

as producing again in our time.’ Pope John Paul II confirms Fr Anthony’s belief that the truth of the Gospel sets us free and is, in fact, the seamless robe contrived of many threads which it was given to him to glimpse as he searched for the root of the matter:

The Gospel does not lead to the impoverishment or extinction of those things which every individual, people and nation and every culture throughout history recognises and brings into being as goodness, truth and beauty. On the contrary, it strives to assimilate and to develop all these values: to liven them with magnanimity and joy and to perfect them by the mysterious and ennobling light of Revelation.

(Slavorum Apostoli. 18)

Why create Hitler?

James Sadowsky SJ

‘If God knows how people like Hitler are going to behave, why does he create them?’ One reply to this objection goes as follows. It is impossible both for God to know what Hitler is going to do and for God to decide not to create him. If He is not going to create Hitler, there will be no Hitler to do anything and no future act for God to know. God’s knowing what Hitler will do presupposes the decision to create. God does not first know how Hitler will act and then decide to create him. It is the other way around.¹ It is as if God is ‘surprised’ by the results of his decision to create—not that he learns something he did not previously know, but that he knows from all eternity something he would not otherwise have known. The decision to create is, in a sense, taken blindly.

While it is true that God does not know what people are freely going to do unless He decides to create them, it is also the case according to many that without having to know whom he shall choose to create he knows what people will freely do in case they are created. He is able, therefore, to take into account these hypothetical choices when deciding to create. If this is true, then the problem of evil becomes more acute. God creates with the *prior* knowledge of moral evil. One then has to

show that the good which comes from creation outweighs the evil by-product.

On the other hand, one can ask what happens to providence if the decision to create takes place without the knowledge of what would ensue from that decision. How can God govern the world if he does not know how his creatures would react in any given set of circumstances? The knowledge that God supposedly has of these hypothetical choices goes by the name *scientia media*, or *middle knowledge*. It is so called because it lies between the knowledge of what merely can happen and the knowledge of what will actually happen.

Equipped with this knowledge God is able to view different scripts containing different characters with their freely chosen deeds. Depending on what outcome he wants God chooses the appropriate script. The desired outcome is obtained without the violation of anybody's freedom because God is not responsible for what happens during the dress rehearsal: he does not write the script; he merely selects it. And, of course, he does so not because of the evil deeds recorded in the scripts but in spite of them.

It would be perverse to accept or reject the *scientia media* because of the happy or unhappy consequences that would follow. We have to accept or reject it on the merits of the case and let the chips fall where they may.

The obvious argument in favour is that since God knows the answers to all questions, he must know the answer to questions like 'What would John do if created?' Do not even human beings know the answers to questions such as 'Would John eat liver for dinner?' ? I know John very well, and I am certain that there are no circumstances under which he would choose to eat liver.

Yes, I do know that John would not eat liver, but the reason I know this is because he lacks the freedom to choose liver. He lacks the freedom to do so because he regards liver as an unmitigated evil. Given this total lack of attraction, there is no way his will can embrace the eating of liver. For John to have a free choice he must be both attracted to the liver and attracted to something that excludes his eating the liver. But then it becomes far from obvious that there is an answer to the question, would John eat the liver? Is there really such a thing as what John would do if offered the liver in circumstances where he is free not to eat it?

For even God to know what John would *freely* do, there must be such a thing as what John would freely do. In the absence of such an object there is nothing for God or anyone else to know. Not even God can know what isn't there.

To ask what would happen if under normal conditions water were heated to 212 degrees Fahrenheit, is to ask what would happen to water in that possible world. And the answer is, of course, that the water would boil. There is a single possible world in which those conditions are applied to water and in which the water boils. Otherwise put, there is no

possible world in which those conditions are applied to water and the water does not boil. Suppose, however, that under the same conditions the water is both able to boil and able not to boil. Suppose, in other words, that the boiling of the water were a free act. In that case we should no longer have a unique possible world. We should have in fact two possible worlds: one in which those conditions obtain and the water boils, and another in which the same conditions obtain and the water does not boil. In that case the question, what would happen if those conditions were applied to water has no application. All that can be said is that there are two possibilities.

In other words, the question what would happen makes sense only when one is dealing with a necessary act. It makes sense to ask what will happen if water is thus heated because there is no alternative to its boiling. But for a free act there is always an alternative. We cannot talk about *the* possible world in which Peter is tempted to deny Christ. If his denial is free there is both the possible world in which he is tempted and denies and the one in which he is tempted and does not deny. If there were only the possible world in which he was tempted and denied, his denial would not be free. There is, then, no such thing as what would Peter freely do. Consequently, there is no such thing as the knowledge of what Peter would freely do. The only hypothetical acts that can be known are unfree, or necessary acts.

Where does this leave providence? How does God's will get done? There are two different conceptions of providence. In the first God has a series of predefined events and sees to it that these events shall come to pass. This conception implies that there is a possible set of events whose occurrence would frustrate the divine will. He has to see to it that these events do not take place. The other view has it that there is no conceivable set of events that could frustrate the divine will and that, therefore, he is under no compulsion to see to it that they do not occur. God, St Thomas tells us, wants contingent events as well as necessary events to occur. His decree is: Let there be A or B. And this is because *either* A or B fulfils the divine plan.² We leave it to the reader to decide which view of providence is the more worthy of God.

1 We trust the reader understands that the procedure is purely logical and in no way temporal: the decree of creation and God's knowing what Hitler will do are simultaneous. A good account of the distinction between logical and temporal priority is to be found in Craig, William Lane. *The Only Wise God*. Grand Rapids, 1987. See pp. 127–128. In general, I shall be using temporal language, leaving the translation to the reader.

2 See Peter van Inwagen, 'The Place of Chance in a World Sustained by God'. *Divine and Human Action*. Thomas V. Morris, Ed. London, Cornell University Press, 1988.