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Baal—Satan
A Dramatic Presentation
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Abstract: Baal-Satan was written for presentation to an audience by a single actor as Baal-Satan joined by a questioner Matthew in a concluding dialogue. The work deals with the eternal conundrum of a good God's creation of a world including both good and evil. It extends Herbert Mason's prior themes of protest against death in *Gilgamesh, a Verse Narrative*, a finalist for the National Book Award, and a martyr's impassioned love of his Only One in *The Death of al-Hallaj, A Dramatic Narrative*, both presented in adaptations and public readings for stage.

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Several years ago after my retelling of *Gilgamesh, A Verse Narrative* was published, I received a letter from an older reader, Emma Sokoloski, of Rochester, New York, who urged me to write a book about Baal-Satan. I responded, and a brief correspondence followed. "Having captured human experience as it was lived prior to revelation, monotheistic law, tradition, and theology," she wrote, "I urge you to consider the story of Baal-Satan and the revealed conundrum of a Good God's creation of a world of both good and evil." I began with Baal-Satan's sources and evolution of identity and belief, combined them with my knowledge of the Persian mystic al-Hallaj's dialogue with Satan, and imagined his rumination on human folly, mischief, malice, decadence, and depravity. This established, hardened and immutable ironist doubts at the core of his being and from his already judged perspective the likelihood of human worthiness existing in God's creation. Should such exist, he would still refuse to bow down.

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Baal in Ugaritic texts was a tragic hero of fertility and love of Anath.¹ His death and scattering of parts caused drought and reign of false, weak gods. He was restored to life and in an eruption of lovemaking with his beloved, he restored rain to earth as the Puissant River of Clouds. After his worship by the Canaanites and especially the Moabites, Baal was cursed and dethroned by the God of the Hebrews as the source of idolatry, abominations of sinning, and evil personified. Baal becomes the accursed, the evil one, who seeks through the lure of unnatural pseudo-fertility and initiatory

¹ The sources of this version of Baal and Satan are "Ugaritic Myths and Epics," transl. Harold L. Ginsberg, pp. 92-119 in James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East*, Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973; and "Tā' Sin al-Azal," transl. Herbert Mason, in Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, Vol. 3: *The Teaching of al-Hallāj*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 308-16; excerpts of the "Satan dialogue" are also included in Herbert Mason, *Memoir of a Friend: Louis Massignon*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1988, pp. 44-53.

seduction of true believers the permanent alienation and damnation of souls cast out by the One Unique God. As Satan in certain Islamic mystical texts he is steadfast in his contemplation of God alone, and cursed for his opposition to God's creating of unworthy and weak humanity. As Satan he insists on the priority and exclusivity of his contemplation even unto damnation.

This Satan Baal spiritualized has become an observer who is not reducible to banal seductiveness. His spiritual pride is based on his higher knowledge of God. He believes that humans' behavior makes them unworthy of their creation and justifies his refusal to bow down before them as their Creator has commanded. Though he is a fallen angel, his steadfast devotion to God is seen by some extremists as a model of purist spirituality.

Rumination

What follows for story purpose is the appearance of someone, anyone at all, preferably a male human who fears his life is coming to a premature end. In fact, he has lost the thread of his own past and his future looms as something undesirable. He is worried, depressed, confused, angry, frustrated, bored with the eternal seeming present, and all of the other symptoms tempting him to the imagined whisperings of the evil one.

"You need to take advantage of the attractions around you, especially those different from what is drying you out and making you believe you're suffocating."

"Yes, dryness, suffocation."

"Is it women or the woman or any woman stifling your creativity?"

"Stifling, yes. Woman, yes."

"Other women then are attracted to you."

"No. That is nonsense. Temptation. Nonsense. I am not attracted to or attractive to anyone."

This Baal-Satan is impatient with his responses. He turns to a woman, who is excited about her future, once she is rid of the whining male who has stifled her creativity.

"Creativity, yes. Stifled. He was never a companion, always just a self-centered, routine oriented, unimaginative, mediocre, ordinary, and often lying person who carried few of the burdens that I bore willingly, that is, up to now."

"Mediation, counseling, others' advice didn't help you rid yourself of that male."

"No, nothing helped and cost a lot of money. Though now, the voice I hear in my head is friendly, understanding, positive, never speaks in distracting questions."

"Yes, positive, understanding, and friendly. I would add, forward thinking. Don't look back. Let all of that go. Old baggage."

The whispering stopped. Snickering was silent. The real Devil's only dilemma is whether either interests him enough to continue whispering. He is frankly bored with human subjects, but they are there to play with, once having been excluded from higher possibilities. Judgment is accepted as a sign of God's recognition of Baal-Satan's higher state of knowledge. He exists apart while these humans keep coming into and going from existence, each different, each the same. It is his curse to only whisper while they can shout. Mostly he rests, recalling nostalgically that he once could be killed and then restored to life. He could fructify Anath, be amputated, to all appearances murdered, and then recreated, over and over again, in the nature of things. Humans once left their One and Only God for *me*. They hungered for *my* secret. Then all of that dying and reliving ended without *my* knowing how. The past just ended for Baal. The humans still keep coming, however. *My past* became theirs or its illusion. They imagined they died and came to life again with each sexual experience. Childhoods died and yet persisted to haunt them. They lived or half-lived with yearnings of futile returns to the past. And I in my transformation was reduced to whispering, luring them into my nostalgia, which now is theirs to bear. Our triumphant God is the author of final judgments but also unexpected substitutions, transferences, interferences, gratuitous gifts, eternal transformations, and of ideas not even I will ever understand. I was an experiment, a test, of obedient contemplation of the Self of selves. And I remained in my new existence faithful, pure, unswerving in my devotion. And then I heard the command to genuflect to humans, and I remained standing instead, out of knowledge of their evil and a higher estimation of God. My reward as a test was to be a witness to change in humans without being able to experience change myself. I was humbled before God's constancy and had not imagined God as the source of such lower beings' capacity for change. The creation of humans was a scandal to my now purist mind and has proven to be so to my embittered spirit. This is what becoming spiritualized amounts to, if indeed, as I recognize, I was once the actual Baal. It is a weakness

in my nature to want to participate at least partially in another's, if not by theft, and certainly not by envy, but by whispering about what is withheld from me. It is my illusory release, without which I would have no idea of liberty at all, being allowed to *talk* only to myself.

I whisper most to women now. Self-confidence, newly acquired, is very tempting to my nature. Once submissive and subsidiary to men, they now are in high state of imitation and are more inclined to listen to flattery and confirming whispers of their greatness. The moral boundaries that were defined for men, they need not fear from crossing, for they know they are different and are not mere objects of necessity, devotion or irritation by creatures with inflated notions of self. Difference, of course, is not the same as change. They too risk the grip of their humanity. That's what they hear from me when something makes them listen to the whispers of those they have displaced. Of course, imitation enables me to sound like husbands who have failed to realize their own dreams. Authority has shifted. Still, I know the needs for reassurance remain. They too are only human, after all. I can help them gloat over men. That's whisper one. I can make them think they can create alone. That's whisper two. I can produce the sound of public acclamation. That's whisper three. Pretty soon they are undermining what they have attained by trusting whispers of recognition and authority, no matter what their fields of expertise may be. Of course, I want to keep them believing in their independent selves, as men did theirs once, for purposes of entertainment, not mine, but of all humans who are prone to mockery of themselves. Even with this apparent change I still am bored; and yet I will not bow down before these creatures, except in mockery of myself. I realize that they believe they are listening to their own mind whispering to them, as men once did. I need no recognition from any of them, once God has sealed me with this role, which is hidden and thus inviolate from them.

What is it in humankind that leads not only to error and folly but to cruelty? Not whispering from me, but their ingrown fear of their mortality. I, no longer being Baal, can relieve them of that fear. It has some purpose in their lives that eludes my understanding. But then I'm not human. My feeling on this point of human cruelty is astonishment, anger and contempt. It seems they torture one another for the rush they think they need without their having to experience torture themselves. It is preemptive, unprovoked by their selected or random victims. They deal with their own guilt by

calling it necessity and blaming it on politics. But in fact it is pure savagery, gratuitous and evil of a kind that shocks me. Once more I feel justified in refusing to bow down before such humanity. God knows something is awry that seems to me, however, to be intentional and gratifying to those who torture their own species. I remain standing in my horror of what I see and have no power to prevent.

One strange thought has crossed my mind, tempting though it be: is the story of God's creations mainly about me, not them? Is it a test of whether I, the first created, transformed and judged, can set aside the purity of my devotion by desire to prevent evil among those who envy my prior gift? Is it their desire to please God through imitating my example of devotion? That would be a change from their nature to mine, which the judgment of God has rendered exclusive to me. It is the conundrum of all conundrums: Pitiful humanity in its religious fervor has the illusion of emulating a creature purer than themselves. Evil is in their desire to commit not prevent. I only whisper, and on this subject, my whisper is my sigh of horror at what I cannot prevent.

The stories of the humans' lives are so banal, so repetitious, so derivative and imitative that I am tempted to believe that my existence, in so far as it is created by the transcendent will of God, must be the only story that can be called original. And by my refusing to bow down to secondary creatures my story, which began in purest contemplation, proceeded to a rational evaluation of lesser creatures than myself, and rests now in a paralyzed state of sighing over what I cannot change. Sighing in a melancholy angel sounds like whispering to a human's ears. I cannot tell their stories. That is left to their imperfect skills in science or in art to forge. Some, with whispering they think is inspiration, tell it almost well. Their beginnings are imagined, their middles are bunched together by what they think are conscious actions, and their ends result from painful unravelings. Fate is the word they use for what they fail to understand. Some turn fate into success, which however shares the same time limitation as their existence.

So, accursed by my fidelity to God, as I believe I am in truth, I am forced to apprehend all of the sufferings of humankind without the power to end them. My fate, unique to myself, is my own continuing strict adherence to purity amidst all conceivable forms of the opposite. I am not reveling in these, but I have no capacity for pity. I never had as Baal. Spiritualized as Satan, my renunciation is even more severe. No one should envy

my state. Perhaps I can be perceived as a teacher of those who desire to exalt themselves as terrorizing servants of God, but they as humans must realize if they can that such devotion as mine can lead to Hell.

If the exemplary story is indeed mine, not theirs, then am I forced to struggle to attain what humanity needs most from me, that is, a change of nature, which is impossible? To understand me humans must consider a creature who no longer has the power of choice. In truth mine is a story more proscribed than theirs. From this perspective, I am cursed to exist ironically with them in theirs.

Out of Character

This judged angel's character is fixed: he was created as a contemplative of God. But, speaking in the third person as I do, he did not go out of character when he refused to bow down before humanity. He remained steadfast, as he argues in his defense to this day. It is only the humans who consider him different than he was intended to be. In his mind therefore, it is humans who freely go in and out of character, and thus can be seen as inconstant. He is depicted as evil by them because they can't stand constancy, though at times they bow down like sheep before tyrannical rulers who recognize their need of constant supervision and control. Their rulers, they think, make a bargain with the Devil, being evil in their tyranny. But, in fact, the rulers don't see themselves as evil, but as responsible guardians. Personally I find rulers not interesting, being too much like myself in their constancy. I will not bow down before humans, which doesn't preclude my being entertained by their variety of changes in character. They are hopeless anyway, so I feel not challenged to tempt them to abandon hope. I find amusing the claims to knowledge of the most intelligent among them, but I find disappointing the rationalizations that lead them to commit violent actions. Justifiable despair happens among them all too regularly without my arguing for it. What is it that makes them so repetitive without their being constant? I have no desire to understand, no desire at all.

A Lover's Love of the Beloved

This is my ironic response to those humans who happen to transform their aroused emotion into love, apply it to another or to others in a vague generality, and then consider the object of the so called love to

be their imagined Beloved. There are cliques of these people in each religious configuration. What they don't realize, being too impatient to study their own history and sources older than those affected by their own anxieties, is that I too was in love once with a beloved. They think I am frozen in my judged state and cold at the heart of my being. None of that's true, though having been spiritualized in order to be finally judged, and thus transformed, my idea of a beloved as the source of love, vanished, in concept but not from memory. My devotion to God is not based on my remembered impure love, which had become too mixed with death. In other words, I am imitated by humans who stray mistakenly from God to a discarded past of mine out of their own decadence. Judgment requires a discrimination, which now I possess and they do not. Thus, knowing humans as I have, I couldn't in my transformed state, with clearer knowledge, bow down before such creatures whose expressions of love are deeply flawed. For further clarification, I have become mostly attracted to knowledge, and I'm not and never was a serpent. Serpents are attracted by nature and instinct to life. There were two trees in the allegorical garden. I knew the two genders. They chose to eat; I was enamored of knowledge, not of them.

Sincerity

In certain cultures other than his own, this is a spiritual state required for the realization of lasting human relationships. In rarer cultures still, it is a prerequisite for seeking knowledge of God. It implies a certain purity of heart. That should be said enough.

Of course, it isn't. Matthew has witnessed it in others belonging to other cultures than his own, and he has met a few people who embrace it in even smaller numbers. To describe it convincingly to those lacking it is futile.

It is a nearly hidden ideal condition without being subversive of other conditions. It is hidden but it is also spontaneous in expression. As such it is an ideal, which means it is real but rarely seen. It can be recognized but not forced to appear.

It is not naïve; in fact, it is worldly wise, being in the world and having others discover, to their embarrassment, its absence. It has no desire to alter anyone else's condition, meaning it has no apparent mission. It appears and it disappears with the person whose state it is. Others remember it with some regret. Remembering among persons acculturated to

insincerity doesn't bring it back into existence. Even grief at funerals is without spontaneity and false if sincerity has been absent previously among the grievers.

Sincerity doesn't come into being as one's state by meditation on loss, guilt, punishment, or evil, nor is it based on exclusive claim to love, honesty, or good. It is not developed by prayer to God but only by the grace of the one to whom one prays; in other words, not by enthusiasm about one's prayer.

Sincerity is thus a gift given spontaneously and expressed in the same spirit in which it is given. Some cynics are virtually excruciated within by what they find is most offensive to their critical acumen; namely, conspicuous sincerity. This is not, however, why sincerity is hidden, meaning out of fear of others' mockery. Sincerity, on the contrary is akin to courage, not to cowardice. It isn't offended by cynicism; to be sure, it is aware that only the fearful would dread its sting. Fear breeds cynicism. Sincerity breeds compassion, which is an even more excruciating state for cynics to encounter. A further still more almost agonizing state for cynics to be afflicted with is simplicity.

Sincerity, compassion, simplicity, the trinity of conditions that afflicts all cynics most with what they regard as personal suffering: in their thought, word, and deed.

Matthew has no ecclesiastical position, by the way, which in any case is not a prerequisite for sincerity, as this judged angel can attest from his forays into supposedly hierarchical temptations.

Though Matthew is that unusual human who is himself sincere or at least admires sincerity as an ideal for humans and may even believe it is possible to attain, he recognizes, if I understand such a person accurately, that our God is Entirely Other Goodness not his own, God's goodness, he believes or hopes, is working through human creatures in order to redeem them. Evidence is scant on this latter point. It is a long shot, of course, given most individuals' tendency or perhaps collective cultural pull toward chaos when not controlled from above. As a judged angel I have to say, even in the face of a sincere Matthew, that I am repulsed by the self-contradictory thinking and experiencing of which humans are capable. The most paralyzing of such states occurs when the human mind surrenders all grace and thought to ecclesiastical, sectarian or cultic dogma and ceases thinking at all. Is this where sincerity leaves a mind desperate to understand? No wonder I'm right to honor God by refusing to bow down before such a creature.

Of course, some ironic human wag might retort in comedic disappointment that I doubt God's power to redeem anyone who has betrayed the grace that's given him. I'll accept that as part of the cost of my being judged.

Does it surprise any human being that I, above all creatures, am the wisest expert on sincerity?

Belief

One fact that eludes the unbeliever for obvious reasons is that only the believer knows how treacherous it is to live with belief. The believer is never comfortable with his own assumptions of knowledge or rightness. His self-doubt is his invisible companion. And self-doubt doesn't make him more understanding of non-believing human beings. Once he has been seized by belief he believes only in unexpected inspiration, not in his own or others' capacity to understand or achieve or be worthy of deeper knowledge. He stands bereft of his illusions about himself. He is stripped except for his vices, which remain clinging to him desperately even as he struggles to convince himself of their meaninglessness to him. He is not seeking another self and has no capacity to believe another self can be created by art or science. He is alone, as love mystics believe they are, with their Only One, and their Only One is their Lover, whose frequent distance from familiar reality is like absence, and is torture. At such a height or depth of belief eternal reunion is considered the only resting place.

To Satan, of course, this is the human folly of all follies, the impossible desire, to which there is his prior experience of ultimate self-deception as guidance. Mystic lovers are the meat he yearns to feed on, if he in his cold determinism yearns about anything at all. He dialogues with such persons, trying to make them believe they are dialoguing with themselves, where he leaves them, if they are just lovers of themselves, in ultimate confusion. If they recognize in his voice another's than their own, however, there is for them a glimpse of the other's perdition. There are few saints in human culture whose foreknowledge of Hell is as certain as that of Jesus. The whole of humans' history is a darkness in which they can only dream of light.

Invisible Source

Albrecht is a thoughtful observer of humanity. This is not to say that he is sensitive, caring or kind. He has a sorcerer's instinct for cruelty; he can tap into its source as if he were endowed with a divining rod and cruelty

were water. He finds it where others can't even imagine it to be. If someone is severely handicapped from birth, it is obvious to everyone who sees him or her that bad doctoring or genetic deviation or humanity's poisoning of its environment or God was to blame. The blaming soul or the conscience in Albrecht, so to say, was blunted and spared of responsible concern or something called vaguely fellow feeling. But if someone's deformity were internal, invisible, and hidden except from the devilish eye, then Albrecht is the one to find and exploit it.

Something deformed him and enables him to exploit the deformity in others he thinks frees him from blame for, as he puts it, what others make him do to them. This is the self-flattering defense that Albrecht contrived in his own wounded soul and plumbed to the depths in his antagonism toward all other creatures. The source is deep within the earth of created nature itself. It has many veins of cruel ore flowing in many directions and affecting all of nature. Because it isn't visible to the ordinary human eye, almost all of humanity acts out of partial ignorance with regard to other humans' afflictions. Cycles of violence rise from the depths as if from nowhere and subside and disappear into unknown regions of hidden mystery. How else to explain the irrational triumphs of evil in the human world? Something occurred that resides within and not only permits but stimulates and directs cruelty outward toward unsuspecting victims. Further, it is a spring that replenishes itself and is generated to the full only by repeated use. The soul deformed at such a depth of cruelty directs outward the energy of revenge that is within it. Revenge is its normal response to every stimulus. The irony of Albrecht's own control of the energy within him is that much of non perceiving humanity in fact admires him, as Albrecht himself observes, for being unwilling to accept responsibility for every self-serving act one does against others.

Conversation

Can a judged angel have a conversation with God if not with humans first?

Being judged for refusing to bow down before God's creation would make it seem impossible. Conversation is an art practiced by friends or by persons who assemble and through conversation discover friendliness through civility. It doesn't require consensus of opinion but it avoids personal rancor or insistence on superiority of one's position over others' on a given subject. Such an

angel, no longer a friend of God and certainly not of humans, can hardly avoid mention of his disdain for those with whom he is conversing before a subject for discussion has been presented. He is by fact of being judged in an anti-human position on every issue that could be discussed. So this angel's relationship to humans is fixed by God and conversation with either is impossible. The relationship is based on contempt and from the humans' perspective on their basic insecurity and fear. God's judgment of me should have protected humans from such perspective, but the fact that it has not further underscores humans' ignorance of God's power and compassion. The art of conversation is thus their art alone among themselves and cannot be performed with a judged angel. It can't be performed at all if the specter of judgment hovers over it. It must be open and free among them, and it is the one thing that they share in a group that may be spontaneous. When one or another's dictation dominates it, it confirms this angel's disdain, even without his being a part of it. The art of human conversation isn't seeking judgment but the free circulation of opinion that flourishes best without demanding a conclusion. This angel's argument has been concluded. As much as he would like to reiterate his opinion, he cannot participate nor inspire such an art among those he holds in contempt. He wallows in his own opinion, thus he is excluded from conversation. He can be intrigued but not deluded by those humans who believe they can and do converse with God. Humans' opinion of themselves makes conversation possible only among themselves, not with God.

Detachment

Some humans appear detached, removed, apart, non-committal, evasive, aloof. These appear to be calm, secure, unruffled, undisturbed by events around them or by their own complicity in allowing or doing evil to others. Truth is, from this judged angel's eye, they are deficient in the very standard of behavior that they would normally expect from others but which they judge unnecessary for their own well-being. In fact, they may be capable of and even responsible for occasions of extreme violence and depravity. Again, though they appear civilized in a world of gross incivility, they above all persons are unworthy of anyone's bowing down to their creation. Our God is not the author of detachment. Rather it is a collateral byproduct of their freedom. It conceals the gross malevolence which they believe God has permitted them to commit against lesser beings

than themselves. It is a veil wrapped around the inmost core of these self-serving creatures. Such humans are predators. They stalk their prey if only when they believe they can't be seen. Once sufficiently veiled from any possible detection from others and scruple of their own, they each feel they are someone else and are thus free to do as they please: Free to commit murder, free to create new forms of atrocity on the unsuspecting. They believe that everything is possible, even to the point of ignoring capture, punishment, and pain to themselves. Their faculty of apprehension has been erased by their inflated conception of freedom. They are prepared to lose everything, because nothing has ultimate value to them, especially other human beings. I find everything about them contemptible, hence I prefer to treat them distantly, to look only at other humans' obvious folly rather than examine too closely their depravity, which nauseates me. After all I am not a monster.

Eavesdropper

This is part of my curse: to be ever eavesdropping on human beings discrediting themselves before an angel who might have had a higher regard for them. As it is, I can only see what I've been judged for knowing what humans would become. In a sense I am self-judged, though I prefer the transcendent emblem I guard proudly: Judged by God Alone. I have a certification of the grandest kind. I am an elected member of the Academy of Academies though I am cast into an academy membered here below by pimps, murderers, rapists, thieves, sociopaths, degenerates, ingrates, child abusers, ecclesiastical hypocrites, brutal mercenaries legalized by criminal states, genocidal maniacs, gratuitous testers of catastrophic weaponry against the unsuspecting, on and on day after day, and nothing changes what I am condemned to see. The curse of the eavesdropper is that he is compelled to see, the pity is that no one sees me watching. A few with partially developed consciences imagine I am pricking them into guilt. This is nonsense. I don't feel guilt myself. How could I prick these pitiful wretches of another creation than mine? I'm not in a closed house, peeking behind a lace curtain. I am in Hell. There's no house, no curtain, and nothing to hide behind. My only pride from what I see is my acceptance of the emblem of God's judgment. I accept it without as yet believing I was wrong. In any case, I never actually acted against these strange creatures. Those who think otherwise are only literary panderers to the most misdirected of human fears, that

something foreign to themselves causes all of their grief. I only eavesdrop. I do nothing. I am an angel, immaterial, unknown and unappreciated by human beings. Those few who believe in spiritual transference may think that a judged angel's spirit of rejection and bitter irony affects the spiritual climate, so to say, of the world in which they live. Perhaps I should feel some responsibility. But I don't. I only eavesdrop, and while doing so I am never seen. Grotesque caricatures by human artists and poets bear no resemblance to me. I am an angel. God didn't create me ugly. I suppose one could argue that God didn't create humans ugly either. My being judged for my opinion was always based in my mind on my having prior knowledge. In that regard I am adhering to truth. That's how I knew before humans developed their hideous distortions of themselves that I would be an eavesdropper.

Torture

This is the bottom line of human behavior. When I sink that low to observe it, the rightness of my refusing to bow down before this creation of God's is confirmed. When humans perform it willfully or under orders from above by other humans their sadism is released, they are thrilled, and I am thrilled by their confirmation of my decision. A cynic might say that I depend on this bottom line for knowing I am right. It is my security, my realism, my peerless critical acumen, my atheism. But of course that is wrong, for unlike the fiercest of human social critics I am not an atheist. Quite the contrary, I know God is the Mind behind all created things, including the gift of freedom for humanity to behave contrary to its own best interest. Irony dominates the world that humans have created for themselves. Some humans, even intelligent ones, can't bear to accept this as a fact. Of course, my created species does not commit torture. I for one turn away from its visual and audible horror. The thrill of my being confirmed blinds and deafens me to every disembowelment, every buggering with electric prods, every gauging of eyes and extraction of fingernails, every simulated drowning, every agonizing scream, and every collective annihilation. The classic human torturer goes for the points of a victim's own greatest physical and psychological sensitivity. Perhaps the torturer is also confirmed at some level about my point of view: Torture is the degenerate human's act of refusing to bow down.

The Last Word

This judged angel is most aroused, within the limits of his altered power, when some human, anyone at all, believes with absolute clarity in the personal reception of divine grace. Many humans who proclaim this in public for the adulation of others and prospect of multiple conversions occurring in their name, are victims of self-delusion, arrogant desire, and boredom with their own lack of creativity. This angel snickers in mockery, confirming his perception based on embittered disenfranchisement. But when a human person believes in grace through humility, not through expectation of deserving anything at all, and is miraculously wholly empty of guile, my rage is aroused. Of course, everything I would do but can't is part of the futility of maintaining my rational position. Rage is, well, what it is, especially in my case. Still, I am pained by the discovery of one human who bows both before our God and before his or her fellow human beings. It is a riddle which, I believe, no human being aspiring to both faith and reason on a lower than an angelic level can solve. I am convinced of my position. I am a contemplative, indeed a lover, of God's perfection. I remain steadfast in my contemplation, even unto my being judged, not for being wrong, but for disobedience to one command that I found contrary to my angelic level of understanding. The mention of humanity and perfection in the same highest spiritual breath is proven contradictory to the most ordinary of observations of humanity's range of behaviors. A truly humble human person might say to my position: "I am not perfect and never claimed to be." But I am not a contemplative of human humility. I am a contemplative of God Who is perfect! An argument against my position can't be based on the discovery of humility in a single human being. Contemplating such a person, by other humans, that is, would only be a form of self-praise and be ridiculous against the vast array world-wide, so to speak, of humanity's arrogance, folly and inevitable self-debasement. The counter argument to my position is circular from which there is no exit for the arguer.

The word compassion, of course, arises only from God's perfection. The embodiment of humility in Jesus aroused my rage and tempted my powers of rationality to challenge its verisimilitude to truth. It is a rare phenomenon that my contemplation of God did not reveal. And none of God's angels had imagined him. But Jesus as one third of the division of the One Unified Indivisible God is contrary to my angelic reason. And

despite the supposedly theological reflections of poor fallible humanity, seeking to be loved by God in their own lower natures, it does not become truth nor does it alter my position. Now, to compassion itself. God may pity humanity and even in rare instances forgive a human person who is genuinely contrite and endures a verifiable broken heart, as the Psalmist hoped. But compassion suggests a conjoining of essences between God and a human being, indeed an intervening sharing of one being with another. This I consider beneath God's greatness and beauty, which is worthy of contemplation not indicative of bizarre compatibility. Even the most humble of human beings is capable of self-delusion if he or she believes in this compassion. It may be that God who is a Stranger to all human beings can be imagined in the guise of the ordinary stranger appearing, even loitering among them. As for myself, I reject such imagining. I accept God's wisdom in judging me, though I still believe in my insistence on God's majesty being unique, transcendent and untransferable in part or whole to other beings. I find no error in my position, even unto the Hell of my powerlessness to change it. Need I go on repeating myself, or can this finally be understood on high and on low as my last word?

A Further Thought

I am presenting this sequence of reflections in response to some humans' repeated demands to understand what is to them a mystery never to be solved: the creation of evil by a good God. It is simply a fact. God is both Creator and Judge who judges creation. It is framed only by humans as being complex. Not a mystery or a problem lending itself to a human understanding, for me it is a spiritual fact. I refused God's command. I was judged. I have lost my position among my obedient peers. Do I care about humans and their problems? No. It is up to them to judge themselves or be judged by their peers. Sorting all that out is tedious. Most just move on by living without satisfying answers to their questions. I don't ask questions. Some of them think, as they put it with regard to my judgment, that the Devil Rules the World, as if that explained anything. I don't rule. I don't care about the world. I care only about God, the source of my existence and my present condition. God can both create and judge. I am a witness to both, not to the practice of ruling anything. Some humans' literary imaginings place me in the ruler's position of everything negative that has happened to them through

their own folly and mischief. It is all nonsense. Beware of the merely literary interpretation of human existence, I whisper softly. Consider only what is just. I refused to obey God's command, and I am judged. By analogy, at most, if humans refuse to respect God's creation of humanity as rational, wise, beautiful, compassionate, loving and so on, then their own action of refusal will judge them. In that sense only does the Devil rule their world; that is, by analogy, nothing more. This is more than I am loath to say to them, for it reveals to them their one way out of their dilemma, by leaving me in absolute solitude in mine.

Rage

I am enraged by humility in humans. I explode within. I feel hatred, contempt, jealousy, exasperation, frustration, impotence, and revenge, defensiveness on behalf of my character and my mind, or just plain rage. This is not tolerable. I am a calm angel, a proud, obedient, intelligent, composed, witty, resilient, disinterested, self-assured Angel! Suddenly, when something human occurs that contradicts my argument with God, I lose a sense of myself. This cannot happen to me. I've mentioned this before, but now, at the risk of repeating myself, I am faced with a blatant contradiction of myself. My life per usual is one of freedom from contradiction. Intellectual consistency is my principal virtue. I am all that humans are not. Suddenly I feel I am everything they are. My rage is aroused by their attempt at spiritual transcendence. This is impossible. It alters my rhythm. How can they transfer theirs to me? Is this my cleverness gone soft? Is their humility authentic? I was powerless to lure Jesus into contradiction of himself. I left him to his suffering, his hell, his humility that enraged me. But after leaving I regained my calm by observance of the rest of humanity. I regained both my horror and my humor. I'm at my best when I'm certain of my position. A judged angel should know the limits of his rage. If all of humanity were humble, I would bow down as God in his greatness commanded. But where would the balance be? So much for boundaries.

A Dialogue

Matthew has experienced throughout his long life occasional twinges of an indeterminate pain. Suddenly, at such times, he senses he will cease to be, meaning he will lose consciousness and in effect not be. The world will have disappeared to him and he to it. It is not a

good feeling, and so he turns away from it by thinking of something trivial, sportive or sexual or anything that makes him feel his mind and his body are both continuing to be interested in things that appear to matter. Still, it recurs and in his older years with greater frequency. He is retired from his professional career, which gives him more time unfortunately to take these twinges seriously. He turns from each to write a story that seems to temporarily postpone twinges of this sort. He is writing in effect to live. He hasn't created the judged angel. Rather he feels and believes in his presence. He seeks a dialogue with him aroused by these recurrent and intensified assaults. He knows he can't force him to respond or share his understandings of God and eternal life as a contemplative. He also knows that this other, higher being, closer to God than he, holds him and humanity in general in contempt, indeed not worthy of an actual dialogue. Matthew can't resort to an imaginary dialogue. The twinges are too serious and too threatening for even the most artful of imaginings. This is life confronted by no life. An angel even a judged one is deathless but as a result of being judged may be closer to humanity and to auditory dialoguing than other angels. He is in effect fallen almost to Matthew's own human state. The only difference is that Matthew knows he has the experience of both doubt and hope. The judged angel has neither. What thus has the angel to lose by such a dialogue? It's a strong argument, especially for a human to make. Still, Matthew can't hear the angel's voice in response; his own mind set being too limited. Further, as an amateur philosopher Matthew is suspicious of any special intuition. He fears there is no possibility of a dialogue. He still, however, resists creating, so to say, an imaginary one. He doubts thus his own capacity to create. He can narrate, but creating out of nothing is something else. Narrating is borrowing on what has already been borrowed successively from the very beginning of humanity's creation. Borrowing, if not stealing, from God's creation is an affront or at least a presumption of gift and power he feels is diminishing in himself. At times he can barely breathe when the twinges occur. The more he seeks the angelic voice beyond his own, the more he feels the presence of death and the disappearance of himself. This is the value of writing, it makes him think more about nothing. Of course, this is no help to him in his desire to dialogue with the judged angel. Is he suggesting that Matthew think analogically? Not about the angel's creation being analogous to his, but about the state of his being judged. That sounds to Matthew

like a hint, a gesture, even a response.

By your being judged am I to believe that God has also judged me?

Don't draw the conclusion that we are in any other way similar.

I won't. I want only to know what being judged means for me.

It means you will die. You will suffer death. You already suffer twinges. Don't be envious of me. My judgment doesn't include death of a body but deeper suffering of mind and spirit in a bubble of incessant irony and obsession with argument and joyless wisdom. You will die, but can you find freedom in yourself from what I have just described to you as my state of suffering? I am a failed lover of God. Are you a failed lover of humanity? Because you loved someone once who died, you failed to regard humanity in any other way than failure? Is the broken heart too hard for a human not to cause but to bear? I know my failure, do you know

all of yours? That's the most I can tell you. This is my voice, this one time only, unless I am drawn back as an echo that doesn't die. I am not enraged by you. You are not a humble person or a saint, though you may collect the testimonies of some who are. You are too ordinary, both in your vices and virtues. You are confounded by your simplest desires, not just your grand ones. You could benefit from my rage even at your condition. There, I hit a nerve. That's the sting of a judged angel who deigns in a moment of weakness to respond to an ordinary human being. You call it twinge. I prefer sting. You are mortal. God created you, as he did me, out of his mind and spirit, but he had you evolve through another kind of nature, with a heart vulnerable to both attachments and regrets. Thus, you have the twinges and the fear of death.

I don't hear you now. I can imagine you think you have said enough to keep me in doubt and hope between twinges, where I belong. Is that true?