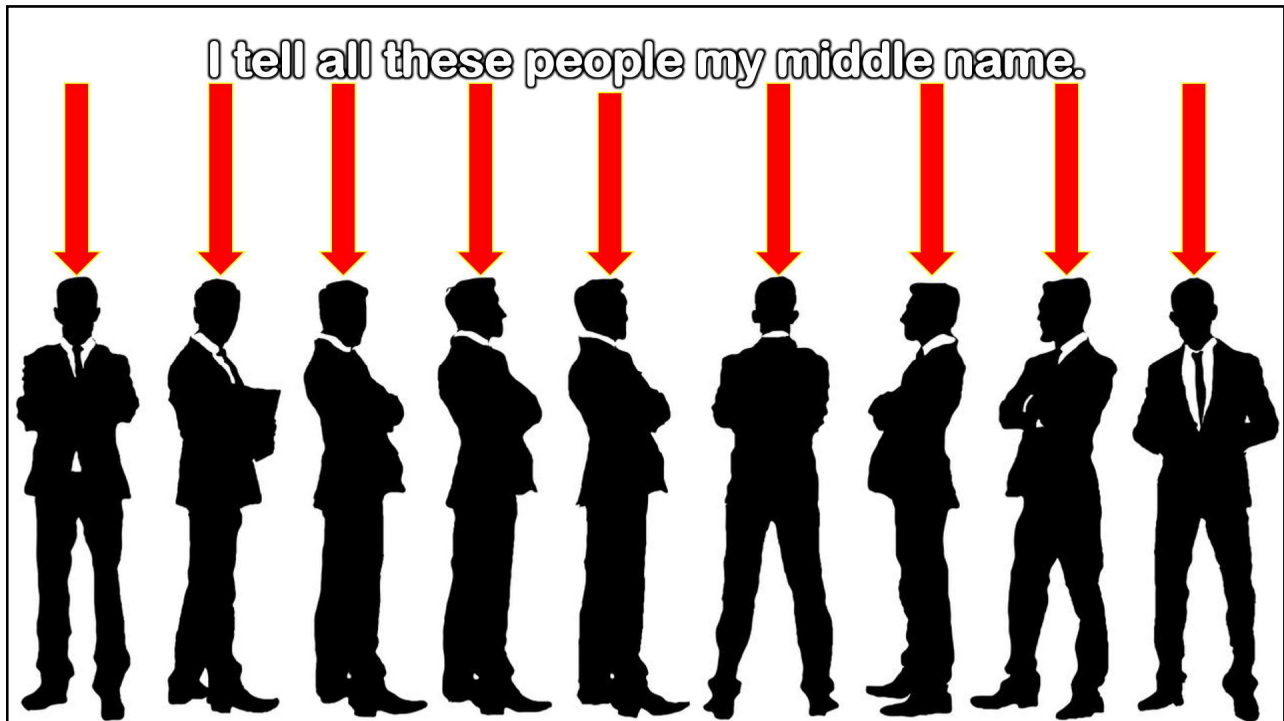
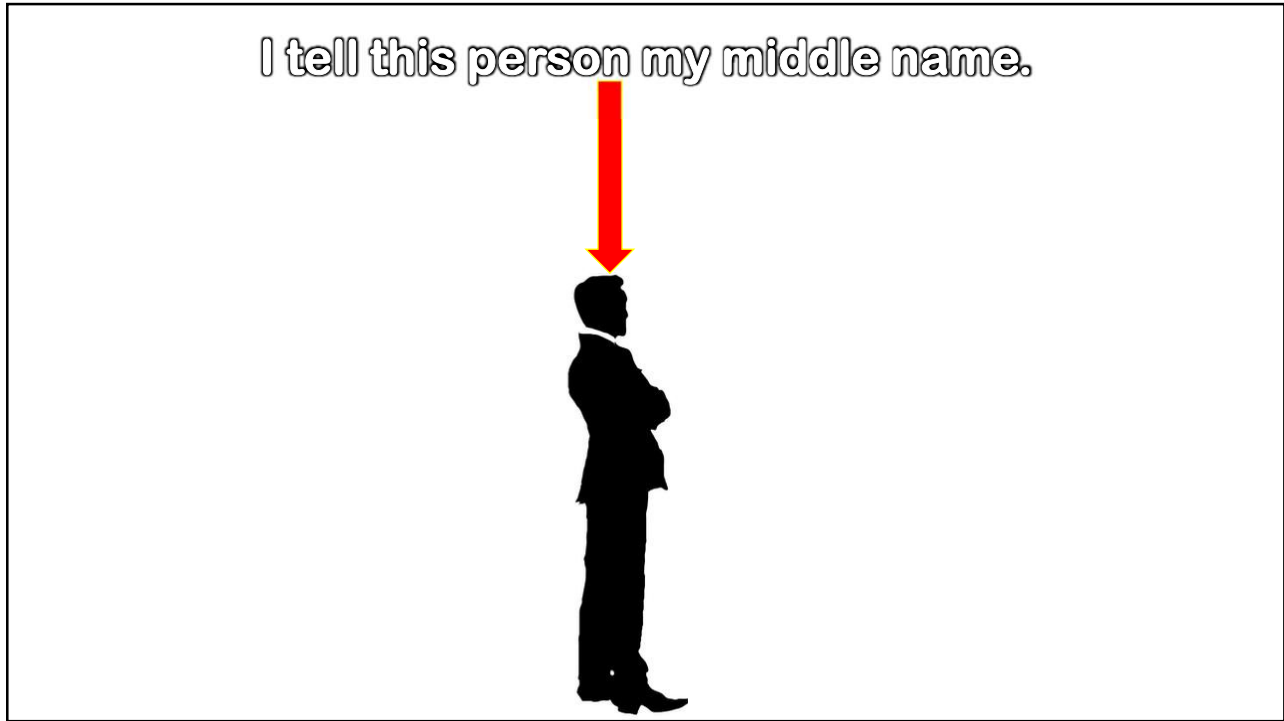
**Nothing
(no creation)**

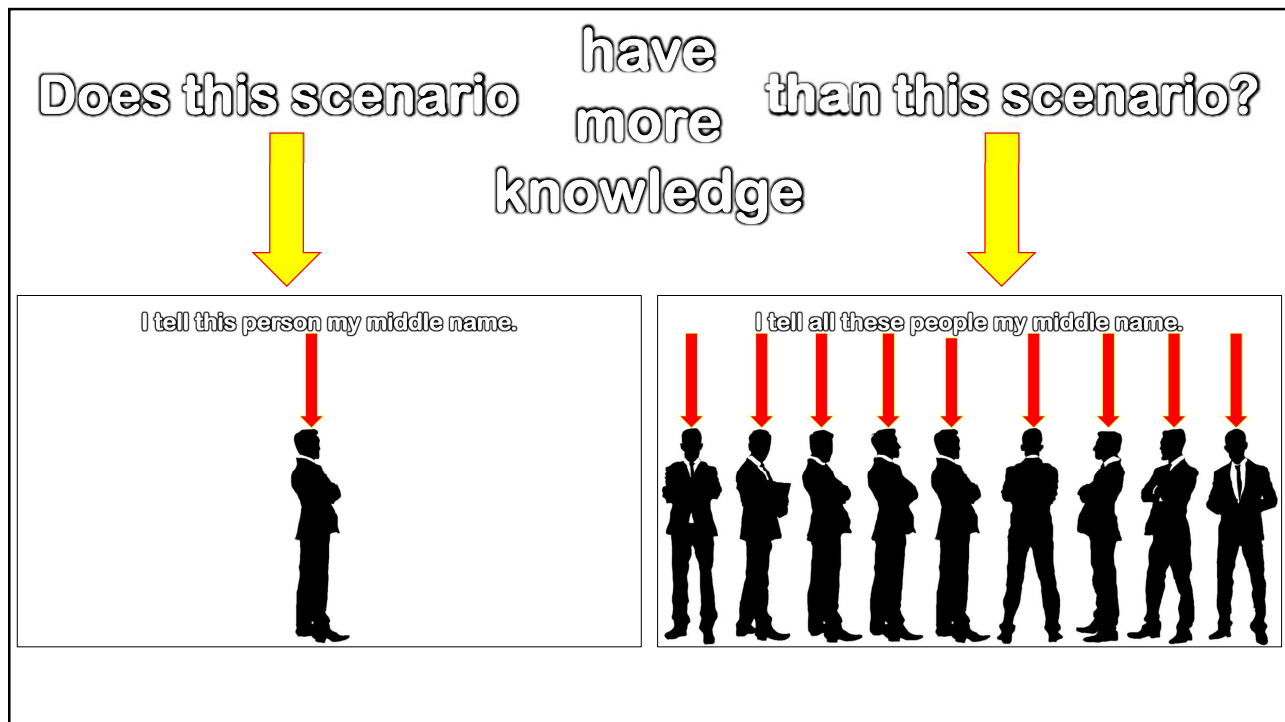


- (i) There is a God who created everything that exists.*
- (ii) Before God created there was nothing but God.*
- (iii) After God created, everything is causally dependent on God.*
- (iv) God had the choice of whether or not to create this world.*
- (v) In one possible scenario, God could have chosen not to create anything at all.*
- (vi) If this choice were actualized, God would not have created a world in which evil existed.*
- (vii) **Since God is perfectly good, if God had not created anything, all that would exist would be perfect goodness.***

Setting aside for the moment the lurking problematic metaphysics of saying that evil exists, what are we to conclude from Weisberger's (La Croix's) point here?







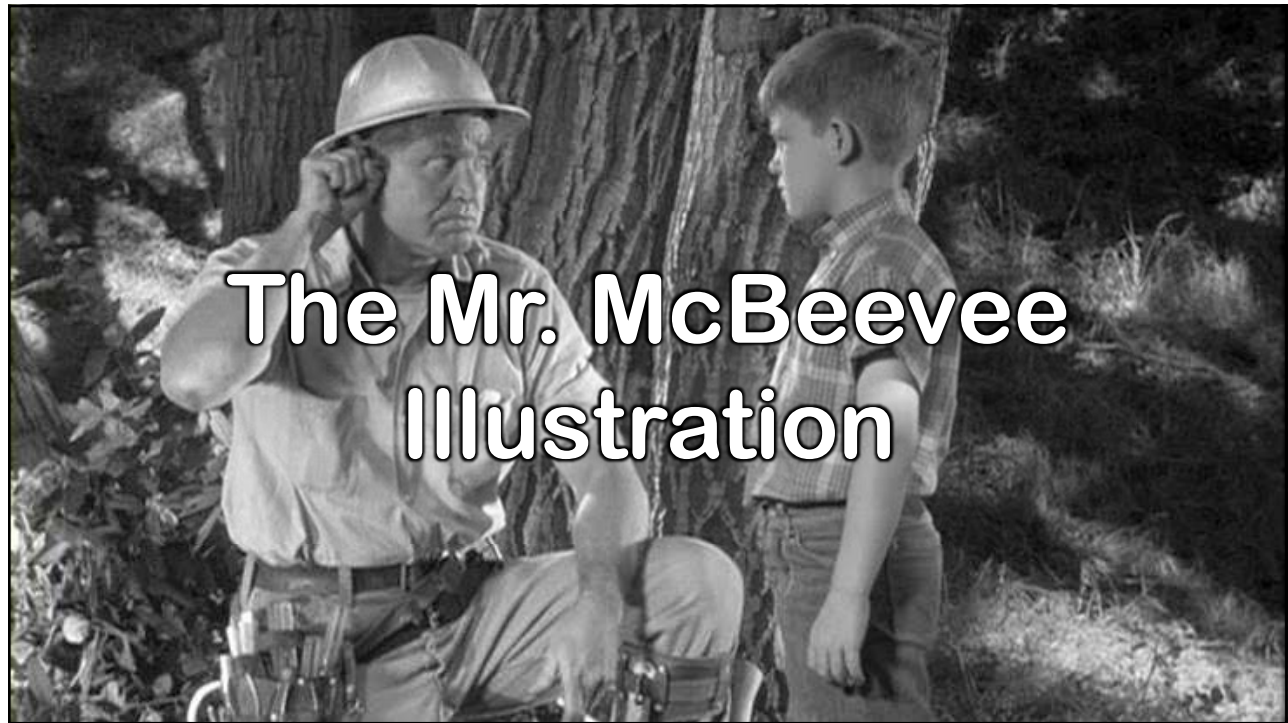
Consideration of the Afterlife



Since it is most often the Christian who is challenged with the problem of evil, it behooves the Christian to cull from the entire Christian world view in responding.

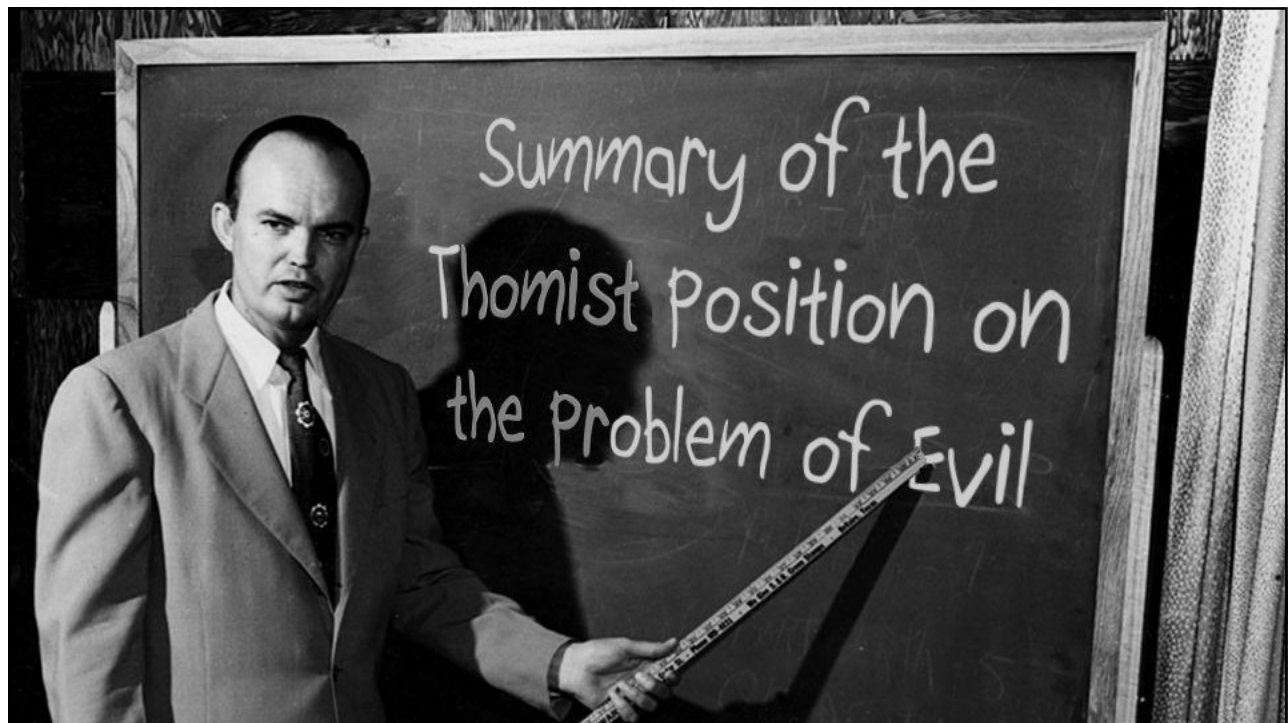
- *In the consummation of history, all will be good.*
- *All moral goods will be rewarded. (which is good)*
- *All moral evils will be punished. (which is good)*

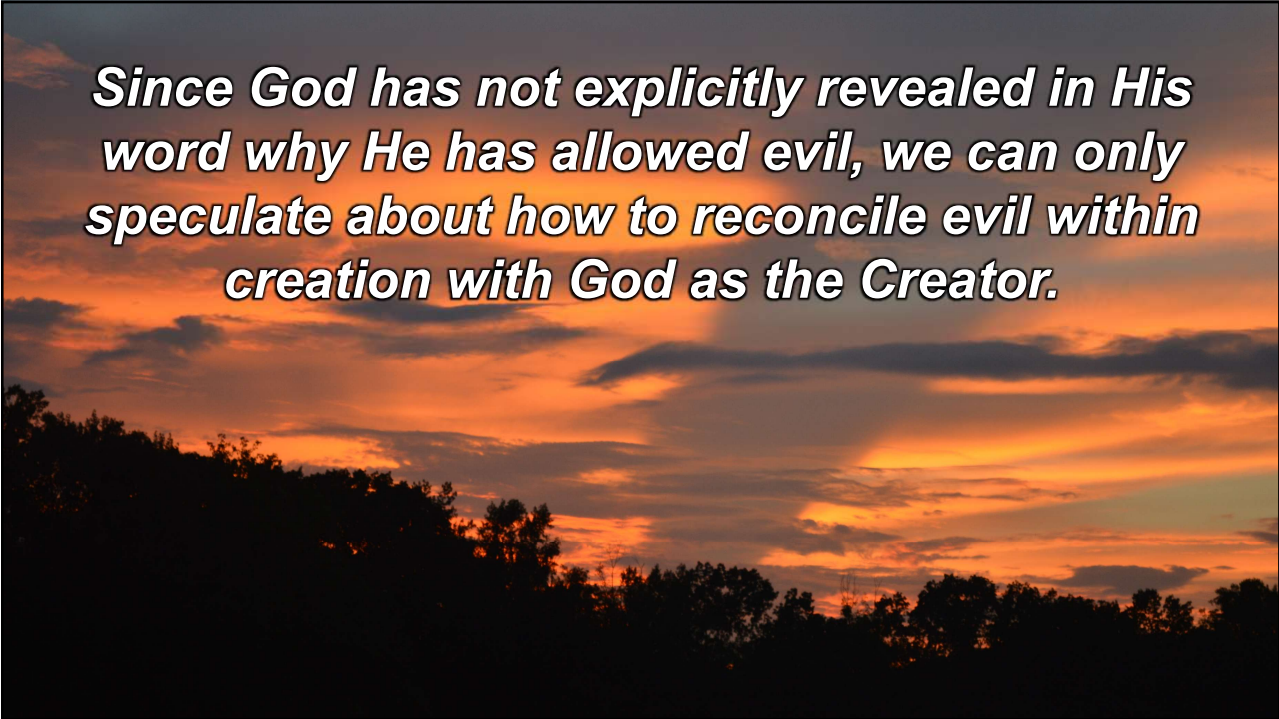
*Would It Have
Been Better if God
Never Created the
World?*



"While it might be easy to imagine what we would do if we had God's power, it is impossible to know what we would do if we had God's knowledge."







Since God has not explicitly revealed in His word why He has allowed evil, we can only speculate about how to reconcile evil within creation with God as the Creator.



Our speculation should be informed and constrained by what God has revealed about Himself:

- ❖ ***through creation (General Revelation and Natural Theology) and***
- ❖ ***through Scripture (Special Revelation and Systematic Theology).***

As for Special Revelation, Scripture unequivocally affirms the goodness of God.



∞ Nahum 1:7 ∞

The LORD is good, A stronghold in the day of trouble; And He knows those who trust in Him.



❧ 1 Chronicles 16:34 ❧

*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He
is good! For His mercy endures
forever.*



❧ Psalm 25:8 ❧

*Good and upright is the LORD;
Therefore He teaches sinners
in the way.*



☞ Psalm 34:8 ☞

Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; Blessed is the man who trusts in Him!



☞ Psalm 100:5 ☞

For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations.

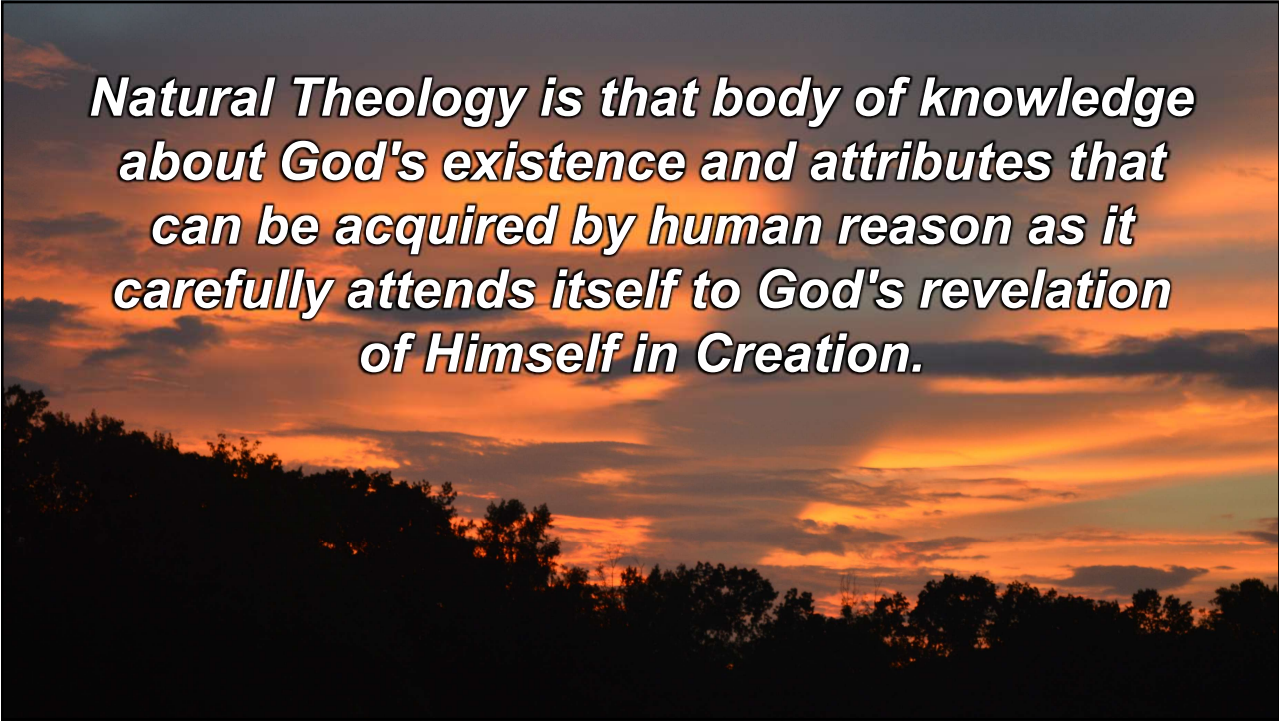




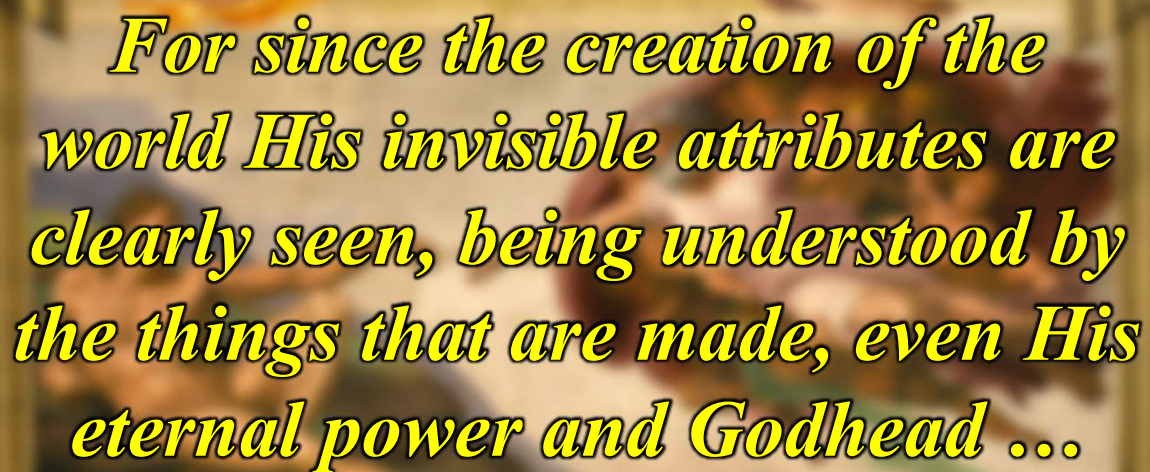
***Of course, this observation is not exclusive
to the Thomist position.***



***As for General Revelation, Thomists put
great emphasis on Natural Theology.***

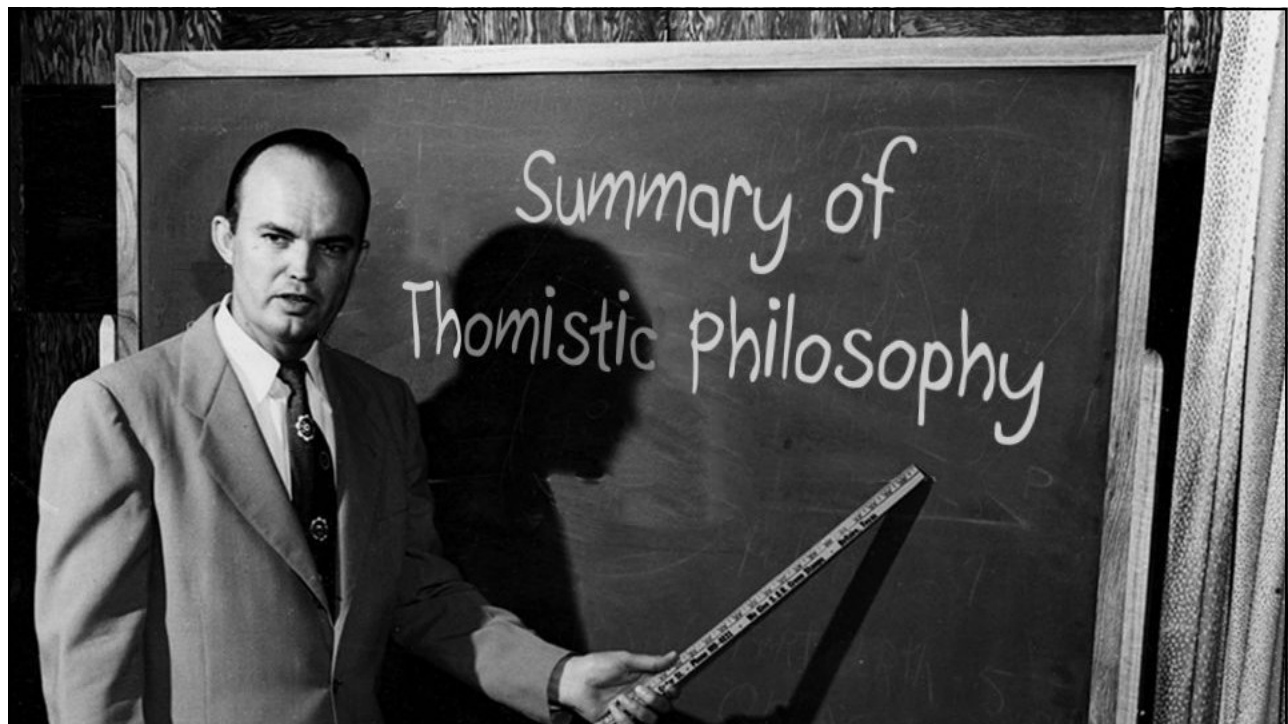


Natural Theology is that body of knowledge about God's existence and attributes that can be acquired by human reason as it carefully attends itself to God's revelation of Himself in Creation.



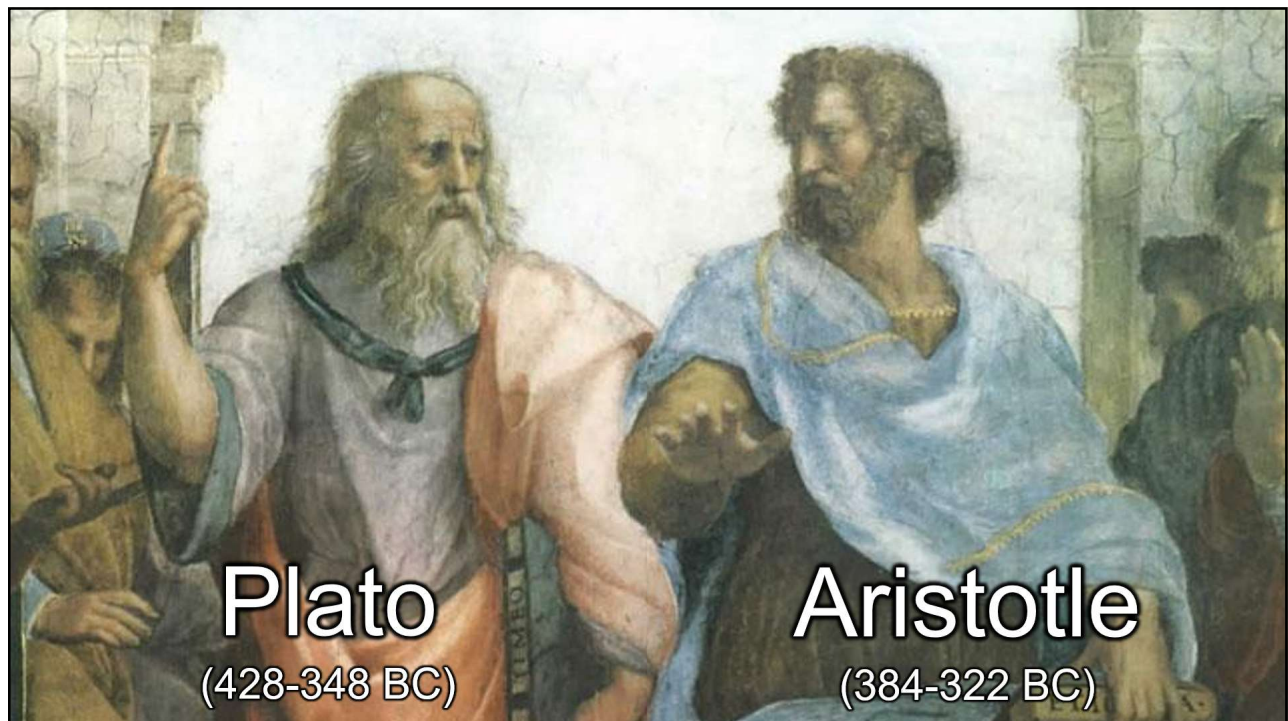
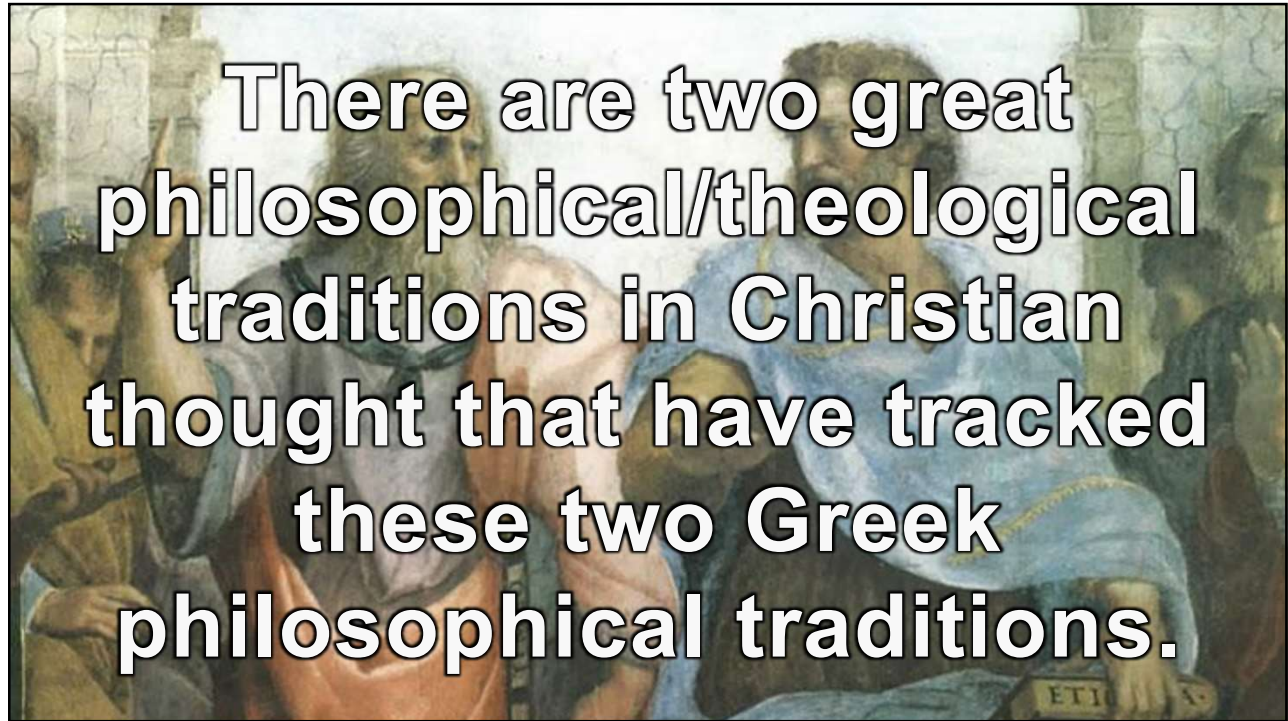
For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ...

Rom. 1:20a



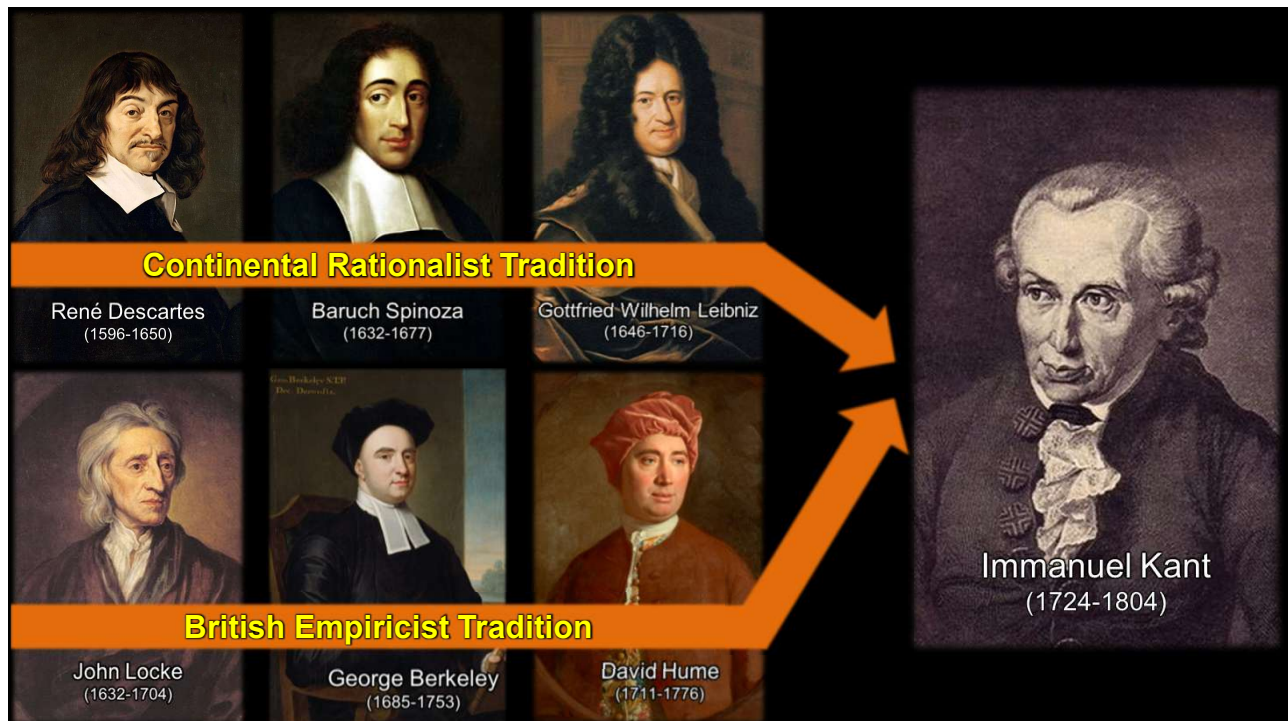
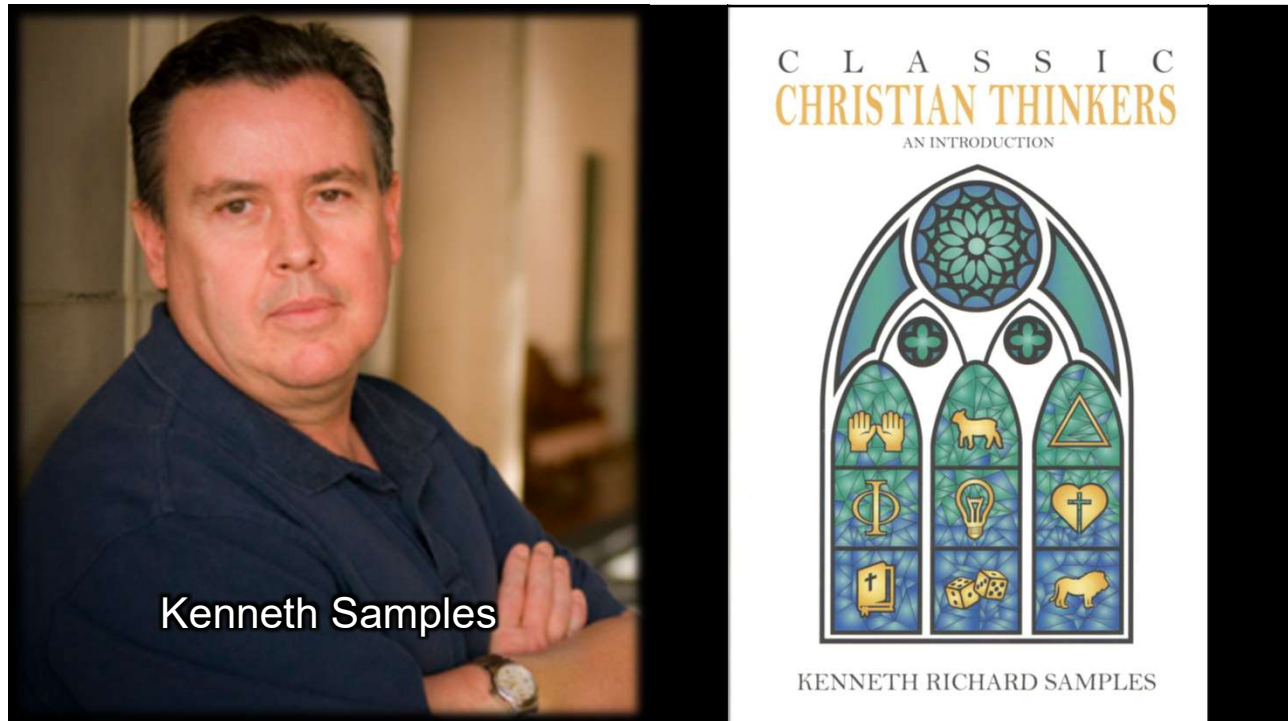
There are two great philosophical traditions in Western thought that have endured since the ancient Greeks.







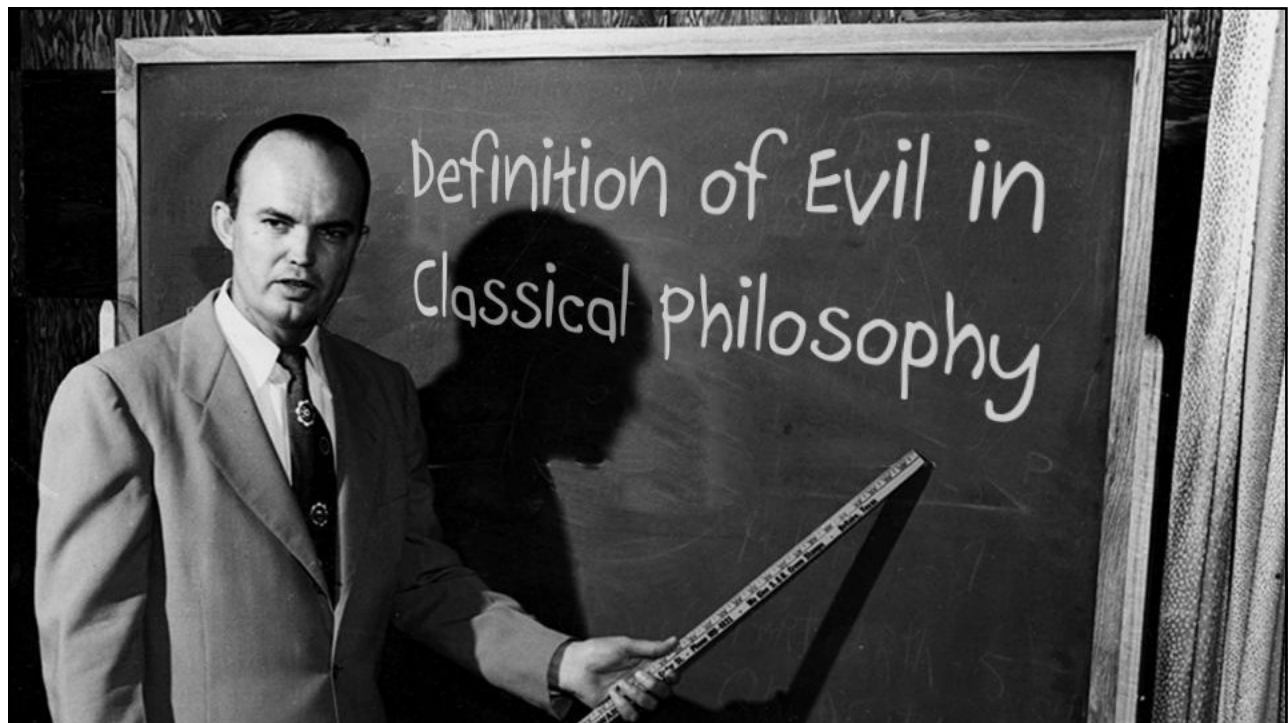
Exploring the contours of how these traditions have answered certain basic questions about the nature of reality and our knowledge of it, will enable us to position many questions and concerns we have as Christians.





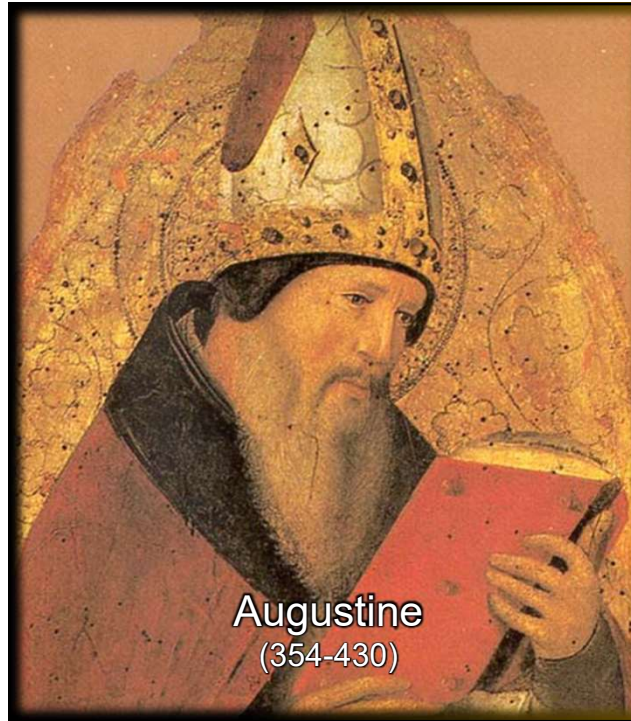
This approach to the problem of evil utilizes the philosophical categories and doctrines of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas.

It follows the contours of how this Classical / Scholastic tradition understands things like good, evil, nature (or essence), existence, causality, teleology, morality, God, and more.



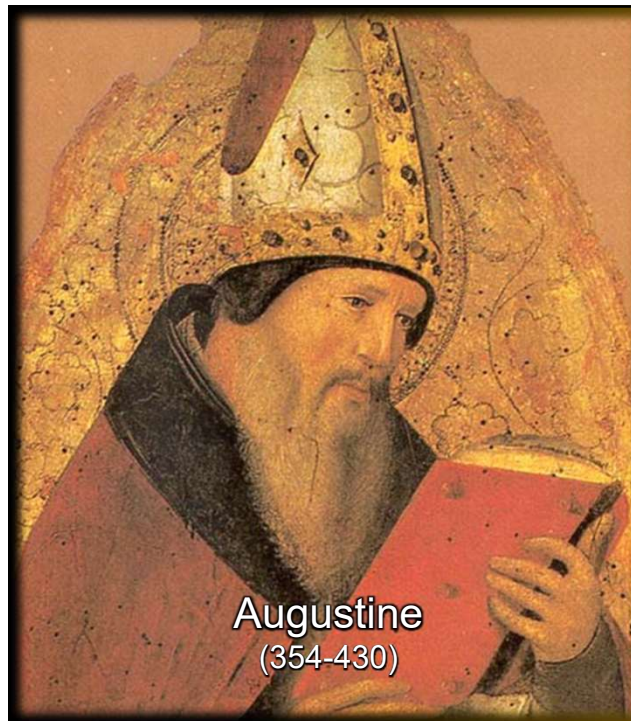
***If God created all things and
evil is something,
then God created evil.***

***If God did not create evil,
then it would seem either:
evil is **unreal**
or
evil is **not a thing**.***



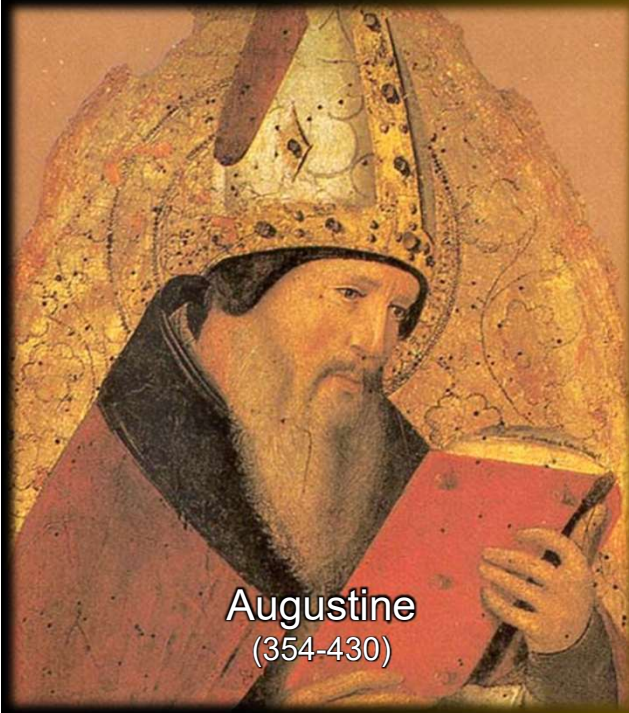
Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine on Evil as Privation



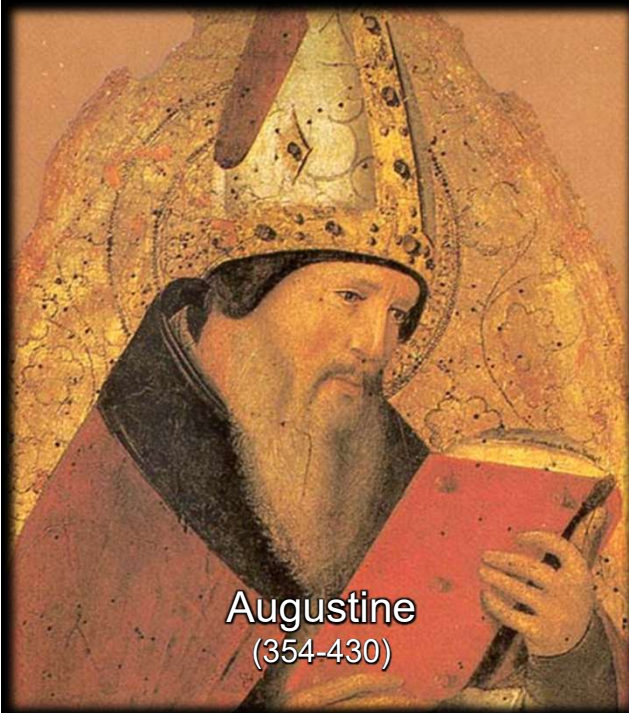
Augustine
(354-430)

There is a
difference
between:
being nothing
(unreal)
and
not being a thing.



Augustine
(354-430)

Augustine argued that evil is real but is not a thing. Rather, it is a **privation** or a **lack** in things.



Augustine
(354-430)

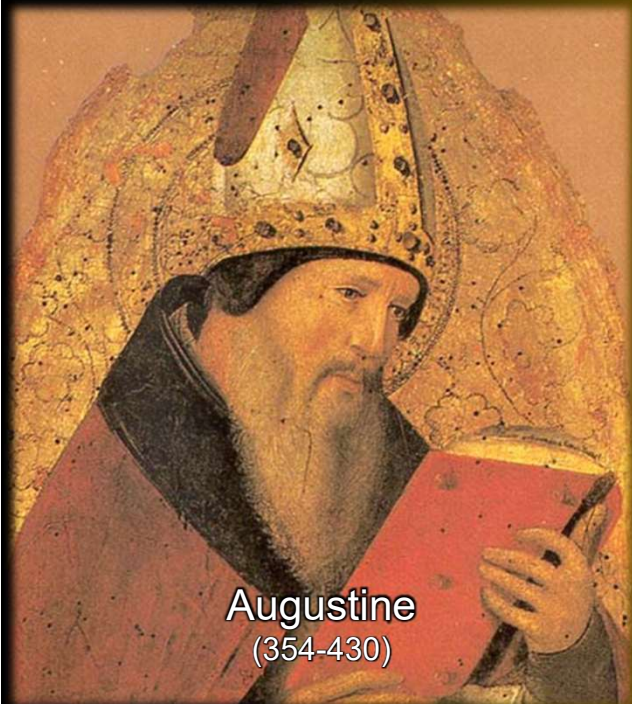
A DOUBLEDAY IMAGE BOOK

THE
Confessions
OF
St. Augustine

*Translated, with an introduction and notes, by
John K. Ryan*

The Greatest Spiritual Autobiography
of All Time, in a Distinguished New
Translation for the Modern Reader

AN IMAGE BOOK ORIGINAL
COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED



Augustine
(354-430)

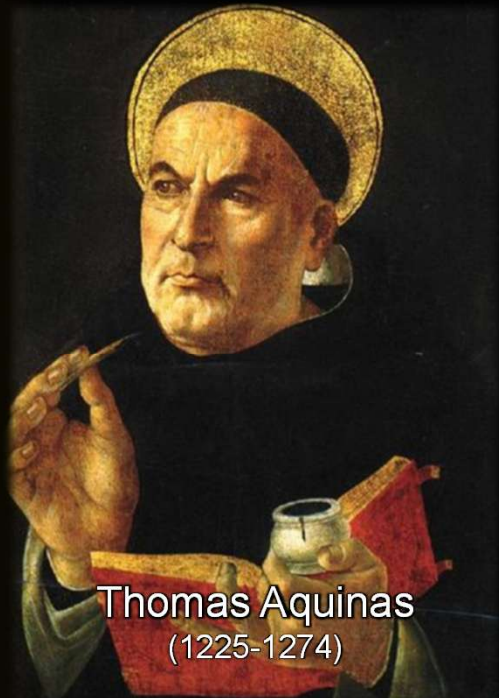
“ ... evil is only the privation of a good ... ”

[Augustine, *Confessions* III, 7, §12, trans. John K. Ryan (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 85. *malum non esse nisi privationem boni*]

The image features a portrait of Augustine on the left, wearing a mitre and holding a book. The right side has a yellow background with a blue cross pattern. The quote is in white, bold, italicized text.

“Now evil is in a substance because something which it was originally to have, and which it ought to have, is lacking in it.”

[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 6, §1]

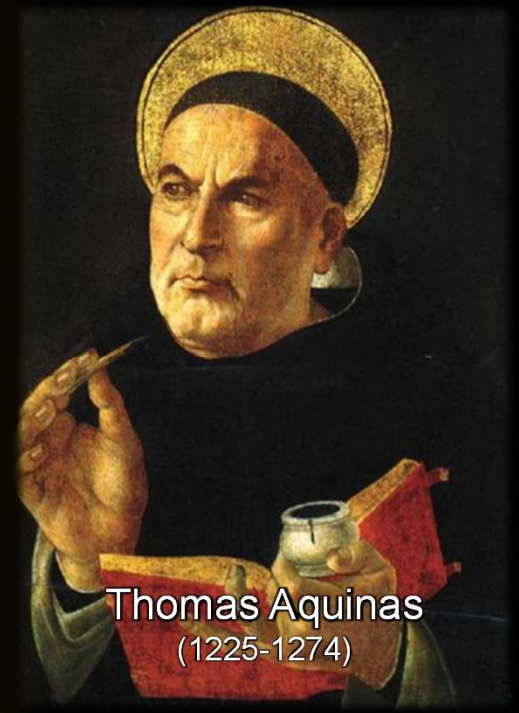


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

The image features a portrait of Thomas Aquinas on the right, wearing a habit and holding a book. The left side has a yellow background. The quote is in white, bold, italicized text.

“Evil is simply a privation of something which a subject is entitled by its origin to possess and which it ought to have.”

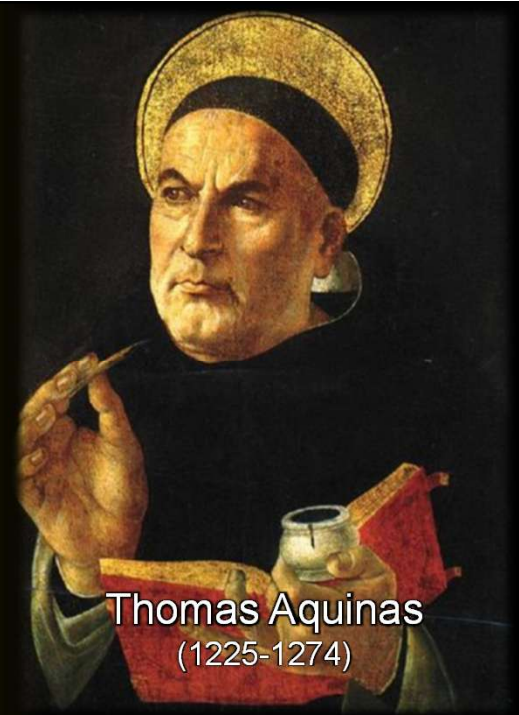
[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 7, §2, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), Pt. 1, 48]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

“Evil is the absence of the good, which is natural and due to a thing.”

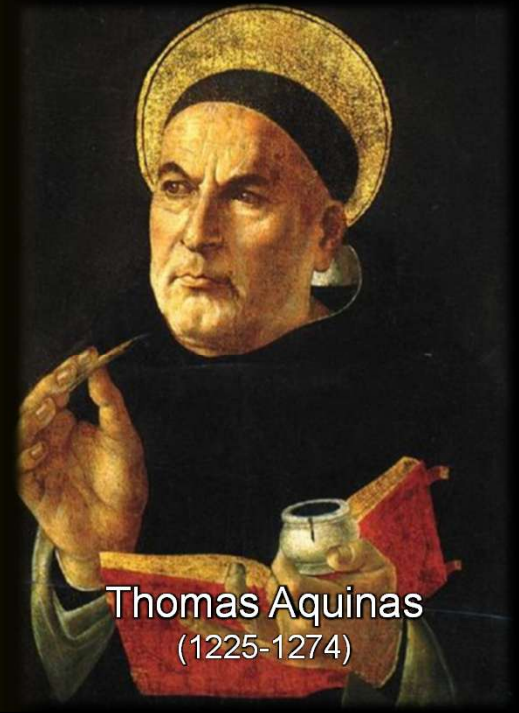
[*Summa Theologiae*, I, Q49, art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

“Evil cannot exist by itself, since it has no essence... Therefore, evil must be in a subject.”

[*Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 11, §2]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

Note that there is a difference between a **privation**

*Note that there is a difference between a **privation** and a **negation**.*

*A **negation** is the mere absence or removal of something.*

A *negation* is the mere absence or removal of something.

A *privation* is the absence or removal of something that “ought” to be there.



***Blindness is the privation of sight.
But blindness is not a thing in itself.***



**Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.**

**A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.**



**Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.**

**A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.**



negation



privation

**Blindness is the
privation of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.**

**A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.**



negation



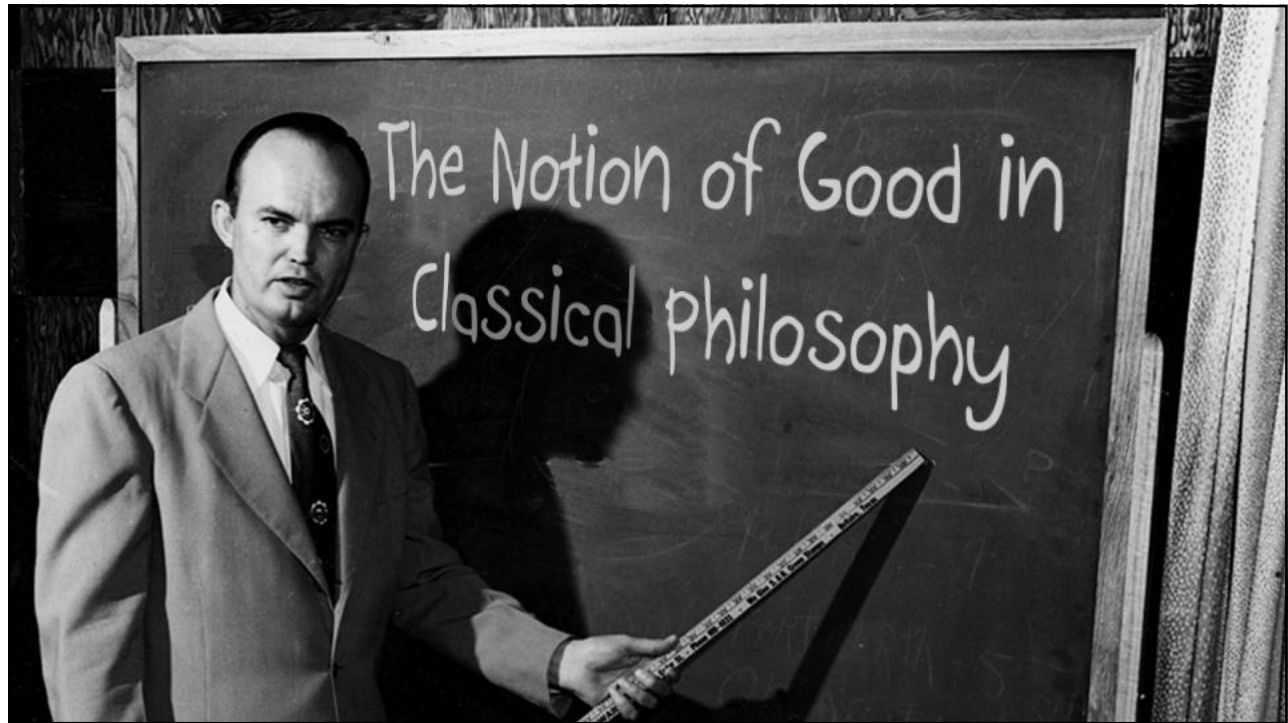
privation

**Blindness is the
displacement of sight.
But blindness is not a
thing in itself.**

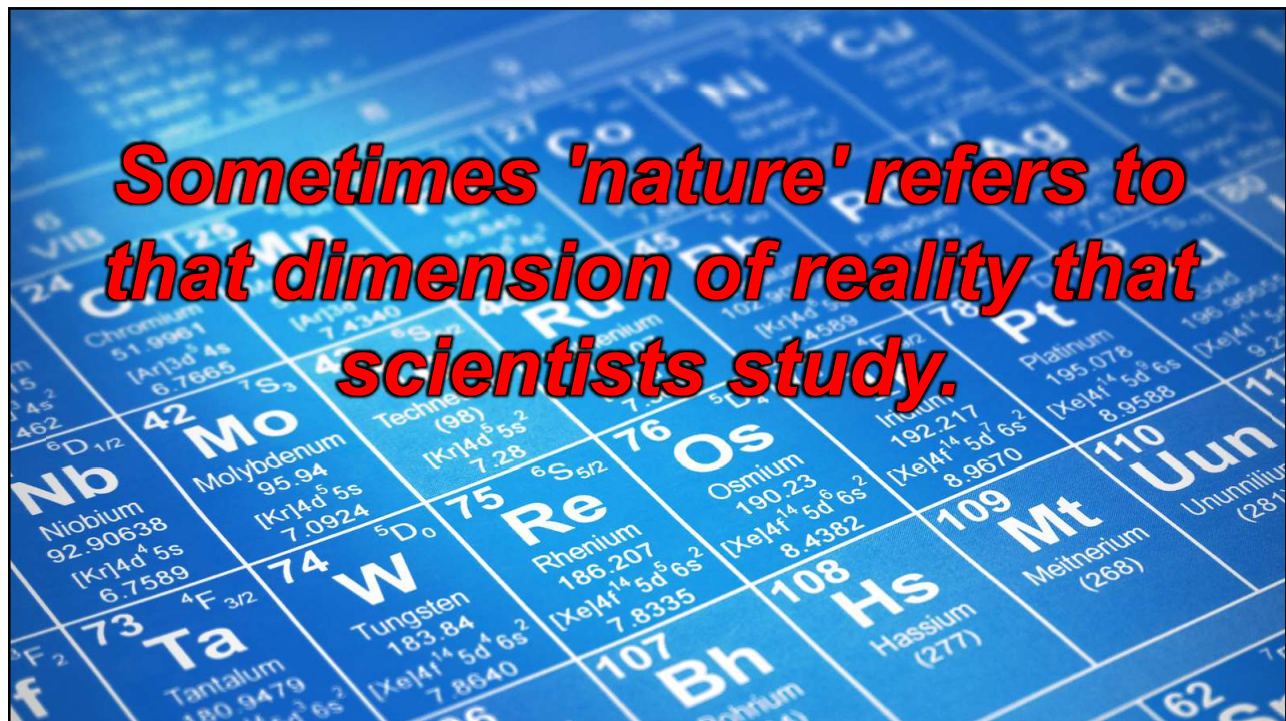
**A rock cannot see, but
it is not blind because
it "ought" not be able
to see.**



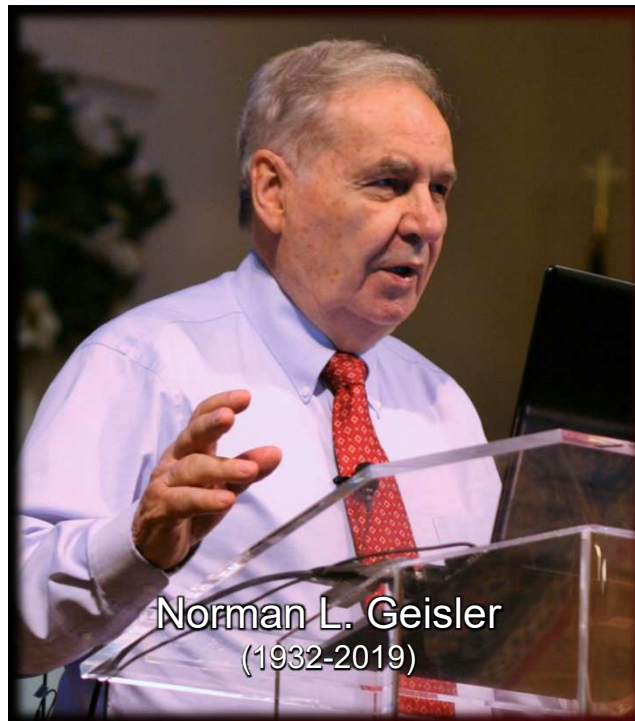
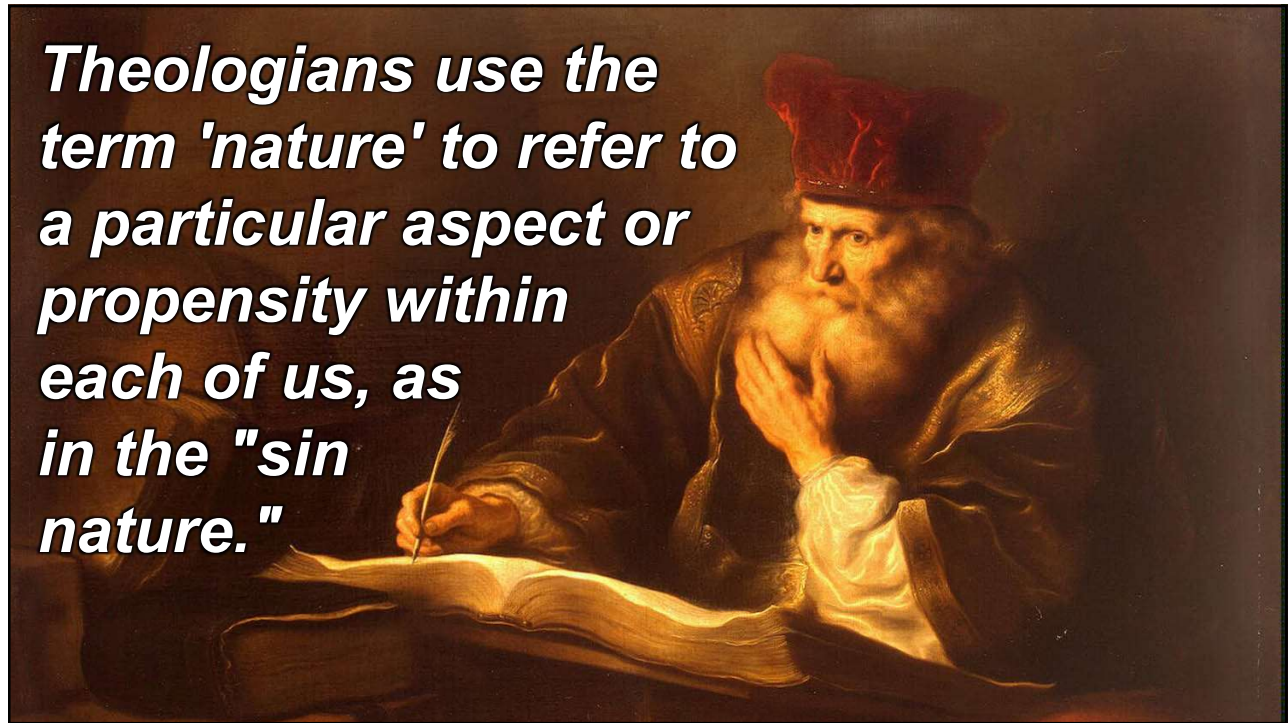
negation



In the Classical/Scholastic Tradition, the "good" of a thing is fundamentally understood along the lines of the "nature" of that thing.



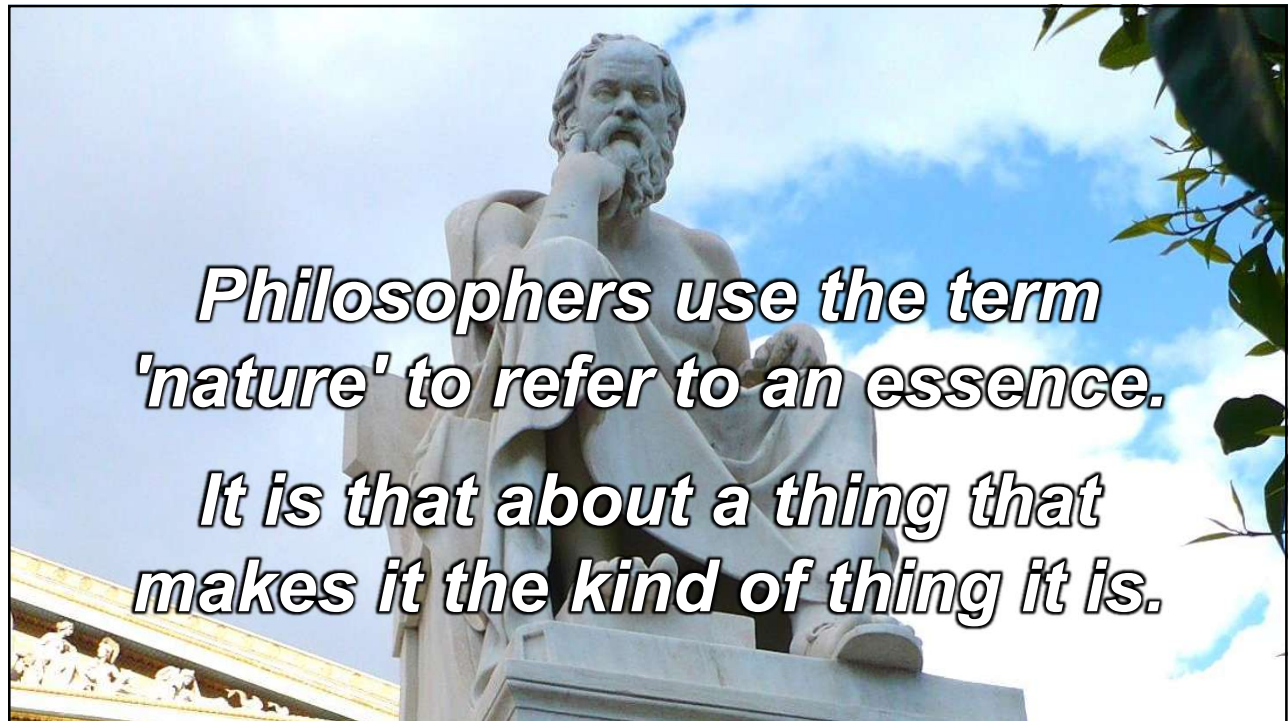
Theologians use the term 'nature' to refer to a particular aspect or propensity within each of us, as in the "sin nature."



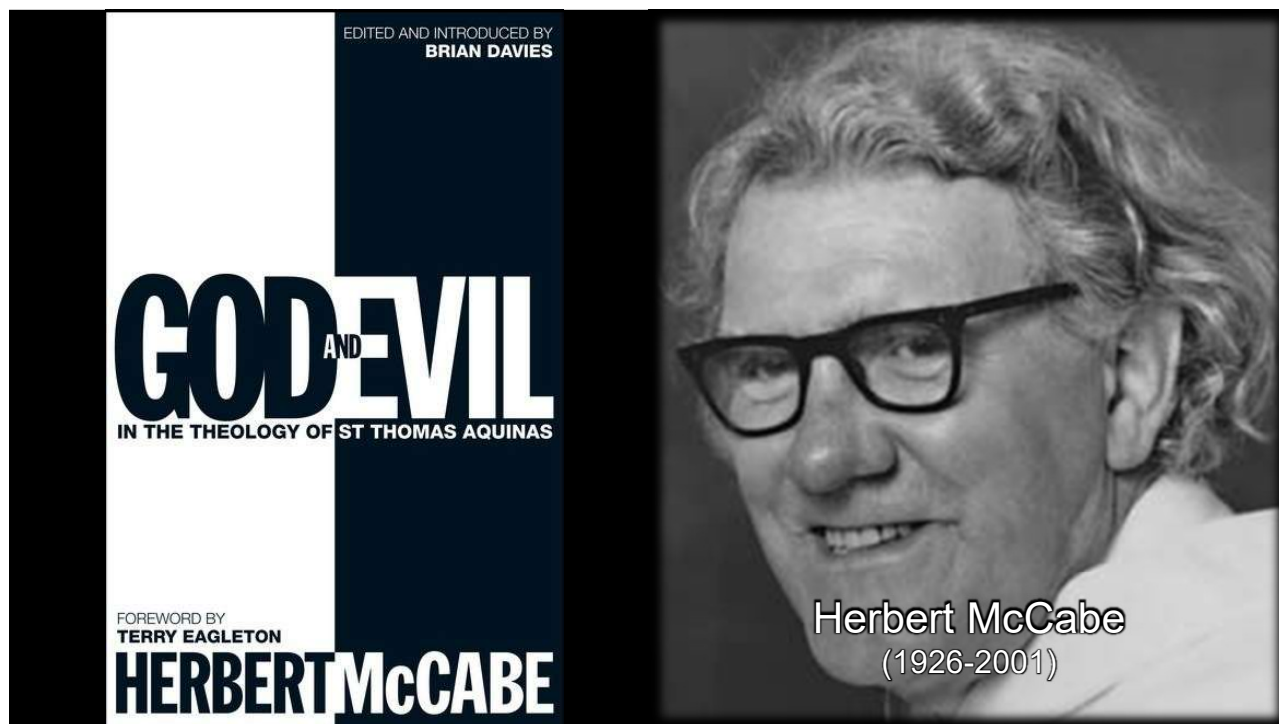
Norman L. Geisler
(1932-2019)

"Everyone who is naturally generated from Adam—every human—inherits a sinful nature from him. ... Being sinners by nature, short of and without salvation, we inevitably are and do what comes naturally: We sin."

[Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology: Vol. Three: Sin Salvation* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2004, 125.)









☞ **Genus** ☞
animal

☞ **Specific difference** ☞
rationality

☞ **Species** ☞
human

☞ **Proper accident** ☞
five fingers

☞ **Accident** ☞
black hair



Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

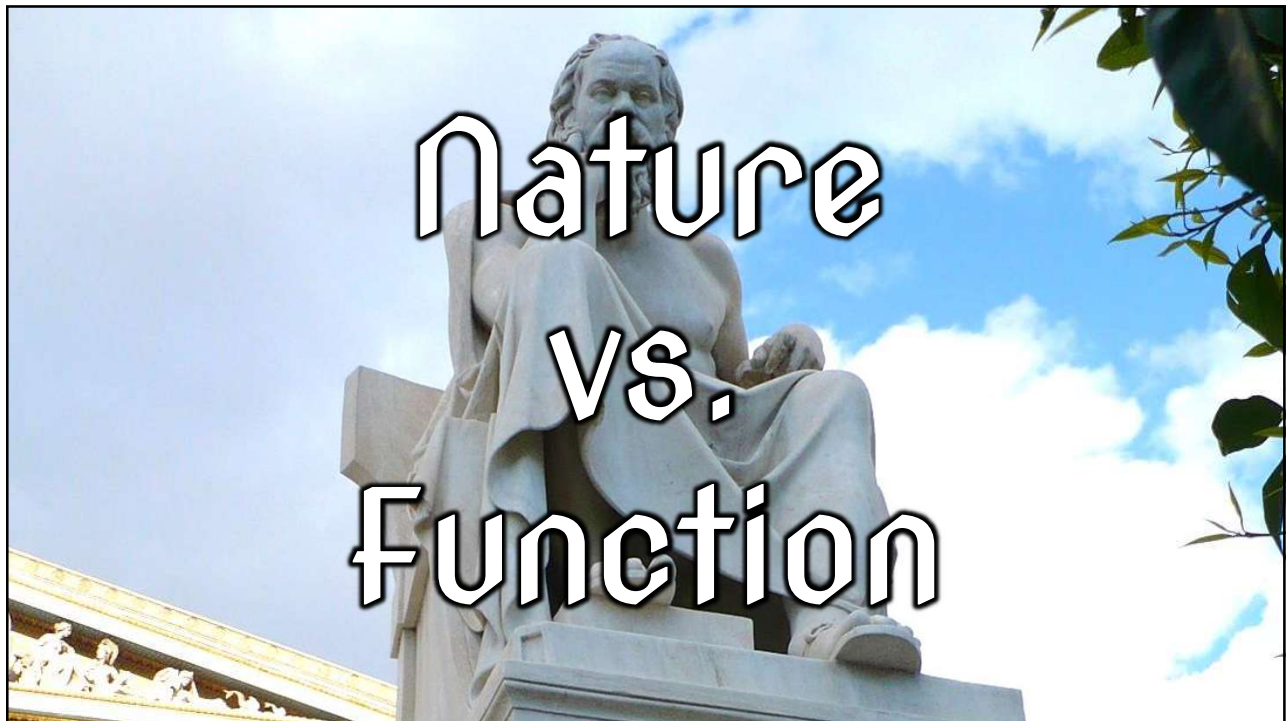
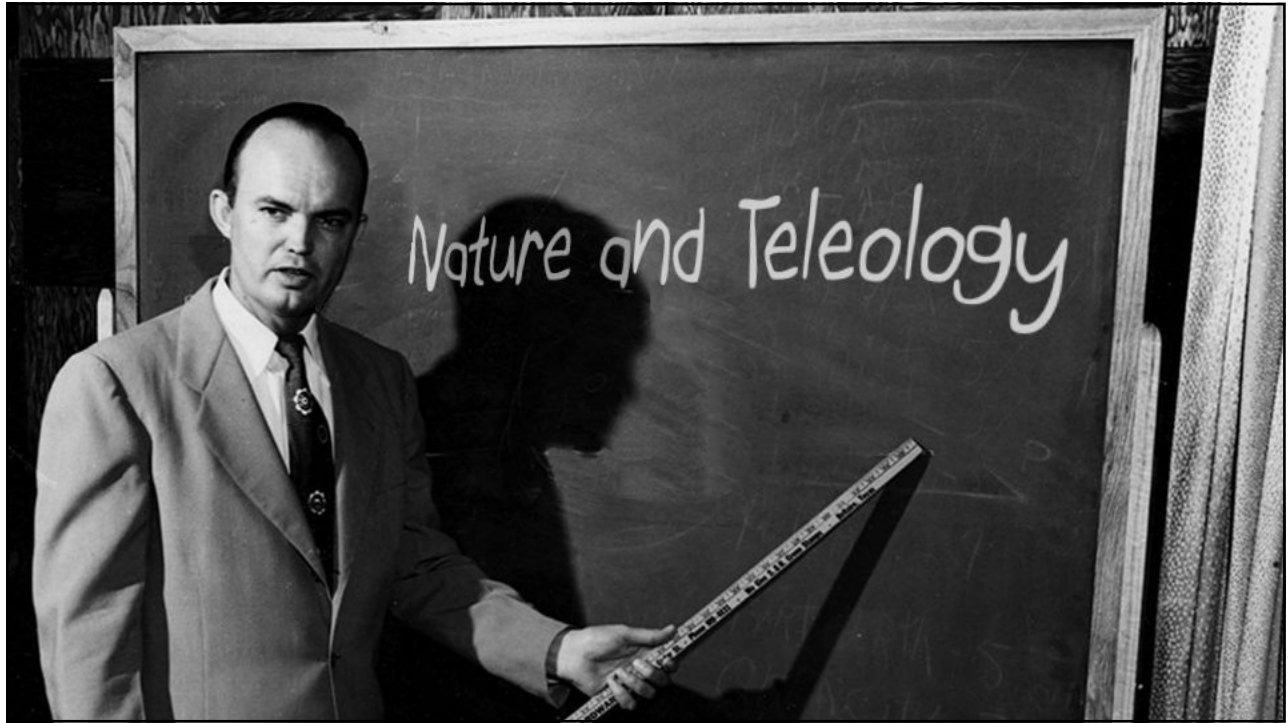
The image shows a classical portrait of Aristotle, a bearded man with curly hair, wearing a blue robe with gold trim. He is seated and holding a book in his left hand. The background is a simple architectural setting.

☞ **PROPERTIES** ☞

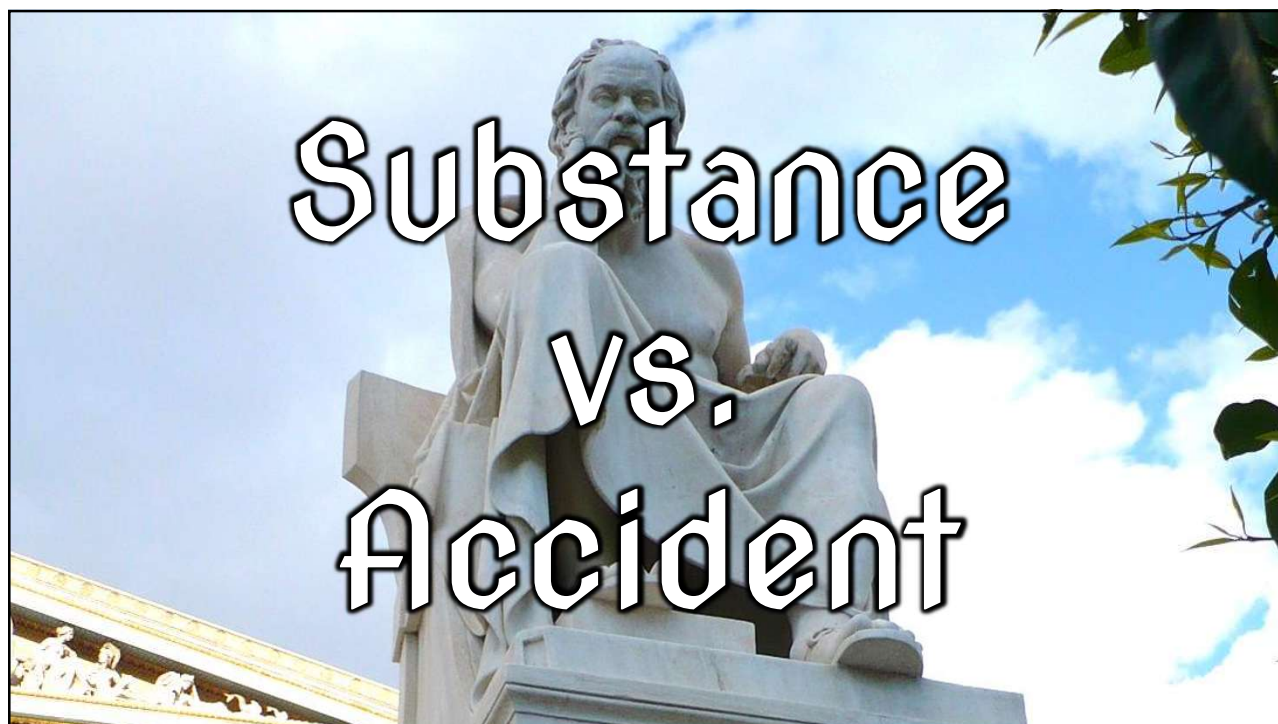


Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

This image is identical to the one above, showing a portrait of Aristotle with the same text and layout.

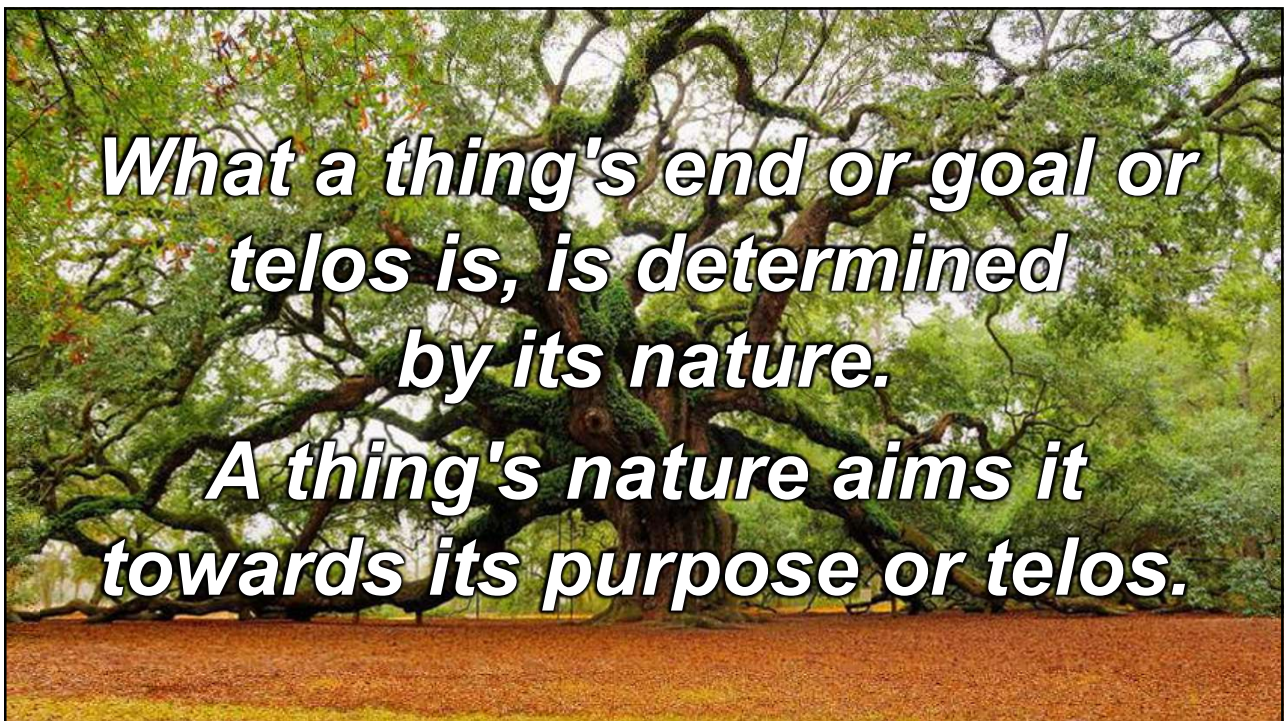




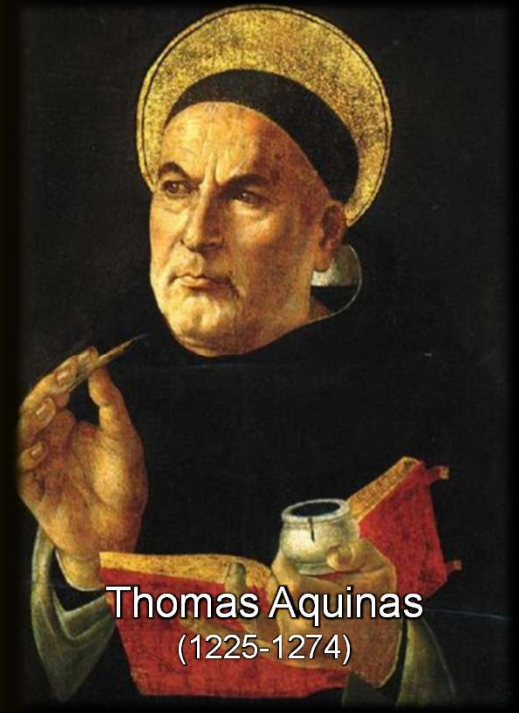




As a living thing grows and matures, it does so, if unimpeded, towards its proper end or goal or telos.



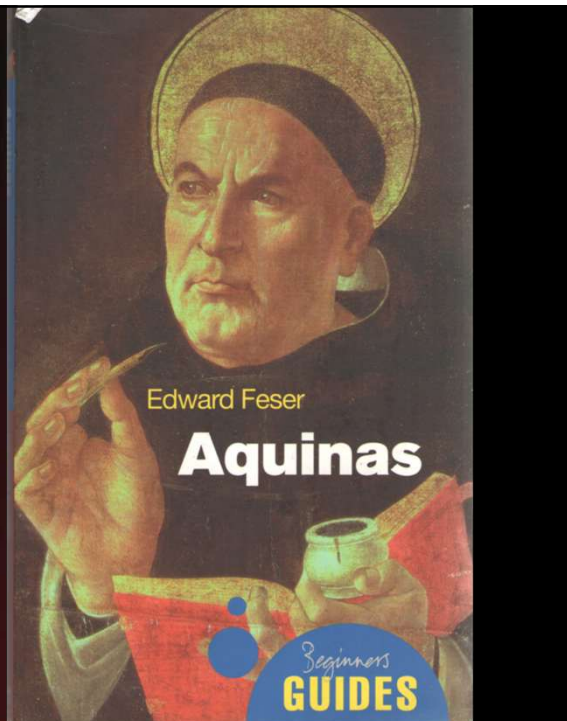
"Whenever things have such a definite nature ... the operation appropriate to a given being is a consequent of that nature."




Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)




Edward Feser



A photograph of Edward Feser, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a maroon shirt. He is seated in a room with bookshelves in the background, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression, his hand near his chin.

Edward Feser

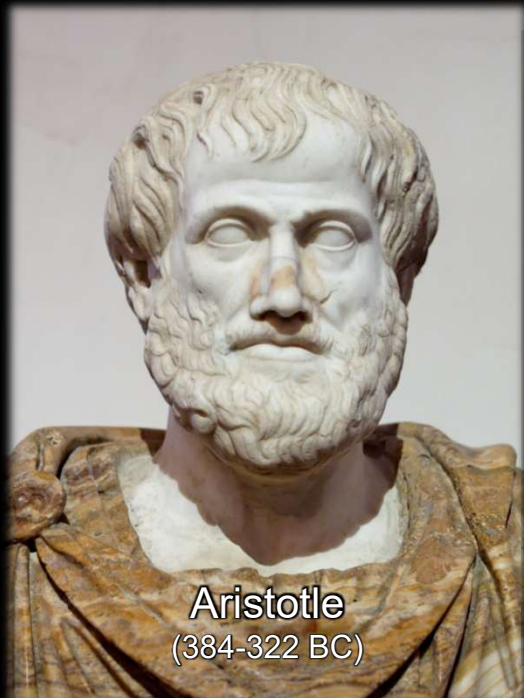
"It is widely assumed that the analysis and justification of fundamental moral claims can be conducted without reference to at least the more contentious issues of metaphysics."

A photograph of Edward Feser, a man with glasses and a beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a maroon shirt. He is seated in a room with bookshelves in the background, looking slightly to the right with a thoughtful expression, his hand near his chin.

Edward Feser

"Nothing could be further from the spirit of Thomas, for whom natural law ... is 'natural' precisely because it derives from human nature, conceived of in Aristotelian essentialist terms."

[Aquinas: A Beginner's Guide (Oxford: One World), 174]

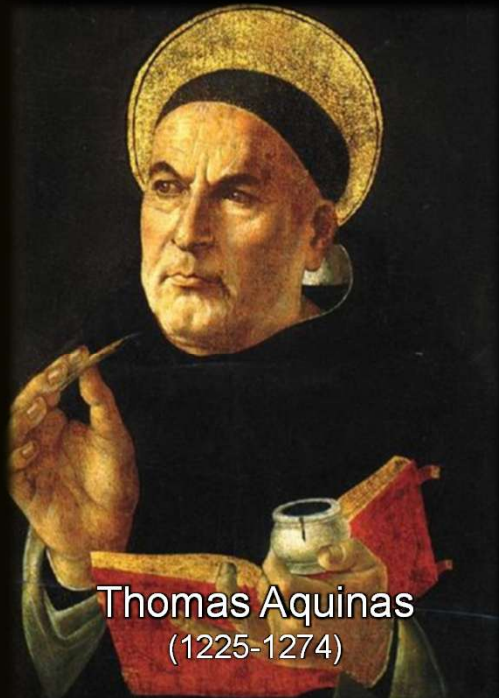


Aristotle
(384-322 BC)

"Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and pursuit, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has been rightly declared to be that at which all things aim."

[Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1, 1094a1-2, trans. W. D. Ross in Richard McKeon, ed. *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (New York: Random House, 1941), 935]

"The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable."

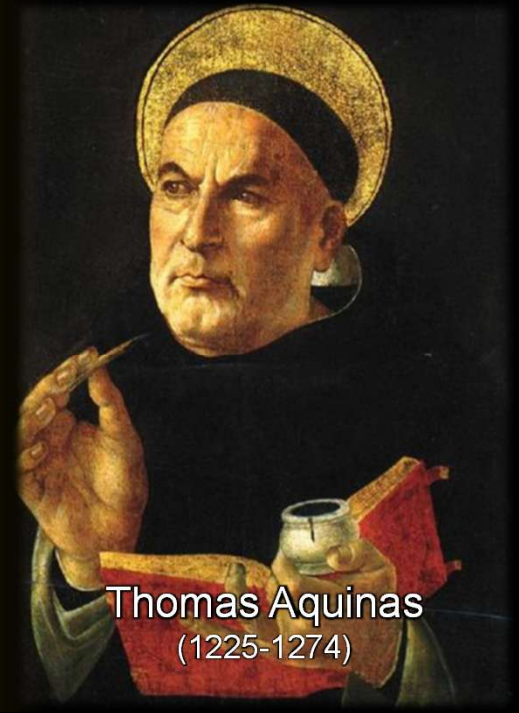


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

[*Summa Theologiae* I, Q5, art. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province in *St. Thomas Aquinas Summa Theologica: Complete English Edition in Five Volumes* (Westminster, MD: Christian Classics, 1981), 23]

***"Goodness
signifies
perfection which
is desirable."***

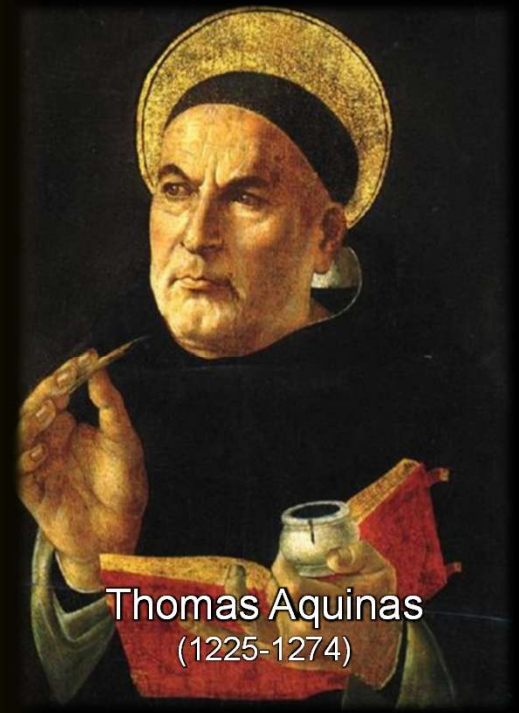
[ST I, Q5, art. 1]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

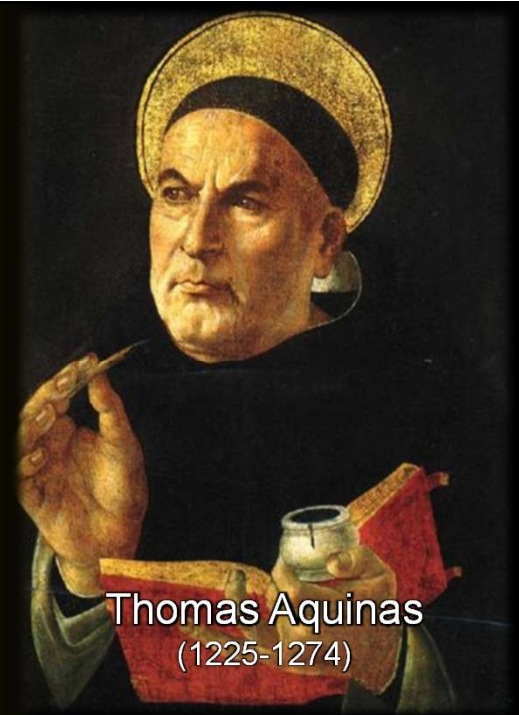


"Whenever things have such a definite nature ... the operation appropriate to a given being is a consequent of that nature."



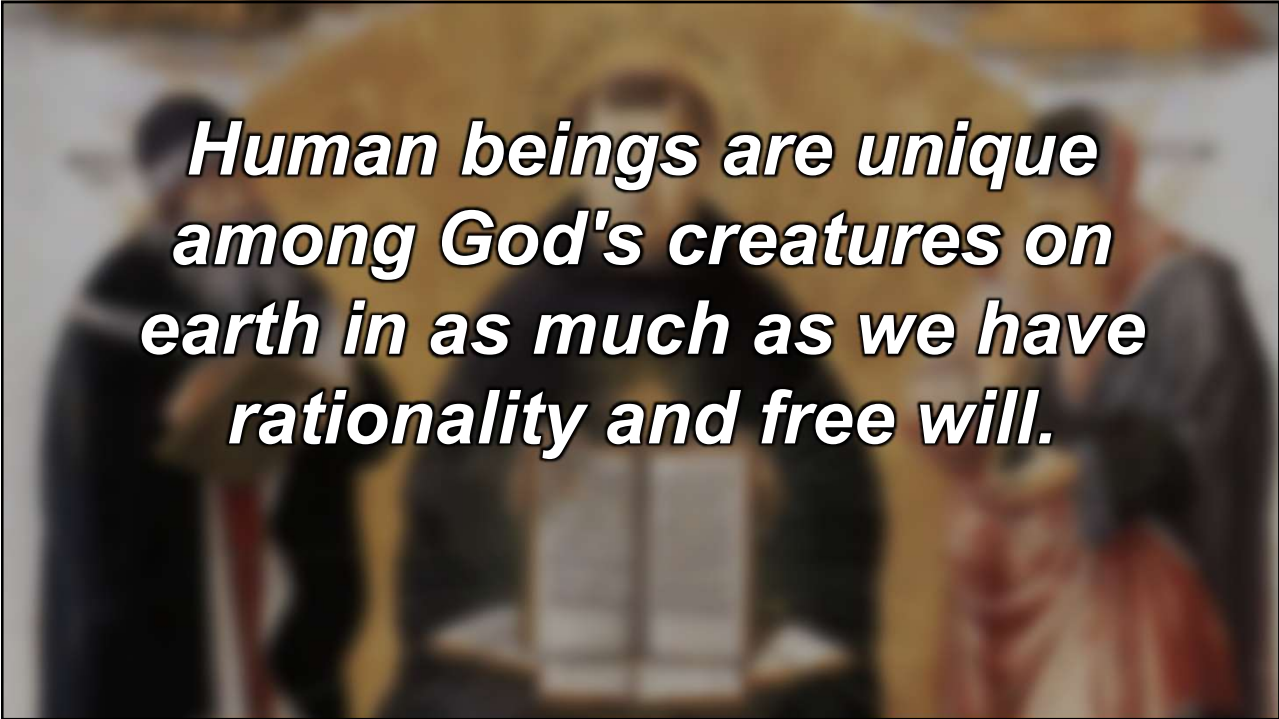
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"Now, it is obvious that there is a determinate kind of nature for man. Therefore, there must be some operations that are in themselves appropriate for man."

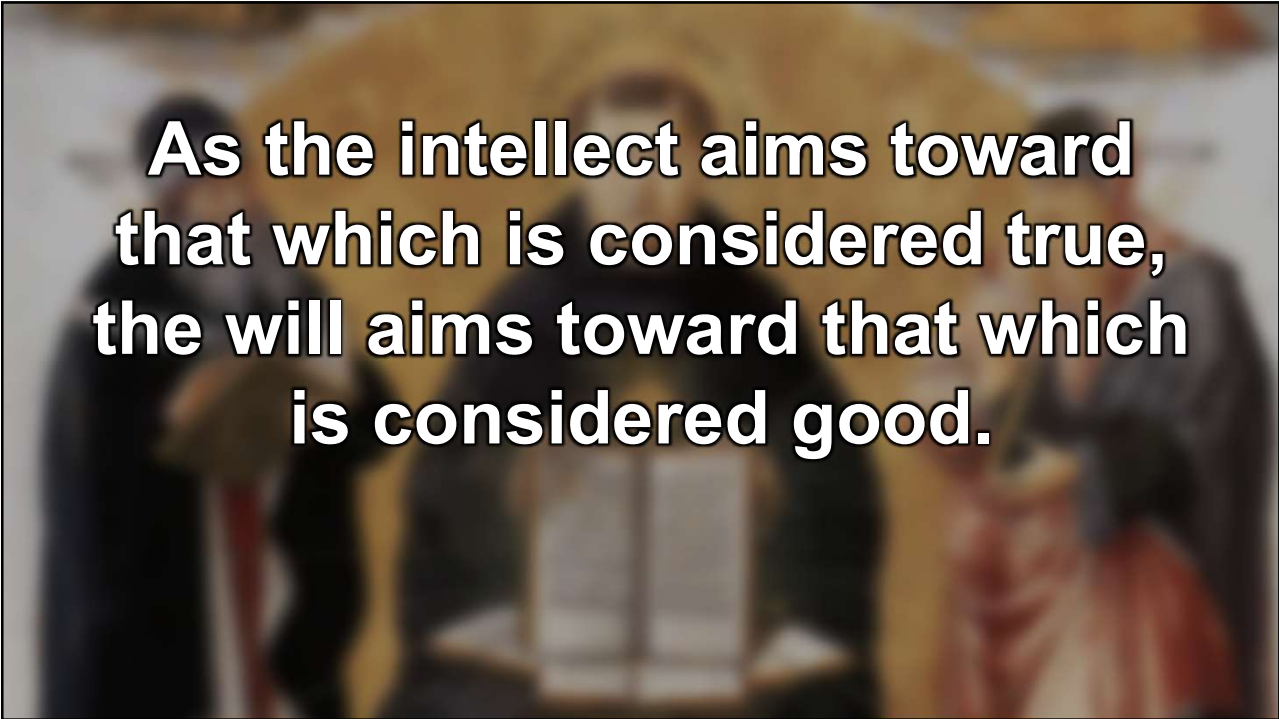


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

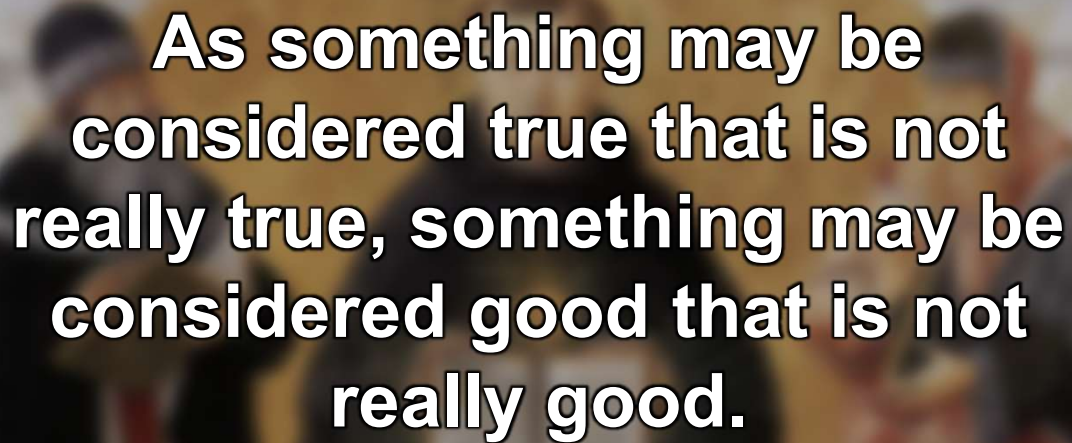
[SCG III, 129, §4, trans. Vernon J. Bourke (University of Notre Dame Press Edition) vol. 3:II, p. 163. Reprint of *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, 1956)]



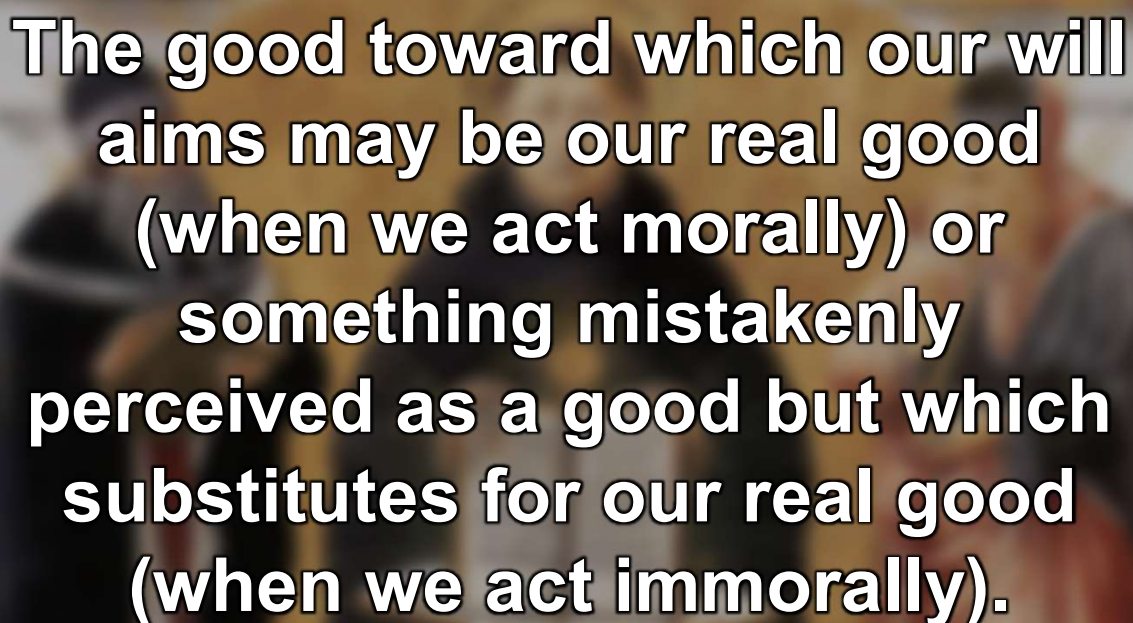
Human beings are unique among God's creatures on earth in as much as we have rationality and free will.



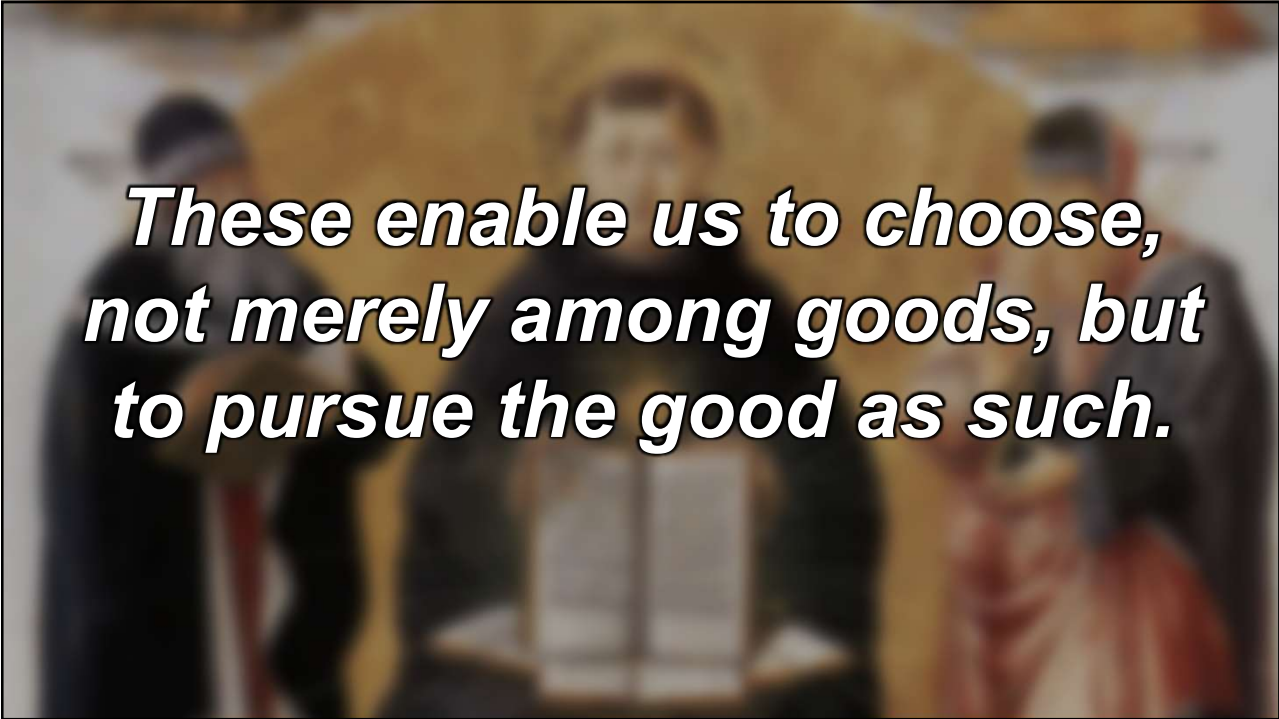
As the intellect aims toward that which is considered true, the will aims toward that which is considered good.



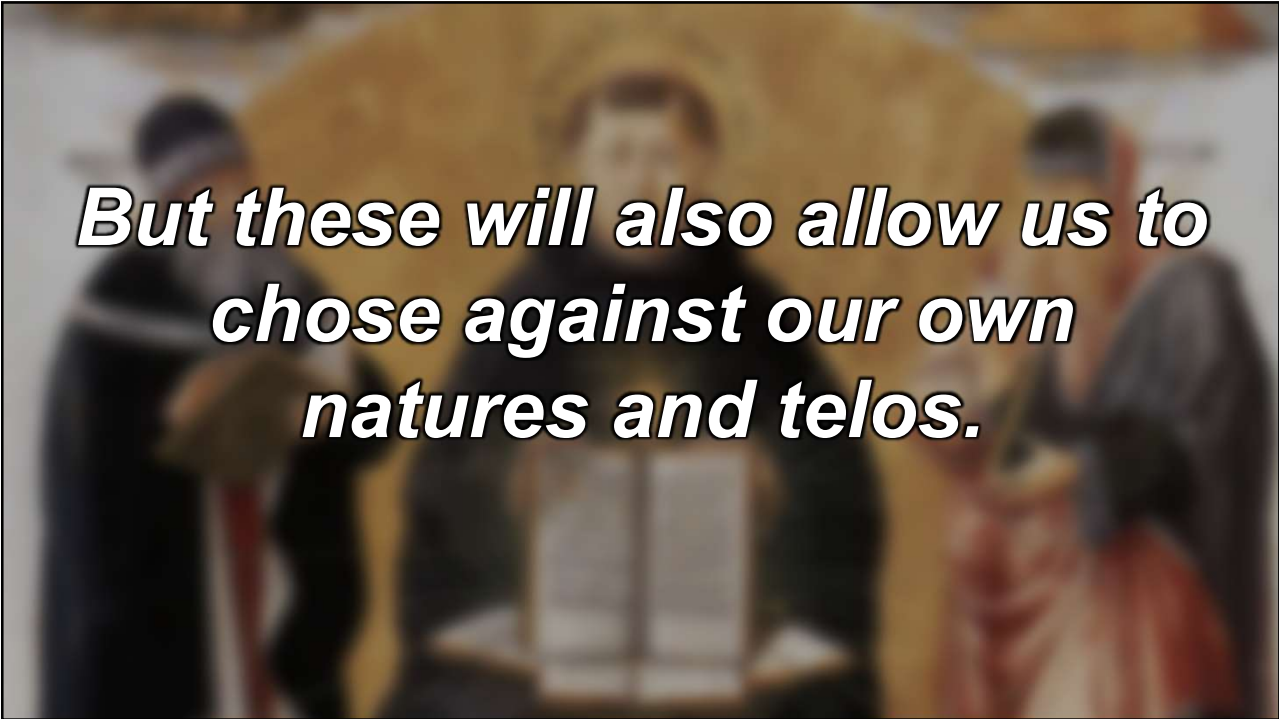
As something may be considered true that is not really true, something may be considered good that is not really good.



The good toward which our will aims may be our real good (when we act morally) or something mistakenly perceived as a good but which substitutes for our real good (when we act immorally).

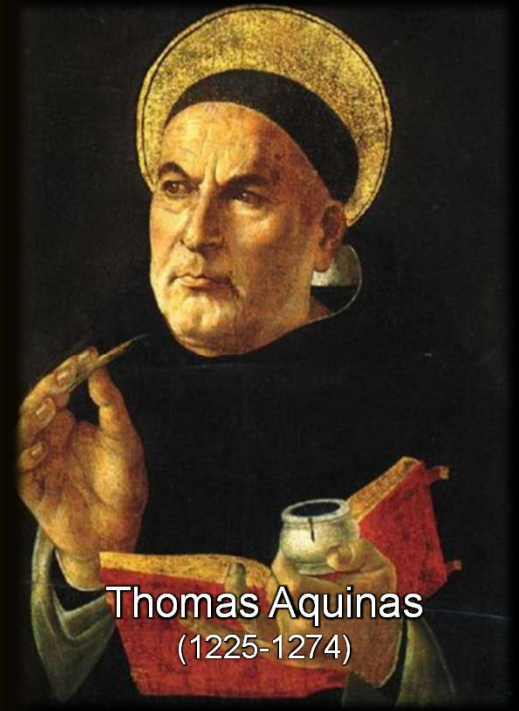


***These enable us to choose,
not merely among goods, but
to pursue the good as such.***



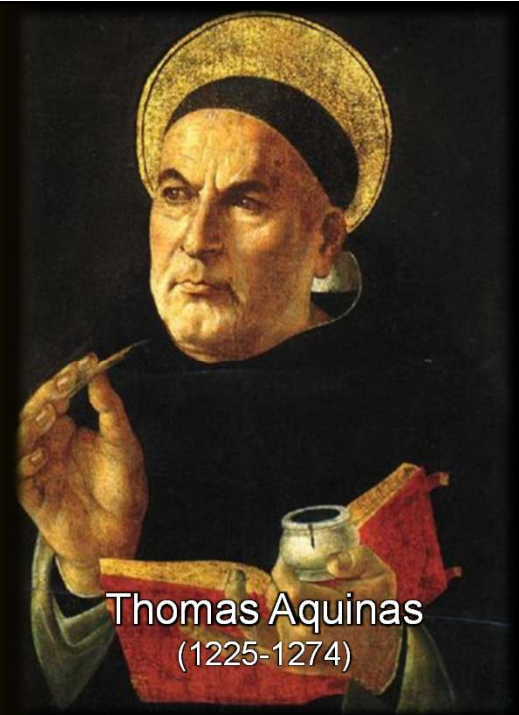
***But these will also allow us to
chose against our own
natures and telos.***

"Evil may be considered either in a substance or in an action



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

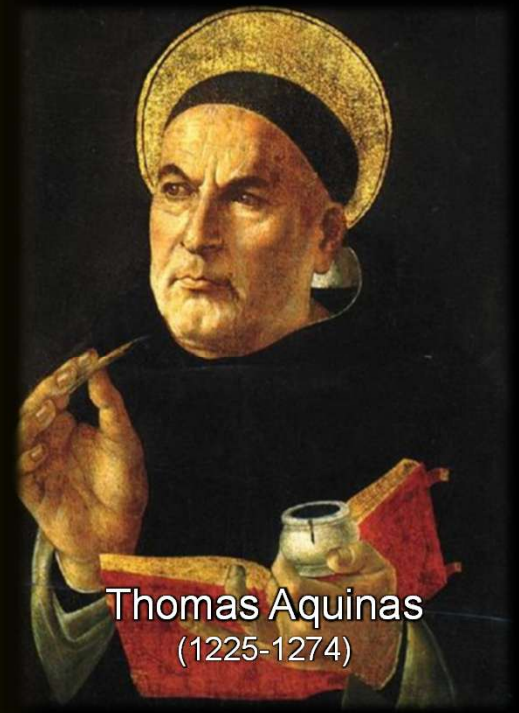
"Moral fault is found primarily and principally in the act of the will only ... so ... an act is moral because it is voluntary. ...



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"The root and source of moral wrongdoing is to be sought in the act of the will."

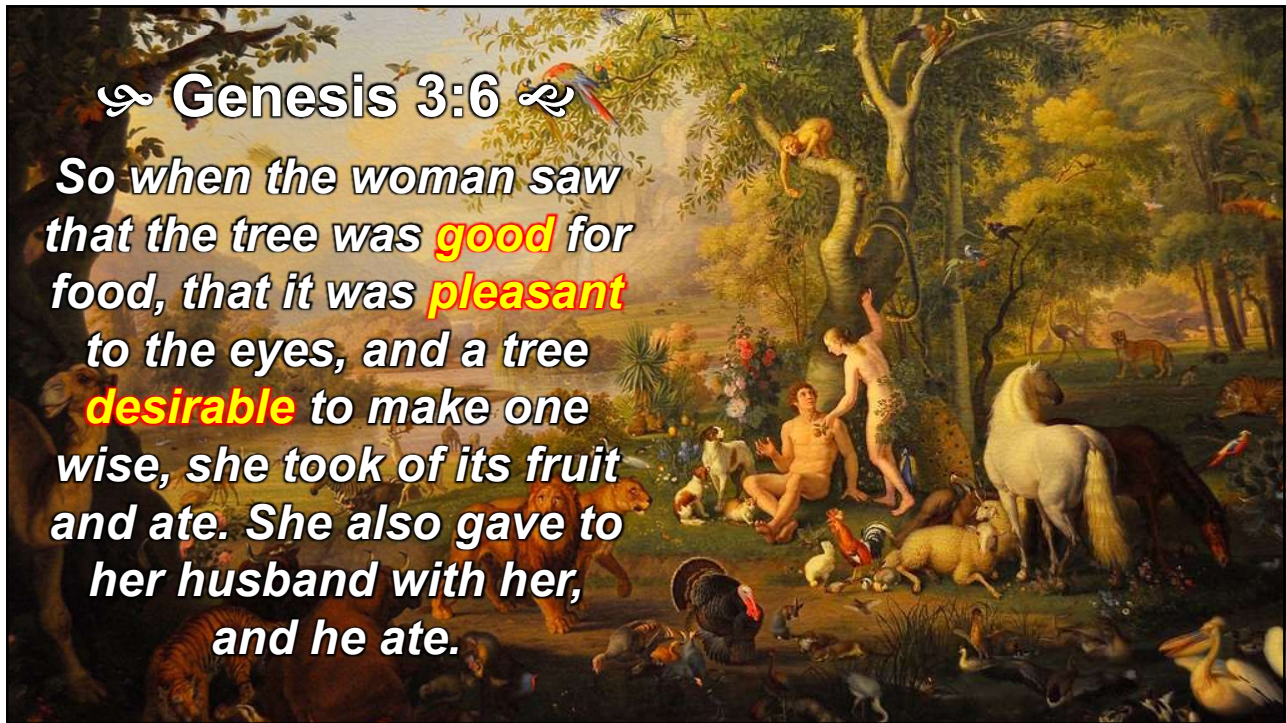
Summa Contra Gentiles, III, 10, §13



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

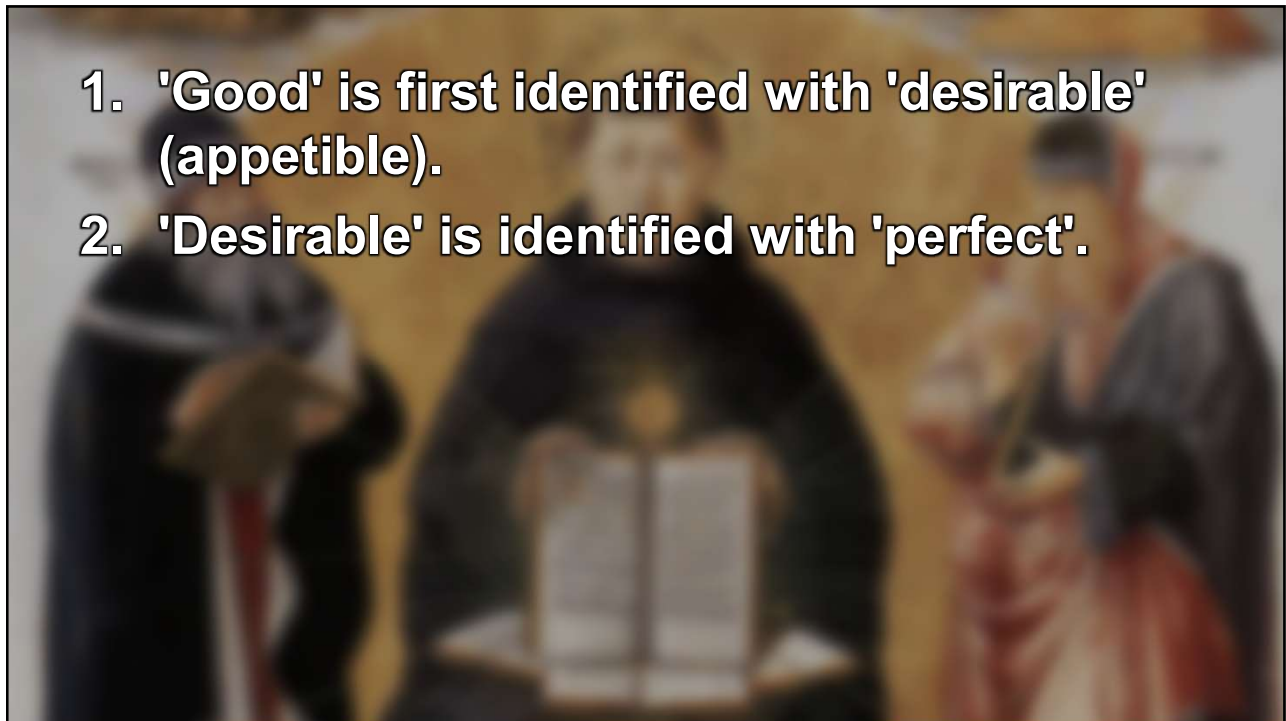
✧ Genesis 3:6 ✧

So when the woman saw that the tree was **good** for food, that it was **pleasant** to the eyes, and a tree **desirable** to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.



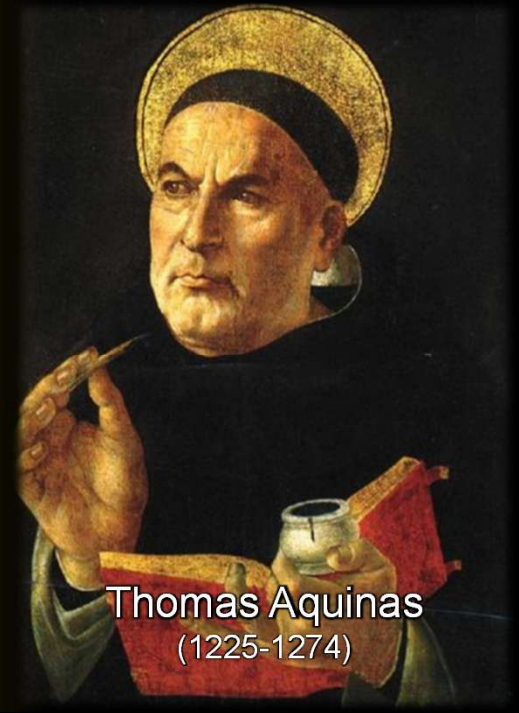


1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.



***"Now it is clear
that a thing is
desirable only in
so far as it is
perfect; for all
desire their own
perfection."***

(ST I, Q5, art. 1)

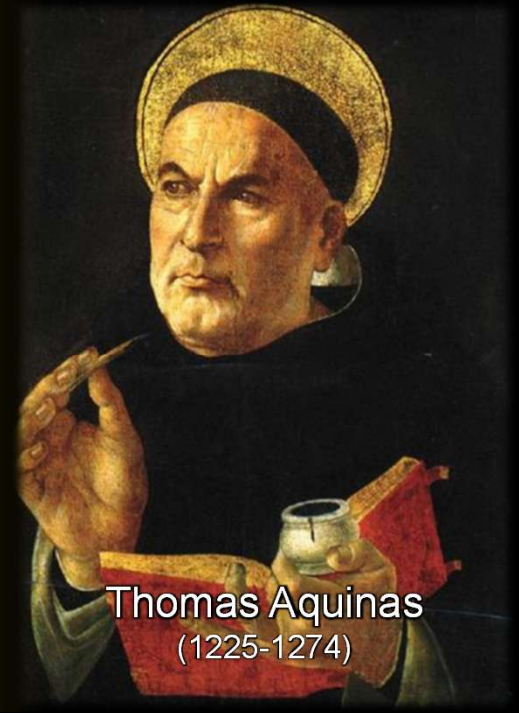


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

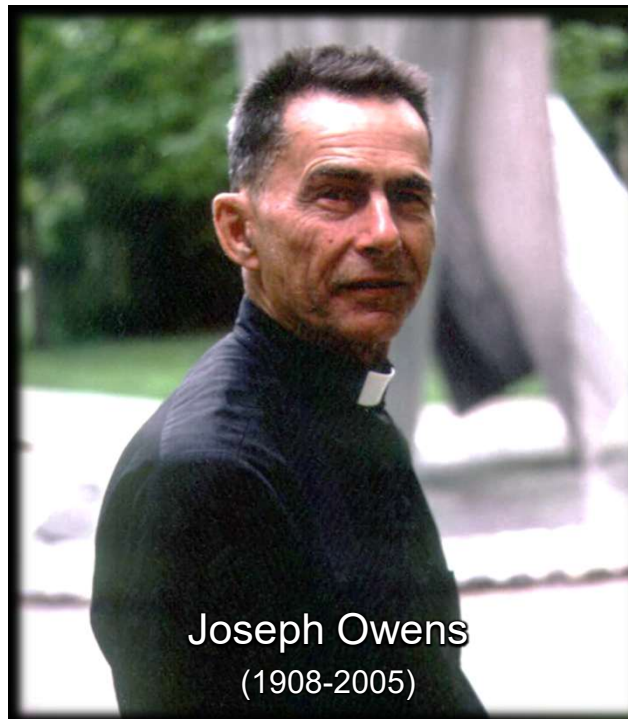
1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.

"Everything is perfect so far as it is actual."

(ST I, Q5, art. 1)

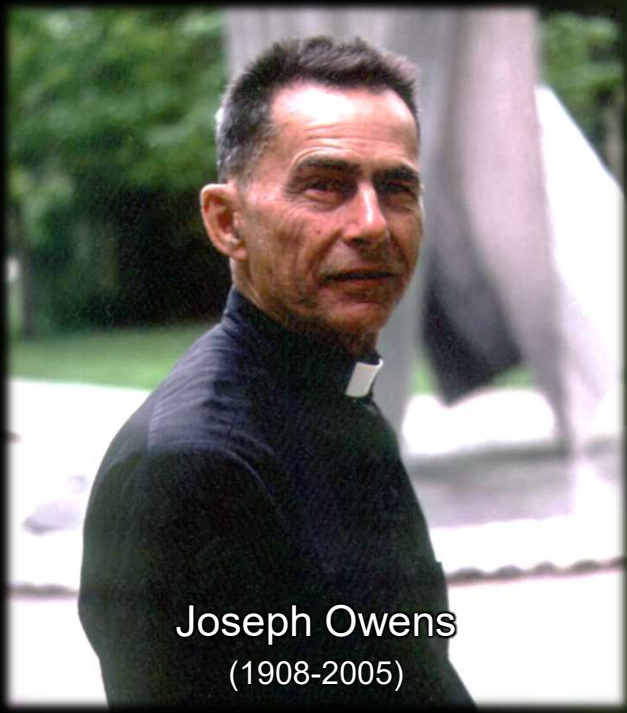


Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



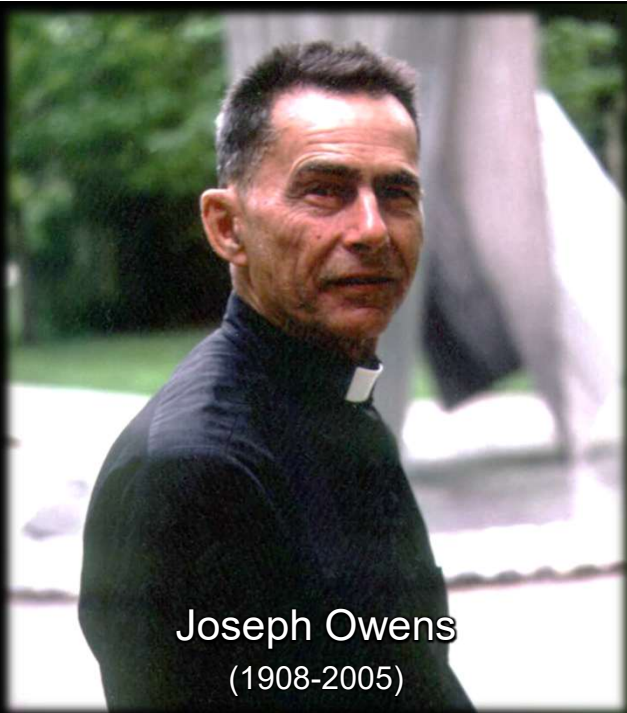
Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)

"An alternate word for actuality in this respect is "perfection" (entelecheia). It was used by Aristotle along with actuality to designate the formal elements in the things."

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a white structure.

"These perfected the material element in the sense of filling its potentiality and completing the thing."

Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)

A portrait of Joseph Owens, a man with short dark hair, wearing a black clerical shirt with a white collar. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera. The background is blurred, showing green foliage and a white structure.

"Since existence is required to complete the thing and all the formal elements and activities, it may be aptly called the perfection of all perfections."

Joseph Owens
(1908-2005)

[An Interpretation of Existence (Houston: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1968), 52-53]

perfection

(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

en, ἐν = in

+

telos, τέλος = end, goal

+

echein, ἔχειν = to have

perfection

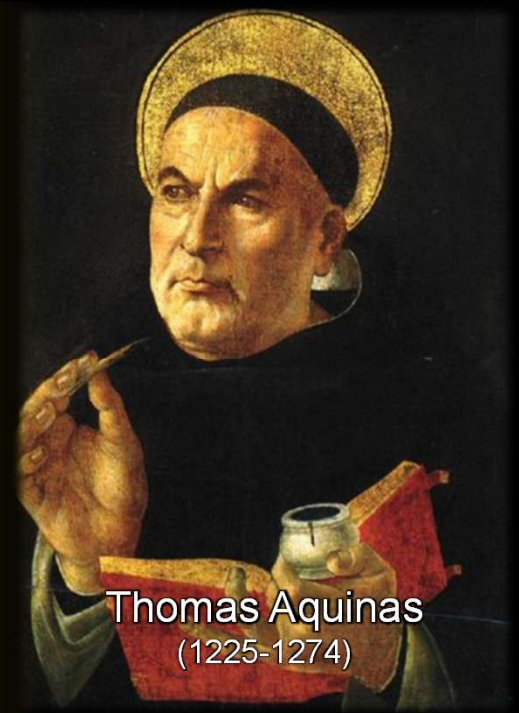
(entelecheia, ἐντελέχεια)

to have the end or goal in

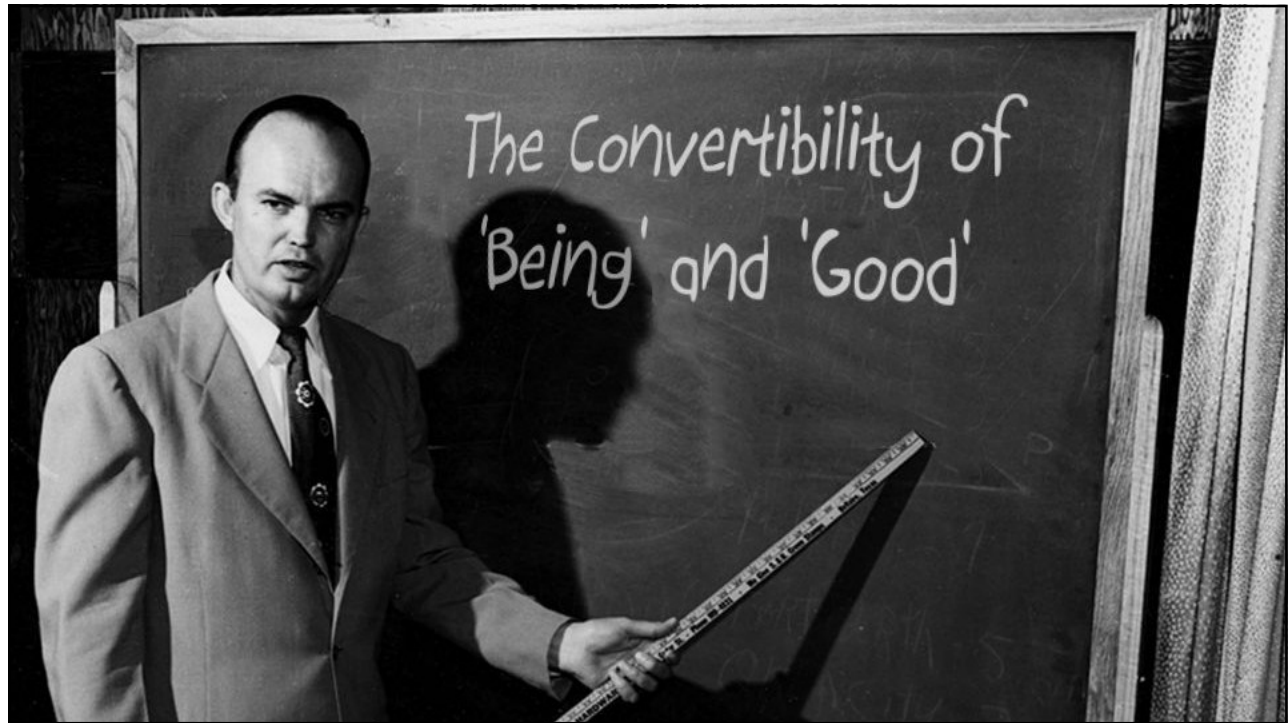
1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.
4. 'Actuality' is identified with 'being'.

"Goodness and being are really the same, and differ only in idea; which is clear from the following argument. The essence of goodness consists in this, that it is in some way desirable. Hence the Philosopher says [Ethic i]: 'Goodness is what all desire.' Now is it clear that a thing is desirable only in so far as it is perfect; for all desire their own perfection. But everything is perfect so far as it is actual. Therefore it is clear that a thing is perfect so far as it exists; for it is existence that makes all things actual, as is clear from the foregoing [Q. 3, A. 4; Q. 4, A. 1]. Hence it is clear that goodness and being are the same reality."

(ST I, Q5, art. 1)



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)



A full exploration of how it is that 'being' and 'good' are convertible, which is to say that 'being' and 'good' are really the same, requires a examination of the Medieval doctrine of the Transcendentals.

The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas

by Jan A. Aertsen

IN MANY medieval thinkers, e.g. Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, the statement can be found: "being and good are convertible" (*ens et bonum convertuntur*).¹ That is to say, "being" and "good" are interchangeable terms in predication (*converti enim est concessim praedicari*).² Wherever "being" is predicated of something, the predicate "good" is involved as well.

That must imply that "good" is here not a concept that adds a real content or a new quality to "being", as a result of which "being" is restricted. For in that case there would be no question of convertibility.³ "Good" is an attribute which pertains to every being, it is a property of being as such, a "mode that is common, and consequent upon every being."⁴ In other words, "good" is coextensive with "being", it is one of the so-called *transcendentia*⁵ which, since Suarez, are usually referred to as "transcendentals".

¹ Alexander of Hales, *Summa I*, Inq. 1, Tract. 3, q. 3, membrum 1, e. 1, a. 1, "An idem sit bonum et ens"; Bonaventure, *In II Sent.*, d. 1, p. 1, a. 1, q. 1, fundam. 5, "Res et bonum convertuntur, sicut vult Dionysius", d. 34, a. 2, q. 3, fundam. 4; Albert the Great, *De Bono* q. 1, a. 6; *Summa Theol.* tract. 6, q. 28; Thomas Aquinas, *In I Sent.* 8, 1, 3; *De Ver.* XXI, 2; *In De Hebdomadibus*, lect. 3; *Summa Theol.* I, 16, 2.

² Thomas Aquinas, *De Ver.* I, 2 obj. 2.

³ *De Pot.* IX, 7 ad 5: Bonum quod est in genere qualitatis, non est bonum quod convertitur cum ente, quod nullam rem supra ens addit.

⁴ *De Ver.* I, 1: modus generaliter consequens omne ens.

⁵ Comp. Albert the Great, *Summa Theologiae* tract. 6, q. 27, c. 2: Bonum dicitur intentionem communem et est de transcendentibus omne genus sicut et ens.

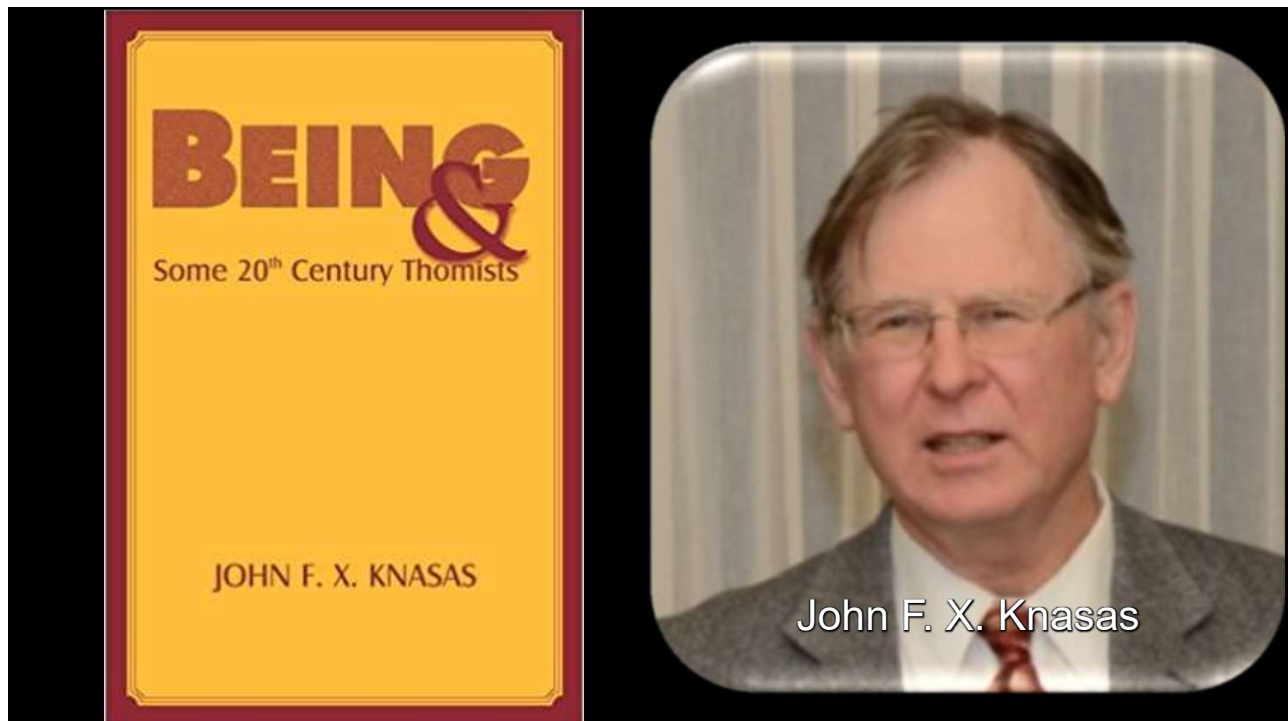
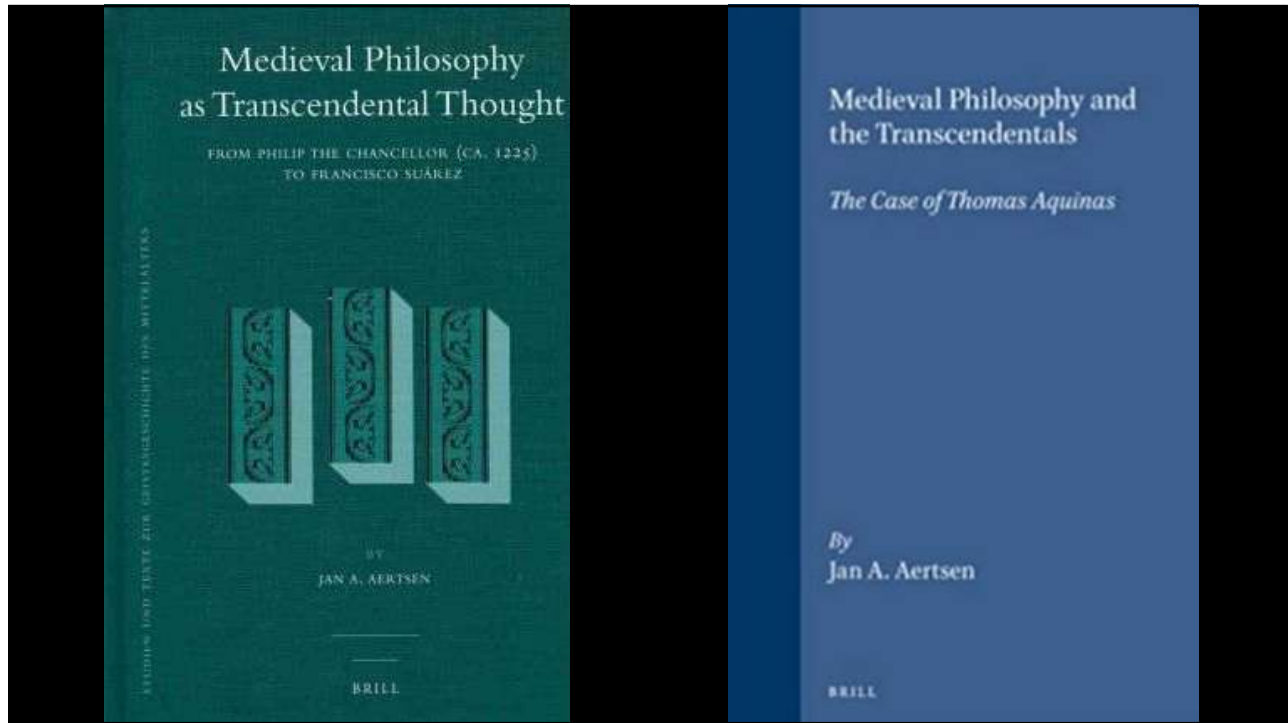


Jan Aertsen
1938-2016

The Convertibility of Being and Good in St. Thomas Aquinas

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IN MANY medieval thinkers, e.g. Alexander of Hales, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, the statement can be found: "being and good are convertible" (*ens et bonum convertuntur*).¹ That is to say, "being" and "good" are interchangeable terms in predication (*converti enim est*



"To see man as the willer of the ratio boni is to engender a special status among things. ... No other thing in our experience so directly and intimately relates to the ratio boni. Only man has good as the proper object of his appetitive power ... and to understand this fact is for one to realize that one should treat oneself and others in a special way."

ST II, Q94, art. 2



John F. X. Knasas

Being and Goodness

THE CONCEPT OF THE GOOD
IN METAPHYSICS AND
PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

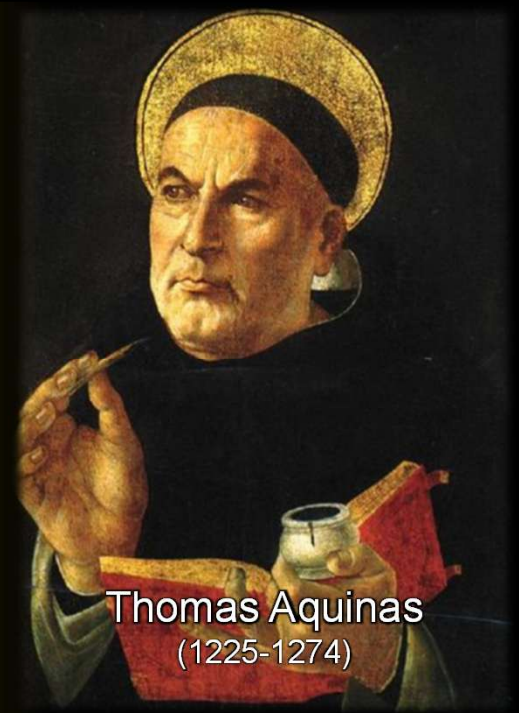
EDITED BY

SCOTT MACDONALD

1. 'Good' is first identified with 'desirable' (appetible).
2. 'Desirable' is identified with 'perfect'.
3. 'Perfect' is identified with 'act' or 'actuality'.
4. 'Actuality' is identified with 'being'.
5. God is goodness itself in as much as God is being itself.

"To God alone does it belong to be His own subsistent being."

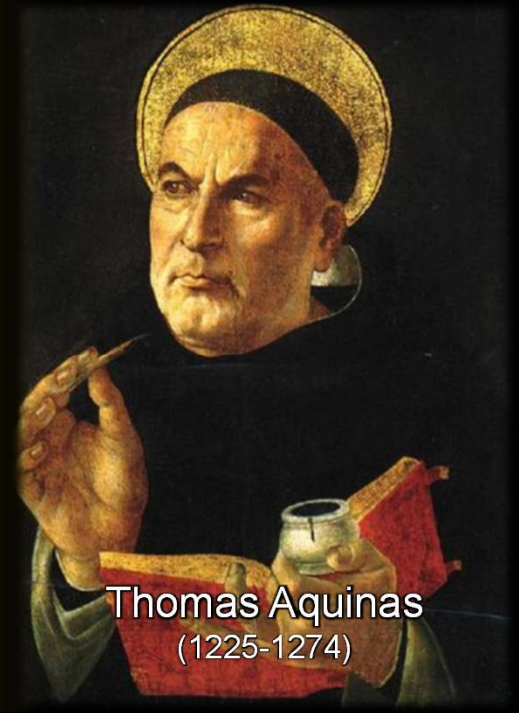
[ST 1, Q 12, art. IV]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"God is absolute form, or rather absolute being"

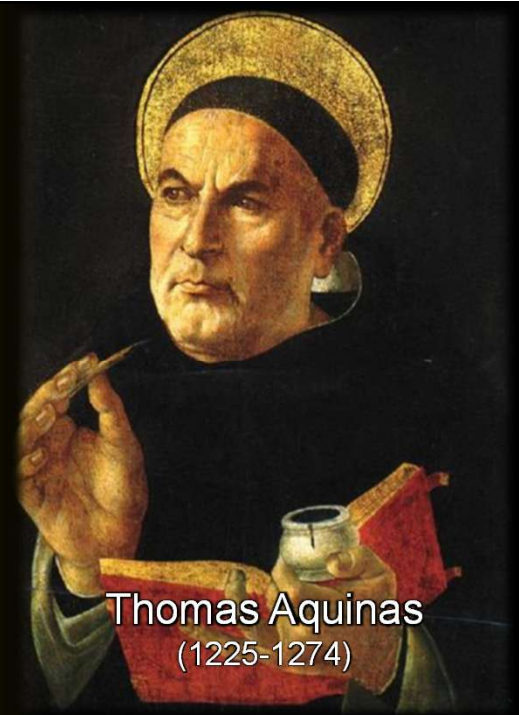
[ST, I, Q3, art. 7.]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"God is supremely being ... He is being itself, subsistent, absolutely undetermined."

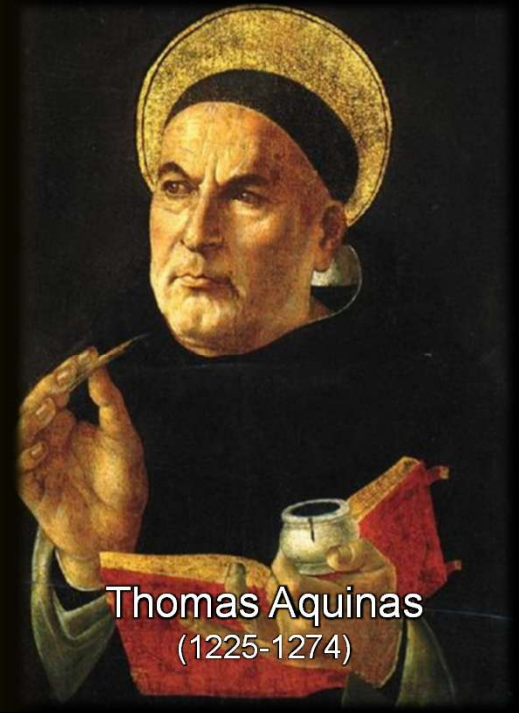
[ST 1, Q 11, art. iv.]



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"Good belongs
pre-eminently
to God."***

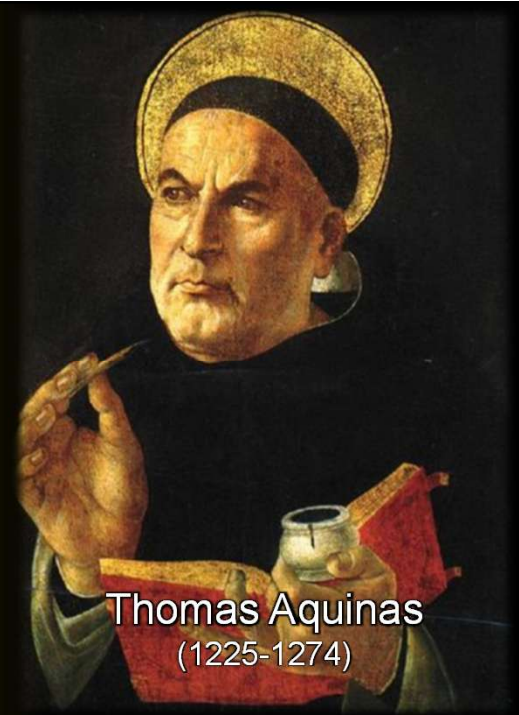
(ST I, Q5, art. 1)



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***"The first indemonstrable
principle is that the same
thing cannot be affirmed
and denied at the same time
.... Now as being is the first
thing that falls under the
apprehension simply, so
good is the first thing that
falls under the apprehension
of the practical reason,
which is directed at action."***

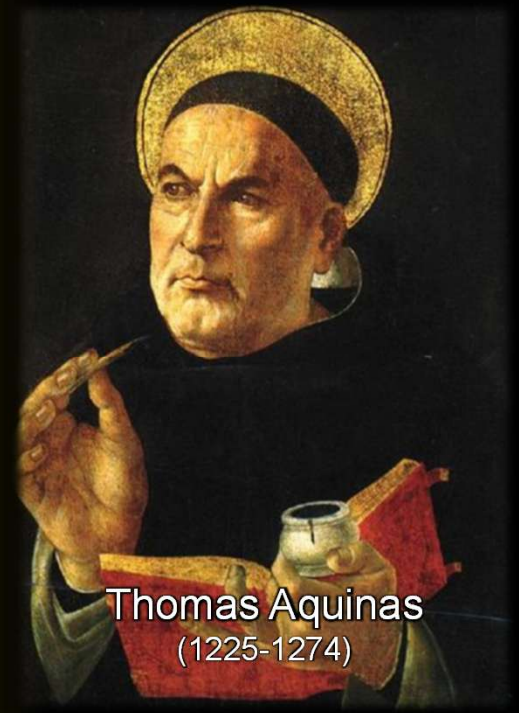
ST I-II, Q94, art. 2



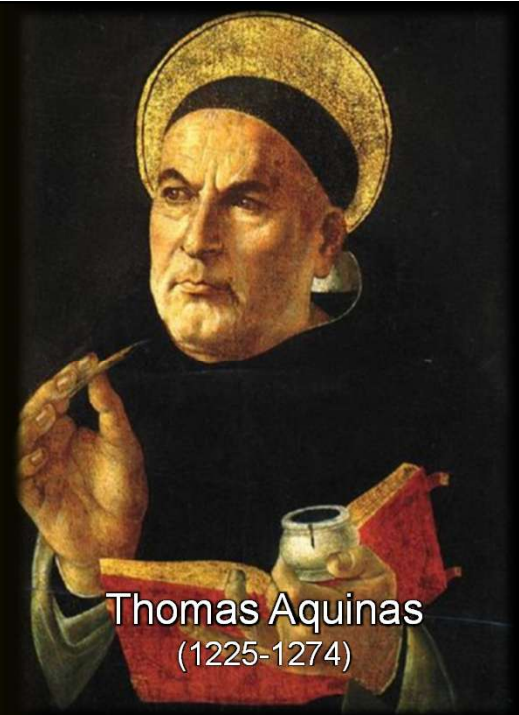
Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

"The first indemonstrable principle is that **the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time** Now as being is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so good is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed at action."

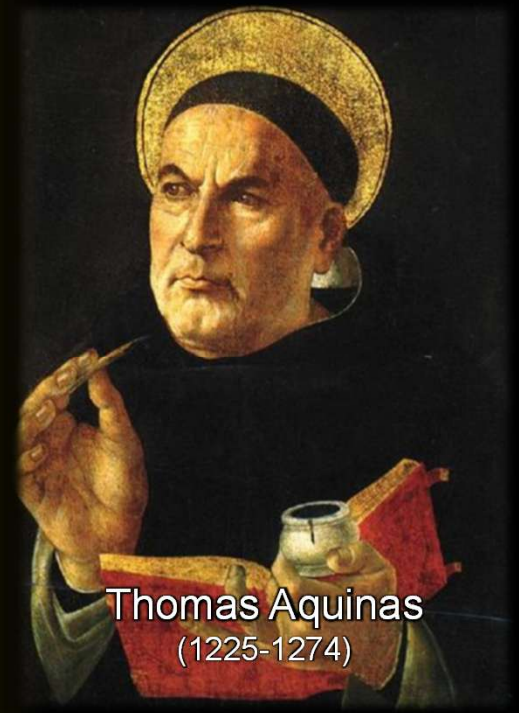
ST I-II, Q94, art. 2



Bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum.

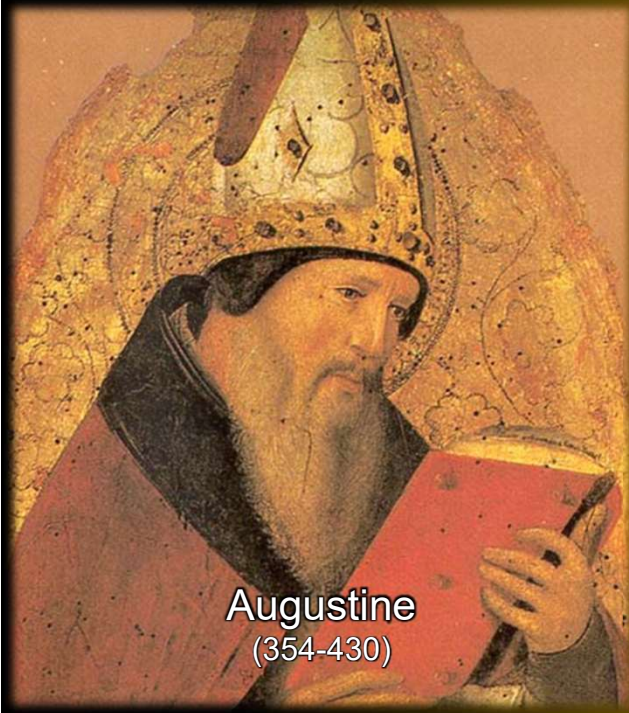


***Good is
to be done and
pursued
and evil
avoided.***



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

***What, then, is
Aquinas's
"explanation"
for evil?***

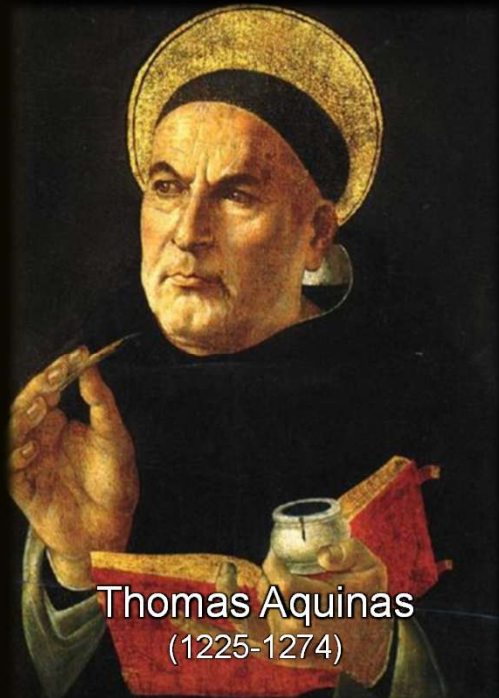


Augustine
(354-430)

"For the Omnipotent God, whom even the heathen acknowledge as the Supreme Power over all, would not allow any evil in his works, unless in his omnipotence and goodness, as the Supreme Good, he is able to bring forth good out of evil."

[Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, III, § 11, trans. Albert C. Outler, p. 5, available at <http://www.saintsbooks.net/books/St.%20Augustine%20-%20Enchiridion%20on%20Faith,%20Hope,%20and%20Love.pdf>, accessed 08/11/22]

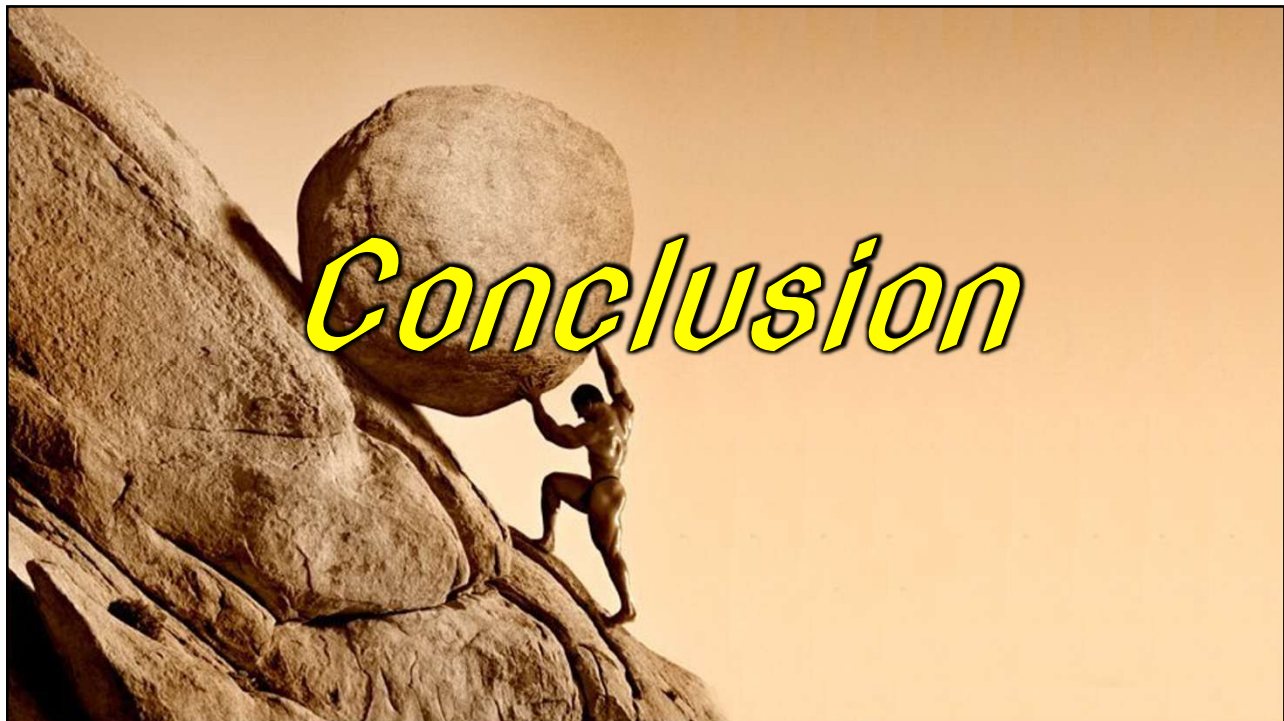
"As Augustine says 'Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil in his works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.' This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good."



Thomas Aquinas
(1225-1274)

[S7, I, Q2, art. 3, ad. 1]

- *It can be demonstrated that God exists and that He is both good and omnipotent.*
- *We know God is all good and all powerful even when we cannot demonstrate the connection between specific evils in the world and the specific goods that God might produce from them.*



There is a difference between natural and moral evil as well as a difference between good and moral good.

Solutions to the problem of evil seek to address both.

In the Classical tradition, evil is understood, not as a thing in itself, but as a privation of goodness in things.

Some solutions to the problem of evil are incompatible with Evangelical Christianity.

*There are solutions to the
problem of evil that are
compatible with biblical
Christianity and Classical
Theism.*



