

It may be thought, however, inconsistent with divine benevolence to place the inferior, irrational animals in a condition of suffering because man would transgress, and thus punish creatures incapable of sinning for his transgression.

Animals do, indeed, suffer in such a world as ours; but not as a punishment for their own or man's sin. The only question is, Do they suffer so much that their existence is not a blessing? Surely experience will decide, without inquiring as to their future existence, that their enjoyments, as a general fact, vastly outweigh their sufferings; and hence their existence indicates benevolence. It should also be recollected that their natures are adapted to a world of sin and death, and they are doubtless more happy here than they would be in a different condition, which might be more favourable to unfallen accountable beings.

Finally. This subject harmonizes infinite and perfect benevolence in God with the existence of evil on earth.

This is the grand problem of theology; and though I would not say that our reasoning clears it of all difficulties, yet it does seem to me that, by letting the light of this subject fall upon the question, we come nearer to its solution than by viewing it in another aspect. For this subject shows us that benevolence decidedly predominates in all the arrangements of the material universe, and then it assigns good reasons why this benevolence is not unmixed; in other words, why severity is sometimes mingled with goodness. It shows us that God, with a prospective view of man's sin, adapted the world to a fallen being; making it, instead of a place of unmingled happiness, a state of trial and discipline; not as a full punishment, (for that is reserved to a future state,) but as an essential means of delivering this immortal being from his ruin and misery, and of fitting him for future and endless holiness and happiness. Thus, instead of indicating indifference or malevolence in God, because he introduced evil into the world, it is a striking evidence of his benevolence. Such a plan is, in fact, the conjoint result of infinite wisdom and benevolence for rescuing the miserable and the lost. Had God placed such a being in a world adapted to one perfectly holy, his sufferings would have been vastly greater, and his rescue hopeless.

Thus far do both reason and revelation conduct us in a plain path; and that, probably, is as far as is necessary for