

Silver

Eliza Tymianska

#### IV

In this essay I would like to consider whether the following two are problematic – the existence of God or the coherency of the idea of God. First I would like to think for a moment if the questions about God are important and why, then if the coherence of the idea of God is problematic or not and finally decide if it is more or less problematic than the existence of God.

Is the question about existence of God truly important? Maybe it's not even worth asking? Since the idea of God is one of the most important ideas in our culture, maybe even the most important one, this question is surely significant. The idea of God exists as long as human beings do and although during the centuries it was changing – people believed in one or many gods (there were mono- and polytheistic religions), God was severe or loving, the idea of him was always somehow present in human life. But 'somehow' does not really tell us anything about the significance of the idea of God. God is not only present in our culture but he is very often the central part of it. People are praying, going to temples, they try to (or at least they should) live the way they believe God demands, some are even able to kill in the name of God. Although today in Western countries God is not the center of the culture anymore, we still cannot escape from the question about his existence – we have to answer to ourselves whether we believe that God exists or we believe that it is just a delusion as some contemporary atheists claim?

It's not surprising that philosophers have always been conducting a dispute about the existence of God. Right from the beginning in ancient Greece to today's world this question is always current. During the middle ages so called 'proves' has been formulated – the most famous are those of Saint Anselm and Saint Thomas but there are many philosophers who tried to refute them and don't think those proves actually prove anything. The dispute is not yet finished and it probably never will since it's not possible to prove whether God exists or not. That's why many modern philosophers don't even try to formulate any prove (which does not mean they don't devote any attention to God itself.)

Nowadays many people who participate in discussion about the existence of God claim that question about the coherence of the idea of God is much more important and much more problematic than this about the existence of God. But what do they mean by 'coherence'? Many people who believe in God are aware of the fact that the idea of God may not be as coherent as they wish. In medieval times theologians were often considering this problem, but the questions they asked may sound a little bit funny for us – they wondered, for example, whether God could create a stone that he wouldn't be able to lift. God is omnipotent so he should be able to create such a stone. On the other hand he is omnipotent so he should also be able to lift every stone. It seems that the idea of omnipotent God doesn't really make much sense.

When we think about God there are also another attributes that come to our minds. People regard God as infinitely good and believe that he made us free. But if they do so, there are also other problems: Why is there so much evil in the world created by infinitely good God? If God knows everything, how can we be free? If God were really infinitely good, he wouldn't let all bad things happen – there wouldn't be any wars, any violence, nobody would ever be hurt. But since there are wars, hunger, poverty and evil in our world exists, God cannot be infinitely good. What's more, it seems that he's not good at all – maybe he is even evil? But we all agreed that goodness is a part of the idea of God. And the second question – people believe that God knows everything and at the

same time we think that we are free. But how is it possible if God already knows what we are going to do? It seems absurd...

This questions show that the idea of God may not be coherent, may not make much sense. And if it doesn't make sense, if it's contradictory, then why should anybody believe in God? And since there's not a lot of people who don't want to believe in something that is senseless, questions like this have always bothered people who believed in God. Many philosophers tried to answer them to make the idea of God more coherent. The theodicy of Leibniz is perfect example of the attempts of explaining the first question. He agreed that God is infinitely good and didn't deny that there is evil in the world. But as he claimed there has to be evil in the world, human being must have a choice between good and evil otherwise he would not be free. Of course God might have created a world where there would be no evil at all, after all he's omnipotent but people living in world like this wouldn't be free because they wouldn't have any choice – they only could make good deeds. And they wouldn't even know they choose the right way as there would be only one way to choose. So God created the best world of all possible ones and it wouldn't be the best without evil. But this answer is just not good enough for many people (we all remember Voltaire who ridiculed Leibniz's idea) and many deny that the idea of God is coherent. This lack of coherence is nowadays one of the most popular arguments against the existence of God.

But we're not wondering about the coherency of the idea of God just because it is the biggest problem, because it is the most important questions. We are doing this because it depends on the coherence of the idea of God if he might exist or not. Of course just because somebody proves that the idea is coherent, it does not yet mean that God exists. But if we prove that it is not coherent it would probably mean that God does not exist. That's why we might say that the coherence of the idea of God is more problematic than its existence itself, but the existence of God is problematic as well.

But there is another issue connected with the coherence of the idea of God – it may not only be contradictory itself but may not be coherent with our knowledge of the world. Many people say that they don't believe in God because its existence does not explain anything. For many science is enough, belief in God is unnecessary and actually makes the world less understandable. Many people say that they don't believe in God because science is just offering much more coherent way of explaining the world. Of course science does not exclude existence of God, it doesn't deny that he exists and it has never proved neither that he exists or not. But since science is enough to explain the world, many people don't need God. As somebody said – it's more important which of the two – science or religion – creates more coherent, more convincing picture of the world. And religion is not offering it anymore – at least not in Western countries. The Old Testament claims that world was created in six days, woman was created from a rib of a man etc. Bible is not the only way to explain the world, what's more if we treat it literally it's simply wrong. And if it's allegory then it may be hard to interpret it correctly and since we now know how many times Churches and clergymen were wrong, we prefer to trust in science which seems to be much more coherent than the religion.

The existence of God and the coherence of the idea of God are both problematic. There are many problems that seem to deny the coherence of this idea and it is important to consider whether the idea of God is coherent or not, because if it isn't it means the existence of God is impossible. The question which of the two is more problematic doesn't really make sense to me because it is irrelevant. We should remember that it is not the coherence of the idea of God that is the most significant question – the most important issue is the existence of God and considering the coherence is just a way to find an answer to this question.