THE GREATER- GOOD DEFENCE

The Greater-Good Defence

An Essay on the Rationality of Faith

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To Donna,

Dave, Dan, Steve, Linda, and Glenn

I believe that God can and will bring good out of evil, even out of the greatest evil. For that purpose he needs men who make the best use of everything. I believe that God will give us all the strength we need to help us to resist in all times of distress. But he never gives it in advance, lest we should rely on ourselves and not on him alone. A faith such as this should allay all our fears for the future. I believe that even our mistakes and shortcomings are turned to good account, and that it is no harder for God to deal with them than with our supposedly good deeds. I believe that God is no timeless fate, but that he waits for and answers sincere prayers and responsible actions.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Letters and Papers from Prison

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Preface

This book is a study of several defences viewed as specifications or ‘offspring’ of the parent, greater-good defence. Numerous formulations of two of the defences and critical studies of them abound, but scant attention has been given to their relatedness and common root. In this volume, the ‘parent’ defence – the greater-good defence – is examined, and several derivations of the defence from tenets of theism are traced. Three specifications, including an original account of what I call the ‘Redemption Specification’ (incipient perhaps in some way or other in the other two), are critically appraised, and seen as bearing significant ‘family resemblances.’ I argue that the defences not only sustain a relatedness, but that they need each other, and that they constitute an apologetic complex that successfully defeats the inconsistency strategy and significantly undermines the probabilistic strategy based on evil.

The first chapter provides a brief conceptual landscape in terms of which selected key issues meaningfully fall into place. How the issue of evil is to be construed is one of the central concerns. Chapter 2 examines the omni-attributes central to the debate. Consideration of counterexamples result in adding qualifiers until definitions evolve which are mutually compatible and ‘fit’ key notions integral to the theist’s system of beliefs. Chapters 3 and 4 cover various greater-good defences and greater-good derivations, respectively. The fifth chapter examines the modal free will defence of Alvin Plantinga, and the sixth, the soul-making defences of Keith Yandell and John Hick. The Fall, in the final chapter, is teleologically construed as a *felix culpa* (happy fault), because it gives meaning to the notion and act of redemption.

The manuscript evolved through two main stages, the first of which satisfied a terminal degree requirement at the University of Minnesota. Burnham Terrell supervised the study, and Jasper Hopkins was a strong influence and encouragement. I am grateful to both for their advice and friendship. During a sabbatical leave in 1986, an extensive revision was initiated. I am grateful to Bethel College for granting the sabbatical so that I could write at Oxford University. Richard Swinburne kindly wrote letters of introduction to the Bodleian and Radcliff libraries, and graciously consented to

read two drafts, one while at Oxford, and another later. His many comments at both stages led to numerous significant improvements. As it turned out, Oxford proved to be an ideal environment for the project. Much of the writing took place in a corner at Pusey Library of St. Cross College.

Many others have helped sharpen the ideas and arguments. Alvin Plantinga responded to questions that I had regarding his free will defence, and granted permission to refer to materials he presented as part of a lecture series at Bethel College. James Sennett drew my attention to several imprecisions in an early account of that defence. An early draft was read by Bruce Reichenbach, and some of his criticisms were very helpful, and a greater-good defence he suggested is included in Chapter 3. Thanks are also due Eleonore Stump for reading and commenting on the manuscript. The section on omniscience in Chapter 2, was read as a paper, to which George Mavrodes offered comments and helpful examples, some of which appear in Chapter 2. C. Anthony Anderson offered a number of helpful suggestions regarding the definitions that appear in Chapter 2. I am grateful to several anonymous readers for having offered many helpful suggestions which led to revisions *passim*.

Along the way, colleagues at Bethel College, Stan Anderson, Alan Padgett, Don Postema, Paul Reasoner, Greg Boyd, and Roger Olson, critically responded to sections of the manuscript read at philosophy department seminars. My T.A., Andrea Winquist, carefully read a late draft, which resulted in some changes for the better, and Robert Franks and Lamont A. Crook helped in proof reading.

The discussion of omnipotence in Chapter 1 appears in slightly different form as an article in *Explorations* under the title, 'On Defining Omnipotence' (Vol. 9, No. 3, Spring, 1991, 77–94), and the seventh chapter, 'O Felix Culpa, Redemption, and the Greater Good Defence,' is a revision of an article under that title that appears in *Sophia* (Vol. 25, No. 3, October, 1986, 18–31). I am grateful to both publishers for permission to include these materials in this study.

The final copy has been meticulously prepared by Janine McFarland, who patiently typed revisions, promptly met deadlines, and kept a watchful eye on detail and fine points of style.

Finally, I owe more than I can ever express in mere words to my wife and children, to whom this volume is dedicated. They patiently endured my many absences and times of stress, in order that I might complete the study. Thanks to their many encouragements and steadfast support, this inquiry has reached this final form.

Table of Logical Symbols

$\rightsquigarrow$	' $\phi \rightsquigarrow \psi$,' 'if ϕ , then-probably ψ ,' two-place probability functor
∇	' $\nabla \phi$,' 'it is probable that ϕ ,' one-place probability functor
.i.	'so-probably' of inductive inference
$\rightarrow$	' $\phi \rightarrow \psi$,' 'if ϕ then-materially ψ '
$\bar{\phi}$	'not ϕ '
(/)	' ϕ/ψ ,' 'probability of ϕ given ψ '
$\square$	' $\square \phi$,' 'necessarily ϕ '
$\diamond$	' $\diamond \phi$,' 'possibly ϕ '
ICa	'individual concept of Adam'
Ia	'individual Adam'
sa	'set(s) of actions'
ssa	'set(s) of logically possible states of affairs'
T(W)	'true in world W'