

One response to our situation is to take refuge in small, somewhat independent moral communities within which particular moral beliefs can arise and grow strong, not only among children but among adults. Such an approach follows Aristotle's emphasis on the importance of proper habits of mind if one is even to make a beginning of moral discourse (I, 4, 1095b 4-12). Moral arguments require starting points. Not every starting point can be justified by argument. Nevertheless, from within those smaller moral communities, efforts must also always be made to enter the public square, however difficult it is to find places from which discussion can begin. To imagine that differences of opinion about moral questions are like different national customs, like Irish dancing and German *lederhosen* is to destroy the whole web of concepts surrounding morality, right and wrong, temptation, guilt, and shame.

A MEDITATION ON EVIL

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Turning away from God would not be a defect except in a nature meant to be with God. Even an evil will then is proof of the goodness of nature. Just as God is the supremely good creator of good natures, so he is the most just ruler of evil wills, so that even though evil wills make an evil use of good natures, God makes a good use of evil wills.

— St. Augustine, *The City of God*, XI, 17

The devil has a huge problem with sacrificial love. He knew God, but he did not love, so he would not serve. With the *Genesis* narrative, there is a choice between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The principle of the Tree of Life, as I see it, is sacrificial love; the principle of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is power. The essence of evil is a choice of the heart for power rather than the Cross. My husband once told me of some priest who told him of a theory—only a theory of course—that the devil rebelled when he was shown a vision of the crucifixion. He said, in effect, I will not serve a God who belittles himself in such a manner. There are those who do not serve because they are so mixed up and poorly formed that they cannot find God. But those who take a deliberate stance against Him usually do so because they hate the Cross. This probably equals what you call wanting to find their own way to God. They want a way which is not self-sacrificial but self-promoting.

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I

In the second book of *The Republic*, we find a brief but impressive remark about the relation of God and evil. Socrates is concerned about the poets, especially Homer, who picture the gods indulging in activities distinctly improper and indeed quite wrong. Socrates does not deny either the incidence of evil in the world or its attraction, but he does not want even to hint, as Homer does, that God causes or participates in evil. Socrates discusses this matter with Adeimantus. But by showing that God does not indulge in evil things, Socrates seems to limit the power of God, who, like Machiavelli's Prince, should be able to do either good or evil, as suits His needs. Socrates, however, asks, "Then good does not cause all things; it is responsible for the things that are good; but not responsible for evil?" Adeimantus agrees to this distinction. Socrates adds, "Nor can God, since He is good, cause all things as most people say. He is responsible for a few things that happen to men, but for many He is not, for the good things we enjoy are much fewer than the evil. The former (good things) we must attribute to none else but God, but for the evil we must find some other causes, not God" (379b-c). Such a passage surely provokes us to wonder about good and evil in their origins.

On the one hand, the implied thesis, as indicated, seems to limit the power of God by denying Him causality over evil, while, on the other, it indicates that the cause of evil is not God or the good. Yet, it does not seem valid to maintain that God is "limited" if He does no evil. Rather He is freed to be good, with no taint of evil. But if the cause of evil is not directly God, it must be found to be properly located in what is not God, yet in what is capable of itself bearing responsibility. If evil were merely a necessity, it would seem, we should not be so infuriated by its very existence among us, if indeed it can properly be said to "exist." The search for a proper "cause" of evil other than God, in any case, stands near the top of all philosophic inquiry about *what is*.

Strictly speaking, however, that about which we can "meditate" is restricted to a something, to some good, to some reality, to something *that is*. What is not a "thing" or not grounded in being, we can only come to grips with in terms of a relation to actual things or in terms of a conscious negation of things *that are*. As such, "nothing" is simply not thinkable. What is not, is not. This negative affirmation is the best we can do for it. But it does affirm what is true. It is true that what is not, is not. Negating the reality of something is a conscious act that takes place in our mind, in its considering the meaning of things. Things that need not be—among which things we must ultimately include ourselves—cause us to wonder. What would it mean, we ask ourselves, if such things that need not exist were, in fact, *not* in existence, were *not* outside of nothingness, as they are outside of nothingness when they *do* exist?

Thus if we endeavor to meditate on "nothing" or on *no* thing, we have first to imagine or experience some real thing. We begin thinking only when we notice and affirm that *something is*. Then, in our own further reflections, we can deprive *what is* of its existence; we can negate its existence. We know in this case of our own negation that reality is not the way we are imagining it when, in our minds, we deny existence to something *that is*. Even to think about what does not exist, we have to form a contrary-to-fact image of what is not. This image substitutes for the normal reality or form of that about which we think when we consider anything *that is*. We are quite aware of what we are doing and of the problematic status of what we ponder. Our thought denies something about the reality about which we think, all the while we know that what is denied in our minds does in fact exist.

Any meditation on evil is an aspect of the meditation on nothingness. It is a meditation on what specifically ought not to exist as it concerns what does exist. Evil is always related to existence, not simply to nothingness. Nothingness, as such, is not evil. If there were only nothingness, there would be no evil since evil always depends on something that exists. Most

human beings, even early on in life, will have recognized that something is evil or disordered in the world or, even more strikingly, in themselves. They will have blamed someone for it, excused themselves of it, or been angered about something that ought not to be. The very act of blame or anger or excuse implies some initial recognition of a lack of correspondence between what ought to be and *what is*. Without this awareness of a comparison between an ought and an is, we could not properly blame or praise anything. But we feel justified in our anger at something that ought not to be, but is. Our anger is, or should be, grounded in reality and its disorder.

In the beginning, however, most people, even while knowing they are influenced by it, will have no very sophisticated idea of what evil is. Yet in practice, unless they are intractable determinists who maintain that whatever is must be and must be as it is, they will acknowledge that some things or aspects of reality ought not to exist, or ought not to exist in a peculiar way, even when they do exist, and are known to exist, in the way they do. The reality of evil is not to be minimized or denied as a mere illusion or misperception. Some things could have been and ought to have been otherwise even though they are now what they are. The "presence" of evil falls among the things that could have been and should have been otherwise.

II

Common sense experience remains the place where we have to begin when we consider more formally or thoroughly evil itself along with other central issues that impinge on our lives. Accounting for reality and for our place within it is a basic requirement of what it is to be a complete human being. We are to "examine" our lives, as Socrates told the Athenians in *The Apology*. Much of mankind's history and several of its philosophers can be our guides, without overlooking the not-to-be-denied possibility of our choosing bad guides. Simply put, no matter who we are, certain things are found in reality that we

should have deliberately and systematically thought about. In particular, we should consciously think about the troubling aspects of reality that we identify as evil or wrong. Far from being dangerous to think properly or accurately about evil, it is more of a danger not to seek to understand what it might be or what might be said about it. An education that neglects a meaningful effort to account for evil is a most incomplete education, as no life can fail to confront its perplexing effect on us.

No education is adequate that neglects a fundamental aspect of reality from its ken. Not to have been puzzled by evil indicates a very inattentive and shallow mind. It is no accident, then, that St. Thomas, at the very beginning of the *Summa Theologiae*, a book itself designed for beginners, intimates that evil is one of the major reasons given for belief justifying the non-existence of God. Notice that with this consideration, Aquinas denies neither God, things, nor the problem. The implication is that if we do not understand evil properly, we will never understand God properly. Evil, at first sight, then, by being a "reality" so obvious that no one would ever bother to deny it, seems to imply that God, as all good, cannot exist if evil exists. No real God, no good God, it is urged, would allow a world in which evil exists. "Is this position true?" we ask ourselves.

What St. Thomas affirms, however, is that what God has in mind may be so great that it involves "allowing" the possibility of evil. To "allow" is not the same as to "cause." The fact of evil, in other words, may indicate, not the *inability* of God to prevent it, but His *ability* to overcome it in His own way in order that something greater might come to be. In this sense, thinking about evil is also an aspect of thinking of God. God Himself, it is implied, is bound by a certain order or logic in His own being. Evil, in this context, causes us to wonder what this "greater" good that "allows" evil might possibly be. We already notice, for starters, that the problem of evil forces us to think more clearly about what we think

we already know. The very rationality of our being includes the account of evil as "possible" but not good or justified as evil. Paradoxically, as in the case of all revelational positions, thinking about evil enables us to think better period.

No doubt, we begin any discussion of evil with the empirical and unavoidable realization that at least something is radically wrong in our lot, otherwise the problem would not occur to us. But it does occur to us. In fact, it leaps out at us. At the same time, we realize that not everything is disordered, that things in themselves are not evil. We are not Manicheans who think that matter, for example, is to be identified with evil. We do not seek to purify ourselves by escaping from material things as if somehow they were, as such, the cause or definition of evil. Augustine tells us that this Manichean notion that matter is evil is oftentimes a most useful theory if we are trying to justify our own evil acts. It is useful because it puts the blame on something other than ourselves, other than our wills, where it more properly belongs. But Augustine also saw that this explanation of blaming matter would never really work. It was only an excuse for not locating the true source of evil within us, in our wills, not in our being or in our bodies or in the structure of the world.

We understand, at least sometimes, that we can and do use good things in a wrong and evil way. Good things, finite things, are capable of being used wrongly not of themselves but by those who have the power to use them for anything at all—who have "dominion" over them. Indeed, it may well be a duty to use them. In *Genesis* we see it affirmed, from the revelational tradition, that no material thing, including ourselves, as such, is evil. Everything *that is*, is good. Or to recall *Genesis*, God looked on all things as He created them and saw that they were not, in spite of being composed of matter, evil, as the Manicheans taught, but precisely "good." The teaching of *Genesis* remains the single most important text for any full understanding of evil. And it begins by affirming that things are not evil in what they are, in their existence. This affirma-

tion includes the human being, limited or finite as he is, and all his given faculties. Evil does not lie in the being of man or in the being of creation itself. Rather, the possibility of evil lies in the fact of created will, of genuinely free will, which itself, as a faculty, is as such good, even when it chooses evil.

If things are not evil, just what "is" evil anyhow? Something mysterious seems ever to envelop it. The whole messy enterprise surrounding evil, we would like to think, ought not to exist. We long for a purer philosophy, if not for a purer world. We look for a way out. Yet we are loathe to think that nothing at all should exist if the price of eliminating evil means that nothing finite, nothing *capable* of doing evil, could exist. The price of finite, rational existence includes, though it does not necessitate, the possibility of evil. The classic tradition from Plato and St. Augustine affirms that evil is not a thing, but a *lack* of something, a privation. What ought to be there, for some reason of chance or deliberation, is missing.

We are accustomed to hear it said that the devil is evil or that Hitler was evil. But as such, neither the devil nor Hitler is evil in what each is. Unless each remains good in his substantial being, in what he is, he can neither exist nor have any evil attached to him. Evil always exists in, is a parasite of, something good. Ultimately, this dependent status is why evil, or better why its effects, can be overcome. Evil always remains what it is. We can never call what is evil good, because what is evil is never, as such, good. The great lie in the soul is the affirmation that evil is good.

The enduring good that bears evil, however, affords this possibility that good can come about through the good that supports evil's reality. Out of this remaining good, a return path to good is at least possible, though never automatic. It too must be chosen, affirmed. Evil itself remains. It never itself becomes "good." Evil remains eternally what it is, evil, though the being who put what ought not to be into existence can change, can recognize the evil and its definition. And Socrates pointed out that to suffer evil is not to do evil.

If someone chooses to do evil, someone else will suffer it. The suffering caused to good beings by someone else's evil is itself potentially redemptive or restorative both to the one suffering the evil and to the one who causes it in the first place, but only on the condition that evil is recognized and affirmed as what it is, evil.

Yet, clearly, some massive truth stands behind the affirmation that the devil is evil or that Hitler was evil. It is as if, which is the case, our being is first given to us for a purpose that is not simply the continued existence of what we are, no matter what it is that we do. What we are presupposes and grounds what we do or how we act because of or in pursuit of what we are. Our existence is itself directed to some purpose that we do not concoct for ourselves unless we claim, as we can, a complete autonomy over ourselves, an autonomy we cannot, in fact, prove ourselves to possess. Our being is ordained to acting, to doing, to knowing. Perhaps it is better to say that we are to direct ourselves to what we are, to the completion of what we are, to choose what we will be on the basis of what we are. We have to will our being in this sense by willing what is good and not by rejecting it or by misusing it. "It is never right to do wrong," as Socrates said. We associate evil with the choiceful rejection of what we are, of what we are invited to be, a choice that is possible in each of our free actions. Every free act bears the potentiality of bringing us to the lack of being that is evil, just as it can bring us to the fullness of being that is good.

III

The classical writers remind us of the difference between what is called "moral" and "ontological" evil. Not unduly to confuse ourselves by such technical words, both sorts of evil are similar in that they both imply the lack of something that ought to be present. Thus, if I see a three-legged dog, I conclude that some evil has happened to the dog. That is, he

is lacking something that he should have but does not. If I do not already know what a dog is, I will never notice that anything is missing if it only has three legs. Until I see other dogs, I will likely think that three-leggedness is proper to dog nature. Let us say that a tree fell on the dog's leg during a storm and cut the leg off. The storm was not evil; the tree was not evil; the falling was not evil; the dog was not evil. The lightning struck the tree and broke the branch. The branch fell and broke the leg of the dog that happened to be running along under it in the storm. Everything here is operating as it should according to its own nature.

The evil in this case of the three-legged dog was fortuitous; it was caused accidentally. Two or three identifiable causes, each doing what it was made to do, crossed at a given time and place. The accident is not directly willed by any of the natural causes, but it still happened because each cause remained what it was. The loss of the leg is evil in the sense that something that ought to be there in the dog is missing. The dog now limps about and cannot run as before. Again, the dog was running down the street for his supper; the lightning struck the tree, the branch fell, the dog lost the leg. Everything was acting according to what it is.

Yet, something identifiable did happen. The dog lost his leg because the tree's branch fell. The dog is missing what ought to be there and the tree is missing its branch. But that dogs are hungry, that lightning exists and strikes branches of trees, that unsupported branches fall, that they fall on what is there below, these things are good. Everything here is doing what it is supposed to do. We do not want the natural laws that govern these actions as such to be other than they are, for on them the universe of interrelated actions exists.

Moral evil also indicates the lack of something that ought to be there. Moral and physical evil stand within the same general definition of what is lacking in something good. Moral evil implies knowledge, will, culpability, choice. What is lacking in moral evil is the order of good that ought to be there, that

ought to have been, could have been put in our actions. If, in a business transaction, I act unjustly, the relation between the other person and myself lacks what ought to be there. The other person is affected by my not placing in my act what should be there. The other person receives an act that is deprived of something that ought to be there—he is deprived of his “due.” He in his turn may respond to my evil either by killing me, or by suing me, by suffering the loss bitterly, by forgiving me, or by changing the law to prevent me in the future.

My relationship to the other changes because of my act depriving him of justice. He recognizes this lack of what is due to him. He, rightly in this case, blames me for it. The what-ought-not-to-be-there, the lack, continues in the world until its consequences are stopped, or at least altered or mitigated, by forgiveness or punishment or by the restoring of what ought to have been there. In another sense, however, consequences can never be wholly stopped. The fact that the disorder occurred remains. It is possible, however, that some good can come, not from the evil in the action as such, for it is non-being, but from the even truncated good in which all evil must exist, including moral evil. How is it possible that we do evil things? Remember, if we are to be blamed for doing evil things, we must somehow show how this evil act proceeds out of our human powers, out of our reason and will, in such a manner that we are its cause. The moral evil we do refers to those acts we deliberately put into the world in which something due is lacking. Something ought to be there but is not there because we choose not to put it there. What process do we go through in such cases? How do we cause evil to happen in us and through our choices?

Explicitly or, mostly, implicitly, we erect an argument whereby we justify, at least to ourselves but potentially to the world, our acts; that is, we give reasons for them. This “giving reasons” is why, when anyone is accused of doing something wrong, what he invariably does, unless he acknowledges the

evil as wrong, is to give a reason, plausible or not, for why he acted as he did. This reason is itself contained in our initial situation of knowing about several ways to do things or several alternatives to guide our actions or at least the possibility of not acting at all. Socrates said that, given the alternative of death or doing evil, death was better because we did not know whether death was evil, but we did know that choosing to do evil was evil. We establish what we mean by good by indicating what we will die for. To be willing to die for nothing, thus to stand for nothing, also defines our being. That we have such alternatives in our knowledge always before us whereby we can choose good or evil, is not, as such, evil.

The reason-giving person implicitly uses his power of reason to claim that his reason is the right or governing one not only of his actions in this particular case before him but of all actions in similar cases. The reason he gives for his action is intended to explain his integrity before the bar of reason. By giving his reason, he stands before the bar of mankind’s reason. This claim of “reason” is why we can debate or dispute any avowal that would justify an act because we all have the same norm or standard of reason against which to test what is claimed to be reasonable. And the given reason is valid as far as it goes. No one can act without some claim of good or reason in his actions. Evil explanations, in this sense, are parasite to the good in which they exist.

Moral evil does not come about because we acted according to the practical syllogism or argument whereby we sought to put something reasonable in its own order into our actions. Rather moral evil comes about because, in giving our reason to the world and to ourselves for our acting as we did, we fail to mention that we suppressed or avoided examining or illuminating our action on the broader scale in which it really exists. We ate something because it was good, tasty. It was good. But we did not want too much to inquire sufficiently about whether what we ate belonged to someone else. We caused a “lack,” as it were, in and by our actions which, to

be complete, needed also to consider the justice as well as the pleasure of what is acquired by our act. This lack now becomes, as it were, a missing "part" of our act and incipiently of our character, which is formed by repeated acts.

Our act forever goes forth into existence missing what it should have had. Good is crippled, lacking, by our deliberate choice, something that should be there. It butts up against reality, as it were, with this lack, this what-ought-to-be-there but is not. This lack, as it were, continues to "exist" down the ages and makes a difference in the world *that is*. Once upon a time, there was a dog with a missing leg who was seen limping along by a little girl. Her name was Sarah. Her father was the king. Because she was so touched by the little crippled dog in the storm, she decided to give her life to help the suffering. Her name is now St. Sarah. . . . Evil somehow occasioned good.

IV

The French philosopher Jacques Maritain brought up the famous query from Origen about whether the devil could, by God's mercy or power, be saved. This effort to "save" the devil is perhaps the most sophisticated form of the denial that evil has any real and ultimate consequences. If the devil can be saved, who cannot be? After all, it seems unfair of God to be so tough on poor Satan. Besides, does it not impinge on God's power and even more on His kindness if He did not do all He could to rescue from damnation even the worst cases? God did do, of course, all He could do, before the event. If He does anything after the event, however, after the final refusal to acknowledge that evil was evil, it would seem that God was not serious in His initial prohibitions against doing evil.

What is implied in this consideration, moreover, is that since the devil is by definition the worst case, it would be much easier for God to save us persistent human sinners who have

nowhere near the brains and subtlety of a Lucifer. We like to think that it is liberal or benevolent or compassionate to lessen any finality to any punishment for our acts. We like to think this mitigation or reversal can be done without lessening human or divine dignity as each is originally conceived. The punishment of evil, it is implied, ought rather, *post factum*, to arouse pity in God who is asked to renege on His justice or on His affirmations about the seriousness of our every-day and lifetime choices. In the punishing of Lucifer or of ourselves, we want to accuse God of not being "compassionate," that modern virtue that forgives all, even the devil, by eliminating any criterion for judging actions that are said to have lasting ramifications.

Maritain's solution was one that sought to keep the essential outlines of the basic Christian position on the eternity of Hell and its dire punishment. That is, he does not deny Hell's existence or possibility. He does not even deny its eternity. What he wanted to suggest was a way for God, as it were, to get off the hook by using His own omnipotence. Maritain did not want to deny the devil's pride, but he did want to save him from its ultimate consequences.

Maritain acknowledged that it would be impossible for God to give Lucifer, because of his abiding pride, the Beatific Vision, for which he, like every rational creature, was in fact created. So Maritain proposed something less heinous than Hell but still something apparently compatible with God's goodness and justice. What God could do would be to put Satan in limbo, that place explained in an earlier theology as the location where unborn, unbaptized babies end with that kind of happiness due to finite natures not destined to participate in the elevated inner life of the Trinity. This place was the natural home that would be due to human and angelic nature had it not been granted, from the beginning, the inner life of God as its final and first purpose. This graced purpose, however, seemed to need for its accomplishment, the active power of free choice, in lieu of baptism. Since this choice was

lacking in the case of Lucifer, limbo was proposed as a reasonable solution to what appeared to be an insoluble dilemma, the apparent conflict between God's justice and His mercy.

Thus, Maritain thought by analogy, that the devil might be relieved of any thing that could be properly called punishment (how angels suffer is itself a question). He would be restored to that natural state of good angels were they not offered the Beatific Vision, which in itself was not due either to their nature or to human nature. Maritain conceived this position out of a spirit that was uncomfortable with the notion of eternal punishment and its supposed dampening of the good name of God's mercy. Maritain, of course, only offered this unusual position as a sort of musing or speculative postulate in his *Approches sans entraves*.¹ He would not have been surprised if he were wrong, but still he felt it would be nice perhaps if God could loosen up a bit with regard to the devil's final condition of eternal punishment and deprivation of the Beatific Vision.

We know from *Genesis* that the devil is a liar. He told Eve not to believe God, all that stuff about death and the eating of the forbidden fruit. Eve, no doubt, had no idea what death might really be like. She was given to understand by the devil that this prohibition of eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was proposed by God out of envy, that He wanted to keep Paradise to Himself. This explanation was, of course, another lie. "But why would the devil even want to lie?" we wonder. What he knew for certain in his own mind was that he himself was not God.

We notice that the devil in *Genesis* is following the classic pattern of giving reasons for what he does. These reasons, rational as they appear at first, however, are given in such a way that they do not present the whole picture of the act. When Adam and Eve do accept the deal they are offered, the consequences follow as God, not as the devil, explained to

¹J. Maritain, "Idées eschatologiques," *Approches sans entraves* in *Oeuvres Complètes Maritain* (Paris: Editions St. Paul, 1991), vol. 13, pp. 441-78.

them. But they do not become, as such, as beings, evil. God will use their given being, its goodness, as a basis to repair the damage of their evil in another way. But God's way will not "coerce" them. It will be after the manner of the kind of beings they are created to be. He teaches the free creature to accept and acknowledge the evil of his act. He leads him to acknowledge his error and to see what was really the good initially offered for him to do, a good that was subsequently lacking because of the free creature's choice.

V

The devil, as just remarked, knows that he is not God. His pride may conceivably make him envious or jealous of God, but his intelligence will not permit him to deny the fact that he did not create himself. There was an old novel by Robert Hugh Benson, entitled, I think, *Will Men Be Like Gods?*, a title that serves to illustrate what is at stake here. What is it to be "like gods." Clearly, pride, the root sin, means that we make ourselves to be the cause of the distinction of good and evil. This was the root temptation in *Genesis*. It is a temptation not so much to be God, but to be "like" God, that is, to choose our way to our destiny, not that of God. Not even the divinity, however, can make what is good to be evil. God is not an arbitrary power, as some late medieval theologians like William of Occam seemed to imply. This god as arbitrary power, already hinted at in *The Republic*, became the "Leviathan" of Hobbes when refashioned for modern political purposes wherein the state becomes the exclusive source of the definition of good and evil, a distinction based on its own arbitrary power.

Maritain's rather amusing effort to show compassion on Lucifer by speculating about God's power does not, in the end, appear to maintain the real dignity of the free creature, angel or man, as well as the simple leaving of the devil where he is destined to go as a result of his own choice and his own

definition of what is good and evil. Even if we might imagine that somehow Lucifer has landed in limbo, much to his surprise, wherein he undergoes no angelic "suffering," the fact will remain that he has rejected the gift he has been offered. His being will permanently "lack" what ought to be there. This alone will suffice to define eternal suffering, both of not knowing what it was that God had in mind for those who were obedient and of being locked in oneself as the only definition of reality when one knows that he did not cause himself.

The positive side, as it were, of Lucifer's choice, however, remains. If God intended that other finite creatures, besides Himself, participate in His inner life, it could only be on His, not on the creature's terms. But, presumably, it would not have been worth God's effort or energies had He not allowed His inner life to be open according to the only terms in which it could be possessed. Since God is love, the only way for Him to become the end or happiness of some being that is not God is for this being freely to choose God in each of his free acts. The form of the virtues, in this sense, remains charity. The free creature's love of God has to be just that, free, and even more, actually chosen as good, as worthy, as infinitely attractive because of what God is.

A philosophic meditation on evil, in other words, is likewise a meditation on good because evil cannot be understood without first understanding that good can be missing from our inner order because of our own choices. The meditation on evil is at the same time a meditation on the ultimate importance of our lives and of our daily actions. When Socrates said that it is never right to do wrong, he implied that it is always right to do what is right when it is presented to us. The presence of what is good causes us not merely to wonder how it happens to be there without our having to put it there, but also to make us wonder about our own incompleteness in our completeness. We are in our very being restless beings, not because we never encounter what is good, but because we

encounter it so incompletely. When we seek this completion solely by our own power and definition, we claim a divine power in the little things of our ordinary lives.

"Do you want me to feel secure when I am daily asking pardon for my sins, and requesting help in time of trial?" St. Augustine asked in one of his sermons (256).

Because of my past sins I pray: *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.* How can all be well with people who are crying out with me: *Deliver us from evil?* And yet, brothers, while we are still in the midst of this evil, let us sing alleluia to the good God who delivers us from evil.

We are not secure. We are tried. Things are not always well.

It was Augustine who told us in *The Confessions* not to attach ourselves to "all those beautiful things" in the wrong way, in an evil way. Yet, it is, in the end, he who tells us to "sing alleluia" because we can be delivered from evil. The meditation on evil is not itself morbid or somber, though evil itself is. Socrates said in *The Republic* that virtue can know vice but vice cannot know evil. The penalty for vice is the vice itself, the not seeing the good in its fullness, the good that ought to be there. The evil that we do stays in the world. Out of it, out of the good that it lives upon, comes, if we choose it, a yet greater good. In his brief answer to the question of whether the existence of evil made the existence of God impossible, Aquinas was right to cite Augustine: "God, since He is the greatest good, in no way would permit evil to be in any of his works unless He were so omnipotent and so good, that He would be able to bring forth good even from evil." We do not find our own way to God, but God finds His way to enable us, even when we fail the good, even when we do evil, to choose the good and in choosing it, to recognize that it is not of our making, hence we can love it.