

SUPER-THEOLOGIAN EXAMINES FREE WILL IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

Charles Hodge challenges the view that your deeds make you a good or bad character - see Systematic Theology Vol 2 page 117. We will look at the most relevant excerpts.

He wrote,

So far from its being true that in the judgment of men the voluntary act alone constitutes character, the very opposite is true. The character of the act is decided by the nature of the principle by which it is determined. If a man gives alms, or worships God from a selfish principle, under the control of a disposition to secure the applause of men, those acts instead of being good are instinctively recognized as evil. Indeed, if this Pelagian or Rationalistic principle were true, there could be no such thing as character; not only because individual acts have no moral quality except such as is derived from the principle whence they flow, but also because character necessarily supposes something permanent and controlling.

A man without character is a man without principles; i.e., in whom there is nothing which gives security as to what his acts will be.

Comment: Is a man who does good for bad reasons make himself worse than one who just does harm? The man is warping his own sense of good so that he ends up seeing selfish but sweet manipulation of others as a good thing. The reality is that the vast majority of religionists do in fact think its all about your deeds making you bad not your deeds being bad because you are the problem - you are bad. Even Hodge would have lapsed into that error a thousand times a day. The norm then is for religion to be bad for its treatment of sin will be less than desirable.

Hodge is showing that love the sinner and hate the sin is nonsense and is religious mendacity. The problem and the evil is not the sin but the person. The person is the sin. He is showing that the doctrine serves to encourage sinners. It teaches that it is hate to encourage or not advise against sin. So it is just hate itself for it in its own way it says yes to your sinning. It makes the sinner feel sin does not touch his inner nature and is not part of him.

The Christian may say she cannot judge the person doing wrong meaning she cannot see if they intend to do wrong. But that is saying, "You see if I could see your soul I'd judge you as dirt. I'd see you for the rake and trash you are."

Anyway Hodge backs up his argument about sin being human nature using the Bible:

The Scriptures in this, as in all cases, recognize the validity of the intuitive and universal judgments of the mind. They everywhere distinguish between principles and acts, and everywhere attribute moral character to the former, and to acts only so far as they proceed from principles. This is the doctrine of our Lord when he says, "Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for a tree is known by his fruit." (Matt. xii. 33.) "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." (Matt. vii. 18.) It is the inward, abiding character of the tree that determines the character of the fruit. The fruit reveals, but does not constitute, the nature of the tree. So it is, he tells us, with the human heart. "How can ye, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart, bringeth forth good things: and an evil man, out of the evil treasure, bringeth forth evil things." (Matt. xii. 34, 35.) A good man, therefore, is one who is inwardly good: who has a good heart, or nature, something within him which being good in itself, produces good acts. And an evil man is one, whose heart, that is, the abiding, controlling state of his mind, being in itself evil, habitually does evil. It is out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. These terms include all voluntary acts, not only in the sense of deliberate self-determination, but also in the sense of spontaneous acts. They moreover include all conscious states of the mind. It is, therefore, expressly asserted by our Lord, that moral character attaches to what lies deeper than any acts of the will, in the widest sense of those words, but also to that which lies lower than consciousness. As the greater part of our knowledge is treasured up where consciousness does not reach, so the greater part of what constitutes our character as good or evil, is lower not only than the will but even than consciousness itself. It is not only however by direct assertion that this doctrine is taught in the Bible. It is constantly assumed, and is involved in some of the most important doctrines of the word of God. It is taken for granted in what is taught of the moral condition in which men are born into this world. They are said to be conceived in sin. They are children of wrath by nature. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, i.e., carnal, morally corrupt. The Bible also speaks of indwelling sin; of sin as a principle which brings forth fruit unto death. It represents regeneration not as an act of the soul, but as the production of a new nature, or holy principle, in the heart. The denial, therefore, that dispositions or principles as distinguished from acts, can have a moral character, subverts some of the most plainly revealed doctrines of the sacred Scriptures."

Comment: Jesus taught that every thought of man whether deliberate or unintentional contains an ingredient: explicit or implicit rejection of God. For him we are rebels at core or at nature. Instead of evil being a mere absence of good - Catholicism says that is all it is - evil is human. Evil is a part of human nature.

Hodge rejects the Augustinian view that sin is merely a good thing in the wrong place:

Hodge corrects the doctrine of Augustine that sin is just a goodness in the wrong place - a mere lack of a good that should be there or that should be there in a certain way. Another way to put that is that sin is a limitation not a moral flaw. It is like a maths exam that is limited by the failure of the student to comprehend algebra. Even if it is not watering down sin human nature feels that it is. You cannot expect any human being to see the assertion: "evil is good in the wrong place" as anything other than too close to condoning or dismissing the evil. It virtually condones if it does not actually condone. This makes outrage against sin just proof that the angry person is a hypocrite and a hater of the person. They are using the sin to get at the person.

He writes:

The second anti-Christian theory of the nature of sin is that which makes it a mere negation, or limitation of being. Being, substance, is good. "Omne quod est, in quantum aliqua substantia est, et bonum [est]," says Augustine. God as the absolute substance is the supreme good. The absolute evil would be nothing. Therefore the less of being, the less of good; and all negation, or limitation of being is evil, or sin.

Spinoza says, "Quo magis unusquisque, suum utile quærere, hoc est suum esse conservare conatur et potest, eo magis virtute præditus est; contra quatenus unusquisque suum utile, hoc est suum esse conservare negligit, eatenus est impotens." In his demonstration of that proposition he makes power and goodness identical, potentia and virtus are the same. Hence the want of virtue, or evil, is weakness, or limitation of being.

Still more distinctly, does Professor Baur of Tübingen, present this view of the nature of sin. He says, "Evil is what is finite; for the finite is negative; the negation of the infinite. Everything finite is relatively nothing; a negativity which, in the constant distinction of plus and minus of reality, appears in different forms." Again, "If freedom from sin is the removal of all limitation, so is it clear, that only an endless series of gradations can bring us to the point where sin is reduced to a vanishing minimum. If this minimum should entirely disappear, then the being, thus entirely free from sin, becomes one with God, for God only is absolutely sinless. But if other beings than God are to exist, there must be in them, so far as they are not infinite as God is, for that very reason, a minimum of evil."

The distinction between good and evil, is, therefore, merely quantitative, a distinction between more or less. Being is good, the limitation of being is evil.

This idea of sin lies in the nature of the Pantheistic system. If God be the only substance, the only life, the only agent, then He is the sum of all that is, or, rather all that is, is the manifestation of God; the form of his existence. Consequently, if evil exists it is as much a form of the existence of God as good; and can be nothing but imperfect development, or mere limitation of being.

This theory, it is clear,

(1.) ignores the difference between the *malum metaphysicum* and the *malum morale*, between the physical and the moral between a stunted tree and a wicked man. Instead of explaining sin, it denies its existence. It is therefore in conflict with the clearest of intuitive truths and the strongest of our instinctive convictions. There is nothing of which we are more sure, not even our own existence, than we are of the difference between sin and limitation of being, between what is morally wrong and what is a mere negation of power.

(2.) This theory assumes the truth of the pantheistic system of the universe, and therefore is at variance with our religious nature, which demands and assumes the existence of a personal God.

(3.) In destroying the idea of sin, it destroys all sense of moral obligation, and gives unrestrained liberty to all evil passions. It not only teaches that all that is, is right; that everything that exists or happens has a right to be, but that the only standard of virtue is power. The strongest is the best. As Cousin says, the victor is always right; the victim is always wrong. The conqueror is always more moral than the vanquished. Virtue and prosperity, misfortune and vice, he says, are in necessary harmony.

Comment: Brilliant analysis. To argue that sin is a form of good or good that is not good enough is to tell people the glass is okay for it is either nearly full or there is water in it. It is to tell people that no matter how terrible the evil is the evil contains the seeds of good and will pass away to let good come. This encourages people to do harm for people do fear the risks associated with committing certain actions.

The real fault then is in us seeing evil as terrible when it in fact is not. If a cancer ravaging your body is seen as good cells dividing fast and all that is wrong is the place and time then you are not a victim if you think this is terrible. You are inflicting the degradation on yourself by refusing to see the good and focus on that. The problem is you not the cancer. This shows the fundamental evil in asserting that God is good and creator of all from nothing.

Christian Science is a religion that says that evil is not a lack of goodness. It is just goodness and evil is not real. It is all in the mind. Christians and Christian Scientists may differ in what they say evil is but both equally blame the human mind for it as the real culprit.

Good for believers means God or amounts to meaning the same thing. If we reason that it is better to have 80% God in a hypothetical situation than no God then we should be glad to find good in evil for that amounts to finding God. There is a significant moral difference between the following two outlooks:

1 GOOD IS JUST THERE A BRUTE FACT AND EVIL IS GOOD THAT IS NOT ENOUGH

2 GOOD IS GOD AND GOD DESERVES TOTAL LOVE AND WORSHIP AND AFFIRMATION AND EVIL IS GOOD THAT LACKS SOME OF WHAT GOD IS ABOUT - GOD IS THERE IN SOME PART OF IT AND IN OTHER PARTS OF IT HE COULD BE THERE MORE BUT IS BANNED AND THAT IS WHY WE CALL IT EVIL.

1 is what an atheist might affirm. It refuses to flatter flawed goodness by seeing it as something like God in a smoky mirror. 2 then is immoral.

Also, if evil is just good that could be better but is not then how can you know that any good is really as good as it can be? You think something is perfect and it is not. The idea of God cannot be as good as God for it is not God. Thus it is inevitable that faith will be an idol - its respect for a dodgy image of God. It is not a statue but no less an idol. The doctrine that evil is banality conveys the poor thinking that leads to evil and how boring it is and how it is never satisfied for its rubbish. Evil cannot be banal if it is good even if it is faulty good. The doctrine serves only to have believers relishing evil. They could be outwardly decent but inside they are praying malevolent prayers and doing terrible things behind people's backs. The evil person soon learns that evil is better if you can use prayers or spells to try to hurt others. It is easier and less risky for him or her. They feel they are creating evil rather than making evil. Thus their evil is more satisfying to them. Also if evil is so banal then the evil in the heart will be a hundred times worse than anything that the person does to express that evil. Why? Because if you want it but find it too banal to act much on it has to be inside you festering and faking and cursing away.

Religion says evil is deceptive which is why it always disappoints the evildoer and leaves her or him never satisfied. So evil breeds evil and even when it cannot breed any more evil that does not mean it is not trying. And such trying is itself evil.

If believers are not pantheists what use is that because they still hold that all is good - the problem with pantheism is not so much as that all is God but that all is good. And we must remember the words good and God are often interchangeable depending on the believer. Even if God is not the same as goodness he practically made the same. It is worse to say that all is good than to say the acorn is the same God as the squirrel that eats it.

The doctrine that evil is not real but a lack is needed if you want to be a pantheist. It is another way of saying that all is good even if all good is not in the right place or right time. It is worrying about the time and place not the immorality of the act. Saying all is good is a required pantheist doctrine even if non-pantheists say it too. It is a step to pantheism. As pantheism is considered a grave abomination in the Bible which orders that statues worshipped as God must be destroyed the step must be a bad thing too. It is like taking a step closer to the brothel even if it is just one step.

Feebleness is a vice (i.e., sin), and therefore is always punished and beaten. This principle is adopted by all such writers as Carlyle, who in their hero worship, make the strong always the good; and represent the murderer, the pirate, and the persecutor, as always more moral and more worthy of admiration than their victims. Satan is far more worthy of homage than the best of men, as in him there is more of being and power, and he is the seducer of angels and the destroyer of men. A more thoroughly demoniacal system than this, the mind of man has never conceived. Yet this system has not only its philosophical advocates, and its practical disciples, but it percolates through much of the popular literature both of Europe and America.

Comment: This sounds very Darwinist! The reality is that people who are considered to be heroes for others and about others such as Joan of Arc are so good because they are strong. Without the strength they would be just all about good intentions and nothing gets done. The point is it does not matter if your power is over the good that

CONCLUSIONS:

Hodge is merely giving Jesus' teaching in line with the New Testament. Sin is more than just a fault in good. Its a deadly destructive part of human nature. Sin is a thing and a power and not a mere good thing that falls short of its best potential. The thing and power it is is the human person. It is the Hyde side if you like. This is a doctrine that shows the real Christian believer is very hard to find.