

Dialogue Between a  
Philosopher, a Jew,  
and a Christian



*Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian* was written by Peter Abelard (1079-1142), a superstar amongst 12th-century Parisian teachers, drawing crowds of thousands at the Notre-Dame cathedral school. Abelard contributed to the development of the “scholastic” method in theology. (The contrasting “monastic” method of theology would be exemplified by Abelard’s opponent, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.) Shifting the balance of influence from Plato to Aristotle (which is bound up with the question of “universals”) was crucial for this change in theological method. Abelard helped secure Aristotle’s prestige though he only had access to a few of Aristotle’s logical works (which are together known as the *Organon*). Impressive spadework in logical and linguistic analysis in the 12th century helped make the high-medieval achievements of Aquinas and others possible in the following century. This *Dialogue* emblemizes the vital “multicultural” conversation carried on amongst medieval intellectuals.

(1) I was looking around in a dream one night, and here came three men along another path and stood in front of me. In a dreamlike way, I ask them straight out what their profession is and why they've come to me.

(2) "We are men inclined to different religious faiths," they say. "To be sure, we all alike confess that we are worshippers of the one God, but we serve him by different faiths and different kinds of life. One of us is a pagan, from among those they call philosophers; he is satisfied with the natural law. But the other two have Scriptures. One of them is called a Jew and the other a Christian. After conversing and disputing with one another for a long time about our different religious faiths, we have finally submitted to your judgment."

(3) So I am very astonished at this, and ask who brought or gathered them together for this purpose, and most of all why they picked me as the judge in this affair.

(4) THE PHILOSOPHER replies: "It was begun at my doing," he says. "For it's the philosophers' job to investigate the truth by means of reasons, and in all things to follow not people's opinion but reason's lead. So having devoted myself to our schools for a long time, and having been educated in both their reasons and their authorities, at last I brought myself to moral philosophy, which is the aim of all the disciplines and for the sake of which I judged all the rest should be mere preliminaries.

(5) "After being taught all I could there about ultimate good and ultimate evil, and about things that make a person happy or wretched, I at once went on to explore eagerly for myself the different religious faiths facing me, into which the world is now divided. After looking into all of them and comparing them with one another, I decided to follow the one that is more in agreement with reason.

(6) "I therefore applied myself to the doctrine of the Jews, and of the Christians too, and examined the belief and the laws or reasonings of both groups. I found the Jews were fools and the Christians crazy — so to speak, no offense to you who are called a Christian. I have conversed with both for a long time, and since the debate has not yet brought an end to our discussion, we have decided to submit its parties' reasonings to your judgment. Of course we know you're not unaware of the powers of philosophical reasonings or of each Law's defenses. For the Christian religion relies on its own Law, which they call the 'New Testament,' but in such a way that yet it does not presume to spurn the Old. It devotes a lot of effort to studying both. We had to pick someone as our judge, so that our debate would reach an end, and we were unable to find anyone who did not belong to one of these three groups."

(7) Then, as if selling flattery-oil and daubing my head with the salve, he went on at once: “So the more word gets around of your pre-eminence in mental keenness and in knowledge of all the Scriptures, the more certain it is that you can support or defend your judgment and are able to withstand a revolt by any one of us. That amazing work of theology, which jealousy couldn’t bear but was unable to do away with, and instead made it all the more glorious by persecuting it, provided for us a sure test that there is indeed a keenness to your mind, and how much the storehouse of your memory is overflowing with philosophical and sacred teachings beyond the usual studies of your schools. For these reasons, it’s obvious you’ve flourished in both fields beyond all the masters, your own as well as the writers we find in the known sciences.”

(8) Then I said: “I’m not soliciting this honor you have saved for me, seeing that in passing over the wise you appoint a fool for a judge. Since I too am used to the empty controversies of this world, therefore, like you, I won’t take seriously things I’ve been accustomed to entertain myself with. Yet don’t regard it as a great thing, philosopher, if you appear to win this contest, you who profess no Law but submit only to reasons. For in fact you have two swords for the fight, whereas the others are armed against you with only one. You can go after them with both Scripture and reason, but they cannot use anything in the Law as an objection, because you don’t follow the Law. And also, the more extensive the philosophical armor you have, being more accustomed to reasons, the less able they are to argue against you with reasons. (9) “Nevertheless, because you’ve settled on this by agreement and common consent, and because I see each of you is confident of his own powers, don’t by any means let our modesty get in the way of your ventures, particularly since I think I’ll learn something from them. Indeed, as one of our own people remarks, ‘There is no teaching so false that there is no true teaching mixed in.’ And I don’t think any argument is so silly that it doesn’t have some lesson in it. Thus even the greatest of the wise, getting the attentive reader ready, says at the very beginning of his Proverbs, ‘Hearing, the wise person will be wiser; the intelligent will get guidance.’ And James the apostle says, ‘Let every person be quick to hear but slow to speak.’ ”

(10) They gladly agree to my agreement.

(11) THE PHILOSOPHER says, “It’s my job to question the others first, I who am satisfied with the natural law, which is primary. I gathered you together in order to inquire about the Scriptures that were added on later. I say the natural law is ‘primary,’ not only in time but in nature as well. For everything simpler is naturally prior to the more multiple. Now the natural law, the science of morals we call

‘ethics,’ consists of moral lessons alone. But your Laws’ teaching adds to them certain commands involving external signs. To us they seem altogether superfluous; we must discuss them too in their place.”

(12) They both allow the philosopher to go first in contesting this fight.

(13) “To begin with,” he says then, “I ask you together about one thing I see applies to both of you equally, you who rely mainly on Scripture. Did some reason lead you into these religious faiths, or are you here following mere human opinion and the love of your own kind of people? If the first of these alternatives is so, that is certainly to be highly commended, just as the other is to be utterly deplored. Yet I believe no discerning person’s conscience will deny that the latter alternative is the true one, especially since we experience it with frequent examples. For it often happens that, among some married couples, when one or the other party converts to a different religious faith, their children hold unshaken the faith of whichever of the parents they are close to. How they were raised has more power with them than does their bloodline or reason, since children would also do this no matter who they were raised by, and would recognize them as ‘fathers’ in faith as well as in rearing.

(14) “This didn’t escape him who said, ‘The Son cannot do anything but what he sees the Father doing.’ For love of their own kind of people and of those they were raised with is so naturally implanted in all human beings that they shrink from whatever is said contrary to their faith. ‘Turning custom into nature,’ they stubbornly maintain as adults whatever they learned as children. Before they are able to grasp the things said, they assert they believe them. For as the poet remarks, ‘A jug will keep for a long time the odor of what it was once filled with when it was new.’ Indeed one of the philosophers argues things like this, saying, ‘If they got something from their childish lessons, they shouldn’t regard it as sacred. For surely an advanced treatise of philosophy often gets rid of things fit for tender ears.’

(15) “For it’s an amazing fact that, although in all other affairs human understanding increases over the course of life and throughout the ages, there’s no progress in faith, where an error is threatened by extreme peril. Instead young and old alike, yokels as well as the learned, are claimed to have a view about it, and the one who doesn’t depart from people’s common view is called strongest in the faith.

(16) “This is surely why it happens that among one’s own people no one is allowed to inquire about what is to be believed, or to doubt with impunity things said by all. For people are ashamed to be asked about what they are unable to reply to. Certainly no one who distrusts his own powers gladly engages in struggle; it is the one who hopes for

victory's glory who voluntarily runs to the battle.

(17) "Often, these people even break into such craziness that they aren't embarrassed to profess they believe what they admit they can't understand, as if faith consists more of uttering words than of the mind's comprehension, and belongs more to the mouth than to the heart. Thus too they pride themselves most when they appear to believe so many things they are unable to discuss orally or conceive mentally. The uniqueness of their own sect even makes them so pretentious and superior that whomever they see divided from them in faith they regard as unfit for God's mercy. Once they have condemned all others, they proclaim that they alone are blessed.

(18) "So after reflecting a long time on this blindness and pride of the human race, I have turned to divine mercy, humbly and continually begging it to see fit to lead me out of so great a whirlpool of errors, so miserable a Charybdis, and to direct me from such great tempests to the harbor of salvation. You see me anxious for this even now and, like a student, fiercely eager for the lessons contained in your answers."

(19) THE JEW: "You have questioned two people at once, but two people cannot properly reply at once. Otherwise the number of speakers interferes with understanding. I'll reply first, if that's all right. For we came first to the worship of God and received the first discipline of the Law. This brother who professes himself a Christian will supply what's missing from my imperfection, wherever he sees me falling short or being less capable. Wearing so to speak two horns in the two Testaments he's armed with, he'll be able to resist and fight the enemy more strongly."

(20) THE PHILOSOPHER: "All right."

(21) THE JEW: "Now I do want to warn you in advance about one thing, before the battle of our proposed debate. If perhaps you seem to overwhelm my simpleness with the power of philosophical arguments, do not pride yourself on having thereby defeated us. Don't turn one little person's weakness into the shame of a whole people, or refute the faith from one person's failing, or accuse it of error because I'm little able to discourse on it."

(22) THE PHILOSOPHER: "That too seems judiciously said. But there wasn't any need to postulate it, since you shouldn't doubt that I'll work toward searching out the truth, not for showing off superiority, or that I'll not bicker like a sophist but rather explore arguments like a philosopher and, most of all, seek my soul's salvation."

(23) THE JEW: "May the Lord himself — who appears to have inspired you with this zeal so that you inquire about him with such care for the salvation of your soul — bring us this conversation whereby you may profitably be able to find him. For me, to the extent that he

grants it, it remains now to reply to your questions.”

(24) THE PHILOSOPHER: “That certainly conforms to the agreement before us.”

(25) THE JEW: “All human beings, while they are children and haven’t yet reached the age of discernment, certainly do follow the faith and custom of the people who take care of them, most of all the ones they love more. But after they’ve grown up, so that they can now be ruled by their own choice, they should be turned over to their own judgment, not someone else’s. It is not as fitting to follow opinion as it is to search out the truth.

(26) “Now I’ve touched on these matters in advance, because perhaps love for our physical forebears and the custom we first learned did lead us at the outset to this faith. But now reasoning more than opinion keeps us here.”

(27) THE PHILOSOPHER: “I beg you, disclose that reasoning to us, and that is enough.”

(28) THE JEW: “If, as we believe, the Law we follow is given to us by God, then we’re not to be blamed for complying with it. Indeed, we should be rewarded for obedience, and those who scorn the Law are making a big mistake.

(29) “Now if we can’t compel you to grant it’s been given by God, you aren’t able to refute it either. But to take an example from ordinary human life, I beg you to give me some advice. I am a certain master’s slave, and am powerfully afraid of offending him. I’ve many fellow-slaves anxious with the same fear. They tell me that in my absence our master has commanded something of all his slaves, but I don’t know about it. They’re working at it, and urge me to work with them.

(30) “What do you recommend I should do if I have a doubt about that command, at which I wasn’t present? I don’t believe you or anyone else will advise me to spurn all the slaves’ advice and, following my own opinion, set myself apart all alone from what they’re doing together and what they all attest the master to have commanded — especially since the command appears to be such that it cannot be refuted by any reasoning.

(31) “What need is there for me to doubt a danger from which I can be free? If the master did command what is confirmed by many people’s testimony and has good reason, I who don’t obey am altogether inexcusable. But if, deceived by the advice or by the urging and example of my fellow-slaves, I do what wasn’t commanded even though it didn’t have to be done, that has to be blamed on them, not on me. Respect for the lord prompted me to it.”



(32) THE PHILOSOPHER: “Surely you yourself have come up with the advice you asked for, and no discerning person will feel the contrary. But apply the example of the proposed analogy to what we are aiming for.”

(33) THE JEW: “Many generations have passed, as you yourself know, during which time our people have obediently maintained the Testament they think was given to them by God. They instructed all their descendants equally in observing it, both by word and by example. Almost the entire world agrees that this Law was given us by God. If perhaps we can’t force some unbelievers to agree about this Law, nevertheless there’s no one who can refute by any reasoning what we believe.

(34) “Surely it is pious, entirely in agreement with reason, and in accord both with divine goodness and human salvation to hold that God shows so much care for human beings that he also sees fit to instruct them by a written Law and to curb our maliciousness, at least by fear of the penalties. If secular princes’ laws have been profitably set up for this purpose, who denies that the highest and kindest prince of all has also taken care of this? For how can one govern a subject people without law if everyone, left to his own choice, pursues whatever he picks? Or how will he restrain their maliciousness by justly punishing evil people, unless a law was set up in advance that prohibits evils from being done?

(35) “For this reason, I believe it is plain that the divine Law first came among human beings so that the world might also take the source and authority of this good from God, since he wanted to bridle maliciousness by setting up *some* laws. Otherwise, it could easily have seemed that God didn’t care about human affairs, and that the state of the world is produced by chance rather than ruled by providence. Now if it’s believed that *some* law was given to the world by God, which one should we suppose this about more than ours, which has got so much authority from its ancientness and from general human opinion?

(36) “Lastly, suppose it *is* doubtful to me, as it is to you, that God set up this Law, even though it is confirmed by so many testimonies and by reason. Nevertheless, you will be forced by the inference in the assumed analogy [(29)-(30)] to advise me to obey it, especially since my own conscience urges me to do so.

(37) “You and I have a common faith in the truth of the one God. Perhaps I have just as much love for him as you do. In addition, I also show it through deeds, which you *don’t* have. If they do no good, what harm do they do me even if they’re not commanded, since they’re not prohibited? Who too can fault me, if labor more for the Lord even when not constrained by any command? Who can fault this faith that

most highly acclaims the divine goodness, as was said [(34)], and very greatly kindles our charity for him who is so concerned about our salvation that he saw fit to instruct us by a written Law? So either find some fault in his Law, or else stop asking why we follow it.

(38) “Whoever regards the steadfastness of our zeal, which puts up with so much, as devoid of reward asserts God to be most cruel. Certainly no race is known or even believed ever to have borne so much for God’s sake as we endlessly put up with for his sake. There can be no rust of sin that the furnace of this affliction shouldn’t be conceded to eat away. Scattered among all the nations, alone without a king or earthly prince, are we not weighed down with such impositions that we pay off the unbearable ransom of our miserable life almost day by day?”

(48) THE PHILOSOPHER: “It is agreed that before the Law or the legal sacraments were handed down, most people were content with the natural law, consisting of love for God and neighbor. They cultivated justice and were most acceptable to God. For example, Able, Enoch, Noah and his sons, Abraham too, Lot and Melchizedek. Even your Law recalls and praises them highly. Among them, in fact, Enoch is reported to have so pleased God that the Lord is said to have transported him alive into paradise, even as one of you asserts in the words, ‘Enoch pleased God and was transported into paradise, to give an example of penitence to the nations.’ And how much the Lord loved Noah — ‘a plain fact, when the Lord saved him and his household alone as the seed of the human race, while all others drowned in the flood. (50) “From this it is plainly gathered how much the earlier fathers’ voluntary compliances were accepted by God, to which no law yet constrained them. We still serve him in this freedom. (51) “But if you say the Law had in a certain sense begun in Abraham on account of the sacrament of circumcision, you’ll certainly find that he gets no reward from it before God (so that there’s no bragging for you from the Law), that he neither got any justification nor was even commended by the Lord for it. Indeed, it is written that like the earlier fathers he was justified through faith while he wasn’t yet circumcised, when it is said, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted as justice for him,’ (55) “Carefully consider too what reward the Lord promises and arranges in advance for observing the whole Law. you certainly can’t expect from him anything but earthly prosperity for this. For you see nothing else promised there. Since it isn’t apparent whether you get even this — you who in your own judgement are afflicted more than all mortals — the faith in this obedience to the Law, whereby you put up with so many and such great things, is quite amazing. For you’re obviously especially frustrated from gaining the advantage that’s to be

expected from the very thing owed to you by the promise.” (94) THE JEW: ”Look, the Lord is clearly offering an everlasting reward for obeying the Law, not a reward that comes to an end. Moses too, after the earthly reward you mentioned earlier for those who keep the Law [(58)], added the mercy that’s to be exercised by God toward them. He was plainly holding out for us another reward than an earthly one. For when he said, ’And that it go well with you all the days of your life, even as it does today,’ he at once added, ’And he will be merciful toward us, if we keep and do all his commandments, as he has decreed to us.’ And after some things in between, when he had said ’The Lord has picked you, that you may be a special people to him among all peoples,’ he added further down, ’And you will know that the Lord our God is a strong and faithful God who for a thousand generations keeps the covenant and continues the mercy toward those who love him and those who keep his commandments.’

(95) “Now I think it doesn’t escape you that the Law itself commands perfect love of God or neighbor, which is what you say the natural law consists of[(48)]. Indeed, in summing up the Law at the end of his life, Moses says:

*And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but that you fear the Lord your God, and walk in his ways and love him, and serve the Lord your God with your whole heart and your whole soul, and that you keep the Lord’s decrees and his rites, which I command today, so that it may go well with you? Come on! The heaven, the heaven’s heaven, the earth, and all the things in them are the Lord your God’s. And when the Lord was closely bound to your fathers and loved them, he also chose their seed after them — that is, you — from among all peoples, as is proved today.*

(96) “The Law so carefully explains that the love of God should be perfect, and so elaborates the point, that it commands that God is to be loved with the whole heart and with the whole soul and with our whole strength. On the other hand, we are ordered to love our neighbor like ourselves, so that the love of God, which extends even above ourselves, is contained by no measure. We are also commanded to love the outsiders who abide among us as we do our very selves. The Law expands the bosom of love to such an extent that its benefits are not lacking even to our very enemies or to criminals. Let’s now set out some texts on these matters: (a) ’If you run across your enemy’s ox or stray ass, return it to him. If you see an ass belonging to someone who hates you collapse under a burden, you will not pass by but will help him lift it up.’ (b) ’You will not annoy the wanderer; you were wanderers too in Egypt.’ (c) ’Do not look for revenge. You will not be mindful of your fellow-citizen’s injuries against you.’ ‘If

an outsider lives in your land and abides among you, do not reproach him. Instead, let him be among you like a native. And you will love him as you do yourselves. For you too were outsiders in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God .’

(97) “And elsewhere: ‘The poor will not be lacking in the land where you live. For that reason I command you to open your hand to your brother, to the destitute, and to the poor who dwell in the land with you.’

(98) “So I beg you, consider on the basis of these passages how much the Law extends the feeling of love both to human beings and to God, so you may recognize that your law, which you call ‘natural,’ is included also in ours. Thus if the other commandments were to cease to apply, these belonging to perfect love would be enough for our salvation, even as they are for yours. You don’t deny that our early fathers were saved by them, so that a greater certainty of salvation is passed on to us the more the Law’s additional commandments establish a more restricted life for us. In fact, this addition seems to me to pertain not so much to religion’s holy practices as it does to fortifying it more securely.

(99) “Certainly a true love of God and man is enough for every mental virtue. Even if deeds are lacking, still a good and perfect will is by no means lessened in its merit. But as I said [(73)], just as the Lord wanted to separate us in location from the faithless so that we would not be corrupted by them, so too he decided that this should be done by ritual deeds as well. Therefore, although love’s perfection is enough to yield true blessedness, surely the additional commandments of the more restricted life deserved to have gained at least something extra, even in this life, so that we would be made more eager and sure toward God by the solace of an earthly benefit. Since his gifts to us would be increased, our devotion to him would grow, and the outside population of unbelievers who saw this would be more easily incited by our advantages to venerate God.

(100) “Now as for the fact that the Lord seems to mention earthly benefits as a reward for the Law more often or more plainly than he does eternal ones, understand that this was done mainly on account of a people who were still carnal and rebellious, whom he led out of Egypt’s wealth, which they were continually muttering about, into a harsh loneliness. It also seemed pointless, in the promise, to mention the matter of eternal blessedness. It was plain that our ancestors had gotten that earlier, even without the Law’s being handed down.

(101) “Finally, infer how great the Law’s perfection is from this one concluding remark that Moses writes at the end of his life, in these words: ‘And now, Israel, hear the commandments and judgments I

teach you, etc. You will not add to or take away from the word I say to you.’ And again, ‘Do for the Lord only what I command you. Do not add or subtract anything.’

(122) THE PHILOSOPHER: “When David composed the Psalms for God’s honor, or solemnly brought the Lord’s ark into Jerusalem, or when Solomon built and dedicated the Lord’s temple, they certainly did what Moses hadn’t commanded in any way. All the prophets as well were selected without any commandment from Moses or from the Law that was handed down to him. After Moses countless things were done by the holy fathers, either from the Lord’s commandment or for the sake of their obvious usefulness, that are in no way contained in Moses’ commandments.

(123) “For commandments from the Lord shouldn’t be expected in matters that have an obvious usefulness. Sin isn’t doing what is not commanded, but rather acting against a commandment. Otherwise you couldn’t go through a single day of the present life, or carry out your household business for a single day, since we have to do many things — buying, making deals, going from this place to that, or even eating or sleeping — that aren’t covered in a commandment.

(124) “Moreover, who doesn’t see that if nothing more or less than what Moses commanded is to be done, then all who keep the Law are of equal merit, and among those whose merits cannot be unequal one person is not better than another?

(125) “From the preceding, therefore, it’s clear there’s no way you can commend the Law’s perfection by your understanding that if something is added on that isn’t commanded in it, it is against the Law for it to be done. Realize that when the Lord was urging obedience to the Law, you aren’t giving him a good enough excuse for leaving out what I said [(58)] is the greatest thing in its reward [eternal blessedness, as opposed to earthly prosperity], if he regarded obedience as enough for him to promise that too.

(126) “But I’m surprised you’re sure that spiritual good follows from the purification of sins through sacrifices [(103)], or through any of the Law’s external works, if — as you yourself acknowledge [(98)] and as plain truth has it — your love of God and neighbor is enough for the justification of holiness. For without the latter, purification will be of no help at all, as far as the soul’s salvation is concerned. And there’s no doubt that when the love of God and neighbor has made someone just, he’s no longer in a state of guilt for sin so as to need spiritual purification. Thus you have it written about the repentant sinner, ‘An afflicted spirit is a sacrifice to God,’ etc. And again, ‘I said, “I will confess against myself my injustice, and you took away my sin’s impiety.”’ ‘Look how the Psalmist commends this sacrifice of the contrite

heart. Elsewhere, speaking in the Lord's person, he completely rejects what is external, saying:

*Hear, people, and I will speak. I will not take calves from your house, Israel, or goats from your flocks. If I get hungry, I will not tell you. For the earth's globe and its bounty are mine. Shall I eat bull-meat? Or drink goats' blood? Offer God a sacrifice of praise, and carry out your vows to the most high. Call on me in the day of tribulation, and I will rescue you, and you will do me honor.*

(127) "The Lord is hungry for the sacrifice of the heart, not of animals, and he's renewed by it. When he finds the former, he doesn't look for the latter; when he doesn't find the former, the latter is altogether superfluous — I mean as far as the soul's justification is concerned, not for getting around the legal penalties. Nevertheless your sins are said to be pardoned in accordance with these penalties. (128) "Indeed your Law, which assigns merits for fulfilling or breaking it only in this life, and in either case pays a remuneration only here, fits all things to this bodily life, so that it rates nothing as clean or unclean according to the soul.

(133) "Just as the soul's guilt is brought on by its willing, so it is at once pardoned through its contrite heart and true remorse of penitence, with the result that it isn't condemned for it any longer. As was said [(126)], 'I said, "I will confess against myself."' For after the repentant sinner has thus decided within himself to accuse himself through confession, by that very fact he permits his perverse will's fault, through which he did wrong, to be now lacking in guilt, and his perpetual penalty is pardoned, although a temporal one may still be kept for the sake of correction, as your same prophet remarks elsewhere, saying, 'Chastising, the Lord chastised me; and he did not tum me over to death.

(134) "I think in asking these things about my soul's salvation I have conversed with you enough about your faith and my faith. Indeed, in summarizing our conversation, I consider it to have been established that, on your own Law's authority, even if you take it to be given to you by God, you can recognize the law Job prescribes for us by his example, or to the moral discipline our philosophers left posterity regarding the virtues that suffice for blessedness.

(175) THE PHILOSOPHER: "Indeed. For it is all right, and we should resolve to do this above all. Let's try as hard as we can, and attempt to insist on the natural law in the truer ethics' lessons.

(176) "We believe this will be brought to completion rightly and in good order if, in accordance with the summary of ethics recounted by you above [(150)], we discuss what the ultimate good is and by what road one can reach it, so that the treatment of our ethics is divided

into these two parts.”

(177) THE CHRISTIAN: “I concur with you on your recommendation. But in accordance with our proposal’s agreement [(146H147)], our views are to be compared with yours so that we can pick the stronger features of each. And you have claimed you get to go first because of the natural law’s ancientness [(11)]. Thus you who are content with what you call the ‘earlier’ (that is, the natural) law and use it alone, it’s your task to make your own or your people’s views known, and afterwards to hear the reasons for ours if we disagree on anything.”

(178) THE PHILOSOPHER: “As a great many of your own people have remarked, they have defined the ultimate good or final good — that is, its summation or completion — as ‘what makes anyone who has arrived at it blessed,’ just as conversely the ultimate evil is that the attaining of which makes one wretched. We earn either one of these by our morals. Now it is certain that virtues or the vices contrary to them are called ‘morals.’ But as Augustine remarks in Book Eight of *On the City of God*, some of our own people have said that virtue itself is the ultimate good, others that pleasure is.”

(179) THE CHRISTIAN: “So what, please, did they understand by pleasure?”

(180) THE PHILOSOPHER: “Not the dishonorable and shameful delight of carnal allurements, as many people suppose, but rather a kind of inner tranquillity of the soul whereby it remains calm and content with its own goods in disasters and good fortune alike, while no sense of sin consumes it. Far be it from philosophers, those greatest despisers of earthly happiness, those distinguished flesh-tamers, to set up the ultimate good in this life’s shamefulnesses! Many people attribute this to Epicurus and his followers (that is, the Epicureans) out of ignorance, not really understanding, as we said, what the latter would call pleasure. Otherwise, as we said, if Epicurus had departed as far as is said from the path of soberness and respectability, then Seneca, that greatest morals-builder, who lived a most self-restrained life as you yourselves acknowledge, would hardly have brought in Epicurus’ views so often for moral instruction, as if they were his own master’s.”

(181) THE CHRISTIAN: “Be it as you suppose. But please answer this: Do those who understand pleasure in this way disagree in meaning too, as they do in words, with those who call the ultimate good ‘virtue’?”

(182) THE PHILOSOPHER: “There’s little or no distance between them, as far as their overall view is concerned. Indeed, to be strong in virtues is itself to have this tranquillity of the soul, and conversely.”

(183) THE CHRISTIAN: “So there is one view for both of them about the ultimate good, but the nomenclature is different. And so the two apparent views about the ultimate good are reduced to one.”

(184) THE PHILOSOPHER: “So I think.”

(185) THE CHRISTIAN: “And what way have they settled on, I ask, for reaching this ultimate good, namely virtue?”

(186) THE PHILOSOPHER: “Certainly the study of moral literature or exercise in taming the flesh, so that the good will that is firmed up into a habit can be called ‘virtue.’”

(187) THE CHRISTIAN: “And whom do they define as blessed?”

(188) THE PHILOSOPHER: “They say the ‘blessed’ is one who is ‘well suited,’ so to speak — that is, deals well and easily in all things. Thus being blessed is the same as being strong in good morals, that is, in the virtues.”

(189) THE CHRISTIAN: “Do they put any value on the soul’s immortality and on a kind of blessedness in a future life, and expect it in return for their merits?”

(205) THE PHILOSOPHER: “Please, where are these remarks going?”

(206) THE CHRISTIAN: “They are so that you may understand, I say, that the better life is the one that surely is altogether devoid of these evils and so absolutely removed from sin that not only does one not sin but one cannot sin there either. Unless it’s better or more pleasant than the present life, it’s pointless to put it forward as a reward. But if it’s neither more pleasant nor better, there’s no reason it’s preferred to this one, and those who desire it more do so uncritically.”

(207) THE PHILOSOPHER: “To tell the truth, I’m learning now that you’re a first-class philosopher, and it’s wrong to resist shamelessly such a plain argument. But according to the argument you’ve set out, a human being’s ultimate good is to be looked for there rather than here. Perhaps this was Epicurus’ view when he said the ultimate good is pleasure. For the soul’s tranquillity is so great that bodily affliction doesn’t disturb it from outside, and neither does any sense of sin disturb the mind nor vice get in its way from inside. Thus its best will is entirely fulfilled.

(208) “On the other hand, as long as something opposes our will or is lacking to it, there’s no true blessedness at all. Surely this is always occurring as long as one is alive here, and the soul, weighed down by its earthly body’s mass and confined in it as though in a jail, doesn’t enjoy true freedom. For who doesn’t sometimes want heat when it’s too cold, or conversely, good weather when he’s tired of rain, or often want more food or clothes than he has? And unless we resist the plain truth, there are countless other things that are pressed upon us against



our will or are denied when we want them. Now if as the argument stands the future life's good is to be regarded as ultimate for us, then I think the virtues we are furnished with here are the way to get there. We'll have to discuss them more carefully later on [(253)-(295)]."

(209) THE CHRISTIAN: "See, our disputation has brought us to the point of maintaining that a human being's ultimate good, or 'final good' as it was called [(178)], is the future life's blessedness, and virtues are the way to get there.

(210) "But first I want to compare our (that is, Christian) teaching about this ultimate good with yours, in order that the teaching with the more fertile doctrine or exhortation may be both regarded as more perfect and complied with more fully.

(211) "Now you suppose you've decisively shown [(58H61), (114)-(118)], blessedness was promised there, and no use is made there of any exhortation based on it. But when he handed down the New Testament, the Lord Jesus put just such a foundation for his doctrine right at the very beginning where he stirred up both contempt for the world and a desire for this blessedness alike, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit. For the kingdom of heaven is theirs.' And later on: 'Blessed are those who suffer persecution on account of justice. For the kingdom of heaven is theirs.' If we pay careful attention to these passages, all his commandments or exhortations are used for the purpose that all good fortune might be despised and adversities put up with in the hope of that higher and eternal life.

(212) "I think your teachers haven't touched on this at all or summoned your souls as much to this final good. But if there were some who did, then run through all the ordinances of your ethics and point them out. Or if you can't point them out, then confess that Christ's doctrine is the more perfect and better one insofar as it exhorts us to virtues with better reason or hope. For you suppose instead that virtues or their contraries are to be striven after or shunned for their own sakes more than for the sake of something else. Thus you suppose the former should be called 'honorable' and the latter 'dishonorable.' Indeed, you call 'honorable' what is pleasant through itself and is to be striven after for its own sake, not for the sake of something else, just as conversely you call 'dishonorable' what is to be run away from on account of its own shamefulfulness. For things that are to be either sought after or shunned on account of something else you instead call 'useful' or 'unuseful.'"

(213) THE PHILOSOPHER: "It certainly did seem that way to our forebears, as Cicero describes rather fully in his Rhetoric. But surely when it is said that virtue is to be aspired after for its own sake, not for the sake of something else, reward for merits isn't being ruled

out entirely; rather the inclination to earthly advantages is taken away. Otherwise we wouldn't have correctly set up blessedness as the virtues' goal — that is, their final cause — as your Boethius remarks in Book Two of his Topics, following Themistius. In fact, while giving an example there of the topic 'from the goal,' he says 'If to be blessed is good, justice is good too.' For here, he says, justice's goal is such that if someone lives in accordance with justice, he is led to blessedness. Look, he plainly shows here that blessedness is awarded as payment for a just life, and that our purpose in living justly is that we might reach it. Epicurus I think calls this blessedness 'pleasure'; your Christ calls it 'the kingdom of heaven.'

(214) "But what difference does it make what name it is called by, provided that the thing stays the same, the blessedness is different, and no other purpose for living justly is proposed for philosophers than for Christians? For we, like you, arrange to live justly here that we may be glorified there. We fight against vices here that we may be crowned there with virtues' merits, receiving the ultimate good as our reward."

(215) THE CHRISTIAN: "On the contrary. As far as I can tell, our purpose and merits are quite different from yours, and we disagree quite a bit too about the ultimate good itself."

(216) THE PHILOSOPHER: "Please explain that, if you can."

(217) THE CHRISTIAN: "No one correctly calls that than which something greater is found the 'ultimate good.' For what is below or less than something cannot by any means be called 'supreme' or 'ultimate.' But it is agreed that every human blessedness or glory is far and inexpressibly exceeded by the divine one. Therefore, none besides it is to be called 'ultimate.' Nothing besides it is justly said to be the 'ultimate good.'"

(218) THE PHILOSOPHER: "In this context we do not mean the ultimate good absolutely, but the ultimate human good."

(219) THE CHRISTIAN: "But neither do we correctly call 'ultimate human good' that than which some greater human good is found."

(220) THE PHILOSOPHER: "That's plain, certainly."

(221) THE CHRISTIAN: "I ask therefore whether in that blessedness [(213)] one person is more blessed than another (as it happens here that one person is more just or holy than another), so that the repayment is different according to the difference in the merits."

(222) THE PHILOSOPHER: "What if that's so?"

(223) THE CHRISTIAN: "Precisely because it is so, you have to grant that one person is made more blessed there than another. And because of this, the person's blessedness that is the less shouldn't be said to be the ultimate human good. Thus it's inappropriate for the one who's less blessed than another to be called 'blessed' any longer. For you

in fact defined the ultimate good as that whereby someone is blessed when he reaches it.

(224) “Therefore, either grant that the one who’s less blessed there than another has received the ultimate good, or else grant that he is not blessed at all, but rather only the one than whom no one there is more blessed. For if what’s received makes him blessed, then surely in accordance with the definition given above, it is properly called the ultimate good.”

(225) THE PHILOSOPHER: “Hold on a moment, please! Pay attention to what I now submit in reply to this most recent line of inquiry. It’s still legitimate for someone to correct things badly stated, since as was said, we are having this conversation to investigate what’s true, not to show off talent.”

(226) THE CHRISTIAN : “I approve, and I grant what you’re saying. For it’s unseemly for us, who are entirely taken up with the investigation of truth, to squabble with one another like children or with uncouth bawling. Or if things are granted rather incautiously, it’s unseemly for one who means to teach or be taught to take the opportunity from that to produce embarrassment where sometimes it’s permissible to grant even falsehoods for the sake of arguing. And so we give full license to either completely changing or correcting a view.”

(227) THE PHILOSOPHER: “Recall what I said, and remember the condition imposed where it was said, ‘What if that is so?’. For it’s seemed to many philosophers that all the virtues are present together in all good people, that one who’s missing some virtue isn’t regarded as good at all, and that therefore among all good people there’s no difference either in their life’s merits or in the repayment that is blessedness.

(230) THE CHRISTIAN: “I see you’re now for the first time not ashamed to get boorish and squabble rather than philosophize. Surely, in order not to appear forced into a confession of plain truth, you turn to the craziness of the most blatant falsehood, so that you regard all good people as equally good, all criminals as equally criminal, and all people as deserving the same glory or penalty to the same degree.”

(231) THE PHILOSOPHER: “If only the matter stays at the level of reality, not at the level of people’s opinion! People judge and repay the effects of deeds more than they do the quality of morals. They judge some people more just, stronger, better, or worse than others according to the things that outwardly seem to be performed .

(232) “Actually, I think you’re not far from this view, if you consider your own teaching. Indeed as your greatest philosopher Augustine asserts, charity encompasses all the virtues under one name. It alone, as he himself says, differentiates between the sons of God and of the Devil. Thus he remarks in a certain passage: ‘Where there is charity,

what is there that can be lacking? But where there is not, what is there that can help? “In fact, love is the fulfillment of the Law.” ’ The Apostle himself who says this, in following up on this fulfillment and both removing evils from it and including goods in it, says: ‘Charity is patient, it is kind. Charity is not envious, it does not act badly,’ etc. Charity is also the topic when among other things it’s said that it ‘suffers all things’ or ‘bears all things,’ surely even death. Now as Christ remarks, ‘No one has more love than this, that someone lays down his soul for his friends.’

(233) ”Therefore one person doesn’t abound with charity more than another one does, since charity contains in itself all these things and carries them with it. Now if no one surpasses anyone else in charity, surely neither does he in virtues or merits, since charity, as you say, embraces every virtue.”

(234) THE CHRISTIAN: “Really, if virtue is understood properly — that is, as what obtains merit with God — then only charity is to be called a virtue. But if it’s understood as what makes one just or strong or moderate, then it’s correct to call it justice, strength or moderation.

(235) “But just as those who have charity are not all equally on fire with it, and not all prudent people understand equally, so not all just people are equally just or all the strong or moderate people equally so. And although we grant that all the virtues, according to the distinction of their species, are present in some people — that is, when any of them is just and strong and moderate — nevertheless we don’t agree that they are on a par in virtues or merits, since it happens that one person is more just or stronger or more forbearing than another. For even though we hold that individual people agree in the previously mentioned species of the virtues, there’s nevertheless a big difference among the individual instances of those species, since one person’s justice or strength or moderation is greater than another’s.

(236) ”So even though charity brings together all the things you said, nevertheless it doesn’t bestow them all on the individuals it is present in. For just as all things advantageous to the body are imparted by nature, but not all of them to all bodies, so it happens with the soul’s goods or virtues too that not all people are enhanced equally by them all.

(239) “Finally, who is there who doesn’t understand how it is the worst craziness to say all sins are on a par? For whether you locate sin in the will or in the doing, it’s clear that among evil persons one has a viler will than another, and is more harmful or acts worse. Certainly the will leads to the act, and when the ability is given to do harm, one person does more harm than another, or persecutes some just person more because he hates him and wants to torment him more. Likewise

not all good people are beneficial or want to be beneficial equally. It's plain from this that good people aren't on a par with one another and evil people aren't either. Neither should their merits be equated, so that their repayment is understood to be on a par too.

(240) “Moreover, disregarding the opinion of fools, if you consider the approved philosophers' lofty doctrines about the virtues, and notice the careful four-part distinction of the virtues given by that most eloquent man Plotinus — he calls some political, some purgatorial, others virtues of the purged soul, and others exemplary — you will be forced by their very names and descriptions to confess at once that people differ greatly in virtues.

(241) “The Apostle too, about whom you raised an objection against us, doesn't pass over this difference when he's talking about self-restraint and allowing marriage. He says: ‘I want all people to be like myself (But everyone has his own gift from God, one person this way, one that way,’ etc. He also distinguishes the future life's rewards according to the quality of virtues or merits, saying: ‘Star differs from star in brightness. So too will be the resurrection of the dead.’ And elsewhere, ‘One who sows frugally will also reap frugally.’

(242) “Now the fact that he said the fulfillment of the Law is charity — that is, the Law is carried out through charity—doesn't show all people are equal in charity, since charity extends beyond what's decreed. Hence there's also Truth's exhortation, ‘When you have done all things, whatever are commanded, say: “We are useless slaves. We have done what we were supposed to do.”’ That is, if you carry out only what you're supposed to on the basis of a command, then regard it as little if you don't add something extra, in addition to the command's duty. His expression, ‘We have done what we were supposed to do,’ is as though he'd said, ‘In fulfilling the commands we carry out only our duties, and perform necessary deeds, as it were, not gratuitous ones.’ Now when someone perseveres to the pinnacle of virginity, he certainly thereby goes beyond commandment, and isn't compelled to it by commandment. Thus the same Apostle remarks: ‘Now I do not have a commandment of the Lord's about virgins; rather I give advice.’

(299) THE CHRISTIAN: “As far as I can see, you understand both the ultimate evil and the ultimate human evil as nothing but the penalties of the future world, exacted in proportion to merits.”

(300) THE PHILOSOPHER: “I do indeed.”

(309) THE CHRISTIAN: “For now, let it be as you say. That is, from what you've granted you can't be accused of granting that what's good is the ultimate human evil, even though you don't deny that a penalty that's good and just is that ultimate evil. But I ask again, since both

the preceding fault and the penalty arising from it are an evil, which of them is to be called the worse and greater human evil? Is it his fault that makes the person evil, or the penalty imposed by God that effects a just judgment on him?"

(310) THE PHILOSOPHER: "In my view, his fault is clearly a worse human evil than its penalty is. For since between any evils whatever, there's no doubt that the one more displeasing to God and deserving of penalty is greater than the other, who doubts\* that the fault is worse than the fault's penalty? Certainly a person displeases God through the fault whereby he's called evil, not through the penalty imposed for the fault. The former certainly is an injustice; the latter is justice's due effect, arising from a correct intention. So it's clear that what there is in a person that makes him guilty is worse than what inflicts a just judgment on him by punishing him."

(311) THE CHRISTIAN: "Therefore, since a person's fault is a greater human evil than the penalty for it is, how do you call a person's penalty his ultimate evil? The fault is a greater evil than that, as was said."

(312) THE PHILOSOPHER: "So if you reject our opinion, please let me hear your view on this. That is, what do you think should be called the ultimate human evil?"

(313) THE CHRISTIAN: "What can make him worse, certainly. So too conversely, his ultimate good is plainly that whereby he's made better."

(314) THE PHILOSOPHER: "And what are they, please?"

(315) THE CHRISTIAN: "His ultimate hatred or ultimate love for God. Plainly, through these two we more displease or please him who is simply and properly called the ultimate good. Both of these surely follow after this life. For the more those who are tortured by the greatest everlasting penalties feel themselves burdened thereby, the more they burn from the very despair of pardon with a greater hatred for him by whose judgment they're being punished. They'd want him not to exist at all, so that then at least they could be released from the penalty. So they are much worse there for hating than they were here in scorning.

(316) "So too conversely, those who enjoy the vision of God that the Psalmist speaks of ('When your glory appears, I will be satisfied' — that is, after you've shown me your divinity's majesty through your very self, I will not need to seek anything more) are then made better insofar as they love more fully him whom they see in himself more truly. Thus ultimate love in the enjoyment of the ultimate good which is our true blessedness should rightly be called the ultimate human good.

(317) "Indeed, divine majesty's glory is so great that no one can gaze

on it who doesn't at once become blessed in the very vision of it. Hence it's said, 'Let the impious be removed, lest he see God's glory.' Thus when his faithful, who loved him above all things, gaze on such blessedness as they could in no way have envisioned by faith, this ultimate exultation of theirs will be their everlasting blessedness."

(318) THE PHILOSOPHER: "It's all right to understand ultimate human good or evil as that whereby a person is made better or worse, as you say. But if this comes about in the future life, so that we're made better or worse there than here, then surely we seem to merit something more there than here. For to the extent we're made better or worse than before, we're judged worthy of a greater penalty or reward

(319) "Now if there's an advance in merits there too, so that the more we know God the more we love him, and if our love for God grows with the repayment as well, so that we're always being made better, then surely the growth in our blessedness is stretched out to infinity, so that it's never complete because it's always being increased.

(320) THE CHRISTIAN: "You don't understand that the time for meriting is in this life only, for reward in that one — that is, here 'for sowing,' there 'for gathering.' Therefore, even though we're made better there by the prize for over again. The very fact that we're made better there than here is the reward for merits had here. Although, having been bestowed for merits, it makes us better, it doesn't merit a prize again. It's established only as a reward for merits, not as being had for meriting something all over again.

(321) "For among us too, when someone receives from a friend a repayment for friendship and loves him all the more because of it, he's not judged to merit a reward from him again because of the greater love that Comes from the prize given — so that the merits are thus stretched out to infinity. For by a kind of force of necessity, love is increased by the payment of a prize, so that it seems not so much voluntary as necessary. Thus surely there's an emotion naturally implanted in all people, so that the very payment of a prize brings with it a kind of increase in love, and sets us on fire with love for him by a kind of necessity or self-love rather than by virtue or love for the payer.

(322) "Therefore, if among people a friend gets a reward from his friend, and is compelled to love him more by that very reward, yet isn't said to merit all over again from this growth in love, what is there surprising if, in the other life too, we who love God more for the reward received don't in any way turn the reward itself into a merit again?

(323) "Or what in the end prevents it from being granted that the divine majesty's glory is so great that there can always be some ad-

vance of ours in seeing it, with the result that the longer we gaze on it and the more it makes itself known to us, the more blessed it makes us? Surely this continual increase of blessedness is worth more than a lesser blessedness that stays at one level only and doesn't advance by any increment."

(324) THE PHILOSOPHER: "How, I ask you, can there be any advance in seeing God, or any difference among those who see him, since the ultimate good is altogether simple? Nothing but the whole of it can ever be gazed on by another."

(325) THE CHRISTIAN: "Surely the diversity isn't in the thing gazed on, but in the way of gazing on it, so that our blessedness in seeing him is increased the better God is understood. For in understanding a soul or some spirit we don't all understand equally, even though such incorporeal natures aren't said to have parts in their essence's quantity. And when a body (or some part of one) is looked at by several people at once, it's nevertheless seen better by one person than by another and, in accordance with some nature of the body, is better known by this person than by that one, and is understood more completely. While the same thing is understood, nevertheless it's not understood equally."

(326) "So too, even though it's through understanding that all people see the divine essence, which is altogether indivisible, nevertheless they don't perceive his nature equally. Thus in accordance with their merits, God imparts a better and more complete knowledge of himself to this person than to that one, and shows himself more fully. It surely can happen that even though this person knows all the things that one does, yet this one knows individual details better and more completely than that one does, and even though as many things are known by this person as by that one, nevertheless the one doesn't have as much knowledge about the same things as the other one does, or doesn't know the same things as well."

(327) THE PHILOSOPHER: "Did the angels that you call 'fallen' ever have the vision of God that true blessedness consists of, or did the main one, at least, who in comparison with the rest is compared to a 'Light-Bearer'?"

(328) THE CHRISTIAN: "Certainly he shouldn't by any means be believed to have had it! And none of those who failed did either. Even those who didn't fail didn't receive that vision in repayment for their humility until after the others' fall, the vision whereby they were made both blessed and confirmed at once, so they wouldn't be able to fall any more."

(329) "Indeed all the angels, like human beings, were created such that they were able to act both well and badly. Otherwise those who didn't



sin would've had no merit from the fact that they didn't accede to the others in sinning.

(330) "Now the fact that Lucifer was endowed with the privilege of a kind of excellence came about not so much because of his blessedness as because of the acuteness of his knowledge, insofar as he was made superior to the rest with respect to the light of knowledge, and made more subtle in understanding all the natures of things. Reflecting on this within himself, he swelled up, inflated with the very extent of his knowledge whereby he saw himself above the others. He ventured greater things than he would've been able to hope for, so that because he knew himself to be set above others, he thought he could become equal to God and would acquire a kingdom all by himself, just like God. Thus, the higher he raised himself up through pride, the worse he failed through his fault."

(331) THE PHILOSOPHER: "Please settle this too: Should this ultimate human good — I mean that ultimate love of God a person takes on from the vision of God — be called an accident of a human being? Is it appropriate for an accident to be called a substance's ultimate good, as if it should be preferred to the underlying substance?"

(332) THE CHRISTIAN: "When you distinguish accidents and their underlying substances, you're resorting to the vocabulary of philosophical teaching and measuring things belonging only to the earthly life, not the heavenly one. Indeed, this secular and earthly discipline was content only with lessons adapted to the present life's state, not to the future life's quality, where neither this vocabulary nor any human teaching is needed. People applied their arts' rules when they investigated the natures of things, but, as is written, 'He who is of the earth speaks about the earth.' Therefore, if you endeavor to scale the heavenly life's summit that goes far beyond every earthly discipline, don't rely too much on earthly philosophy's rules. Earthly things still haven't been able to be fully comprehended and defined by them, much less heavenly ones.

(333) "Now there's no use in deciding whether the love that's said to be had in the heavenly life is an accident or some kind of quality. It can't be truly known except by experiencing it, since it goes far beyond all sense of earthly knowledge. But what does it matter to blessedness whether we maintain it's an accident or a substance, or neither one? For whatever we say or decide, it isn't changed for that reason, and doesn't diminish our blessedness.

(334) "If you pay careful attention to what your philosophers have said about accidental and substantial forms, you will see it isn't substantial for us human beings, since it isn't present in all of us. It isn't accidental either; for after it is present, it cannot be absent. Thus even your

own view describes an accident as what can be present and absent.

(335) “Also, what is there to prevent us if we grant that the future love there, like the present kind we have here, is an accident? For even though our substance is regarded as better or more worthy than any accident of it, nevertheless it doesn’t seem incongruous that what renders a person best and most worthy through participation in it, should be called the ultimate human good. To speak more truly and with greater likelihood, let’s settle it that God himself, who alone is properly and absolutely called the ultimate good, is also the ultimate human good. That is, we’re made truly blessed by the participation we enjoy in the vision of it that we’ve spoken of [(316)-(317)].

(336) “Indeed, his ultimate love flows to us from him whom we see in himself. So he who isn’t from another and makes us so blessed is more rightly to be called the ultimate human good.”

(337) THE PHILOSOPHER: “This view about the ultimate good is certainly all right. It’s not unknown to our own philosophy.

(373) THE PHILOSOPHER: “As far as I see it, if these things are as you say, then God whose glory you preach above all in everything seems to owe many things to your faith. But now it remains for you also to explain carefully what one’s view of hell should be. For just as the ultimate human good will be more striven for the more it’s known, so conversely the ultimate evil will be more avoided the less it’s unknown.”

(374) THE CHRISTIAN: “In fact for a long time now there’s been a difference of opinion on this topic, among us as among you. Some people think hell is a kind of corporeal place underground that’s called ‘hell’ because of its location, which is lower than the other parts of the world. Others think hell isn’t a corporeal torment so much as a spiritual one. Thus just as we distinguish souls’ ultimate blessedness by the name ‘heaven,’ which is the world’s higher part, so too their ultimate misery by the name ‘hell,’ which is said to lie lower the farther away it’s recognized to be from that ultimate blessedness, and the more contrary it’s seen to be to it. For just as what’s better is called ‘high’ on account of the excellence of its worth, so conversely what’s worse is called ‘lowest’ on account of its being debased.

(376) “How can what the Lord relates in the Gospel about the rich person and Lazarus, who are dead, be taken literally? For surely the rich man’s soul cannot have a corporeal grave in hell. Or what is Abraham’s corporeal bosom where Lazarus’s soul is said to be carried off by angels? What tongue does the rich man’s soul have there, or what finger does Lazarus’s soul have? Or what is the corporeal water there, a drop of which poured on the burning tongue can put out or lessen its fire? Thus, since these things can’t happen literally with souls already

sweated out of the flesh, neither can what's said elsewhere: 'Bind his hands and feet. Send him into the shadows outside. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there.'

(377) "It seems to be implied by both the Old and the New Testament that the things said about hell should be taken mystically rather than corporeally. Thus for example just as Abraham's bosom, where Lazarus's soul is taken, is to be understood as spiritual and not corporeal, so too hell is the spiritual torture where it is recounted that the rich person's soul is buried.

(378) "For as long as souls lack bodies, where can they be carried or moved locally, or forced as if being surrounded by the body? They aren't localized at all, and by their own nature are far subtler than any body. Or what corporeal force of the elements is there, either of fire or the other elements, that can touch or torture souls without bodies? All this can't easily be described or understood.

(379) "Thus even demons after the fall are said to have been spun off into certain airy bodies they took on as a prison, so to speak, so that they can suffer corporeally too. For this reason they were called 'airy powers,' since they can do a great many things in the element they're embodied in, just as people who rule on earth are called 'earthly powers.'

(382) "Thus if it seems to someone that divine judgment's power is great enough to be able to punish equally in all the places it wants to, and that the qualities of places are irrelevant to the penalty or to the glory, then I have no doubt that this view will find assent more easily the more it seems to commend divine power and to come closer to reason. For let's follow the general view of almost all people, who say that some who are put in the same fire are tortured more, some less, in accordance with their merits, not in accordance with the amount of fire. I don't see how so great an adjustment in the same fire's pain can come about through divine power, and that power not be more able to afflict people with different torments who're put in different places — or even to rack them all, no matter where they are, with any pains he wants and to turn all the elements against them into whatever pains. As it's written, 'The earth's globe will fight for God against the irrational.'

(383) "For by their reckoning the common faith asserts that the bodies of the blessed will stay in the ethereal heaven without any damage, where the fire burns and shines more purely the more acute and intense it is, and this is bestowed on them after the resurrection for their glory. Our weakness couldn't withstand that earlier. So indeed does light restore healthy eyes and aggravate weak ones.

(384) "Also, who doesn't daily experience animals' natures so different

that what preserves the life of some snuffs out others', and according to the different structure of bodies, what helps one thing hinders another for both animate and inanimate things? Human beings die under water, fish in the air. Salamanders are known to live in fire, which brings a quick destruction to other animals. Venom is the snake's life, a human being's death. The same things provide a needed diet for some animals, but a deadly one for others. There's nothing whatever that can be adapted to all natures. People who come from the same womb, begotten together by the same father, don't live by the same customs at all. They aren't amused or offended alike by the same things, and aren't tormented alike when they're together in the same heat or cold. This difference in their sufferings certainly doesn't come from the quality of the things that do the punishing, but from that of the punished. (385) "And so why should it be surprising if divine justice's power adjusted the restored bodies for pain according to each person's merits, whether in the same place or different ones, so that all things might be everywhere equally painful to them? He who admitted he could not escape God's vengeance certainly had this in mind when he said, 'Where will I go, away from your spirit? Where will I flee from your face? If I climb up to heaven, you are there. If I go down to hell, you are present.'

(392) "From all these things, I now think it's clear that the place's quality is irrelevant to the penalty of the damned and to the glory of the blessed. Rather, being tortured in hell or handed over to perpetual fire is to be racked with the ultimate pains. They are especially compared to fire because torture by this element seems more piercing. Also, it seems to commend the divine power's glory most if he who is no doubt everywhere present through his power dispenses damnation's penalty and blessedness's glory in all places equally."

(393) THE PHILOSOPHER: "I see you're eager to tum the damned's penalty and the elect's glory equally to the praise of the divine power, in order to proclaim his great goods even in ultimate evils."

(394) THE CHRISTIAN: "And that's certainly fitting. For there're no deeds of his but noble ones, full of amazement. But I think it's superfluous to define the places these things occur in, so long as we can get or avoid them."

(395) THE PHILOSOPHER: "Of course, there's still a discussion to be had after this. Now that in accordance with our plan [(296)] you've described both our ultimate good and our ultimate evil, as they appeared to you, explain no less carefully the roads by which they're reached, so that the more we know them the better we can hold to the former or avoid the latter. But because it seems that what the ultimate good or the ultimate evil is can't be understood well enough

yet, I want it first to be determined what should be called good or evil in general; I want you to define that, if you can. Of course, we know many kinds of these things, but nevertheless we aren't able to understand or examine well enough in what respect things are called good or evil. Indeed, our authors who call some things good, others evil, and others indifferent, didn't distinguish these by any definitions, but were content to illustrate them with certain examples."

(396) THE CHRISTIAN: "I realize how hard they thought it was for things to be defined the names for which seem hardly ever to consist of a single signification. Indeed, when 'good person,' 'good blacksmith,' 'good horse' and the like are said, who doesn't know that the name 'good' borrows different senses from the words joined to it. For we call a person good because of his morals, a blacksmith because of his knowledge, a horse because of its strength and speed or whatever things are relevant to its use. On the other hand, the signification of 'good' is varied so much by what is joined to it that we aren't afraid of attaching it even to the names of vices. We say, for example, 'a good thief or 'the best thief,' insofar as he's adroit and cunning in performing this maliciousness. Sometimes we apply the expression 'good' not only to the things themselves, but also to things said about those things — that is, to the dicta of propositions — so that we even say 'It's good for evil to be,' even though we in no way grant evil is good. Indeed, it's one thing to say 'Evil is good,' which is completely false, and another to say 'It's good for evil to be,' which is not to be denied.

(397) "And so what's surprising if, like them, we aren't able to define the signification of these words, which is so unfixed? Nevertheless as it strikes me now, I think that is called 'good' simply — that is, a 'good thing' — which, while it's fit for some use, mustn't impede the advantage or worthiness of anything. Contrariwise, I believe a thing is called 'evil' that necessarily carries one of these features with it. The 'indifferent,' on the other hand — that is, a thing that's neither good nor evil — I think is one such that necessarily no good is delayed or impeded by its existence. For example, the casual movement of a finger or any actions like that. For actions aren't judged good or evil except according to their root, the intention. Rather, by themselves they're all indifferent. If we look into it carefully, things not good or evil by themselves contribute nothing to merit, since they're equally appropriate both to reprobates and to the elect."

(398) THE PHILOSOPHER: "I think we should stop here and linger awhile, to consider if perhaps the things you've said can serve as definitions."

(399) THE CHRISTIAN: "It's extremely difficult to circumscribe all things with their own definitions, so that they can be separated from

all other things — especially now, since we don't have time enough for thinking through the definitions. With most names, we've come to know which things they go together with from their use in speech, although we're unable to determine what the correct meaning or understanding of them is. We also find many things for which we can't outline the correct nomenclature or meaning in a definition. For even if we aren't ignorant of the things' natures, nevertheless expressions for them are not in use. And often the mind is quicker to understand than the tongue is to utter or discuss what we perceive. Look, from the daily use of the word we all know which things are called stones. Yet I believe we're still unable to determine what the proper differences of 'stone' are, or what the characteristic of this species is, in any expression whereby a definition or description of 'stone' can be achieved. It shouldn't seem surprising to you either if you see me fail in matters on which we know that those great teachers of yours, whom you boast of as philosophers, weren't adequate. Yet I'll try to say what I can in reply to any objection raised by your investigations of these definitions I've offered."

(400) THE PHILOSOPHER: "What you're now saying too seems reasonable and likely enough. But really, unless things that are said are understood, they're uttered in vain. They can't teach others unless they can be discussed. Now, if you please — rather, because you've agreed to do so — I want you to clear up a little the things you've said. Why then didn't it seem enough, I say, for you to say 'what's fit for some use' — that is, suited for some usefulness when you were defining a 'good thing'?"

(401) THE CHRISTIAN: "It's a common and likely proverb that there's scarcely any good that does no harm, or an evil that does no good. For instance here's someone who, a long time ago now, trained himself in good deeds so much that, being praised quite often for it, either he's lifted up to pride, confident of his virtues, or else someone else is thereby set on fire with envy. And so it's plain that evil thus comes out of good, and often good is even the cause of evil. Indeed, our vices or sins, which are what are properly to be called evils, are unable to exist except in souls — that is, in good creatures. Neither can corruption arise except from a good. Conversely, who doesn't see that often after great catastrophes of sins people arise stronger or better through humility or penitence than they were before?"

(402) "Finally, it's plain that penitence for sins is an evil rather than a good because it's a mental affliction and, since it induces sorrow, cannot go together with perfect blessedness. Yet no one doubts it's necessary for forgiveness. Who also doesn't know that God's ultimate goodness, which permits nothing to happen without a cause, preor-

dains even evils well, and even uses them for the best, to such an extent that it's even good for evils to exist, although nevertheless evil isn't good at all? For just as the Devil's ultimate wickedness often uses even goods for the worst in such a way that he turns them into causes of the worst effects, and so he does the worst kinds of things through things that are good, so God acts the other way around, namely making many goods come out of evils and often using for the best what the Devil strives to use for the worst.

(403) "Both the tyrant and the prince, in fact, can use the same sword evilly and well, the former for violence, the latter for redress [(279)]. There aren't any instruments or any things adapted for our uses, I believe, that we can't use both evilly and well according to our intentions' quality. For this it isn't relevant what is done, but rather with what mind it's done.

(404) "Thus all men, both good ones and perverse, are the causes of both good and evil things, and through them it comes about that both goods and evils exist. For the good man doesn't seem to be at variance with the evil one insofar as he does what's good, but rather in that he does it well. For even if nowadays conversational usage holds that 'doing well' and 'doing good' are the same, nevertheless perhaps the peculiar force of the phrase doesn't work like that. For just as 'good' is often said where 'well' isn't — that is, 'with a good intention' — so too it seems that good can be done although it isn't done well. Indeed it often happens that the same thing is done by different people in such a way that the one does it well and the other evilly, according to their intention. For instance, if two people hang some criminal, the one solely because he hates him but the other because he has to carry out this justice, this hanging is accordingly done justly by the latter, because it was done with the right intention, but unjustly by the former, because it was done not out of love of justice but out of fervor for hatred or wrath.

(405) "Sometimes too, evil men, or even the Devil himself, are said to work together with God in doing the same deed, in such a way that the same thing is asserted to be done both by God and by them. For look, we see the things Job possessed taken away from him by Satan, and nevertheless Job himself professes they are taken away from him by God. He says, 'The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away.'

(406) "But let's move from that to what Christians' minds embrace more dearly, even if it seems laughable to you and to those like you. The Lord Jesus Christ's being handed over into the Jews' hands is mentioned as being done by Jesus himself, by God the Father, and by the traitor Judas. For the Father is said to have handed over the Son, and the Son to have handed over himself, and Judas the same

man. Yet although in such doings either the Devil or Judas did the very same thing God did, nevertheless they shouldn't be said to have done well, even if perhaps they seem to have done something good. Even if they did or wanted to be done what God wants to be done, or have the same will as God has in doing something, should they for that reason be said to do well because they do what God wants to be done? Or do they have a good will because they want what God wants? Of course not! For even if they do or want to be done what God wants to be done, nevertheless they don't do or want to do it because they believe God wants it to be done. Their intention isn't the same as God's in the same deed. And although they want what God wants, and God's will and theirs can be called the same because they want the same thing, nevertheless their will is evil and God's is good since they want it to be done for different causes. So too, although different people's action may be the same because they do the same thing, nevertheless according to the difference in intention this one's action is good and that one's evil. For although they accomplish the same result, nevertheless this one does the selfsame thing well, that one evilly.

(407) "And, it's surprising to say, sometimes there's even a good will when someone wants evil to be done by someone else, because he wants it with a good intention. For the Lord often decided to torment, through the Devil or through some tyrant, people who are either innocent or else didn't deserve that torment for purging some sin of theirs. They're tormented either to increase their merit or to give others an example of patience, or for whatever reasonable cause, even though it's hidden from us. Thus Job remarks on the fact that with the Lord permitting well, the Devil acted evilly. He says 'As it pleased the Lord, so it was done.' In giving him thanks, he shows he doesn't doubt how well this was permitted by the Lord, when he adds, 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

(408) "Also, the Third Book of Kings' teaches that the lying spirit had been sent by the Lord to deceive impious Ahab. For when the Lord said, 'Who will deceive Ahab?' the lying spirit came out and stood before the Lord and said, 'I will deceive him.' The Lord said to him, 'With what?' And he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You will deceive and prevail over him. Go out and do so.' Indeed the prophet Micaiah, when he had explained before Ahab himself that this had been revealed to him, added 'Then look now, the Lord has allowed a lying spirit in the mouth of all your prophets who are here, and the Lord has spoken evil against you.'

(409) "Now whether the Lord permits the Devil to rage against the



saints or against the impious, it's surely plain he only permits well what's good to be permitted, and the Devil only does the evil that nevertheless is good to be done and that has a reasonable cause why it's done, although one unknown to us. For as that great philosopher of yours remarks in his *Timaeus*, when he proves God does all things for the best: 'Everything begotten is begotten from some necessary cause. For nothing happens for which a lawful cause and reason does not precede its arising.'

(410) "It's plainly shown in this that no matter what things are done, no matter by whom, because they occur from divine providence's best governance, they take place reasonably and well in the way they turn out. For they have a reasonable cause why they're done, even though he who does them may not do them reasonably or well, or in doing them pay attention to the same cause God does.

(411) "So since plainly nothing is done except with God's permitting it indeed nothing can be done if he's unwilling or resists — and since in addition it's certain that God never permits anything without a cause and does nothing whatever except reasonably, so that both his permission and his action are reasonable, surely therefore, since he sees why he permits the individual things that are done to be done, he isn't ignorant why they should be done, even if they're evil or are evilly done. For it wouldn't be good for them to be permitted unless it were good for them to be done. And he wouldn't be perfectly good who would not interfere, even though he could, with what wouldn't be good to be done. Rather, by agreeing that something be done that isn't good to be done, he would obviously be to blame.

(412) "So obviously whatever happens to be done or happens not to be done has a reasonable cause why it's done or not done. And for that reason it's good for it to be done, or good for it not to be done, even if it's done by someone by whom it's not done well, or evilly not done by the one by whom it's not done that is, its being done is renounced because of an evil intention. Thus it's good even for evils themselves to be or to be done, although the evils themselves aren't good at all. Truth itself plainly acknowledges this when it says: 'For it is necessary that scandals come about. But woe to the man through whom a scandal comes about' — as if saying openly: 'It's useful and in keeping with human salvation that some people, offended or enraged because of me, thereby fall into scandal of the soul (that is, damnation), so that through some people's maliciousness that deed should be done whereby all are saved who are predestined to be cured. But nevertheless woe to (that is, ere will be damnation for) the one by whose advice or persuasion the scandal is instigated. So the scandal is evil, but it's good for the scandal to exist. So too it's good for any

evil to exist, although nevertheless no evil is good.’

(413) “Noticing this and reflecting how much God orders even these evils for the best, Augustine, the great disciple of truth, says the following about God’s goodness and the Devil’s wickedness, ‘Just as God is the best creator of good natures, so he is the most just orderer of evil wills, so that while they use good natures evilly, he uses even evil wills well.’

(414) “Again, the same man says about the Devil, ‘When God created him, he was not ignorant of the latter’s future wickedness, and foresaw what good he himself was going to make out of the latter’s evils.’

(419) “Look, you’ve heard it shown by plain reason that it’s good for there to be evil too, although it isn’t true that evil is good. Surely it’s one thing to say it’s good for there to be evil, and another thing to say evil is good. For in the latter ‘good’ is applied to an evil thing, in the former to there being the evil thing — that is, in the latter to the thing, in the former to the thing’s occurrence.

(421) “Now I think this is enough at present for describing a ‘good thing.’ But when we apply the expression ‘good’ to the occurrences of things — that is, to what are said by propositions and what they ‘propose’ as occurring, so that we call it good for this to be or not to be — it’s as though the occurrence were said to be necessary for filling out some optimal arrangement of God’s, even if that arrangement is completely hidden from us. For it’s not good for someone even to do well, if his doing it doesn’t agree with but rather opposes some divine ordering. For what doesn’t have a reasonable cause why it should be done cannot be done well. But if something arranged by God were necessarily hampered if a thing came about, then it doesn’t have a reasonable cause why it should be done.

(423) “In prayer too, we often through error ask for many things that won’t be beneficial to us at all. They’re most appropriately denied to us by God in the divine arrangement of things. He knows what’s necessary for us better than we do. Thus the main thing is Truth’s lesson, whereby in prayer one must always say to God, ‘Your will be done.’

(425) “If there’s anything left over that depends on investigating the ultimate good, and that you think ought to be asked further about it, it’s all right to add it, or else hurry on to the remaining points.”