The facts of good and evil, of progress and decline, raise questions about the character of our universe. Such questions have been put in very many ways, and the answers given have been even more numerous. But behind this multiplicity there is a basic unity that comes to light in the exercise of transcendental method. We can inquire into the possibility of fruitful inquiry. We can reflect on the nature of reflection.

The possibility of inquiry on the side of the subject lies in his intelligence, in his drive to know what, why, how, and in his ability to reach intellectually satisfying answers. But why should the answers that satisfy the intelligence of the subject yield anything more than a subjective satisfaction? Why should they be supposed to possess any relevance to knowledge of the universe? Of course, we assume that they do. We can point to the fact that our assumption is confirmed by its fruits. So implicitly we grant that the universe is intelligible and, once that is granted, there arises the question whether the universe could be intelligible without having an intelligent ground. But that is the question about God.

Again, to reflect on reflection is to ask just what happens when we marshal and weigh the evidence of pronouncing that this probably is so and that probably is not so. To what do these metaphors of marshalling and weighing refer? Elsewhere I have worked out an answer to the question and here I can do no more than summarily repeat my conclusion [cfr. Insight, chpts. IX, X, XI]. Judgment proceeds rationally from a grasp of a virtually unconditioned. By an unconditioned is meant any \( x \) that has no conditions. By a virtually unconditioned is meant any \( x \) that has no unfulfilled conditions. In other words, a virtually unconditioned is a conditioned whose conditions are all fulfilled. To weigh the evidence is to ascertain whether the fulfilment of the conditions certainly or probably involves the existence or occurrence of the conditioned.

Now this account of judgment implicitly contains a further element. If we are to speak of a virtually unconditioned, we must first speak of an unconditioned. the virtually unconditioned has no unfulfilled conditions. The strictly unconditioned has no conditions whatever. In traditional terms, the former is a contingent being, and the latter is a necessary being. In more contemporary terms the former pertains to this world, to the world of possible experience, while the latter transcends this world in the sense that its reality is of a totally different order. But in either case we come to the question of God. Does a necessary being exist? Does there exist a reality that transcends the reality of this world?

To deliberate about \( x \) is to ask whether \( x \) is worth while. To deliberate about deliberating is to ask whether any deliberating is worth while. Has “worth while” any ultimate meaning? Is moral enterprise consonant with this world? We praise the developing subject, ever more capable of attention, insight, reasonableness, responsibility. We praise progress and denounce every manifestation of decline. But is the universe on our side, or are we just gamblers and, if we are gamblers, are we not perhaps fools, individually struggling for authenticity and collectively endeavoring to snatch progress from the ever mounting welter of decline? The questions arise and, clearly, our attitudes and our resoluteness may be profoundly affected by the answers. Does there or does there not exist a transcendent, intelligent ground of the universe? Is that ground or are we the primary instance of moral consciousness? Are cosmogenesis,
biological evolution, historical process basically cognate to us as moral beings or are they indifferent and so alien to us?

Such is the question of God. It is not a matter of image or feeling, of concept or judgment. They pertain to answers. It is a question. It rises out of our conscious intentionality, out of the a priori structured drive that promotes us from experiencing to the effort to understand, from understanding to the effort of judge truly, from judging to the effort to choose rightly. In the measure that we advert to our own questioning and proceed to question it, there arises the question of God.

It is a question that will be manifested differently in the different stages of man’s historical development and in the many varieties of his culture. But such differences of manifestation and expression are secondary. They may introduce alien elements that overlay, obscure, distort the pure question, the question that questions questioning itself. None the less, the obscurity and the distortion presuppose what they obscure and distort. It follows that, however much religious and irreligious answers differ, however much there differ the questions they explicitly raise, still at their root there is the same transcendental tendency of the human spirit that questions without restriction, that questions the significance of its own questioning, and so come to the question of God.

The question of God, then, lies within man’s horizon. man’s transcendental subjectivity is mutilated or abolished, unless he is stretching forth towards the intelligible, the unconditioned, the good of value. The reach, not of his attainment, but of his intending is unrestricted. There lies within his horizon a region for the divine, a shrine for ultimate holiness. It cannot be ignored. The atheist may pronounce it empty. the agnostic may urge that he finds his investigation has been inconclusive. the contemporary humanist will refuse to allow the question to arise. But their negations presuppose the spark in our clod, our native orientation to the divine.


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