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What Hatcher's paper shows is that the logic of relations, when ineptly used to generate misunderstandings about what the problem is, merely muddies the philosophical waters. All Hatcher really achieves by replacing the monadic predicate "is evil" with the dyadic relation "is better than" is a complicated begging of the question. This can scarcely be called intellectual progress, for we do not require the modern logic of relations in order to commit or to detect that fallacy.

NOTES

1. *Zygon* 9 (1974): 245–55.
2. Suggested to me by comments of an anonymous referee for *Zygon*.
3. See Alvin Plantinga, "The Free Will Defence," in *Philosophy in America*, ed. M. Black (London: Allen & Unwin, 1965), pp. 204–20, and literature cited there.

THE RELATIVE CONCEPTION OF GOOD AND EVIL

by William S. Hatcher

Philip L. Quinn obviously feels that he has seized the main thrust of my article entitled "A Logical Solution to the Problem of Evil," and for him this main point is, "though interesting," essentially trivial. I find that I feel rather that he has thoroughly missed the point and that for whatever reasons—be they due to my exposition, to his framework of interpretation, or to a combination of both—his critical remarks are largely beside the point.

My article consists of two distinct parts, only the last of which is substantially discussed or even mentioned in Quinn's criticism. The first part of the article consists of a fairly detailed examination of the argument which constitutes what I have called the problem of evil. This examination involves first a formalization of the argument in order to establish clearly that there is real, logical contradiction and not just a paradox of some sort. Once the set of premises which leads to contradiction is clearly established, there follows a philosophical discussion of each of the premises with a view to answering the implicit question, "Which, if any, of these premises can we acceptably reject on philosophical grounds in order to avoid contradiction?" The only a priori restraint I impose is that we shall not reject God's existence, or his omnipotence, or his goodness. This discussion tends to show that none of the other premises can be reasonably rejected on philosophical grounds as long as one insists on an absolute (monadic) concept (predicate) of "good" and of "evil."

The conclusion to this first part of the article is that if one insists on maintaining belief in the existence of a good and omnipotent God, one must

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abandon the absolute framework of good and evil and adopt a relative framework. The last part of the paper then reformulates the initial argument in this relative framework and shows that contradiction no longer follows from the reformulation.

It is the second part only, the reformulation, that has been the object of Quinn's critical remarks. But in his discussion he continues to use an absolute framework involving the use of "good" and "evil" as absolute (monadic) predicates. His critical remarks and purported counterexamples are therefore not applicable to my reformulation, which is, precisely, a proposal to abandon this framework.

In my proposed framework, one can no longer speak of something simply as "good" and "evil" in an absolute way, except that one can attribute supreme goodness to one thing (i.e., God) which is better than every other thing, and one could also consistently attribute supreme evil to one thing which would be worse than every other thing. Moreover, by the use of quantification, adverbial nuances, and numerous other devices of this kind, the relative framework allows for a very rich and precise description of the degree of good and evil that one wishes to attribute to any given thing.

Neither does the existence of simple models of my reformulated system destroy its integrity. The reformulation was obviously meant to be minimal in its assumptions. When all of the other things that are true about the relation *Val* are added as premises to the system, the models will reflect the truth of the moral situation. The absolute framework, which Quinn insists on maintaining, can never do this because it is contradictory and is thus not true of anything at all.

Clearly, the reasonableness of my reformulation and of the proposed relative framework rests heavily on the analysis in the first part of the article, for it is this analysis which shows that the absolute framework is logically incompatible with theistic belief in a good and omnipotent God. Anyone for whom this conclusion is unacceptable must either abandon his belief in a good and omnipotent God or else find what he feels are substantial philosophical reasons for rejecting one or another of the several other premises examined in the first part of the article. No other alternative is open.

That Quinn did not understand my article in this way would seem to be borne out by his steadfast omission of any discussion whatever of this whole first part as well as his discussion beginning "In reply to criticism. . . ." For here he entertains the idea that one *might* propose a relative framework, whereas the whole thrust of my article was that one has no other choice if one insists on maintaining a certain conception of God. Moreover, he attributes this idea to the referee—which would seem to indicate clearly that it was not part of his basic interpretation of the article.

In his brief discussion of the relative framework, Quinn rejects out of hand as *prima facie* unreasonable the restriction to the use of "good" and "evil" in a purely relative way. He feels that this linguistic and conceptual framework does not "take evil seriously." He gives the Nazi holocaust of the Jewish people as an instance of an absolute evil.

Now this is a perfect example of where the philosophical force of the use of the relative framework makes itself felt. I, for example, am horrified by the Nazi actions precisely because I know that man is capable of acting otherwise. It is precisely by comparison with other things, such as the actions of a Jesus or a Buddha, for example, that the true horror of such a thing as the holocaust reveals itself. And the more exalted a conception we have of man's

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moral capabilities, the more horror we feel over such a gross lack of these superior qualities represented by something like the holocaust.

On the other hand, however evil the holocaust may be, it is still possible to imagine actions which are even more evil, though perhaps not many (e.g., a conscious and deliberate genocide perpetrated against the whole world). In any case, by such comparisons we can situate the holocaust precisely as being, in effect, very much worse than most every other thing.

Already here we see the use of devices, such as quantification and adverbial modification, clearly showing that the relative framework is not at all limited to the type of simplistic comparisons given as examples in Quinn's discussion.

Far from "not taking evil seriously," the necessity of using the relative framework allows us to understand the nature of good and evil in a much more profound way and to see God's purpose even more clearly. Is it not much closer psychologically to the truth of "good" and "evil" as they are experienced in life that it is by comparisons (perhaps unconscious or partly conscious in some instances) with alternative possibilities, within ourselves and within others, that we come to judge and prefer one course of action as superior to another? Is it not precisely on the basis of such a judgment that one might well see the adopting of a relative framework of good and evil as superior to abandoning belief in a supremely good and omnipotent God? The reader will have to judge for himself, but he cannot escape the logical alternatives forced by the initial analysis of the "problem of evil."

A great moral thinker once said that "the good deeds of the faithful are the sins of the near ones," meaning that those same actions considered highly worthy by moral people would constitute lesser actions for those even more advanced spiritually and morally. For anyone interested in a serious philosophical and theistic (rather than purely logical) presentation and discussion of a relative framework of good and evil, I would refer them to the work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá mentioned in a footnote to my original article and entitled *Some Answered Questions* (7th ed. [Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1954]; see, in particular, chap. 74, "The Non-Existence of Evil," as well as chap. 57).

My "solution" to the problem of evil was properly labeled "logical" in that it was never intended to solve the problem of our emotional response to instances of suffering. Even when we are able intellectually to perceive that a certain experience of suffering is beneficial (and therefore "good"), our emotional response may still be a negative one (e.g., rejection instead of acceptance). On the other hand, a clear, logical perception of the inconsistency of the absolute framework and the necessity for the relative one can be useful in allowing us to redirect our energies away from the false problems that may often result from naively assigning absolute labels of "good" and "evil."

I suppose my solution to the problem of evil is trivial for anyone prepared to accept a purely relative view of good and evil. But willingness to accept such a framework is, as we have seen, the very heart of the matter. In particular, Quinn specifically rejects such purely relative use. Neither is it clear whether Leibniz would.