

## Articles

P. T. Geach. "Animal Pain," Chapter 4 of PROVIDENCE AND EVIL (Cambridge University Press), 1977,

That the fact of the existence of animal pain poses a problem for the Christian doctrine of the joint omnipotence and benevolence of God is recognized by many Christian apologists. Among these are such illustrious names as C. E. M. Joad, C. S. Lewis and Peter Geach. Geach touches upon the matter in Chapter 4 of his book, PROVIDENCE AND EVIL. In that chapter, entitled "Animal Pain" Geach informs us that

One virtue, if I am right, that God cannot share with his creatures is the virtue of sympathy with physical suffering. It is virtuous that a man should in measure sympathize with the suffering of the lower animals . . . God is not an animal as men are, and if he does not change his designs to avoid pain and suffering in animals he is not violating any natural sympathies . . . only anthropomorphic imagination allows us to accuse God of cruelty in this regard. (pp. 79-80)

In other words, God's acquiescence in the existence of animal pain and suffering, great as such pain and suffering must be acknowledged to be, is no reflection on God's perfect benevolence. It would appear that God simply lacks the ability to be moved by animal pain and suffering. He is simply indifferent to it. Men, on the other hand, who do experience pain and suffering, possess this ability to sympathize, at least with those animals most like themselves.

One might wish to reply that God's inability to sympathize with pain and suffering marks a real limitation on his omnipotence. Geach, however, is ready with a reply to such a critic: God is not absolutely omnipotent. Geach argues that Aquinas also recognizes limitations to God's omnipotence and borrows an example from him, the purport of which is that God cannot alter the past. On page 24, Geach reproduces a list from Aquinas of things that the latter claimed God could not do. Included are being a body, being tired or oblivious, being angry or sorrowful, suffering violence

or being overcome, or undergoing corruption. About this list writes, "it's no good arguing that God cannot do what God has done, and in the incarnation God did do all these things Aquinas said God cannot do." (p. 25) Now we are left to wonder why it is that God can do just the sorts of things a man can do and because of which it is virtuous of man to sympathize with the animals, and yet God cannot sympathize with the animals. In view of this contradiction, I think we can safely and justly conclude that Geach has not given us a reasonable account of the correct Christian view toward animal pain and suffering.

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