

IRENEUSZ ZIEMIŃSKI

IS GOD (PERFECTLY) GOOD?  
REMARKS ON *OPATRZNOŚĆ BOŻA, WOLNOŚĆ, PRZYPADEK*<sup>1</sup>  
BY DARIUSZ ŁUKASIEWICZ

REMARKS ON METHODOLOGY

The book by Dariusz Łukasiewicz is an impressive philosophical venture, since the author has undertaken the task of solving one of the most difficult problems of metaphysics and philosophy of religion, that is, the problem of Providence, especially in relation to human freedom and coincidental events. The author's erudition, going far beyond the field of philosophy (Dariusz Łukasiewicz also relies on expert literature from the fields of natural sciences and theology) as well as the detailed analyses, show the versatility and astuteness of framing the problem. In an effort to organize various detailed issues as well as evaluate the validity of solutions to the problem of Providence proposed to date, Dariusz Łukasiewicz rightly decided that the field of ontology would be the best grounds to settle the debate. The goal is neither to critique nor to defend the idea of Providence, but rather to study what Providence could be in the world we live in, if there was a God with specific attributes, if people were free, and if some events were coincidental (by the measure of one of the twenty four meanings of coincidence highlighted in the appendix).

Discussing the problem on the grounds of ontology and considering the potential possibilities allows one to keep one's distance from religious and existential solutions related to the idea of Providence. It does not mean that the author wishes to completely eliminate them; rather he puts them in parentheses so that they do not negatively affect the end result of these deliberations, prejudging it. Thus, the

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IRENEUSZ ZIEMIŃSKI, Prof. Dr Hab., Institute of Philosophy and Cognitive Science, University of Szczecin; address for correspondence: al. Krakowska 71-79, 70-017 Szczecin, Poland; email: [ireneusz.zieminski@univ.szczecin.pl](mailto:ireneusz.zieminski@univ.szczecin.pl); <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4686-8625>.

<sup>1</sup> Dariusz ŁUKASIEWICZ, *Opatrzność Boża, wolność, przypadek. Studium z analitycznej filozofii religii* (Poznań: W drodze, 2014). I cite this book by providing a page number.

book by Łukasiewicz should be considered a model example of an ontological dissertation taking on important religious issues. After all, the results are independent from the question of whether God does exist or not and whether we are capable of seeing any traces of Providence in the world.

Stating the problem in this way (as well as the final result) certainly will not satisfy either a theist or an atheist, since they have received no decisive arguments supporting their position and disproving the opposing position. Despite that, ontology understood as the study of all possibilities is the most optimal grounds for any debates about the existence or nature of God (and other religious issues). For this reason, the analyses by Łukasiewicz finally make it possible to state the problem of God's existence and His potential actions in the world. The author rightly distances himself from any efforts to use the fact that humans experience freedom or coincidental events to prove the existence of God or lack thereof; for *prima facie* these phenomena point to neither the existence nor non-existence of God as a providential creator of the world. While over the course of history of philosophy there have been numerous attempts to justify atheism based on the existence of coincidental events, one can just as easily flip these arguments and conclude that a coincidence is a special type of action undertaken by God, in which case it would be a strong argument in favor of the theist position (11). Even though Łukasiewicz leans towards the thesis that proving the possibility of co-existence between God and coincidence strengthens theism and weakens atheism (11), he consistently makes an effort to remain neutral on the issue when making his arguments. The author's suggestion that we do not have access to conclusive metaphysical experience which could help us determine which ontological model of Divine Providence (if any) was realized in the world we inhabit could serve as confirmation of him reserving judgement about the existence of God. There is no doubt that Łukasiewicz is skeptical towards our personal experiences which we are sometimes prone to interpret as God's absence or His special providential intervention in our lives. While he does not negate that they occur nor does he dismiss the possibility that they are credible, he does stress that they cannot be treated as evidence for the existence of Divine Providence or as evidence for lack thereof. Although these experiences may be valuable to us, they are inconsequential to settling metaphysical problems.

However, on the other hand—precisely from the perspective of our existential needs—the ontological perspective assumed by the author may raise doubts or even protest. For if we take into account the existential (including religious) significance of the problem of Providence, only considering various possibilities may seem artificial and redundant; the analyses conducted by Łukasiewicz offer the

discovery of neither our troubling problems and doubts nor our hopes. For when a religious person states the problem of Providence, they are not looking for an encyclopedic recounting of possible theories (with their advantages and disadvantages), but rather they want to know if the evil they have just experienced is under God's control or not. The existential problem of Providence is not a question of the nature of God and how He operates in the world, but the question of what His plans for me are and whether the specific events I experience may be considered their fulfillment. Yet this is not a question that can be answered by even the most detailed ontology of Providence. However, this limitation cannot be considered a fault on the part of the author, since it is related to natural theology as such and not its specific model.

Another limitation of the ontological perspective seems to be that the problem of Providence—at least in light of Christianity—does apply first and foremost to earthly life, but rather eternal life during which all evil will be redeemed. Therefore, not seeing any traces of Divine Providence in current life does not necessarily disprove its existence. What follows is that it is also not important whether it can be reconciled with freedom and coincidence or is mutually exclusive with these phenomena. Such deliberations may turn out to be completely inconsequential for someone who believes in the triumph of Divine Providence in a future life. For if God is indeed a providential creator who is leading us to salvation, then there is no point in inquiring whether He will realize His plan through our freely taken actions or coincidental events or perhaps through suspending our freedom and eliminating any coincidence. If, however, God is so weak that our freedom could thwart His plans, then it is doubtful whether he even deserves the title of God. From the perspective of faith, God is the one who can literally do anything; therefore, I should trust that He will lead me to the highest good, even if I do not currently know what that good is and how it may be realized. One could thus say that in the discussed book, its author took on an important ontological and theological problem, however he overlooked what seems to be most important about the issue of Providence—the religious and existential problem.

There is also another methodological issue regarding the discussed monograph, related to the role of results of empirical sciences in philosophy and theology. Dariusz Łukasiewicz cites (21) Saint Augustine's words on the issue, supported in contemporary times by Michał Heller; according to them, in the case of a clear discrepancy (even more so, a conflict) between the literal interpretation of a biblical passage and the truth about nature settled by credible arguments, one should accept the second and search for a metaphorical interpretation of the biblical text. Michał Heller makes an even stronger point, adding that the discoveries of empiri-

cal sciences about nature cleanse theology of myths; while the process may seem painful, it is necessary and beneficial in the long run (269, para. 7).

There is no doubt that such a position is fully rational and justified, it is also common practice in the Roman Catholic Church. Although in the beginning the Church negated the theories by Copernicus or Darwin and expressed doubts about the theory of the Big Bang, over time it accepted these scientific theories, even claiming the phenomena they described as signs of God's actions in the world. Most likely the same will happen regarding modern research on sex and gender, even though at the moment—following its infamous past—the Church rejects gender studies as a supposed symptom of a false ideology. Accepting well-grounded scientific theories by the Roman Church resulted not only from its desire to survive or adapt to current cultural trends, but also from the rational assumption that the Bible is not a scientific text and was not an attempt to credibly describe the structure or evolution of the cosmos.<sup>2</sup>

I have no doubts that framing the issue in such a way is absolutely necessary; however, it does have serious consequences for Christian doctrine. Saint Augustine's rule essentially proposes adjusting biblical text to contemporaneous scientific theories; it is therefore a differently worded postulate to demythologize religion. If applied consistently, it must lead to rejecting those Christian claims which are openly contrary to the laws of nature as determined by science. Take the examples of Christ's descentance to Sheol (located in the Earth's abyss) and leading many of the dead out of there, the resurrection of Jesus, His moving through closed doors after resurrection or ascension into heaven, or God's home located above the sky. All these evangelical testimonies must then be interpreted metaphorically, which leads to the conclusion that the core of Christianity, the idea of Incarnation, is only a metaphor. This suggests that the otherwise apt rule of adjusting religion to science forces one to treat the Christian history of salvation as a mythical story, analogous to the Greek religion of poets which Plato fought against. Although one can still try to extract specific existential or moral content from Christian myths (which Catholic preachers often do, interpreting Christ's resurrection as a symbol

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<sup>2</sup> The necessity to adapt the Church's doctrine to scientific theories instead of adapting scientific theories to the Church's doctrine was also rooted in politics and economics. For ever since science has existed outside of the Church structures, becoming financially independent, scientists were no longer under direct pressure from Church institutions; with time they also gained the right to disseminate the results of their research without needing the approval of Church censors. Strategy also played an important role; for if the Church wanted to find a common language with the world, it could not openly reject scientific theories even if they directly contradicted biblical text. Standing behind the obsolete (or even mythical) view of the world would not only be anachronistic, it would result in the marginalization of the Church in social and intellectual life.

for humanity defeating sin), the same can then be done to Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, or pre-Columbian myths. This problem is important because the alternative to Augustine's rule and, if I understand correctly, approved by Dariusz Łukasiewicz, is an irrational biblical fundamentalism which demands that the various biblical texts from the Old and New Testaments be treated as descriptions of actual astronomical phenomena or accurate historical events. Such a position, however, is even more problematic, because it forces one to accept obvious absurdities as truths, such as the Sun pausing its movement on the horizon, the influence of Moses' raised hands on the result of a battle, or Joseph's trust in dreams during which he was informed about the virginal conception of Mary's baby. Thus, the question arises whether anything can be salvaged from the history of salvation described in the Bible that is not an obvious falsehood or myth, even if it is *prima facie* contrary to well-grounded scientific theories. Michał Heller, whom Dariusz Łukasiewicz cites approvingly on a few occasions, argues that the best way to get to know God is by getting to know his work—the world He created. However, in that case, one has to assume that we will either eventually find scientific (natural or historical) proof of the Incarnation, Resurrection, Ascension into Heaven and Sending Of The Holy Spirit, or we will be forced to accept that God (if He exists) is someone completely different from what Christianity claims Him to be. For obvious reasons, Dariusz Łukasiewicz did not address these problems, focusing solely on ontological analyses of the possibilities of certain facts. However, if he accepts the possibility of the existence of God and His Providence (especially the co-existence of the latter with freedom and coincidence), then the reader would have a right to know whether—according to the book's author—it is possible to recognize actual traces of Providence in the world and whether these traces may suggest that God is basically what Christianity purports Him to be.

Dariusz Łukasiewicz is perfectly aware of the problems laid out here, which are quite obvious. He is also aware of another problem, related to the relationship between science and religion, that is the changeability and relativity of science (269). As history teaches us, many of the theories which were initially believed to be final (for example Newton's laws of mechanics) turned out to be either mistaken or only partially applicable (accurately describing only some aspects of the world, not the world as a whole); contemporarily accepted theories may eventually face the same fate (270). However, if natural sciences are subject to changes, using them as a tool to cleanse theology of myths may seem too rash; after all it is possible that various theological interpretations of biblical text will be rejected with the rejection of cosmic theories. Philosophy faces the same danger. So, even though it would seem that neither theologians nor philosophers should ignore

the developments of science, they also should not be enslaved by contemporary scientific theories. In this light, the Roman Church's caution to accept the validity of a scientific theory contrary to the Bible is justified.

The well-known case of Hegel, whose works on nature are now sometimes the subject of ridicule among biologists and cosmologists, should be a cautionary tale for everyone engaged in philosophy in a scientific context. Take for example the famous thesis about the necessity of 5 and only 5 planets to be in existence in our solar system, or the theory of physiognomy, popular especially in the nineteenth century. The latter claimed that examining the shape of a skull (and facial expression) allows one to determine a person's personality traits or even their intellectual capabilities and morality. The influence of physiognomy was so significant that it was utilized in the judicial system to determine whether the defendant was telling the truth based on the shape of their skull, and consequently to determine whether they were guilty or not.<sup>3</sup> Without going into details about this field (which has now been abandoned), one should note that Hegel was mostly mistaken when he wanted to add contemporary science (which he knew very well) to the philosophical system he was creating. If Hegel were to trust his dialectics instead (and evolutionary idea of being), he probably would not have considered nature to be a timeless and immutable system, but rather would have noticed that it was just as changeable as human history. This suggests that contemporary Christian philosophers (and theologians) should be more careful than Hegel and use scientific results more critically, even when they seem to openly contradict the truths of their religion.

Meanwhile, as Dariusz Łukasiewicz argues, this problem may be solved differently; although science is subject to change (and many theories are abandoned when they are found to be false), these changes are neither sudden nor frequent. The history of science is not only the story of disproving various theories but also confirming and elaborating upon them (270). This means that not all theories which

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<sup>3</sup> In the 19th century the idea of phrenology was dominant, supported also by the founder of positivism and great admirer of empirical and technical sciences, August Comte. Phrenology was based on the assumption that the moral characteristics of a person are dependent on their physical body structures and are revealed by such features as the shape of the skull. These ideas were developed by Cesare Lombroso in the field of craniometry. See John GRAY, *Czarna Msza. Apokaliptyczna religia i śmierć utopii*, trans. A. Puchejda and K. Szymaniak (Kraków: Znak, 2009), 101, originally published as *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). Literary works, such as *The Forsyte Chronicles* by John Galsworthy are a testament to the durability of these ideas and their acceptance as scientific; in the aforementioned novel one of the characters studies the shapes of skulls trying to determine the ancestors of the human race and the time when it came to be.

are now accepted as true (or at least as highly probable) must necessarily share the fate of past theories such as the ones about ether, life force, or phlogiston.

Without undermining the validity of this position, one could suggest a slightly different way of studying philosophy of religion, and especially theology. It would be about interpreting the Bible in such a way that its potential compatibility with science, or its lack, would have no impact. One would have to, as far as possible, read the Bible not as a description (or even interpretation) of facts which are highly unlikely but as a promise of salvation, regardless of what was known about the evolution of cosmos and human history in the past, and how they will be developed. The point would be to work out such a model of theology relative to science, in which none would be a threat to the other—neither natural science to theology, nor theology to natural sciences. However, it is doubtful whether such an isolation model is possible; it seems obvious that a theological concept of God has, perhaps indirect, consequences for the understanding of nature, whereas cosmological theories have, perhaps indirect, consequences for the understanding of God (and His relationship to the world). It is therefore possible that one has to side with one of the following alternatives: either the primacy of empirical sciences over theology (and a demythologization of the Bible), or the primacy of theology over empirical sciences (which carries the risk of biblical fundamentalism also outside of religion), or finally a theory of two truths—scientific truth (reason) and theological truth (faith). If I understand Dariusz Łukasiewicz's intentions correctly, he supports the first alternative; however, there is no doubt that it leads to abandoning Christian doctrine as a set of myths.

Regardless of how (if at all) we deal with the methodological problems, the issue of Divine Providence in the world is considerably more important. It is directly linked to the concept of God subscribed to by the author.

#### REMARKS ON METAPHYSICS

Dariusz Łukasiewicz seems to support the Anselmian concept of God as a being that is absolutely perfect, that is the most perfect among the possible (such that one cannot think of any being more perfect). According to the author this intuition, if applied to the issue of Providence, is confirmed by our commonplace views regarding the existence of human freedom. It is also supposed to be in accordance with the claim that there is evil in the world that is an actual state of affairs (not just the absence of good), and in many cases it is a pointless evil (362).

While in agreement with the author that (at least in light of our subjective self-knowledge) we are free, in agreement also that some events seem to be coincidental

and that there is such an evil in the world which does not lead to any recognizable good, a question should be posed whether a God who would be the creator of the world we inhabit would deserve the title of an absolutely perfect being (meaning also morally good). This question applies to the assumptions that form the basis of the book more than to specific argumentations it includes. Therefore, I will not ponder the accuracy of possible strategies to reconcile Divine Providence with freedom and coincidence (broadly discussed by Dariusz Łukasiewicz), but rather focus on the problem—in my view a more fundamental one—of whether God is (perfectly) good. Contrary to the author, I will not limit myself to ontology, which considers pure possibilities, but will also take into account events happening in the world and available to our daily experience. However, my goal is not to take on the issue of God's existence, only His nature; I will therefore attempt to answer the question whether we can defend the claim that God (as the creator of the world as we know it) is perfectly good; in other words, I am interested in whether the Anselmian assumptions made by Dariusz Łukasiewicz are credible.

I will understand God's goodness not only in a metaphysical sense (assuming him to be a perfect being that is autonomous, necessary, infinite, simple etc.) but also in a moral sense. Thus, if God is perfectly good, He should always do what is best in the given circumstances, or—if there is no possibility to do good—from two or more alternatives choose the least evil. If, however, in at least one instance God acted differently, he would not be perfectly good; after all it is hard to attribute such a trait to one who chooses evil when they can chose good, does the lesser good when they can do a bigger good, or chooses the bigger evil when they could have chosen the lesser one. Such a case, however, would not have to contradict God's limited good, because a being that is good does not always have to do good (even more so—the most good possible); they may sometimes do evil; however, in that case they certainly would not be a perfectly good God.

Dariusz Łukasiewicz seems to assume that God is good, or even—considering the acceptance of Anselmian intuitions—that he is *perfectly* good. In the book we also find (at least a partial) justification for these views referencing both a priori and a posteriori reasonings. Some of the arguments cited by the author are positive, referring to such attributes of God or world based on which one may (or even just) conclude that God is good; others are more defensive for Łukasiewicz points out that the attempts to show that God is not a (perfectly) good being are inconclusive. Contrary to this optimism on the part of the author, I will attempt to show that God's goodness (especially moral kindness) is not obvious either a priori or a posteriori.



Dariusz Łukasiewicz rightly suggests that an absolutely perfect being should also be perfectly good, because every perfection breeds necessity, omnipresence, sainthood, beauty, or love (28, para. 3). It is hard to undermine this reasoning, for if a being has all perfections, then it certainly also possesses every single specific perfection;<sup>4</sup> in which case it should also be attributed perfect moral kindness. Regardless of whether the solution is purely definitional, one should pose the question about what reason would dictate that we identify every perfection (or a being that has every perfection) with God. Although it may seem that every being which is God is also every perfection while every being which has every perfection is God, these claims are actually not tautologies. After all, thinking about a being which possesses all perfection I do not necessarily have to think about God, just like thinking about God I do not necessarily need to think about a being with all perfection. Claiming that a being that has all perfection is not a god is not inherently contradictory; similarly, there is no logical contradiction in a claim that God is not a being with all perfections attributed to it. Over the course of human history, there have been numerous peoples who denied the absolute perfectness of God; some African tribes, for example, believe that God is not fair because He makes some people happy and others miserable, presents some people with abundant crops, and destroys the crops of others.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that these peoples do not adhere to the rule of no contradictions or that they have the wrong idea of God, but rather that they are willing to attribute to Him different traits than the religious and metaphysical tradition of the West does. It shows that one of the reasons for the concept of God being identified with the concept of absolute perfection is language practice in a specific culture; however, this fact does not prove that God is (must be) a being with all perfections attributed to it. The aforementioned example shows that the name “God” functions differently in different languages, which does not settle anything about the nature of the object it references.<sup>6</sup>

Defining God as an absolutely perfect being (having all perfections) is also largely a formality since we still do not know what absolute perfection is; therefore,

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<sup>4</sup> One can certainly question some of the attributes of God listed by Łukasiewicz, especially the ontological ones (necessity and omnipresence); neither of the two has to result from perfection unless we define perfection as a sum of specific values, including ontological ones. However, since the main problem for me is God’s perfect kindness (especially in a moral sense), I will omit the issues of God’s necessity and omnipresence.

<sup>5</sup> See Maria OSSOWSKA, *Socjologia moralności. Zarys zagadnień* (Warsaw: PWN, 1986), 107.

<sup>6</sup> An even starker example is the image of Old Testament Yahweh who can take revenge on people for worshipping other gods; His wrath may sometimes result in an instantaneous killing of the guilty party. It is difficult to consider this a sign of perfect kindness.

first we must establish a criterion of perfection. If we decided that only positive moral traits are perfection, then necessity of existence, simplicity, autonomy, or infinity would not be its elements. Quite the contrary, it may turn out that a necessary, autonomous, infinite etc. being is also morally evil; in this case the necessity of its existence would have to be considered a sign of imperfection rather than kindness, for it is better for a morally evil being to not exist at all (or exist only coincidentally) than for it to exist as a necessity. An analogous situation would occur if a necessary being were to suffer; it might prefer to not exist rather than exist, making it possible for it to curse its eternal and necessary existence (which it cannot abandon) as the biggest evil.

Similar comments may be made directly about God. If he were to be not only morally perfect but also ontologically perfect (that is necessary, autonomous, infinite etc.), then certainly—contrary to the prevailing Western tradition—it cannot be happy. As Leszek Kołakowski rightly argued, the vast majority of suffering He observes in the world but which He cannot prevent excludes happiness, which would be the contemplation of its own perfect existence; it would not only be unimaginable in this case but perhaps even unworthy of God.<sup>7</sup> Yet although Dariusz Łukasiewicz does not directly attribute happiness to God (at least when he lists His attributes), he does indeed—if I understand his reasoning correctly—approvingly cite one of the resolutions by the First Vatican Council in which God is named the happiest being (28). However, if God were indeed to be happy, it would be difficult to attribute perfect kindness to Him in light of the vast evil in the world; it stands to reason that He should not be intoxicated with His own happiness seeing how some species devour other or looking at mass genocide, but rather He should suffer with his creations. This would be the reaction of most fathers of the Earth, if they became witnesses to one of their children murdering another. If, however the heavenly Father is happy despite all the cruelties of the world, he is either an Aristotelian god who knows nothing about the existence of anything but himself or is cruel and sadistic. In the first case he is Providence but only unintentionally and submissively, in the other—he should not be ascribed the attributes of Providence.

A theist could of course reject this conclusion by arguing that the nature of God as a perfect being means in itself that He cannot have all the perfections on a maximum level. Take the example of mercy and fairness; if he were to have mercy for everyone, he would have to have mercy for perpetrators of genocide which would mean being unfair to their victims. However, if one agrees with

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<sup>7</sup> Leszek KOŁAKOWSKI, “O szczęściu. Czy Pan Bóg jest szczęśliwy?” in *Czy Pan Bóg jest szczęśliwy i inne pytania*, by Leszek KOŁAKOWSKI (Kraków: Znak, 2009), 140.

this reasoning, it should also be noted that there is a more serious problem here concerning God's coherence as an absolutely perfect being. If attributing absolute perfection to God, one has to specify His attributes so that they are not mutually exclusive and do not undermine our most basic intuitions about concepts such as kindness, fairness, mercy, or happiness. In other words, the main question about the credibility of Anselmian intuitions is related to the possibility of God as absolutely perfect. Thus, the main problem is not whether His Providence may be reconciled with our freedom and coincidences, but whether He is a coherent being.

If we do assume the ontological criterion of perfection, identifying it with such attributes as necessity, autonomy, simplicity, or infinity, the question is raised whether we are able to derive from them any positive moral traits He is entitled to. At first glance it would seem that moral perfection is in no way derived from such traits as simplicity, necessity, or infinity. It is possible to think of a necessary being which would not be morally good, or even would not be a person capable of any moral actions. Moral kindness also does not derive from almightiness or omniscience. Quite the contrary, almightiness (and omniscience) may even be obstacles to moral kindness; for if a being knows everything what is logically possible to know and may do anything that is logically possible to do, then it not only should know evil, but also be able to do it. These examples suggest that God's (perfect) kindness cannot be proven a priori, thus one is left only with the path of a posteriori.

As I have already mentioned, Dariusz Łukasiewicz seems to sympathize with Michał Heller's opinion that the best way to get to know God is not to repeat biblical myths but to analyze His creations, especially the harmonious, rational cosmos of which He is the author. In accordance with this perspective, if God is good then his goodness should, at least partially, be reflected in the world He created. However, one can argue against this assumption; for if we take into account not more than the mathematical elegance of the world, highlighted by physicists, astronomers, and even biologists, if we also account for the suffering of sentient beings that inhabit the world, it becomes difficult to claim perfect goodness as an attribute of God. After all, there is a natural and inescapable cruelty in nature, a result of the fact that some species are food for other species. Therefore, if God has indeed created the world, He probably was not sensitive to the suffering of the creatures he brought to life; meanwhile, such sensitivity can certainly be included into positive moral traits. Critics of Christianity during the Enlightenment, such as Wolter and Diderot, paid special attention to this problem, this was one of the reasons they leaned more towards deism than creationism (Wolter) or even supported naturalism (Diderot). Although studying nature allows one to consider

God (as the creator of the world) to be the most perfect being among all known beings (or even all existing ones) it does not justify considering Him to be absolute perfection. Following the arguments by David Hume or John Stuart Mill, the creator of the world should be more perfect than His creation, but He does not need to be perfect in every way.

The book by Dariusz Łukasiewicz includes, however, an argument which is supposed to defend the absolute perfection of God despite the world's imperfection (or even the vast amount of evil present in it). The author references the well-known reasonings by Thomas Aquinas, which are also used in contemporary theodicies aiming to prove that the concept of the world as the most perfect among possible worlds is incoherent or even impossible to imagine; in which case even God (a perfectly good and almighty being) could not logically create such a world because one can always imagine a more perfect world than the one already imagined. Therefore, regardless of how perfect the world created by God; one could always imagine a more perfect one; thus, it is not the fault of God that He did not create the best possible world (67). It suggests that one should not deny His perfect goodness solely on the basis that God created a world in which there is evil. If I understand correctly, Dariusz Łukasiewicz considers this argument to be final, since he states that it is enough to "reject atheism derived from the assumption about the non-existence of the best possible world" (67).<sup>8</sup> However, I consider this conclusion to be too optimistic.

First and foremost, the assumption that it is impossible to imagine a world most perfect among possible worlds, is dubious. It is based on an equally dubious belief that the number of possible worlds is infinite (equal to the set of natural numbers); following the rule that one can always imagine a bigger number than the one already imagined, similarly one can always imagine a world more perfect than any already imagined world. However, one could argue that the number of possible worlds is finite, although probably so big that our mind is unable to comprehend it. This statement may be justified by referencing the finite nature of the world which is an assumption made by theists. It suggests that regardless of how God creates the world, it will be finite just because it depends on God for its existence. Another aspect of the finiteness of any world is that it was built from a finite number of objects; at the moment the existence of an infinite number of objects is a priori impossible. For the same reason one should assume that the number of all possible objects which could be the elements of any possible world is also finite. Therefore, the number of possible relations between these objects

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<sup>8</sup> All quotations translated by AZ.

is finite—in which case it would be possible to put all possible worlds in order of their level of perfection (imperfection). For example, a more numerous world, a more coherent one, or perhaps a world combining both attributes in a harmonious fashion, could be better. Perhaps the world in which fewer sentient beings suffer from undeserved harm or a world in which less people starve to death would be better. God, as an omniscient being would know all possible worlds and all possible criteria of their perfection; thus, there is no doubt he would also know which world would be the most perfect. In this case—as a perfectly good and almighty being, God would also be capable of creating it. Unfortunately, simply the possibility of imagining a more perfect world than the one we inhabit suggests that if God is its creator, He did not use his knowledge and power.

Eliminating the idea of the most perfect world out of the possible ones suggested by Thomas Aquinas, is a creative trick which is supposed to save the idea of God's perfect kindness despite the horrible evil which can be observed in the world. However, the trick should not be considered effective, because it is based on a wrong identification of supposedly infinite number of possible worlds with its finite number, even if it is incomprehensible to the human mind; just because something is incomprehensible to the human mind does not mean that it is objectively impossible. The psychological impossibility of imagining the most perfect world does not therefore prove the impossibility of God creating it.

The cunning of the theist who references the logical impossibility of God creating the most perfect world possible is also clear when we think about the worst possible world. For if a theist wants to be consistent, he must assume that it is equally impossible for God to create the worst possible world, because regardless how bad the world God creates it, it will always be possible to imagine a worst one. This leads to the conclusion that regardless of how bad the world God created, we would not be able to call Him (absolutely) evil because He did not create the worst possible world. This would suggest that creating any world does not permit questioning God's goodness; He must be at least a little good if he did not create a world worse than the one He actually did, even though he could have. This intervention settles the issue of God's goodness in a purely definitional matter; if it is logically impossible to create the worst possible world, it would follow that a theist may say that God is good at least in the sense that He does not opt for the biggest evil. However, framing the issue in such a way goes in conflict with our experience which suggests that there is a lot of evil on the current world (and pointless evil at that) for which the Creator is responsible.

A critic of the idea of God's goodness could assume yet another strategy by arguing that God is never perfectly good because—due to the impossibility of

imagining (and creating) the most perfect world as put forth by Thomas Aquinas—whatever world God creates He can always be blamed for not creating a slightly better one. Thus, the theodicy aimed at defending God (freeing Him from responsibility for the evil in the world) lead to conclusions that its proponent would not wish to accept as true.

Negating the possibility of imagining the most perfect world possible can also have negative consequences for accepting the coherence of the Anselmian concept of God as a being perfect in every way; by definition it is such a being that one cannot imagine a more perfect one. Consequently, this idea should be considered as incoherent as the idea of the most perfect world possible; it would mean that regardless of how perfect we think God is, we could always imagine a more perfect God. If, however, the idea of God as the most perfect being possible is coherent, then so is the idea of the most perfect world possible, and as follows an almighty and perfectly good being could create it. An example of such a world could be a being with all the moral attributes of God which does not possess His ontological attributes, especially the necessity of existence. Such a being would be coherent, for the necessity of existence is not derived from moral traits and no moral traits must result in the necessity of existence. Therefore, God could create a world made out of such beings (which seems to be confirmed by the Christian notion of creating angels).

The trouble with God's perfect goodness will not end even if, for the sake of argument, we assume that the concept of the most perfect world possible is incoherent. Such an assumption does not prove that the Creator of the currently existing world deserves to be called perfectly good; it is possible that He is only good in a limited sense—such that it was enough to create the currently existing world. Similarly, just because God did not create a worse world does not mean he deserves to be considered (perfectly) good.

These comments suggest that the perfect goodness of God also cannot be proven a posteriori, by making reference to the already existing world; thus, even if God is indeed perfectly good, He has not revealed it in the world he created. In that case there is no basis for calling Him perfectly good; while one could think that God is perfectly good without it being contradictory, even though he decided for some reason to hide it from people, such behavior, however, seems unlikely especially on the part of a perfectly good being. Nonetheless, this assumption would suggest that even the biggest evil present in the world may be reconciled with God's perfect goodness. However, if we do not want to claim obvious absurdities, we should assume that there is a certain amount of horrendous and pointless evil which can be considered enough to falsify the claim about God as a perfectly good and

providential creator of the world. If we do not accept this condition (concluding that every evil in the world can be reconciled with the perfect goodness of its creator), then attributing perfect goodness to God would be an irrational postulate derived from blind faith in his goodness. However, once such a perspective is assumed, one could also claim that Hitler and Stalin were kind people (and definitely better than others) but they simply hid this kindness. Their kindness could also be evident in that they electrified the country (Stalin), built highways (Hitler), or even in the fact that they had the option to murder or starve even more people but did not do that. If, however, we are repulsed to call the worst murderers in history good people, we should also consider whether the creator of the world should be seen as perfectly good. Most likely we do this because we radically change the concept of good when applied to Him; in reality calling God perfectly good is not consistent with our commonplace moral intuitions. Thus, one could seriously doubt whether Dariusz Łukasiewicz is correct to assume that Anselmian intuitions are consistent with our most basic beliefs, making the rule the basis of his analyses of Providence.

It is also possible that calling God perfectly good (contrary to the world's testimony) is derived from our fear of his wrath or revenge; not willing to risk the charge of blasphemy—which it would be to say that He is evil—we dutifully attribute to Him all the positive traits to the highest degree, despite our doubts. However, such a position would be a sign of enslavement resembling the behavior of citizens in a totalitarian state, who officially worship their leader only to avoid repression. Although such a position seems rational, or even necessary for survival, in certain social conditions, similar behavior towards God is harder to understand, there is no respect for the Creator in this case. This type of artificial devoutness would actually suggest that we have a low opinion of God, believing that he values only those who are duplicitous in their praise and punishes those who dare to doubt His kindness. Such an image of God—in reality a caricature of Him—is dubious both on philosophical and theological grounds.

In the discussed book there is one more way of avoiding the problems I have pointed out, namely by making reference to the mystery of God. As Dariusz Łukasiewicz argues, humans are incapable of comprehending all of the reasons for God's actions and that they even should not be able to know them; after all, one of the signs of God's work is that He has reasons we are not able to comprehend (163). "The concept of God as the most perfect being means also that He takes actions because He has reasons and that the reasons being God's actions may not be comprehensible to us. There is a certain obvious pattern here that we do not comprehend the reasons of God's unique actions because of the metaphysical

abyss between us and God infinite in his power and wisdom” (163). Unfortunately, such a solution is troublesome because following the rule of mystery consistently would have to result in a complete destruction of discourse about God and thus any attempts to reconcile Providence with freedom and coincidence. Referencing the idea of mystery is also problematic from a theological perspective because it undermines the point of making a distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy; this is probably why it has never been consistently used in the Roman Catholic Church’s practice, exemplified by announcing dogmas about the nature of God and defending their one interpretation. Even if we were to agree to the complete mysteriousness of God, we would not be able to defend His goodness in this way; for if His reasons are incomprehensible to us then we also cannot know that they are good or that by following them God does good.

The problems with justifying the claim about God’s perfect goodness in no way prove that He is evil; it is still logically possible that God is the apogee of perfection. The result of the author’s reasonings should be judged similarly; although it is logically possible that Divine Providence exists and works within the world while being consistent with freedom and coincidence, it is also logically possible that Divine Providence does not exist or that it is mutually exclusive with freedom and coincidence. This observation leads to the question whether determining the logical possibility of something is an important empirical result, especially in matter so serious as Divine Providence. It seems obvious, as the author openly points out, that the problem could only be settled on metaphysical grounds; this however seems unlikely due to the lack of a credible metaphysical experience. Thus, it seems one should stop and admit that the signs of Divine Providence on the world are ambiguous and can mean both that His Providence exists and that it does not. However, if natural theology is only capable of such modest conclusions, one can cast doubt on whether it would be worth it to establish any charity in hopes of developing it. Even though the author writes that if he were rich, he would certainly establish such an organization (180), one would think that there are more effective ways (perhaps even more morally and religiously desirable) of spending money.

The problems with the concept of God assumed in the book by Dariusz Łukasiewicz lead to a conclusion that philosophy of religion should attempt to demythologize not only the anthropomorphic ideas of God characteristic for religions (including the monotheistic ones) but also abstract philosophical concepts, including Anselmian intuitions, which include the concept of absolute perfection. For the God of philosophers, who is supposed to be necessary, infinite, almighty,



omniscient, simple, autonomous, and above all perfectly good, turns out to be an empty abstraction, which is pointless from the perspective of religious life.

A full demythologization of God is certainly impossible, because every time we attempt to introduce Him to ourselves (especially when we try to address Him in prayer) we create a subjective image of Him (which is also a caricature). I would be willing to claim, however, that we distort God less when we ask for a specific grace than when we see Him as a magician who miraculously saves our freedom by affecting the quantum world. In my view, God is indeed simple, but not in a sense of metaphysical lack of complexity (or the identities of all His attributes) but in a sense that even a child can comprehend Him when they address Him making the most banal requests. This subjective God from our prayers has many names, probably as many as there are people who address Him. It certainly is not a coherent God, after all people ask him for a variety of things, often contradictory ones. It is even possible that it is not an almighty or perfectly good God, since people have discovered on numerous occasions that he cannot grant even the most noble of requests, like asking for world peace or to prevent a famine; at the same time many people feel that it is Him (and perhaps only Him) who understands them. Certainly, such a God is not free from faults, one could even say he is an idol created by humans for their own purposes, as accurately illustrated by Karel Čapek in *Apocryphal Tales* where he presented an internal monologue of a baker pondering Jesus. Although the baker was ready to accept the miracle of multiplying fish so fishermen could go bankrupt due to lack of demand for their product, he could not forgive Jesus for the miraculous multiplying of bread because it endangered his own interest. Despite the ostensible impropriety of treating God this way, there is more authentic faith in the baker's position than in scholarly philosophical and theological tractates. If God really exists, then we can be sure that He loves everyone, even those who passionately argue about His nature and whose speculative skills lead one to believe that they could defeat even Him in an academic dispute.

In the end, one must pose the question what these speculations—conducted for thousands of years—are supposed to bring? Is it the goal that we ourselves believe that we are rational creatures? Is it to ensure that the content of put faith is coherent? Even if we prove that God is coherent and that his providential actions can be reconciled with freedom, coincidence, and other phenomena in the world, will we be able to better understand Him? Will His kindness and love for us be more tangible? I am willing to claim that no one believes in a perfectly good God or even wants God to be like this. There are people who would not want to meet Hitler or Stalin in heaven, which shows that they do not expect God to save tyrants;

quite the contrary, they expect that He will punish the most horrible of evildoers with eternal damnation. We also want God to love us and at least occasionally give a clear sign of his providential concern about us; from this perspective not only the God from philosophical speculations may seem distant to us, but also the God from Christian rituals. It is difficult to comprehend a God who during every mass performs the miracle of transubstantiation, descending on the altar yet He does not stop a suicidal pilot or a pilot terrorist who decided to crash a plane with innocent passengers on board. Thus, there is probably no clear answer to the question I put in the title: Is God (perfectly) good? However, it may be possible that it is more important for Him to be our (my) God.

Translated by Agnieszka Ziemińska

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#### IS GOD (PERFECTLY) GOOD? REMARKS ON *OPATRZNOŚĆ BOŻA, WOLNOŚĆ, PRZYPADEK* BY DARIUSZ ŁUKASIEWICZ

##### S u m m a r y

The main problem of Dariusz Łukasiewicz' book is the problem of God's goodness, especially the question if God is perfectly good (also in moral sense). If He is perfectly good, He should always do what is best in the given circumstances, or—if there is no possibility of doing good—choose the least evil given two or more alternatives. In the paper I argue that God's perfect goodness could not be justified neither a priori, nor a posteriori. A priori arguments are not conclusive ones because it is not possible to infer moral goodness from such ontological features as simplicity, necessity or infinity. Moral goodness also does not derive from almightiness or omniscience. Quite contrary, almightiness (and omniscience) may even be obstacles to moral goodness; for if God knows everything what is logically possible to know and can do anything that is logically possible to do, then not only should He know evil, but also should be able to do it. A posteriori arguments are not conclusive because of horrendous evil in the world, especially in the nature; after all, there is a natural and inescapable cruelty in nature, a result of the fact that some species are food for other species. Therefore, if God

indeed created the world, He cannot have been sensitive to the suffering of the creatures he brought to life, especially that there is a lot of pointless evil in the world we currently inhabit.

**Keywords:** God; good; evil; morality; world.

CZY BÓG JEST (DOSKONALE) DOBRY?  
NA MARGINESIE KSIĄŻKI DARIUSZA ŁUKASIEWICZA  
*OPATRZNOŚĆ BOŻA, WOLNOŚĆ, PRZYPADEK*

Streszczenie

Podstawowym problemem książki Dariusza Łukasiewicza jest kwestia natury Boga, przede wszystkim pytanie, czy jest On bytem doskonale dobrym (zwłaszcza w sensie moralnym). Jeśli jest doskonale dobry, to powinien zawsze uczynić to, co w danych warunkach najlepsze lub – jeśli nie ma możliwości czynienia dobra – z dwu lub więcej alternatyw wybierze tę, która jest najmniej zła. W argumentacji rozwijanej w artykule staram się pokazać, że dobroci Boga (zwłaszcza moralnej) nie da się wykazać ani a priori, ani a posteriori. Argumenty a priori są niewystarczające, ponieważ z takich ontologicznych cech Boga, jak prostota, konieczność czy nieskończoność dobroć moralna nie wynika. Podobnie moralna dobroć nie wynika z wszechmocy ani wszechwiedzy. Raczej przeciwnie, wszechmoc oraz wszechwiedza mogą być przeszkodą w dobroci moralnej; skoro bowiem Bóg wie wszystko, co jest logicznie możliwe wiedzieć, a także może uczynić wszystko, co jest logicznie możliwe uczynić, to powinien nie tylko zło znać, lecz także móc je czynić. Argumenty a posteriori są niewystarczające z powodu ogromu zła obecnego w świecie; przykładem jest naturalne i nieuchronne zło obecne w przyrodzie, wynikające stąd, że jedne gatunki są pokarmem dla innych. Jeśli zatem Bóg rzeczywiście stworzył świat, to nie był wrażliwy na cierpienie istot, które powołał do istnienia, zwłaszcza, że w zamieszkiwanym przez nas świecie istnieje wiele zła (i to zła bezcelowego).

**Słowa kluczowe:** Bóg; dobro; zło; moralność, świat.